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## Building Structure in a Land without Rules: A Delphi Study to Decipher the Best Avenues to Diminish Cyberbullying in a Middle School Setting

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Building Structure in a Land without Rules: A Delphi Study to Decipher the Best  
Avenues to Diminish Cyberbullying in a Middle School Setting

A Dissertation by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

August 2016

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Building Structure in a Land without Rules: A Delphi Study to Decipher the Best  
Avenues to Diminish Cyberbullying in a Middle School Setting

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## ABSTRACT

### Building Structure in a Land without Rules: A Delphi Study to Decipher the Best Avenues to Diminish Cyberbullying in a Middle School Setting

by Dave Kline

**Purpose:** The purpose of this Delphi study was to identify what policies and procedures were most effective in reducing cyberbullying as perceived by a panel of middle school administrators.

**Methodology:** This Delphi study asked middle school administrators, through a series of three surveys, to determine the best policies and procedures to manage cyberbullying in a middle school setting. Through the survey process, the panel of experts delineated several policies and procedures that are implemented at various middle schools in the central valley of California. Policies and procedures were analyzed and scored by the experts using a five-point Likert scale. Results were reviewed by the panel as they determined the best policies and procedures to reduce the impact and amount of cyberbullying in the middle school arena. There has been extensive research regarding bullying in schools and there has been an increasing amount of research about cyberbullying as well. However, a review of literature has indicated a gap in research regarding effective policies and procedures implemented at the middle school aimed at limiting cyberbullying. By quantifying middle school administrators' responses, through a Delphi study, information indicated which district generated and site generated policies and procedures best assist with the reduction in cyberbullying. The panel also had the opportunity to share their knowledge regarding the results that were generated. The aim

of the study was to determine the most effective policies and procedures to limit the impact and to reduce the number of cyberbullying incidences in a middle school setting.



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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

As we have moved forward with greater reliance on *social technology* and all the sophisticated gadgets this technology has provided us for our convenience, we have had to adjust, as well, to unintended consequences in many areas of our lives. Social media has allowed greater speed and greater facility in our communication. Fox, Rainie, & Duggan (2014) found that adults and youth appreciate the expediency of social media and they believe that the tools that provide this convenience are increasingly essential in their lives. Yet these cyber-spaced tools have created many intrusive avenues in formerly safe institutions and altered our behaviors and challenged us to rethink how to keep our social world a safe place.

Regarding social development in the past in public schools, most children learned skills and how to think as well as develop relationships with other students their age and adult teachers and administrators. Students learned to be competitive through sports and debate teams and not through peer centered rivalry that was hidden from adult view. Of course, there have always been bullies in public, and private, schools, but the behavior was out in the open for teachers, administrators as well as other students and parents to see and know about. Certain students believed they needed to assert their dominance as bullies and ruin the enjoyable times that were taking place out on the school yard. School administrators and other school professionals struggled with how to handle bullies, but strived to maintain a safe school community. Some parents would encourage their children to stand up to the bully or as Pellegrini (2002) suggested, determine that the act was a normal occurrence in the life of a youth. Despite efforts, bullying continued to some extent in most school cultures, yet in recent decades the issue of cyberbullying has

taken hold among adolescents in schools with the infiltration of the Internet into all our lives.

In the past, laws and established school rules regarding bullying were limited. Often times, victims were left to their own devices to deal with a bully. Students might learn to cope with the bullies by staying away. This was not always possible and some students suffered harsh consequences as schoolyard bullying became more prevalent. Hinduja and Patchin (2015a) explained that victims of bullying may struggle with academics, as well as truancy and other delinquent behaviors. One stark example of this is that it was claimed the aggressors of the Columbine High tragedy in 1999 were reported to have been bullied. However, despite obvious and horrible outcomes of bullying one may have had at school, safety and privacy could often still be found at home with family. However, it would not be long before this all changed.

Throughout the twentieth century, new technologies introduced stronger systems of communication and information gathering into the global community. Few tools were more important than the computer, which was introduced to the masses in the late 1970's. Li-Ron and Bass (1999) stated that the Apple II, the first personal computer (PC), was introduced in 1977 and would lead the PC market until the IBM PC appeared in 1981. By the middle of the 1980's some families and schools had this tool, which was used for organizational and writing purposes. The computer alone did not bring access to others, but it did provide a tool to assist with that process. In the late 1980's, another technology tool was introduced and brought in larger and larger numbers of people into a global communication system: this was, of course, the World Wide Web. It was like a *new* world was created before our eyes. This new world, also called the Internet, allowed

people to communicate effortlessly and gather information expeditiously. Unfortunately, this new world came with its own downfalls. Pruitt-Mentle (2011) stated that the rise of Internet usage brought a rise in academic dishonesty and copyright infringement as well as an increase of sexual predators and pornography. The transition into the technology/information age also allowed those who had a penchant for bullying another avenue and a new approach called *cyberbullying* was created.

According to Belsey (2004), "Cyberbullying involves the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group, which is intended to harm others" (p. 2). Furthermore, Donegan (2012) argued that bullying and cyberbullying are similar, with the difference being the anonymity that cyberbullying allows. With the widespread use of smart phones, cyberbullying is not only anonymous but now allows immediate access to many people. For example, Donegan indicated that with smart phones, cyberbullying has flooded the youth landscape. With the continuous development of various websites and applications, a youth's life is inundated with opportunities to take the lead or encourage cyberbullying. In fact, Graves (2013) contended today's culture is filled with social technology, which has highly impacted adolescents and one of the disparaging consequences is cyberbullying.

Even though the impact of cyberbullying is different than physical bullying, the results can be just as detrimental. In addition, Willard (2006) indicated that while face-to-face bullying has long been recognized as causing psychological harm to targets, cyberbullying can be just as damaging. Albin (2012) summarized four points that give cyberbullying as much of a negative impact as bullying are (a) the lack of boundaries that

exist, (b) the high level of anonymity, (c) the never-ending accessibility, and (d) the ability to send information instantaneously to many others. Harcey (2007) suggested that the insidious nature of cyberbullying is spotlighted by the fact that an adolescent can be victimized while in the pseudo security of their residence. No longer can a child find safety in the comfort of their own home or their room. In addition to cyberbullies and victims, school professionals and parents play a significant role in either reducing or increasing cyberbullying. Lyons (2013) insinuated that schools' well-meaning attempts at reducing cyberbullying through interventions can actually perpetuate or act as a catalyst for repercussions on the victims. If the intervention was incorrect or lacked follow through, there may well be a continuance of cyberbullying.

This feeling of being unsafe is carried over into the realm of school and administrators are often in a position to deal with the repercussions. Administrators struggle with their role in dealing with this problem. The issue is compounded by the fact that administrators often grapple with the issue of cyberbullying occurring off school grounds, thereby limiting the school's ability to intervene. Hester (2012) suggested that even though cyberbullying often occurred outside of school, outcomes manifested themselves at school. As a result, administrators are faced with the legal dichotomy of finding the link from off-school grounds behavior and the negative outcomes that are manifested while on school grounds. Schools are not held accountable for behavior off school grounds, but they are accountable for behavior on schools grounds. This presents an ominous legal situation for schools as they are bound to keep a safe school and at the same time are required not to violate a student's First Amendment rights. Hester suggested that school administrators should have an appropriate understanding of

student's basic rights when dealing with cyberbullying. Castile (2013) interpreted the *Tinker v. Des Moines School District* court case suggesting that schools may intervene with student behavior that occurs off campus if the behavior led to a disruption on campus. Thus, school administrators are faced with a challenging legal task of finding a link to behavior that is essentially out of their jurisdiction in order to keep their school safe.

States and the federal government have been slow to enact bullying laws and even slower to enact cyberbullying laws. Albin (2012) stated that Georgia was the first state to enact a bullying law in 1999, in retrospect of the Columbine massacre that occurred in Colorado earlier in the year. Albin continued to state that now 49 of the 50 states now have laws specifically related to bullying. At the federal level, Hauck (2014) explained that the Megan Meier Prevention Act was introduced to Congress in 2008, but did not pass. As a result, states and schools do not have guidance at the federal level to protect students from cyberbullying. However, Hauck stated that of the 49 states that do have bullying laws, 20 have language specifically related to aspects of cyberbullying. These states have allowed school districts and schools the latitude with which to build policies and procedures to combat this growing issue. There is a need to discern the most effective approaches implemented at a middle school that will reduce the amount and the impact of cyberbullying.

### **Background**

Before discussing the intricacies of cyberbullying, it is important to establish a clear understanding of the history of this phenomenon. Bullying has been a part of life in all societies; however, developing progressive approaches to deal with bullying is still in



its relative infancy. Cyberbullying itself is still young; however, as with technology, the pace of cyberbullying has increased dramatically. Developing an understanding of the progression, parts, and players of cyberbullying is essential in order to have a clear picture of this aggressive act.

### **Traditional Bullying**

If cyberbullying is an offshoot of bullying, a solid understanding of the root behavior is essential. The key elements associated with bullying all derive from an attempt to gain power over someone. Coloroso (2010) explained that bullying will always exhibit an imbalance of power, an intent to harm, and a threat of further aggression. A fourth element, *terror*, involves the bully systematically striving to maintain dominance and indicating an escalation of bullying behavior. Donegan (2012) indicated that bullying occurs when one or more people abuse the victim through physical, verbal, or other means in order to gain a sense of superiority and power. These actions may be direct (i.e. hitting, verbally assaulting face-to-face, etc.) or indirect (i.e. rumors, gossip, etc.). Trends for bullying in recent years have been relatively stable. The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (2009) summaries maintained that in 2009, 19.9% of all students had been bullied at school. In 2013, that percent still maintained at a level of 19.6% (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, 2013).

The impact of bullying beyond the physical nature of the act is noticeable for victims, bullies, and even bystanders. Research has indicated that the adverse effect on victims include depression and anxiety. Bullies are more likely to be abusive to their spouses or children. Bystanders are more likely to miss or skip school. These and other

outcomes will be explained and linked to the seamless transition to cyberbullying that has occurred due to the advent of the Internet and advancements in technology.

### **Internet and Cyber Crime**

Currently, it would be hard to function in life without the Internet as it is such an intimate part of daily life. The idea of the Internet was devised in 1962, when J.C.R. Licklider of MIT created the concept of the *Galactic Network*. In 1972, his team of researchers created the term *Internetting* (Leiner et al., 1999). Even then, as the researchers continued their pursuit of this process, concerns were apparent. One researcher, Robert Kahn voiced a concern that if this internetting continued, it would do so without universal control at the base level. As this process continued to flourish in the research world, the grounds for additional stakeholders took place. These stakeholders had an economic frame of mind instead of an intellectual frame of mind (Leiner et al., 1999). By the 1980's, the Internet, or the World Wide Web, became available for public use (Henson, Reys, & Fisher, 2011). Kahn's concern for a lack of control at the base level did come to fruition and the framework for cybercrime was established.

As early as the late 1970's, the first Internet crime was documented by a young boy who hacked into a phone company's digital network. By the 1990's hacking was not the only crime committed on the World Wide Web. In addition, the cost and availability of the Internet became widespread with companies offering free email and Internet access. By 2000, email users grew at an astonishing rate, approaching 100 million users worldwide. With this lack of control and access to the masses in place, the groundwork for other types of nefarious activity was handed to criminals. Other types of cybercrime such as email scams and cyberstalking began to occur. The first case of cyberstalking

resulted in the prosecution of a man in 1999 for using the Internet to terrorize a woman who rejected his advances. The man was eventually sentenced to six years in prison (Henson et al., 2011). With time, Internet crime committed by adolescents and teenagers, was bound to occur.

### **Cyber Use and Cyberbullying**

Currently, there are over three billion people with Internet access, which is approximately 40% of the world's population. In the United States, the percentage is much higher with close to 87% of the population as Internet users (Internet Live Stats, 2015). An interesting point is the percent of teens with Internet access is even higher than adults. Lenhart (2015) stated, "Aided by the convenience and constant access provided by mobile devices, especially smartphones, 92% of teens report going online daily— including 24% who say they go online almost constantly" (p. 2).

With advanced technology more and more in the hands of children, the path to cyberbullying is clearly established. There appears to be more of a willingness for young people to share their information on line. From 2006 to 2012 there has been a dramatic increase of personal information posted online. For example, in 2013, 91% of teens posted their picture compared to 79% in 2006. Also, 20% posted their cell phone number compared to 2% in 2006 (Madden et al., 2013). This release of information on the Internet for all to see allows for others to use that information against them. J. Carter (2011a) stated that the structure of the Internet has increased the opportunities for crime by increasing the pool of offenders and by creating an environment in which offenders are less likely to be held accountable for their actions. Magliano (2012) stated that the

two most commonly used tools in cyberbullying are smart phones and various online social networking sites.

### **Who is Bullied and Cyberbullied?**

Most information related to who is cyberbullied incorporates bullying as well. Research as late as 2008 could not give clear information as to who was cyberbullied. Dehue, Bolman, and Völlink, (2008) implied that cyberbullying research is still in its infancy; thus, research findings are inconsistent regarding sex and age. Lyons (2013) stated that cyberbullying can occur at any age level but appears to intensify during the middle school years, as children become more technologically savvy. More and more information indicates that there is a difference with the victims of cyberbullying. It appears that girls are more often the victims of cyberbullying than boys. Kowalski and Limber (2007) have indicated that there are more girl victims than boys. Holfeld and Grabe (2012) stated as a result of cyberbullying being committed through the Internet, it provides a more convenient avenue for girls to engage in this type of behavior, which has also been called *social sabotage*. Also, Hinduja and Patchin (2015a) stated that the rationale for this is that girls are often more verbal than physical and shoving and fistfights are more typical bullying behaviors of boys and that the Internet does not facilitate this type of behavior.

### **Impact of Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying can impact the victim, family, friends, school culture and school achievement. There is evidence that the impact of cyberbullying can impact a child's education and health. Carter (2011a) stated that research indicated a correlation between physical health symptoms and cyberbullying. Smith, Thompson, and Davidson (2014)

indicated that victimization in cyberbullying has led to depression, especially for females. If physical illness and depression are the direct result of cyberbullying, that would have an impact on a child's educational outcome as well.

Having a positive and focused school culture plays a significant role in student achievement. Wang and Holcomb (2010) stated that a school's climate is important to academic achievement, attendance, and behavior. Welker (2010) supported this statement and added that cyberbullying disruption during the school day adds to the complexity of maintaining school operations, safety, and academic achievement.

### **Approaches to Reduce Cyberbullying**

There are a multitude of approaches that are suggested to reduce cyberbullying. Abbott (2011) believed that a program that would assist with the development of empathy would diminish one's desire to cyberbully. There are approaches that suggest parental involvement is an integral part to limit cyberbullying. Dehue et al. (2008) suggested that interventions should not just be aimed towards students, but parents as well. Korenis and Bates-Billick (2013) stated that there needs to be preventive methods including educational seminars and screening in the schools to assist with educating parents and young adolescents.

Even though parent training could diminish the amount and impact of cyberbullying, Force (2013) implied that principals are often disappointed in the poor parent turnout for school-sponsored training sessions. Even though there are many different approaches that are suggested to assist with the reduction in cyberbullying, there is a gap in research as far as what school administrators believe to be the best and most practical approaches used to reduce cyberbullying in the middle school setting. A simple

technique that has been proven to be effective has been incorporated by teens. The National Crime Prevention Council (2009) explained that over 70% of teens block the cyberbully from their contact and that has been proven to be effective. There is ample evidence that suggests that the bystander is playing a more significant role in the prevention of cyberbullying. Barlinska, Szuster, and Winiewski (2013) established that empathetic behavior by the bystander, such as not forwarding information or not encouraging a cyberbully, has proven to be effective in limiting the impact of the act.

There appears to be a limit of definitive statistics regarding the effectiveness of specific methods in dealing with cyberbullying. There are programs designed to limit the impact. However, there is little support in terms of statistics that support the effectiveness of these programs. In fact, Smith et al. (2014) discovered from their findings that more research and action is needed and that interventions will need to be evaluated for their effectiveness. There have been programs such as PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Support) that have been implemented effectively at schools and have shown a reduction in negative behaviors in schools. Ross (2012), explained that as principal of McNabb Elementary in Kentucky, he implemented PBIS. As a result, there was a drop in referrals to the office of approximately 61% over a four year period. However, there was no information specifically related to cyberbullying.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

Bullying has been a part of the social structure for decades and possibly centuries. Koo (2007) insisted that bullying is not a modern problem but has been part of civilized life in perpetuity. The first notable journal review of bullying was written in 1897 but not reviewed again until the 1970's. This issue has persisted in modern American school

culture for decades. In fact, Limber and Small (2003) argued that historically bullying was not an issue that was considered urgent or potentially damaging, but viewed as behavior within the realm of normalcy. Victims and their parents often had to find ways to minimize the impact of bullying on their own. For years, one way that was common in dealing with bullying was the assertion that *kids will be kids* (Solberg, Olweus, & Endresen, 2007). This approach allowed the bully the opportunity to continue the aggressive behavior. However, despite a victim's struggles at schools, there was the hope of safety at home. Technological advances have dealt a blow to this realm of safety as virtual bullying can reach victims any time anywhere.

With the advent of the Internet and smart phones those who have a proclivity toward bullying now have a cloak of invisibility to bully and they are not bound by time or place. In the past with bullying, parents could provide safety within the confines of their home. However, with the Internet, that semblance of security is no longer there and this lack of refuge is most prevalent in middle school. Research indicates there is an increase in bullying and cyberbullying when middle school begins. More specifically, Force (2013) found cyberbullying occurs most frequently in grades six through eight. Daly (2011) suggested one reason for this increase is students are moving from the organized areas of elementary school, with 30 students to a class, to the less supportive environment of middle school, where students may change classes ever hour.

Students bully others in order to be accepted by others and to maintain a dominant profile. Along with the increase of freedom that students have in the middle school arena, their Internet skills are often far more advanced than the Internet skills of parents and school officials. A parent who desires to provide support to their child may struggle

because they do not believe that they have the technological skills to provide the necessary assistance. Shariff (2007) proclaimed that not only do children have poor impulse control, but they also have the computer and Internet skills that transcends those who are older. This lack of knowledge and control adults have regarding this issue has created an uncontrolled environment ruled by children. Shariff has likened this to William Golding's novel, *Lord of the Flies*, where, with no supervision, Golding's boys terrorize and ultimately kill each other.

Cyberbullying puts students on a virtual island with no supervision and few rules. Both schools and families have struggled with how to deal with this ever expanding issue. Schools have sponsored trainings for parents and yet, based on lack of parent attendance, this has proven to be ineffective in curbing cyberbullying incidences. This implies a lack of awareness from the parents. Castille (2013) suggested that children are being harassed online and yet their parents are not fully aware that this is occurring, possibly meaning that some may believe that there is a problem with cyberbullying with other children, but not their own. This is supported by Droser (2013) who implied that parents will often place their own children on a pedestal, where cyberbullying takes place on a regular basis, just not perpetrated by or committed to their own. This lack of acknowledgement by parents can only serve to perpetuate this issue. At school, there are negative outcomes if this issue is not addressed. Taiariol (2010) stressed that this issue may result in negative school behaviors and limited school performance. Despite the effort, schools may remain liable for any negative outcomes that may occur as a result of cyberbullying.



Obviously, there is a need for support in the form of state and federal law. Even though laws associated with bullying and cyberbullying are being outpaced by the progression of technology used for this act, they have intensified within the past 15 years. School policies do have a legal baseline in which to build a framework of policies. Alexander and Alexander (2012) asserted that when one student's expression disrupts the learning environment or safety of another, school officials have a basis to deliver consequences against the cyberbully without infringing on their constitutional rights. States have established more specific laws based on this constitutional framework. In California, it was not until 2006 that California Assembly Bill 86, Education Code Section 48900(r) of 1999 was amended to include language that specifically related to "bullying committed by means of an electronic act" (Public Safety, 2008, sec. 48900(r)). With this legal backdrop established, schools now have an avenue with which to develop policies and procedures.

Hunley-Jenkins (2012) stated even though many schools are implementing policies and procedures to minimize cyberbullying, little research has been completed to determine the effectiveness of these solutions aimed at reducing the rates of this behavior. Hinduja and Patchin (2015a) accentuated the need for all schools to develop cyberbullying policies that include consequences and remedial actions as well as the development of procedures for reporting and investigating. Force (2013) suggested that even though site administrators are critical in resolving issues related to this act, policies were ambiguous implying the need for formalized policies and procedures. In addition, Guckert (2013) stated that several participants of the study did not have a clear understanding of school programs and policies and suggested that further research should

include a case study of a specific middle school that had policies and procedures firmly in place. Thus, there is a need to examine and determine which policies and procedures that have been implemented are effective, especially at the middle school level where cyberbullying has been determined most prevalent. There is limited research regarding approaches effectively implemented.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this Delphi study was to identify what policies and procedures are most effective in reducing cyberbullying as perceived by a panel of middle school administrators.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the most effective policies and procedures that middle school administrators believe will assist with reducing cyberbullying in the middle school setting?
2. Of the policies and procedures identified in research question 1, how do middle school administrators rank them as being the most effective with reducing cyberbullying in a middle school setting?
3. What can middle school administrators do to best implement the policies and procedures identified in research question 1 and 2 in order to reduce cyberbullying in a middle school setting?

### **Significance of the Problem**

Bullying at the middle school level has always been on the radar of school officials; however, with the proliferation of the Internet and social media, bullying has morphed into cyberbullying. Not only has cyberbullying negatively impacted the

functioning of a middle school, much of the activity that takes place occurs in the once safe confines of home. Parents and school professionals struggle with limiting the negative impact this has on middle school students. Shariff (2007) stated that children are technologically advanced but lack the internal psychological and sociological controls to moderate their behavior. This fact is seen at the middle school level.

There has been extensive research regarding bullying in schools and there has been an increasing amount of research about cyberbullying as well. However, a review of literature has indicated a gap in research regarding effective policies and approaches implemented at the middle school aimed at limiting cyberbullying. By quantifying middle school administrators' responses, through a Delphi study, information will indicate which district generated and site generated policies and procedures best assist with the reduction in cyberbullying. There is a need to have input from those that are inundated with this issue on a regular basis, the administrators that work in a middle school setting. As the first responders to student safety at the middle school level, they should be granted the opportunity to share information as to the best approaches used to address cyberbullying in a middle school setting.

All stakeholders in a middle school setting will benefit from the results of this study. Students will know how to respond when cyberbullying occurs. They will have tools to assist them from becoming a victim. Those working with cyberbullies will have consequences that extend beyond punitive outcomes. Those who are potential bystanders will feel less likely to forward inappropriate pictures or respond to an antagonistic cyber message. Parents will know how to effectively support their children. Instead of immediately taking away their child's cell phone, they will become more cyber-aware

and will know what to do when their child is harassed. School officials will be able to effectively and efficiently reduce cyberbullying which will lead to a more secure and safer learning environment which will in turn foster improved learning.

Graves (2013) stated that if administrators, teachers, and counselors do not properly handle cases of cyberbullying, the cyberbullying victim and family can file a lawsuit against the school for negligence. The consensus generated from this Delphi study will give all stakeholders the tools necessary to limit the negative impact of cyberbullying at schools. Also, with having a clear plan in place, middle schools can guard themselves from legal issues.

### **Definitions**

For the purposes of this research, information from Dr. Sameer Hinduja and Dr. Justin Patchin (2009), two premier experts in the field of cyberbullying, will provide many of the definitions. The specific terms are the following:

**Bullying.** Repeated and deliberate harassment directed by one in a position of power toward one or more. This can involve physical threats or behaviors, including assault, or indirect and subtle forms of aggression, including rumor spreading. The term bullying is usually reserved for young people and most often refers to these behaviors as they occur at or near school.

**Cyberbullying.** Intentional and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices.

**Victim.** The person who is on the receiving end of online social cruelty. Also known as the *target*.

**Offender.** The one who instigates online social cruelty. Also known as the *aggressor* or *perpetrator*.

The term bystander was not defined by Hinduja and Patchin. Willard (2007) defined this term:

**Bystander.** A witness of bullying or cyberbullying in real time or someone who may possess information (e.g., overheard conversations, veiled threats, changes in behavior, and/or evidence of online aggression which may include screen shots or verbal reports of online forms of aggression).

**Administrators.** For the purposes of this study this term will be defined as a combination of assistant principals, deans of students, principals, and other administrators. Middle school, incorporates grades 6th through 8th grade, where junior high incorporates grades 7th through 8th. The schools that were selected, for this study, were a blend of middle schools and junior high schools. For the purposes of this study, the researcher will reference middle schools. This reference will include junior high schools as well.

### **Delimitations**

The study generated, compiled, and refined effective strategies to help middle school administrators reduce cyberbullying in a middle school setting. Delimitations for this study were created in order to define the area and boundaries of the study. The delimitations for this study include the following:

1. This study is delimited to middle school administrators.
2. This study is delimited to middle school administrators who work directly in the area of child welfare and discipline.

3. This study is delimited to middle schools from central valley California.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study will encompass five chapters that describe many areas regarding cyberbullying in the middle school setting. Chapter I will provide an extensive background regarding multiple points associated with cyberbullying. Chapter II will have an extensive delineation of literature in order to give the reader an indication of a gap of information thereby justifying the need for the study. Chapter III will give extensive information regarding the methodology of the study. Research, data collections and findings will be reviewed in Chapter IV. Findings, conclusions, and recommendations will be reviewed in Chapter V. Also, included in this chapter will be the author's rationale for selecting the topic of cyberbullying.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this Delphi study was to explore what policies and procedures are most effective in reducing cyberbullying as perceived by a panel of middle school administrators. In this chapter, a review of literature will provide background for this issue and also determine any gaps in the literature. The chapter is divided into multiple sections. The first section focuses on the history of the Internet and the rapid rise of technology since the late twentieth century. This will give perspective on how quickly the Internet has grown in such a short period of time and how this rapid growth has impacted modern society, including middle school students. The second section of Chapter II focuses on ways that this high powered technology has had the unintended consequence of empowering adolescent children with communication abilities that supersedes their maturity in many instances and creates legal and moral problems. The third section focuses on the history of bullying and how aspects of this practice provided the seeds for cyberbullying to sprout. The fourth section reviews four important participants: victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and parents. This includes each group's perceptions, the role they play regarding cyberbullying, and the impact they have with other participants; an in-depth critique of the legal aspects of cyberbullying follows that. This critique covers the established laws that attempt to combat cyberbullying and gives an overview of the possible legal outcomes if schools do not deal with this behavior correctly. Finally, the role the school plays with either increasing or limiting cyberbullying is reviewed and an analysis of the approaches that schools use to mitigate

the impact of cyberbullying is analyzed. This will set the stage for the impetus of this study.

### **The History of the Internet**

In terms of impact, no tool has shaped modern society like the Internet. The impact has been so great that it is hard to ascertain what the world would be like today without the Internet. Despite its enormous potential in the early days of experimentation, creators of the Internet foreshadowed negative aspects of this tool as it was in development.

The idea of the Internet came to fruition in the early 1960's. J.C.R. Licklider published a paper titled, "Man-Computer Symbiosis," where he envisioned a system that allowed humans to solve elaborate issues in collaboration with computers (Kleinrock, 2010). This paper foreshadowed Licklider's intentions as he partnered with several MIT researchers to develop the plan to connect independent computer systems together with networking technologies and the *Galactic Network*, later coined the *Intergalactic Network*, idea came into play in 1962 (Kleinrock, 2010, p. 28). Even then, the creators had the foresight to state that as this idea progressed, it would do so without general restrictions. To expand this study, in 1963, Kleinrock, one of the creators, took the idea with him to UCLA and in 1965, he and others connected a computer from Connecticut to a computer in California using a dial-up telephone line. This *inter-netting* expanded in the educational research field to include Stanford University and the University of London in the 1970's. This began a lengthy process of the development of Internet concepts and technologies (Leiner et al., 1999).



As technology companies became involved with the educational field, widespread development of local-area networks with computers began to proliferate. By the mid to late 1980's, the Internet assisted a wide range of researchers and developers. Email was being used by several communities displaying the ability to interact with electronic communications among people. At approximately the same time, the Internet began to grow in the commercialized world as companies began to see the value of this tool beyond just email (Leiner et al., 1999). Thus, in 1989, Sir Tim Berners described in a paper an information system that led to the creation of the World Wide Web, which allowed others to use the Internet to create graphical displays on linked computers (Fox et al., 2014). The world has taken these ideas and inventions and firmly implemented them into daily life in both work and home.

Today, the Internet is an integral part of modern life. Since the first guise of a website was established over 25 years ago, the Internet has exploded. In 2009, it was estimated that there were approximately 200 million websites and 1.5 billion Internet users (Henson et al., 2011). Now, it is estimated that the total number of Internet users grew to over 2.5 billion users in 2014 (Gilmour, 2014). With more and more people and businesses moving to the Internet, so too did the number of online criminals, better named cybercriminals.

### **The Advent of Cybercrime**

The first *cybercrime* is disputed in terms of time and the specific definition of cybercrime. Hossain (2014) stated that the first technological crime was committed in 1820, when a group of workers in a textile factory sabotaged the owner's implementation of more efficient technology. Through the 1960's, 1970's and early 1980's, cybercrime

existed but was limited to physical destruction of technology or accessing a single computer. Until the Internet, software piracy was the premier cybercrime. This changed dramatically in the 1990's with the advent of the World Wide Web. This brought millions of users and billions of dollars. This onslaught in cyber activity lured criminals into the cyber world (Hossain, 2014).

Henson et al. (2011) defined cybercrime as any illegal activity that occurs in the virtual world of cyberspace. These researchers suggested that the crime could be Internet-assisted, meaning the Internet was a part of the act, yet the Internet is not required to commit the crime: identify theft or fraud, for example. An example of an Internet-based crime, where the crime is solely committed online, would be *hacking* (Henson et al., 2011). Aggarwal, Arora, Neha, and Poonam (2014) synthesized the definition by implying that cybercrime is an unlawful act wherein the computer is either a tool, target, or both.

There are many modern types of cybercrime. Fraud, for example, that includes stealing of passwords or engaging in financial theft effects over 1.5 million individuals every day. Piracy of entertainment, software, and copyrighted information accounts for hundreds of billions of dollars each year. Recently, there have been attacks on smart devices including phones and even expanding to TVs, refrigerators, and cars. This crime can steal personal information and damage or destroy the device (Hossain, 2014). These crimes cost consumers greatly and yet the Internet thrives and creates wealth for many.

It is difficult to ascertain how much money is generated by the Internet; however, some attempts have been made to estimate the monetary value of cybercrime. In 2014, the security company McAfee estimated that cybercrime makes up approximately 1% of

the GDP of the world. That percent alone would equate to hundreds of billions of dollars (Penn, 2015), yet with the type of financial impact that cybercrime has, it appears that many people do not take necessary precautions to avoid it. A Blue Coat blog (2014) proclaimed that people do take some precautions to avoid crime from occurring, but online, people willingly give credit card numbers or PIN numbers to random strangers, costing them in upwards of \$100 billion a year. Van Allen (2014) estimated that cybercrime costs approximately 20 cents for every dollar accumulated by the Internet, an amount that is roughly between \$375 and \$575 billion dollars a year. As almost all of humankind have made this transition into the cyber world, including criminals, this presents an interesting situation as adolescents have been the frontrunners in mastering the idiosyncrasies of the Internet.

### **Rise of Technology**

The percent of people *online* or using the Internet, has mushroomed. According to Fox et al. (2014), 87% of American adults now use the Internet and that percent increases to 99% in households making over \$75,000 a year. Additionally, 68% use a smart phone or a tablet to connect to the Internet. It could be difficult for many to conceive what their lives would be like without the Internet. Fox et al. contended that 53% of Internet users believe that at a minimum, it would be very difficult to give up their Internet usage. For the most part, adults have a positive outlook regarding the Internet as studies reveal that 76% believe the Internet has been good for society and 90% believe it has been good for them. Also, 67% believe that the Internet has strengthened relationships (Fox et al., 2014). The percentages regarding teenagers' usage of the Internet is similar if not higher in some regards.

According to Lenhart (2015), approximately 75% of teens are in possession or have access to a smartphone. Of those who have such a phone, 94% go online daily. Guckert (2013) mentioned that one in three teens send more than 100 texts a day or 3,000 texts a month. This process far outweighs other forms of online communication. In addition to the high level of texting, there has been an increase in the use of social media sites by teenagers. Lenhart contended that teens use social media sites at a high rate “with 71% using Facebook, 52% using Instagram, 41% using Snapchat, and 33% using Twitter” (2015 p. 3). Even though Facebook remains the most used social media site by teens, there has been some change in their views of it. Madden et al. (2013) suggested that teens are losing interest in Facebook because of adult involvement with the site. Teens appear not to appreciate the questioning that ensues from adults regarding what they perceive as innocuous information. In addition to this desire to distance themselves from adults, teens have poor insight regarding information posted being used by unknown third parties. Madden et al. stated that one in six teens have had contact from someone unknown or that made them feel uncomfortable. Also, girls are twice as likely to have this experience more than boys.

It is clear that the Internet is a powerful tool that is not going away. It has become an integral part of life and teens have almost fully integrated themselves into the Internet world. Nowadays, teens are constantly in possession of their Internet tool and they are consistently online. Along with this phenomenon, criminals have infiltrated the Internet. This has laid the groundwork for teens to be the subject of inappropriate or even illegal Internet activity. Of all the cybercrimes committed, cyber harassment is the third highest form of Internet crime (Carter, 2011b).

On March 12, 2014, the World Wide Web turned 25 years old. This tool has revolutionized lives personally and professionally (Fox et al., 2014). Leiner et al. (1999) supported this assertion by predicting that along with powerful, yet affordable online communications in portable form (i.e. cell phones), the Internet makes possible “a new paradigm of nomadic computing and communications for most of the populace” (p. 15). It is doubtful that the team of MIT researchers who questioned the prominence of the Internet without a global control at the operations level could have predicted the impact that this has had on modern life as it is now known (Leiner et al., 1999). Indeed, it was Leiner et al. who declared that if the Internet falters, it will not be the result of a lack of technology, vision, or motivation; it will be because, as a collective group, we have no direction for the future. Gilmour (2014) supported this point by suggesting that now is the time to heavily invest in finding avenues of conducting investigations into cybercrime with all levels of law enforcement before it is too late.

As Leiner et al. (1999) stated, as the Internet developed, it would do so without global controls. This lack of control came to fruition as criminals found another avenue to generate income and infiltrate the rights of others. This led to the advent of crime and inappropriate activity in the cyber world. Couple cybercrime with the increase of Internet usage by all populations and this lays the groundwork for nefarious activity involving all, including middle school students. As the basis for cyber activity has been established through the review of history of the Internet and through the establishment of virtually all having access to the Internet, the next step is to review bullying and its linkage to the cyber world.

## History and Current Status of Bullying

The precise definition of bullying slightly changes depending on the interpreter. Many rely on Olweus' interpretation as a baseline. In the context of school students, Olweus (1993) stated that bullying occurs when a student is victimized by negative actions over time by one or more persons. In other work, Olweus defined bullying "as unwanted aggressive behavior that involves an imbalance of behavior that is unprovoked and occurs repeatedly over time" (2003, p. 1). Koo (2007) suggested four key terms to assist with the definition: power, pain, persistence, and premeditation. Cary (2004) suggested that bullying is a branch of aggression among children in which a stronger individual or group imposes unwanted acts upon those who are less powerful with intention to do harm.

Olweus (1993) explained there are two distinct types of bullying that occur. There is *direct bullying* (open physical or verbal attacks) and *indirect bullying* (social isolation, confidence reduction). Iossi-Silva, Pereira, Mendonca, Nunes, and Abadio de Oliveira (2013) explained that regarding roles associated with bullying, there are four roles that can be assumed: (a) aggressors, (b) victims, (c) aggressors who are also victims, and (d) bystanders. In terms of gender, there appears to be a higher percentage of boys who bully than girls. Also, research indicates that boys are more likely to be victims of bullying than girls. Iossi-Silva et al. implied that boys are more often the perpetrators and victims of bullying than girls, especially in the realm of physical violence. However, girls are more likely to participate in indirect bullying such as teasing or ostracizing. Favela (2010) supported this by suggesting that girls are more

drawn to spread rumors, ostracize, or exclude others. This is the result of girls preferring language over physical aggression, which tends to be preferred by boys.

It is difficult to determine the roots of bullying. Some may say that bullying is built from the survival instinct that is a part of all living things. Donegan (2012) stated that the survival instinct and a competitive atmosphere has been a part of humans as they evolved. These forces have flowed over into the educational, social, and economic realms. With regard to civilized times, bullying can be traced back centuries. According to early accounts, from the 18<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, what was generally described as physical harassment that resulted in increased isolation or extortion of school children would now be described as bullying (Koo, 2007). Donegan supported this by arguing that since the country's founding, bullying has been intertwined with American life. Regarding children, Hartwell-Walker (2011) suggested that bullying has been around since there has been such a thing as adolescence, where children, who are trying to define their own self-worth or who are just mean, put down others who are considered different or weak. So, the United States is apparently not an exception when it comes to bullying and it conforms to the argument that suggests that modern human life is created from a competitive and pecking order type of lifestyle, and therefore bullying has been an integral human issue that has existed over time.

Despite these proclamations, literature associated with bullying was dormant for decades. Koo (2007) mentioned that the first scholarly article that focused on this phenomenon was published in 1897. The next academic article was written in the 1970's, with the first systemic study taking place in 1978. Koo described an event where a group of older boarding school boys killed a younger classmate by an indoctrination

technique. None of the older boys were punished and the school leaders said it was a misadventure and thus was a part of a normal boy's life. This type of behavior is also described by Koo in Japan, where children were encouraged to ostracize others in order to create a norm of conformity. Even with adults, in certain situations, bullying was considered part of human nature that has exhibited itself in specific circumstances like an army barracks. Koo described an event in Japan in 1790, which garnered attention from newspapers, where an incident of bullying resulted in the death of a soldier.

In more modern times, bullying has continued. The first nationwide study of bullying in the United States appeared in 2001 (Nansel et al.). The study concluded that close to 30% of the students had been subjected to bullying. Boys were more likely than girls to be the victims and perpetrators of bullying. Also, bullying occurred more often in grades 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup>. N. Willard (2011) suggested that bullying has sometimes been seen as a part of school cultures or a rite of passage. All groups or types of students can be victims of bullying. However, McKay (2012) implied that students who are overweight or who are considered to be *nerds*, or perceived to be different, can be subjected to bullying more often. Guckert (2013) supported this by suggesting that students with observable disabilities are more likely to be victimized. Also, the national study (Nansel et al., 2001) intimated that those who don't *fit in* are more likely to be bullied.

Bullying occurs not only to students who are considered to be different but also to students who are closely associated with the perpetrators. Coloroso (2011) described an event, in 1993, where several high school football players taped a peer naked to a towel rack. Parents of the perpetrators complained vehemently when their sons were removed



from the team stating it was *part of the game*. The victim was ostracized by the team. Eventually, the victim was removed from the team, allegedly for informing school officials.

Bullying in school has been prevalent and it has been more frequent at the middle school level. The website, Stopbullying.gov (2014) suggests that 20% of students in grades 9-12 have experienced bullying and that percentage increases to 28% when grades 6-8 are included. This is supported by the Bullying in U.S. Schools Report (2013). Information from the report indicated that in grades 7 & 8, 15% of the students reported that they had been bullied 2-3 times a month. That percentage drops in high school to 11% in grade 9 and 8% in grade 12. Nansel et al. (2001) suggested that bullying occurs more frequently in grades 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

With the prolific use of Internet tools by middle-school aged students and their propensity for aggressive and impulsive acts, that includes bullying, it appears that an adolescent's transition into cyberbullying would be nearly seamless. Hinduja and Patchin (2015a) have implied that while research has not been able to determine that cyberbullying is more detrimental than bullying, it has been determined that the Internet has made the process much more convenient.

### **Cyberbullying**

Life online mimics life in the real world. States have been slow in responding to creating laws that directly addresses bullying. In fact, the U.S. Department of Education (2011) stated that it was not until the 1999 Columbine massacre that was, in part, due to excessive bullying, that states began to create laws that directly addressed bullying. Limber and Small (2003) suggested that for years, bullying was reviewed as a rite of

passage and was allowed to proliferate in schools. As bullying was not directly addressed, it has become a problem with middle school students. With regards to cyberbullying, school administrators are hesitant to respond in such situations as they are unsure of the laws or policies that address it (Hinduja and Patchin, 2015a). Also, Poole's study (2010) suggested that during the time period studied the school districts had not developed a working definition of cyberbullying and this led to confusion for administrators as well as students.

As schools have been slow to respond to cyberbullying, like bullying, it too has flourished. One of the frequent forms of cybercrime is cyberbullying. Carter (2011b) mentioned that cyberbullying is the third highest Internet crime. As bullying has been around, predictably since the dawn of civilization, cyberbullying has probably been around since the dawn of the Internet. As a result of cyberbullying occurring, at all times of the day and virtually at any place, there is a lack of supervision. This is a distinguishing point between traditional bullying and cyberbullying. The majority of traditional bullying occurs at school, where there is at least adult supervision a majority of the time. However, as Tokunaga (2010) asserted, there is a lack of supervision with cyberbullying. This lack of supervision elevates the seriousness of this type of bullying. As N. Willard (2006) suggested, there are three points that give cyberbullying as much of a negative impact as bullying: (a) the lack of boundaries that exist, (b) the high level of anonymity, and (c) the never-ending accessibility.

In addition to these points, Hunley-Jenkins (2012) suggested that disinhibition allows for cyberbullying to occur. Disinhibition allows someone to be unconstrained in his or her behavior. This lack of face-to-face interaction allows perpetrators the

opportunity to act more boldly. Suler (2004) argued that online interaction lacks access to the victim's facial expressions, eye contact, or physical distance, all of which could modify the perpetrator's behavior.

*Deindividuation* is another concept that comes into view with cyberbullying. Hinduja and Patchin (2015a) suggested that deindividuation allows people to distance themselves from their own constraints of what is considered appropriate behavior thereby reducing concerns about other's reactions. What one would not do in person is done effortlessly online. Another point that comes into the foray is the speed of cyberbullying. Unfortunately, speed lends itself well to the impulsivity of a middle school student. In years past, what took days to spread around school can now take minutes. There is little time to confront a rumor or to stand up to a cyberbully when negative messages are spread so quickly, anonymously, and to multiple receivers (Hartwell-Walker, 2011).

This point is accentuated by Albin (2012), who suggested that while spoken rumors and tangible photos appear to spread like wildfire, the harm is only expedited and magnified by the use of technology that is in the hands of today's youth. As a result of youth being constantly tied to their Internet device, there is essentially nowhere for victims to escape.

Few environments produce the same impact from cyberbullying as that which occurs in the middle school environment. Pilkey (2012) implied that data supports the fact that middle school students experience cyberbullying at a disturbing rate. Pilkey also delineated the manner in which cyberbullying occurs. Of those who are cyberbullied, 37.8% receive nasty messages from someone, 32.4% engage in an online fight, and 23.9% receive mean gossip or rumors.

Determining the factors as to why someone would cyberbully is limited; however, Li (2010) surveyed students to gather information as to why others bully. One in five believed that the perpetrators were being *cool*. Close to half thought the bullies were insecure or jealous. Over 60% believed they were doing it for fun. Almost 30% believed it was used as a defense mechanism. A longitudinal study from Smith et al. (2014) suggested that girls have experienced an increase in popularity as a result of electronic aggression.

Regardless of intent, it is becoming more and more well known that while the Internet and all the tools that are utilized have allowed conveniences to all, there are some, including youth, who will use these tools to hurt others. Other statistics related to reporting indicate that victims are reluctant to report cyberbullying to anyone. Wiseman (2011) implied that adolescents are reluctant to report their experiences to anyone at all. This is supported by Juvonen and Gross (2008) who suggested that an alarming rate of 90% of the victims did not report being cyberbullied to an adult. Determining who is cyberbullied and who cyberbullies is the next step to mitigating the impact of this phenomenon.

### **Who is Cyberbullied and Who Cyberbullies?**

Determining the victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying is a crucial step to finding approaches to deal with this phenomenon. Research has indicated that multiple groups are victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying. However, to date, research specifically related to who are victims or perpetrators of cyberbullying is inconsistent.

Research from Beran and Li (2007) could not find a defined age range associated with increased cyberbullying or victimization. Some comprehensive studies set the age

range of the studied groups such that middle school aged students and high school aged students were included in the sample, so a clear distinction was not indicated. Shiraldi (2008) suggested that cyberbullying occurs more frequently during ages 13-17, with the initial onset of cyberbullying occurring in the middle school years. Other research indicates that cyberbullying either begins or occurs most frequently during the middle school years. A study from Williams and Guerra (2007) investigated cyberbullying in elementary, middle, and high schools. They intimated that cyberbullying peaked in middle school and declined in high school. Brown, Kilpatrick-Demray, and Secord (2014) summarized other information by stating that cyberbullying most likely occurs in middle school. A much smaller percentage occurs in the younger years. Kowalski and Limber (2007) implied that 6<sup>th</sup> grade is when cyberbullying and victimization is likely to begin. This could be the result of access because middle school is usually when students attain the technology to access the Internet. Some middle schools do not include 6<sup>th</sup> grade as part of their population. Also, 7<sup>th</sup> grade might be the time when parents allow their children to have a smart phone.

Gender is an important indicator for cyberbullying in order to find approaches to limit the occurrences or to reduce its impact. Research regarding gender is limited and conflicted, in terms of specifically defining who is cyberbullied more frequently. Kowalski and Limber (2007) suggested that middle school girls are more often involved in cyberbullying both as the victims and perpetrators. Li (2010) indicated that girls are slightly more apt to be involved in cyberbullying in middle school. Castile (2013) also supported this proclamation by suggesting that female students cyberbully more than

male students. Other studies, including Williams and Guerra (2007), found that there is no difference between genders when it comes to this phenomenon.

Ethnicity and cyberbullying has been studied minimally. The study from Fox et al. (2014) indicated that the percentages of Hispanics and African-Americans who have a cell phone is the same as whites, so it does not appear that nefarious Internet activity can be categorized by specific races. Abbott (2011) suggested that little consideration has been given to how non-white individuals have experienced cyberbullying either as a victim or a perpetrator. However, Guckert's study (2013) that surveyed students from various backgrounds, suggested that those from different backgrounds, with specific needs, or who were unpopular were more likely to be cyberbullied compared to those who were considered mainstream. The study from Kowalski and Limber (2007) acknowledged that their study was not ethnically diverse, leaving the possibility of other studies reviewing the impact of cyberbullying regarding specific populations. Mitchell (2011) suggested that students who performed better academically in school were less likely to cyberbully, but were just as likely to be the target. However, Mitchell also stated that the strongest indicator of someone who will cyberbully is a history of involvement with traditional bullying. Regardless of age, ethnicity, or gender, the impact of the act can be observed from the victims, parents, and schools.

### **Impact of Cyberbullying**

As technology and online activity increased, so did cyberbullying. According to a study completed by Jones (2014), in 2000 only 6% of the students in the sample were cyberbullied. Five years later, the students reported a 50% increase in cyberbullying with approximately 9% of the students being cyberbullied. Percentages have only increased

with time. According to Bullying Statistics (2013), well over 50% of the youth have been cyberbullied and approximately 15% experience regularly. The impact of this phenomenon affects not only the victim, but others as well. Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) indicated that electronic bullying may have more impact on youth's emotions than traditional bullying because the victim may not know the perpetrator, thus creating a greater power imbalance. J. Carter (2011a) supported this by suggesting that the impact of cyberbullying is more detrimental than traditional bullying because of the 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, on or off school campus availability. Also, the range of the impact could be from a minor annoyance to severe mental and physical health issues.

McKay (2012) implied that emerging research on brain development suggests that young brains are being changed by interactions with technology, as seen with students in close proximity with each focused on their electronic devices and seemingly oblivious to the real people around them. Hartwell-Walker (2011) intimated that the shorthand approach used with electronic communication has limited courtesy and restraint. This approach, while convenient, does not include tact.

Albin (2012) suggested that cyberbullying is not only more severe than traditional bullying, it has had a severe impact on students' emotional, psychological, and sociological development. As words are exchanged through any medium, there is the potential for conflict. Castile (2013) described an incident where two girls exchanged inflammatory words online and the situation escalated when the two girls arrived at school threatening to fight. Mitchell's study (2011) suggested that the most frequent type of cyberbullying was in fact starting a fight online. N. Willard (2011) indicated that

targets of cyberbullying were significantly more likely to receive detentions, suspensions, and end up skipping school.

Others have reported more drastic outcomes of cyberbullying. Hester (2012) indicated that victims of cyberbullying have negative emotional repercussions resulting from incidences. Slonje, Smith, and Frisen (2012) intimated that victims of cyberbullying express such emotions as anger, sadness, frustration, and depression, which could lead to actions like self-harm and suicidal ideation. This is supported by Barlinska et al. (2013) who implied that victims feel a sense of isolation and helplessness, which may prompt the victims to become perpetrators by wanting to exact revenge. J. Carter (2011a) implied that that there is an impact on physical health with an increase in headaches and stomach aches as well as poor peer and parent attachment. Dehue et al. (2008) supported these statements by suggesting that eating disorders for victims was an outcome as well. Guckert (2013) conveyed that cyberbully victims would even suffer from suicidal thoughts.

Ideations of suicide, depression, loneliness, and sadness have not been the worst outcomes of cyberbullying as described by the media. Mark and Ratliffe (2011) mentioned that the media has highlighted stories of teen suicide as a result of youth being victimized by cyberbullying. Henson et al. (2011) retold a story of a cyberbullying incident that brought this phenomenon to the forefront of American life:

In October 2006, 13-year-old Megan Meier befriended whom she thought was a teenage boy named Josh on MySpace. The two exchanged flirtatious messages and became friends. However, events suddenly changed as Josh, along with several other teenagers, began posting very derogatory comments about Megan.



One night, the insults pushed Megan's already fragile self-esteem to the breaking point, and she took her own life. The case took another strange turn when it was discovered that “Josh” didn't actually exist. Instead, the account was created by Lori Drew, the mother of one of Megan's friends and one of her Megan’s mom’s coworkers. (p. 3)

Another case involved Ryan Halligan, who was cyberbullied by rumors being spread about his sexuality. He eventually committed suicide. Ryan’s father stated that cyberbullying amplified his son’s depression and led Ryan to take his life (Hester, 2012).

Not only is the individual impacted by cyberbullying but also entire systems can be impacted as well. Cyberbullying may have a significant impact on school officials’ ability to maintain a safe school environment (Force, 2013). Guckert (2013) suggested that students who are victimized are at risk of not having successful academic outcomes and the ability to feel safe in school. This is supported by Taiariol (2010) who mentioned that victims of cyberbullying exhibit risky school behaviors and low GPA. With others and society as a whole, McKay (2012) implied that cyberbullying behavior is just one manifestation of a society which, in rushing to embrace technology, has challenged human relationships and possibly diminished both respect and a sense of responsibility. McKay continued with the point that there also appears to be a loss of community and less recognition of core social values and it is in this context that both young and old have problems adjusting to the rapid pace of change. Investigating the perceptions of the different participants in this phenomenon is the next progressive step in finding avenues to lessen the impact this has on our society.

## **Perceptions**

Perceptions of all stakeholders involved with cyberbullying can give a baseline for next steps. The following sections shed light on the perceptions of students, parents, school professionals and bystanders regarding cyberbullying.

### **Student Perceptions**

Student perceptions of cyberbullying is an interesting phenomenon. Cyberbullying is a pervasive issue according to Bullying Statistics (2013); this publication states that over half of adolescents and teens have been bullied online and about the same number have engaged in cyberbullying. Another interesting point from Bullying Statistics is that well over half of young people do not tell their parents when cyberbullying occurs. Juvonen and Gross' (2008) study found that 90% of the 1,454, 12 to 17 year-olds surveyed, reported that they did not inform an adult when they were cyberbullied.

Students must be educated on the methods available to report cyberbullying. However, once reported, immediate follow through can be viewed as essential in the eyes of the victim. Holfeld and Grabe (2012) upheld that once the cyberbullying is reported, there is a 42% chance that the behavior would stop. The implication is that that well over 50% of the time, cyberbullying continues after it is reported the first time. This means that if youth are not helped initially, they will not report cyberbullying in the future.

Even though middle school-aged students may not verbally state their need for parent support regarding this issue, there is a glaring need. Donegan (2012) believed that parents buy a cell phone for their children for protection. However, this is providing the primary tool for cyberbullying. Parents need to monitor their child's behavior and

provide the correct support. With monitoring, parents should be aware the type of activity their children are participating in without being too intrusive, which may lead the child to be more secretive with their online activity. Also, the wrong kind of support, though well intended, could have negative consequences. Parents who try to interact with a cyberbully could find themselves being included in part of the occurrence rather than being someone who is trying to stop it. Sometimes, bringing in adults can lead to even more hurtful comments. Also, parents can provoke the situation even more (Wong-Lo, 2009). It is unwise for a parent to become involved in an act that involves impulsive and aggressive teenagers who they have little authority or control over.

### **Parent Perceptions**

Droser (2013) stated that parents who react to their children in a supportive manner allow the child to feel safe, validated, and comforted while at home. However, cyberbullying has challenged this family dynamic. As previously stated, cyberbullying has no limits on time and space. An act of aggression can be sent at any time to any place. This directly impacts the feeling of safety and support that a child may have in their own home and also directly impacts the parent as well. Possibly for the first time, parents are unable to provide that feeling of safety and support in the confines of their own home. A parent may feel powerless to assist a child in a place once believed to be a safe haven. To cope with this lack of control, parents may purchase a smart phone for their child under the auspices of providing safety. Their child is being attacked in a place that was once believed to be impregnable and the parents, once believed to be the guards, are powerless to stop this from occurring. This can be detrimental to all involved and could lead to poor decisions from the child and the parents. Chibarro (2007) implied that

parental involvement is integral to the prevention of cyberbullying. However, the wrong kind of support can exacerbate the issue, especially at school. Force (2013) mentioned that over involvement of parents in regards to cyberbullying can negatively impact the school environment.

Monitoring and regulating Internet use might assist with the reduction of inappropriate use. Force (2013) found that parents should monitor their children's Internet usage in terms of what is being accessed, when it is being accessed, and for how long. Lyons (2013) supported this point by suggesting that a lack of Internet supervision from the parents can increase the probability of cyberbullying occurrences. Wang, Bianchi, and Raley (2005) mentioned that over 60% of parents believe that they effectively monitor their teen's Internet use. However, less than 40% of those teens believe that their parents are effective with monitoring their use.

Also, parents have a false perception that their child would tell them that there is cyberbullying. Jones (2014) stated that parents believe that their child would state they were cyberbullied. Indeed, Droser (2013) implied that there may be a difference in how parents perceive their child's involvement in cyberbullying and actually how their children are participating in cyberbullying. Harcey (2007) suggested that middle school youth would rather be cyberbullied than to be severed from their peer group. Kraft (2011) supported this by implying that victims would rather be victimized rather than inform their parents and risk losing their technology. Also, they believe that adults can do nothing to stop it. Students would rather be cyberbullied than risk losing their Internet tool by informing their parents. Also, Jones mentioned that parents do not have defined rules for cyber activity. Hinduja and Patchin (2013) intimated that parents who talk

about the dangers of cyberbullying to their children often experience less inappropriate Internet activity. This is supported by Hunley-Jenkins (2012) who mentioned that parents should take an active role in monitoring their child's Internet activity in order to stay aware of their child's engagement with the Internet. Parents should report inappropriate activity and impose consequences as a result. Droser (2013) supported this by suggesting that parents should talk about cyberbullying to decrease the perceived risk their child faces if he or she participates in cyberbullying.

Many aspects of parental involvement with cyberbullying have not been researched to date. Jones (2014) stated that further research involving parents and cyberbullying would be beneficial because there is almost no research on the topic. A first step for parents is acknowledging a problem. Dehue et al. (2008) stated that the percentage of parents who believe that their child is involved in cyberbullying is significantly lower than the actual percentage of children who are involved. Results from Wong-Lo (2009) indicated that a majority of parents perceive that their child would inform them of such an act but, in fact, a dramatically low percentage of children actually did inform their parents. Graves (2013) explained that a common issue involving parents is that they do not have the technology skills to keep up with youth today and their online behavior. McKay (2012) supported this by suggesting that there is a tremendous gap between generations and how people interact. The emergence of social media, still dominated by the younger generations, has changed how people connect with the world. Albin (2012) mentioned that because parents lack the facts and circumstances behind cyberbullying until it is too late, they and their children are left with nothing but grief. Some parents lack the awareness of the impact of cyberbullying and willingly accept this

relentless and mean activity as a rite of passage (Hartwell-Walker, 2011). Lacking the awareness or the skills to assist with a resolution can be frustrating for parents.

### **School Professional Perceptions**

Teachers, administrators, and other school professionals play a significant role regarding cyberbullying. However, perceptions of school officials are varied based on a number of factors. Guckert (2013) suggested that teachers lack knowledge of the frequency of cyberbullying, lack knowledge of school procedures for cyberbullying, and have varied experiences managing cyberbullying. Noah (2012) supported this point by implying that educators are unaware of the prevalence of cyberbullying and school procedures for dealing with it. However, those same educators believe they have a definitive role in preventing it. With that being stated, Li (2010) wrote that school officials rarely try to help alleviate the situation.

Educators have a negative perception concerning the persistent use of the Internet by youth today. Hester (2012) suggested that school officials perceive that cyberbullying is the result of an inability of young people to interact positively with others and is a direct result of larger societal issues, including a moral decline and a lack of responsibility by parents to properly supervise their children. Other educators believe that cyberbullying is not an issue at school even though a majority of those same teachers were worried about the impact of cyberbullying (Guckert, 2013).

There are several issues concerning involvement by school officials. Graves (2013) stated that school professionals are hesitant to intervene because cyberbullying occurs most often away from the school environment. Couvillon and Illeva (2011) additionally stated that school personnel lack clarity and understanding about

cyberbullying, in part, due to the inadequacy of information, guidance, and resources. Reaching a resolution to a specific incident of cyberbullying can be a difficult and delicate task. Teachers recognize the long term impact of cyberbullying and realize that parental involvement would help with reducing this impact, but they are hesitant because they believe it is not their place.

School official involvement can lead to a reduction in cyberbullying. However, the correct action and appropriate follow through are essential for a resolution. S.S. Lyons (2013) stated that attempting to resolve an issue is difficult for school officials because of their limited ability to monitor students' online communication. School intervention can act as a catalyst for repercussions on the victims. Lyons continued that parental involvement can sometime impede successful management by school officials. Parents and school officials should work together to reduce cyberbullying. Also, Castile (2013) accentuated this point by stating that principals believe that state laws and policies, focusing on cyberbullying education and increasing parent education, should be initiated in order to give educators a legal framework to establish school and district policy. Additionally, Smith (2010) stated that there is a need to have a shift in policy and a more proactive stance within the school system regarding cyberbullying.

### **Bystander Perceptions**

The role of a bystander in any situation can be awkward. Hinduja and Patchin (2015a) wrote that bystanders in a bullying situation are in a difficult position. They do not want to bring issues upon themselves and yet recognize that there is something wrong and should do something about it. In a middle school setting, a bystander, depending on what is occurring, can have a direct impact on the outcome of a situation. Barlinska et al.

(2012) suggested that, with cyberbullying, a bystander can choose to spread a defacing picture or text to multiple recipients or choose not to do so thereby preventing cyberbullying from being expanded. Brody (2013) mentioned the diffusion of responsibility which makes individuals less likely to exhibit prosocial behavior during an emergency situation when other bystanders are present. With the awkwardness of middle school, this diffusion is only accentuated as these students are struggling to find their own identity.

At the same time, bystanders may not perceive themselves as participants to cyberbullying. The bystander effect, explained by Hinduja and Patchin (2015a), suggests that bystanders do not become involved because they believe that it is none of their business or that someone else will intervene. By not becoming involved, bystanders are unaware of the harm they may cause the victim (Kraft, 2011). In addition, Hester (2012) suggested that cyberbullying feeds the pack mentality. Bystanders, trying to find their role in a social group, may choose to “pile on” to exacerbate the problem. This phenomenon is supported by Li (2010), who stated that about one in eight bystanders actually encouraged the cyberbully to continue. The cyber world allows for negative bystander behavior to occur more often than in the real world. Also, the larger the size of the audience increases the chances that a bystander will act more negatively (Barlinska et al., 2013).

In the case of traditional bullying, a bystander can choose to encourage the one bullying by laughing or verbally encouraging the bully. This type of response perpetuates the issue by giving the bully an audience. The bystander could also choose to



do nothing and ignore what is going on. On the other hand, the bystander can chose to become involved by trying to stop the bullying or by notifying school officials.

The National Crime Prevention Council (2009) suggested that bystanders who do become involved can limit greatly the impact of cyberbullying. McKenna (2008) stated that cyber activity gives the bystander a diminution of a sense of responsibility meaning that they don't believe their role as a bystander will have an impact on the outcome. This sense is supported by Li (2010) whose study indicated that 70% of bystanders knew cyberbullying was occurring, but chose not to become involved. Research indicates that with cyberbullying, the involvement of bystanders can play a significant role in reducing or perpetuating cyberbullying. The next step is for schools, parents, and other concerned stakeholders to review legal aspects of this phenomenon in order to develop effective policies and procedures to curb its impact.

### **Cyberbullying and the Law**

The establishment of law, with which policies are established is steeped with bureaucracy. Laws take a tremendous amount of time to be established. Technology is not confined by this issue. As a result, the laws protecting someone from cyberbullying have been slow to develop whereas technology that enables it to occur has flourished. In addition, the federal government under the Communications Decency Act of 1996 allowed the Internet service providers (ISPs), like AOL, immunity. This means that ISPs are not accountable for any type of cybercrime (Shariff, 2007). This presents the point that the government has to find other avenues to prosecute those who commit cybercrimes.

At the federal level, it is appropriate to start with the U.S. Constitution, commencing with the First Amendment. Willard (2011) intimated that in most settings, the First Amendment suppresses the government's ability to limit speech. However, in the school environment, school professionals must have the authority to limit speech that may create a safety concern. Mark and Ratliffe (2011) supported this, but also suggested that school officials must decipher between a student's First Amendment rights of expression and victim's right to be safe from harassment and a school's right to keep a campus safe from disruption. Poole's study of 2010 delineates five areas of the First Amendment to be examined: (1) form of speech, political or obscene, (2) school-sponsored speech, (3) severity of the disruption caused, (4) site(s) of the incident, and (5) whether the incident rises to the level of a true threat (p. 16). Albin (2012) provided some specificity under the First Amendment by suggesting that schools can only address cyberbullying when it occurs within its jurisdiction. Because cyberbullying mostly occurs off-campus and after hours, a school's ability to address this issue is limited. However, Force (2013) provided some clarity for schools by implying that, to levy consequences, schools must provide nexus for off-campus, after-hours cyberbullying, that created a disruption on campus.

The next step is the need to cover case law that interprets the U.S. Constitution. There are many cases that interpret student activity that has provided the connection to address cyberbullying. The first and arguably the most famous case related to student expression was *Tinker versus Des Moines Independent Community School District*, which established the precedent for many other cases involving school districts' attempts to limit student expression. Hester (2012) explained that the Supreme Court allowed

student expression provided that the act did not threaten other students or create a disruption to the learning environment. Other cases are based on threads from the Tinker case. In fact, N. Willard (2011) suggested that most student expression cases use the Tinker standard regarding substantial disruption. In Bethel School District versus Fraser, the Supreme Court ruled that that school districts have the right to restrict speech if it is disruptive and offensive (Castile, 2013). In Hazelwood versus Kuhlmeier, a case centered on school newspaper articles about pregnancy and divorce, Castile explained that in a school setting, school administration has the right to edit material provided that it is reasonable and related to the effective operations of a school. N. Willard (2011) summarized both Fraser and Hazelwood by suggesting that schools have the right to limit speech when it is associated with order and morality and in accordance with the school's educational mission.

The United States Court of Appeals, in Kowalski versus the Berkeley County Schools (2011), ruled that schools were within their jurisdiction to levy consequences against students who posted material online with the intent of inviting others to indulge in disruptive and hateful conduct which caused an in-school disruption. The Tinker standard for substantial disruption could be based on derogatory comments or threats made against staff as well. In J.S. versus Bethlehem Area School District, Castile (2013) implied that derogatory comments made against staff could also constitute a substantial disruption of the school environment. N. Willard (2011) summarized Saxe versus State College Area School District by implying that when speech interferes with a student's education that is considered a substantial disruption. Also, the case accentuates harassment provided that a reasonable person would agree that it is a substantial

disruption as well. Once federal and case laws are established the states have significant grounds to establish laws related to cyberbullying.

States are beginning to implement laws associated with bullying and cyberbullying. Hinduja and Patchin (2015b) reported that all but the state of Montana had laws that deal with bullying. Of those state laws, 48 had language that included electronic harassment. However, only 22 had language that specifically dealt with cyberbullying. McKay (2012) suggested that Massachusetts law has enacted strict responses to cyberbullying on and off school grounds and has levied consequences using the Tinker standard.

As states move forward with creating laws, Albin (2012) has suggested that they need to be careful with ensuring that cyberbullying is not over criminalized when perpetrators are levied criminal charges related to more serious crimes such as menacing by stalking. Laws should address cyberbullying specifically. State laws continue to progress and refine in order to deal with cyberbullying. Many of California's laws regarding cyberbullying were implemented before social media became an essential part of teen life. Recently, laws in California have been adjusted to address social media as well (Smith, 2013). Additionally, in 2014, California enacted Assembly Bill 256, which adds to the Education Code to allow schools to suspend and even expel students as a result of cyberbullying (California Legislative Information, 2014).

Some states have consequences beyond the school yard. Hinduja and Patchin (2012) stated that in Wisconsin it is a misdemeanor crime to threaten to "inflict injury or personal harm" through the use of email or another computerized device (p. 3969). Hinduja and Patchin (2012) continued that in the state of New Hampshire, cyberbullying

is the same as bullying except with electronic devices. The law focuses on the act as motivated by an imbalance of power based on a pupil's actual or perceived characteristics, beliefs or behaviors. Albin (2012) explained that with Oregon law, school boards are to adopt a policy prohibiting harassment through bullying and cyberbullying. The underlying principle for this law is that every student has a right to attend school and enjoy a safe and harassment-free school environment.

Also, it should be noted that school administrators believe that as government policy makers begin to construct laws, they should be in consultation with school professionals who have firsthand knowledge of the issues (Hunley-Jenkins, 2012). With case law, along with federal and state law in place, schools and school districts have grounds to develop effective policies, procedures and strategies.

### **School Policy, Education and Action**

With laws enacted, schools now have a baseline in which to build policies and procedures with which to mitigate the outcomes of cyberbullying. The following sections delineate policies as well as procedures that include the creation of educational programs and plans of actions.

#### **School Policy**

When an issue has a negative impact on a school's culture or mission that can in turn have an effect on student learning. It has been established that cyberbullying has an impact on a school. Schools are required to respond in order to improve the educational outcomes of the youth that they serve. Thapa, Cohen, Higgins-D'Alessandro and Guffey (2012) suggested that student safety is a chief responsibility for all schools and is paramount for perpetuating a healthy school atmosphere. If schools are the arena where

many of the outcomes come to fruition, then schools should respond accordingly. Chibbaro (2007) suggested that if there is not a policy in place specifically related to cyberbullying, schools and districts should immediately begin with creating such a policy. The first step for schools and districts is to establish effective policies. Bauman (2007) stated that

Policies regarding cyberbullying should be an offshoot of bullying and should be clear and provide guidelines for practice. Also, policies should make a statement about the issue. The policy should permit confidential reporting of cyberbullying, as the fear of retaliation, serves to inhibit youth from getting help. In addition, it is essential that consequences be individualized to the situation. (p. 18)

Snakenborg (2012) implied that policies should not be general enough so an impulsive administrator calls all acts of online activity a violation. Nor should they be specific enough where very few acts are seen as such.

Simms (2013) also implied that policy should be specific to the cyber world. Many administrators in the study believed that current district policy was insufficient as it was. This belief in lack of policy has trickled down to the teachers and to the students as well. Guckert (2013) supported this as teachers revealed a lack of knowledge of cyberbullying intervention and prevention approaches as well as their school's procedures for handling cyberbullying. Students also believed that teachers could not effectively address cyberbullying.

A step in the right direction should begin with policy reform at the site level. Smith (2010) intimated that developing school policy associated with cyberbullying should include input from all stakeholders, including parents and students. With

increased stakeholder input comes the better possibility of support from all involved. Policies should allow school professionals, act in place of the parent, when they have reasonable suspicion to search a cell phone or other device in order to prove a crime has been committed or a school rule broken (McKay, 2012).

### **Student Education and Action**

Regarding students, policies should clearly establish the definition of cyberbullying and the consequences for when it takes place (Painter, 2014). In addition, there should be an increase in student education. Force's (2013) study suggested that prevention through education is of the utmost importance to reduce the number of instances and the impact of cyberbullying. This includes avenues for children to anonymously report incidences of cyberbullying. Victims, perpetrators and bystanders should understand why it is important to take a stand against cyberbullying. Victims as well as bystanders, should be educated on methods of reporting (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Also, these policies should encourage schools to educate students to the boundaries of socially acceptable behavior on school grounds or off (Shariff, 2007). Brewer (2011) implied that school communities should teach students about the dangers of cyberbullying through the use of technology. Policies that include suspension of perpetrators may send a message to parents and students that schools respond to cyberbullying seriously. However, it may not reduce the impact and it may impair the school's ability to reform perpetrators (Snakenborg, 2013). N. Willard (2013) supported this assertion by implying that suspensions do not curb social technological interactions; they only interfere with student success at school. McKay (2012) took a slightly different view stating that holding individuals accountable for their actions is essential. However,

in lieu of suspension, an act of cyberbullying can be used to teach pro-social skills to assist with building capacity for empathy of others.

Beyond reactionary measures, schools should educate their youth regarding preventative approaches as well. Shiraldi (2008) suggested that even within the early grades, students should be taught to never give out personal information online, not to believe everything that they observe online, to never respond in anger, and not to open a message from someone unknown. Bauman (2007) supported this by suggesting that students should be educated about how to respond.

Bauman continued that students need to know how to take screen shots and other strategies to identify a perpetrator. Students should be encouraged to tell adults when they are the targets or are witnesses. Korenis and Bates-Billick (2013) intimated that we must educate students and the entire school community, including parents about the potential dangers of cyberbullying. This should include preventative education that begins in late elementary school. Awareness campaigns regarding cyberbullying with narratives from victims of cyberbullying can make a positive impact regarding a reduction of the act as it assists with children's understanding of the hurtful impact cyberbullying has on its victims (Pilkey, 2012).

Students should be educated regarding norms of civility, through all subject areas, which instructs them about respectful discourse and conflict resolution, and their relevance in both the real and cyber realms (Hunley-Jenkins, 2012). Awareness development and responsibility is supported by Li (2010) who suggested that students, who are paramount in reducing cyberbullying, should be educated regarding the power and negative impact technology has on others. Hester (2012) implied that students do not



have conflict management skills to negotiate a difficult situation either online or in person.

Schools should be leading the way with teaching students to handle situations before it turns to inappropriate actions or aggression. Helping students develop appropriate *netiquette* will help them become better technological communicators and will help them recognize the hazards of Internet activity; yet, student education should not rest solely between the victims and perpetrators. As Guckert (2013) wrote, bystanders play a critical role in the dynamics of bullying and they need to understand the importance of appropriate action as well. All prevention programs, therefore, should include bystanders as well as victims and perpetrators.

### **Parent Education and Action**

Parents, as the primary caregivers, and educators, in the role of *in loco parentis*, should take a predominant role in order to reduce the impact of this activity. Shiraldi (2008) intimated that parents and educators should be educated in order to know the harmful effects cyberbullying can have on children and how to help if they become involved. Anti-bullying websites have provided assistance with this process. Wong-Lo and Bullock (2011) augmented this point by mentioning that in collaboration with parents and school professionals, cyberbullying can be mitigated or prevented. Belsey (2004) provided specifics by suggesting that parents should require their children to sign an agreement of proper Internet usage.

Also, young people should know that online activity is a privilege, it is not a right and should be used appropriately. Froeschle, Crews and Li (2011) suggested that parents should become involved with their children to strengthen communication and to build

trust among family members. This would allow children to share incidences with parents in order to reduce the effects. Mark and Ratliffe (2011) summarized that parents should be educated in terms of the importance of school communication. Regular communication between parents and schools regarding current data associated with this issue should occur. Mark and Ratliffe (2011) continued by delineating key points of parent education that should occur:

- Parents should be informed regarding standard strategies for online safety. Internet use should be in a public area at home. Parents should educate children about appropriate online activity.
- Parents should be educated about the potential dangers of texting and social media and how to maximize safety for their children.
- Parents should be informed about their children's reluctance to share information if a consequence is losing access to the Internet. Alternate means should be implemented, such as limits on technology use, digital safeguards and closer monitoring. (p. 106)

There is a difference between having a defined educational plan for parents and implementing such a plan. This study will research if parent educational plans are implemented at the middle school level and if so, to what degree and to what level of success.

### **School Professional Education and Action**

Education, for all school professionals, should be a definitive component in controlling cyberbullying. Graves (2013) suggested that schools should provide staff development in the area of cyberbullying. School professionals should be trained to use a

delicate approach when investigating incidences of cyberbullying and to use a variety of tools. As a result of the rapid change and innovations in technology with applications, periodic in-services to keep staff current is essential (Bauman, 2007). This is supported by Painter (2014), who suggested that school staff should stay abreast of new social media outlets and that this information should be passed on to parents and community members.

Lyons (2013) mentioned that each cyberbullying incident is distinct. Therefore, intervention with each incident should be well thought through and unique as well. Also, administrators should be sensitive to the victim's situation. Middle school cyberbullying victims may have anxiety and symptoms of depression. A web-based program tailored for each victim could help victims cope with incidences (Jacobs, Völlink, Dehue & Lechner, 2014). Teachers are increasing awareness through the use of anti-cyberbullying curriculum, displaying anti-cyberbullying literature in classrooms, and starting student organizations such as an anti-cyberbullying club (Force, 2013).

Counselors have been effectively used in middle schools. Lyons (2013) wrote that counselors have the ability to establish the background behind an incident and can follow through on the aftereffects of cyberbullying. The specific position of counselors may allow them to process all who are involved in an incident to determine outcomes, processes, consequences, and how to best communicate with parents (Menzies-Murlette, 2012). Many schools have incorporated school resource officers as part of their safety efforts. However, Patchin (2011) stated that approximately 25% of school resource officers did not know if their state had a law specific to cyberbullying. If the police force

is to be incorporated in the school systems, time and effort should be in place to train all staff involved, including police.

School-wide initiatives have proven to be significant in mitigating the outcomes of cyberbullying. School-wide interventions should include empathy training to increase appropriate Internet behavior and mitigate online aggression (Ang & Goh, 2010). Other approaches used by schools have used cyberbullying lessons embedded into school wide character education programs. Guest speakers have been used by schools as well (Force, 2013). Sprague (2012) specified the implementation of a school-wide program called Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). This program is planned to fortify appropriate and supportive behavior across the entire school community. Sprague claimed that PBIS has a goal that all schools should create a culture that encourages: (a) Respect and tolerance; (b) Conversations among students, educators and parents; (c) Shared commitment to reduce bullying and cyberbullying; (d) Empathy and help for students who are bullied and cyberbullied; (e) Adult responses will be helpful (p. 52).

This school-wide method takes an approach that spans beyond bullying and cyberbullying. It promotes an atmosphere of shared rules and responsibilities, mutual respect, empathy, and friendship building to be shown not only by students but also by teachers and other school personnel. The program also gives students the ability to intervene and report incidences of inappropriate or aggressive behavior (Sprague, 2012).

Another program that deals with students on a more intimate level, when a violation occurs, is restorative justice. This program, in place of punitive consequences, includes all parties involved, inspiring discussion about the outcomes of one's actions and how to build bonds between school mates (McKay, 2012).

## Summary

Technology has flourished over the past decades, with the Internet having the biggest impact on modern life. This tool has influenced the way in which people interact, share news, take care of their health, perform their jobs, learn and teach (Fox et al., 2014). A tool this valuable cannot be ignored. In fact it should be encouraged as the benefits are plentiful. However, it is doubtful that Licklider of MIT and other creators of the Galactic Network, could have imagined the impact, positively and negatively, that the Internet has on modern life as it is now known.

Kuehner-Hebert (2015) suggested that by 2019, cybercrime will cost global Internet user nearly 2 trillion dollars a year. Criminals have found a new path to generate income and to damage lives. Despite this negative outcome almost all Americans, approximately 90%, believe that the Internet plays an important role in their life (Fox et al., 2014). This tool is being embraced in the educational field more and more. Also, this tool's use is dominated by today's youth. However, just as crime has made its way into the cyber world, so too has inappropriate youth activity. Cyberbullying has joined with its parent, bullying, as having a negative impact on learning and school culture. Parents, school officials, students and the community at large struggle with ensuring the safety and well-being of youth. Much of this responsibility has been placed on the schools. With a high percentage of cyberbullying occurring at the middle school level, school professionals are faced with finding the effective approaches to deal with this issue.

The progression of law development struggles to keep pace with the implementation of new technology. However, school districts are developing policies that allow schools to best implement approaches to reduce the amount of cyberbullying

and to mitigate the outcomes when it occurs. Belsey (2004) summarized what schools should do by:

1. Amend anti-bullying policies to include text messaging, cell phone use and online bullying.
2. Make a commitment to educate teachers, students and parents about cyberbullying.
3. Make sure parents know whom to contact at the school if there is a problem.
4. Never allow a known incident of bullying to pass unchallenged and not deal with it.
5. “Walk the Walk” of positive, respectful, online communication and behavior in schools and not simply “Talk the Talk.” Strongly encourage teachers and students to become engaged in collaborative projects where there is a well-established, mutually respectful online community with a solid track record in education. (p. 7).

Castile (2013) noted that often school administrators interpret district policies and implement unofficial school approaches. If unofficial school procedures are each individual school's interpretation of district policy, then it would make sense to quantify these strategies that are used in order to determine the best avenues to cease or mitigate the outcomes of cyberbullying. This study will quantify effective approaches that middle school administrators implement that either reduce the number of instances of cyberbullying or to mitigate the impact of such activity.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### Overview

Chapter III describes the methodology and procedures used to complete this study. The chapter delineates the purpose and design of this study and describes the population and sample used in the study. Also, the chapter describes how this Delphi study was implemented, including information specific to data collection, sample selection, analysis, as well as the limitations of the study.

In order to give specific middle school administrators the opportunity to expand on the research related to cyberbullying and its growing impact within the public schools, the researcher chose a Delphi study as the methodology for data collection and resulting study. Linstone and Turoff (2002) stated that the Delphi approach originated in 1950's through the military sponsored Rand Corporation, which focused on the use of expert perspectives. The goal of the process was to develop consensus through a sequence of in-depth questionnaires intermixed with specific feedback. Linstone and Turoff established that a Delphi study is an approach for structuring a group process so that individuals as a collective group can deal with a complex problem. In the case of cyberbullying, research is at a relatively early stage. As a result, data related to this topic is still limited. Because Linstone and Turoff (2002) showed that the Delphi study is an effective approach when the gathering of current data is not well known or available, this dissertation will use the Delphi study in order to establish reliable parameters for research in this area. Less formal encouragement for this approach comes from Dalkey (1969) who suggested that *group process* aids in the gathering of information because as the saying goes, "Two heads are better than one," especially when specific information is limited.

Also, the Delphi technique was selected for practical reasons related to the dissertation process. The researcher deemed the Delphi technique the best process due to the proximity and time constraints related of the expert panel. Linstone and Turoff (2002) stated that one practical use of the Delphi comes when cost and time are an issue in gathering the professionals together in order to achieve consensus. Riggs (1983) concurred by suggesting that the Delphi technique is an effective approach to prevent negative outcomes associated with the use of face-to-face meetings. Riggs explained those outcomes as (1) group pressure to conform is limited, (2) interacting groups have a tendency to move toward a specific and non-divergent train of thought, and (3) authoritative personalities have a propensity to sway the process. As such, this study employed an electronic survey as the means for data collection.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this Delphi study was to explore what policies and procedures are most effective in reducing cyberbullying as perceived by a panel of middle school administrators.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the most effective policies and procedures that middle school administrators believe will assist with reducing cyberbullying in the middle school setting?
2. Of the policies and procedures identified in research question 1, how do middle school administrators rank them as being the most effective with reducing cyberbullying in a middle school setting?



3. What can middle school administrators do to best implement the policies and procedures identified in research question 1 and 2 in order to reduce cyberbullying in a middle school setting?

### **Research Design**

Hsu and Sandford (2007) stated that the Delphi technique is a widely used and accepted method for gathering data from respondents within their domain of expertise.

Dalkey (1969) identified the three distinct basic characteristics of the Delphi approach:

1. Anonymity: the use of questionnaires or other communication where expressed responses are not identified as being from specific members of the panel allows for anonymity.
2. Controlled feedback from the interaction: Controlled feedback allows interaction with a high reduction in discord among panel members. Interaction consists of allowing discussion among group members in several stages, only through the results of the previous stage summarized, and group members are asked to reevaluate their answers as compared to the thinking of the group.
3. Statistical group response: the group opinion is defined as a statistical average of the final opinions of the individual members, with the opinion of every group member reflected in the final group response. (p. v)

Dalkey further suggested that these characteristics are in place to minimize the potential prejudicial influences of assertive panel members, of unrelated discussions, and of compulsion for acquiescence.

Other studies were examined for analysis of cyberbullying in the middle school setting. Patten (2012) explained a *correlational study* as an approach when researchers

analyze the relationship between two quantifiable variables, such as the correlation between college entrance exam scores and college completion. Comparing a school's effective anti-cyberbullying program to the number of student referrals for cyberbullying violations may have gleaned valuable information. However, preliminary information presented no school with a plan implemented that has definable information to compare.

A *case study* was also considered as an approach for this research. Yin (2009) described a case study in part as a practical investigation of a current phenomenon. Based on literature reviewed, multiple studies regarding cyberbullying had been completed. Lyons (2013) conducted a case study that focused on the role of leadership and leadership qualities that influenced the impact of cyberbullying in three schools. Graves (2013) researched technologically-apt teachers and how they defined and dealt with cyberbullying in a school district. In total, the researcher discovered six additional case studies that focused on the issue of cyberbullying. The demand for alternative research approaches was evident.

The need for additional information regarding the best avenues to address the issue of cyberbullying at the middle school level led to the use of the Delphi method for this study. Hsu and Sandford (2007) suggested that the Delphi technique allows for the generation of information regarding a specific approach, policy, or procedure. This technique allows researchers to collect information from those who are intimately involved in the area of focus and to provide practical and useful information. Also, Riggs (1983) suggested the Delphi approach prevents the command of over-influential participants.

This study aimed to utilize the Delphi technique to gather information generated by a panel of middle school administrators deemed to be experts in their field regarding the best policies and procedures are most effective in reducing cyberbullying. School administrators are often faced with addressing cyberbullying in the scope of their duties, and this study collected participants' expert opinions about to the most effective policies and procedures being used to deal with cyberbullying. The Delphi technique specifically distilled the collected information into a high level response rate through a multi-round process of reaching consensus.

The Delphi approach generated data that was quantitative and qualitative in nature with the goal of generating a consensus among the participants. The first two research questions addressed used quantitative data. With the first research question, administrators generated a list of policies and procedures that were implemented in the middle school setting. With the second research question, the list of policies and procedures generated from research question one was used. Using a five-point Likert scale, administrators assigned a point value as to the policies and procedures they believe to be implemented. Results from the Likert scale were analyzed in order to determine the top five approaches being implemented in a middle school setting. The last research question provided for open-ended responses. The five best policies and procedures were reviewed by the administrators that responded to research questions one and two. They shared how these policies and procedures can best be implemented at the middle school sites.

## **Population**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated that a population is a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria and which tend to represent the parameters of the research. The population for this study consisted of middle school administrators who currently work at or have considerable experience with middle schools. The California Department of Education (CDOE) in 2013-2104 stated that there were 1,333 junior highs or middle schools in the state, serving approximately 1,400,000 students. Students in junior highs or middle school range in age from 11 to 15. The ethnic breakdown of the administrators selected for this study are somewhat diverse, with approximately 75% White, 19% Hispanic and 6% other.

## **Sample**

Selecting a sample for a study involves many considerations. Although working with individuals who have the greatest expertise or longevity of experience is preferred, other considerations may come into play that create a sample unique in certain characteristics. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated that a convenience sample is a group of subjects selected on the basis of being accessible, so even though this sampling procedure might have limited the generalizability of the current study, it was determined that finding willing participants would be the best approach for this study. Three rounds of questioning periods were scheduled for this study and with the limited time that administrators have, it was determined that finding willing people would be the best path to generate meaningful information. Also, the researcher has multiple middle school contacts in the Central Valley of California, which contributed to a solid sample size.

For this Delphi study, a panel of experts were selected from the current pool of public school administrators in central California. The superintendent of smaller districts referred specific middle school administrators who, in their opinion, could be considered experts in the area of cyberbullying. For larger districts, the member of the superintendent's cabinet who oversees child welfare and attendance gave the referral. In addition, these administrators met specific criteria within the profession. The selection of these administrators allowed for opinions specifically related to the issue of cyberbullying at the middle school level. The demographics for each school from which the administrator was associated, is listed in Table 1. As the table indicates, the demographics of the schools are diverse. This may assist with generalizability for other schools and school districts within the Central Valley of California and possibly with other areas in the nation.

This sampling technique is both convenient and homogeneous in nature. The researcher who oversaw this project had access to multiple middle school administrators in the Central Valley of California. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated that this type of sample allows for a more trouble-free type of research, but it does limit the ability to generalize to other populations. Also, the sample selection was homogeneous in nature as well because all those who were selected had sufficient experience in the field of middle school education. Patton (2002) argued that limitations on the results are based on the subjects who are selected to participate in the gathering of the data. For the purposes of this research, the participants in this Delphi study must have met two of the following criteria:

- Must have at least five years of experience as a middle school administrator.
- Must have had direct contact with middle school students in the area of child welfare (i.e. discipline, attendance, educational progress).
- Must have been at a junior high or middle school site within the past five years.
- Must have experience with cyber activity at a middle school site.
- Must have experience with creating or implementing cyberbullying policy either at the site, district, state or federal level.

### **Selection and Size of Panel**

The panel of experts selected for this Delphi study were selected from school administrators in Stanislaus County, which is closely aligned to the state of California in terms of the demographics. The Hispanic population in California is 53.3% compared to 56.8% in Stanislaus County. The white population is 25% in California compared to 30% in Stanislaus County. There are 22.7% English learners in California compared to 25.4% in Stanislaus County. There are 59.4% students in California on free or reduced price meals compared to 66% in Stanislaus County. Other populations in California compared to Stanislaus County include: Asians, 8.7% compared to 4% and 6.2% African-Americans compared to 3% in Stanislaus County. The middle schools within Stanislaus County are diverse, but all have lower percentages of Asian and African-American. However, the percentages for Hispanic/Latino range from 90.2% to 32.6%. The percentages of white students range from 62.6% to 4.1%. English learners percentages

range from 6.4% to 35.6%. The percentages of students who are on free or reduced meals ranges from 38.4% to 97.3% (Table 1).

Table 1

*Stanislaus County Middle School Demographic Breakdown 2013-2014*

	Hispanic or Latino	White	Asian	Black or African American	English Learners	Free or Reduced Price Meals	Enrollment
<b>State of California</b>	<b>53.3%</b>	<b>25.0%</b>	<b>8.7%</b>	<b>6.2%</b>	<b>22.7%</b>	<b>59.4%</b>	
<b>Stanislaus County</b>	<b>56.8%</b>	<b>30.0%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>3.0%</b>	<b>25.4%</b>	<b>66.0%</b>	
<b>Hickman Community</b>	<b>22.6%</b>	<b>69.8%</b>	<b>1.3%</b>	<b>2.3%</b>	<b>6.3%</b>	<b>35.7%</b>	
Hickman Middle	32.6%	62.6%	1.6%	0.5%	8.9%	40.5%	190
<b>Hughson Unified</b>	<b>52.7%</b>	<b>44.5%</b>	<b>0.5%</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>24.2%</b>	<b>53.7%</b>	
Ross Middle	59.3%	36.7%	0.2%	0.0%	20.0%	59.6%	450
<b>Keyes Union</b>	<b>59.0%</b>	<b>36.9%</b>	<b>2.4%</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>34.7%</b>	<b>65.6%</b>	
Spratling Middle	79.2%	16.3%	3.0%	1.0%	35.6%	85.6%	202
<b>Modesto City Elementary</b>	<b>67.0%</b>	<b>18.3%</b>	<b>3.8%</b>	<b>3.0%</b>	<b>39.7%</b>	<b>85.3%</b>	
Hanshaw Middle School	90.2%	4.1%	1.4%	1.9%	35.4%	95.4%	789
La Loma Junior High	52.1%	36.1%	2.9%	3.5%	9.6%	75.0%	737
Mark Twain Junior High	77.8%	6.1%	8.0%	4.1%	28.2%	97.3%	766
Roosevelt Junior High	54.3%	31.0%	2.4%	5.4%	15.1%	69.4%	764
<b>Newman-Crows Landing</b>	<b>74.0%</b>	<b>20.7%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>35.0%</b>	<b>68.0%</b>	
Yolo Junior High	74.6%	19.5%	0.8%	0.6%	31.6%	67.6%	646
<b>Oakdale Joint Unified</b>	<b>34.7%</b>	<b>60.6%</b>	<b>1.1%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	<b>10.8%</b>	<b>43.1%</b>	
Oakdale Junior High	34.5%	60.2%	1.5%	0.9%	8.2%	42.7%	794
<b>Patterson Joint Unified</b>	<b>70.5%</b>	<b>14.8%</b>	<b>2.4%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>34.0%</b>	<b>69.1%</b>	
Creekside Middle	67.6%	16.1%	3.0%	8.1%	24.6%	66.9%	1201
<b>Salida Union Elementary</b>	<b>62.2%</b>	<b>24.8%</b>	<b>3.3%</b>	<b>3.3%</b>	<b>29.2%</b>	<b>68.4%</b>	
Salida Middle School	59.7%	26.5%	3.3%	4.5%	19.6%	66.3%	903
<b>Stanislaus Union Elementary</b>	<b>49.1%</b>	<b>27.2%</b>	<b>10.4%</b>	<b>6.3%</b>	<b>23.8%</b>	<b>64.2%</b>	
Prescott Junior High	49.3%	28.2%	11.3%	6.0%	13.0%	61.1%	671
<b>Sylvan Union Elementary</b>	<b>40.1%</b>	<b>40.2%</b>	<b>5.7%</b>	<b>4.3%</b>	<b>14.5%</b>	<b>49.6%</b>	
Savage Middle	38.4%	43.4%	5.0%	4.6%	6.4%	43.3%	999
Ustach Middle	39.5%	38.4%	8.3%	4.4%	9.7%	38.4%	950
Somerset Middle	42.4%	40.8%	3.4%	5.7%	8.5%	60.6%	944
<b>Turlock Unified Schools</b>	<b>55.3%</b>	<b>34.1%</b>	<b>4.6%</b>	<b>2.2%</b>	<b>27.2%</b>	<b>58.7%</b>	
Turlock Junior High	54.7%	33.6%	4.8%	2.8%	22.2%	67.1%	1299
Dutcher Middle School	55.8%	32.2%	5.6%	1.3%	22.3%	57.9%	677
<b>Waterford Unified</b>	<b>40.5%</b>	<b>44.0%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>2.2%</b>	<b>15.5%</b>	<b>59.8%</b>	
Waterford Junior High	66.8%	28.9%	0.9%	1.3%	36.2%	85.5%	235

Generated by Ed-Data 2013-2014

<https://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/Pages/Home.aspx>

Skulmoski, Hartman, and Krahn (2007) researched several Delphi studies. The sample sizes varied from 4 to 171 *experts*. They concluded that the Delphi method should be altered to fit the circumstances and research question. For this study, the sample size consisted of 12 to 18 experts. The goal was to have 18 experts, which would permit a rate of mortality of 6 and that still allowed for a consensus and an effective outcome.

Upon approval from Brandman Institutional Review Board (IRB) the process of contacting the administrators began. Using the knowledge of the administrative pool in the area, the researcher contacted qualified administrators. Referrals to other qualified administrators were generated through discussions with the established and qualified administrators. The researcher contacted all administrators via invitation by email or phone. If the administrator met the minimum criteria and agreed to participate, a letter of informed consent was sent. The letter contained information regarding the process, purpose of the study, directions for completing the questionnaires on Survey Monkey, the timeline and a form to be completed by all panelists.

### **Data Collection**

The Delphi approach allows for a group of experts to participate together in anonymity in analyzing policies and procedures to mitigating outcomes of a complex problem or issue. This current study contained of three rounds of interviewing, consisting of surveys that took approximately 20 minutes to complete. The respondents answered the questions based on personal yet professional opinions rather than based on the processes and policies that are currently established within a given school or district. Because the surveys were completed online, no travel was needed for the members of the



Delphi study. Also, all respondents responded anonymously and did not have knowledge of the others participating. Of the approaches with the Delphi process, this is a common repetitive practice.

Three rounds for this Delphi study were implemented. Upon approval of the Brandman IRB, data was gathered according to the process delineated below (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Delphi Study Schedule*

Round	Description of Activity	Timeline
Prior to Round 1	Email to provide informed consent, timeline for the study, expectations for participation, and a test form using Survey Monkey	March 20 – April 10, 2016
Round 1	Email with description of study's purpose, participation expectations, directions for accessing Round 1 using Survey Monkey examples of responses (for purpose of illustration)	March 22 – April 18, 2016
Round 2	Email with directions for completing the Round 2 for ranking the strategies as having the most influence identified in Round 1 using Survey Monkey.	April 24 – May 13, 2016
Round 3	Email with directions for completing Round 3 Input, directions for providing input based on the strategies identified in Round 2, provide each expert the mean response of all participants to each Round 2 item, provide experts opportunity to make additional comments about any item from the rankings, phone interview with each expert panelist regarding their final responses	May 15 – June 2, 2016

## **Instrumentation**

Prior to data collection, all participants received an email (Appendix A) requesting participation, a brief overview of the intent of the study, informed consent (Appendix B), and Brandman University Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix C). If willing participants did not meet the criteria, they were removed from the study. Next, those who agreed to be participants and who met the selection criteria to serve on the expert panel sent the researcher a response stating that they were willing to proceed and they had received a copy of both the consent and the IRB Bill of Rights. The initial test form was generated through Survey Monkey, which tabulates and organizes information quickly and anonymously (Appendix D).

Once consent was attained, the respondents were sent the link for the Round 1 survey (Appendix E), which asked for input regarding approaches that are effective with reducing cyberbullying at the middle school level. Respondents were to explain approaches used at the middle school level that are most effective with limiting the impact of cyberbullying at the middle school level. The survey allowed for open ended responses that allowed the participants to explain in detail the procedures set by the school, by district policy or by their own established strategies. Once attained, these responses were configured with each other in order to establish a baseline of strategies to be used in Round 2.

In Round 2, respondents were sent an email delineating the expectations (Appendix F). The email explained that the results from Round 1 were compiled and based on their own opinion. Using a five point Likert Scale, respondents were asked to assign a rating to each strategy. A link to the compilation of responses was used to

provide additional information if needed. Once Round 2 was completed, all scores were tabulated in order to generate what was considered by the experts to be the most effective approaches aimed at reducing cyberbullying in a middle school setting. This set the groundwork for Round 3(Appendix G). For Round 3 the experts were sent the top five responses from Round 2. Each panel member was asked to describe how the top five policies and procedures could best be implemented at the middle school level. Using NVivo, an online qualitative analysis tool, information from the panelists was sorted. Each answer, from each policy and procedure was sorted to determine similarities of the responses. Each similarity, from the respondents, was formed into a node to assist with the sorting of the answers. If there was a need based on a combination of information, some nodes shared references.

### **Data Analysis**

Hsu and Sandford (2007) asserted that one rationale for conducting a Delphi study is to generate consensus among the group of participants. The first round of a Delphi study identifies strategies. Followed by the second round which quantifies the strategies. The third round generates practicable recommendations (Okoli and Pawlowski, 2004). In the current study, information from Round 1 set the baseline for what was to be utilized in Rounds 2 and 3. Statistical results are analyzed in Chapter IV. From the results of Round 1, the mean was generated. Dalkey (1969) suggested that a more accurate estimate can be achieved by using the mean of the scores.

With Round 1, responses were compiled using Survey Monkey that generated a list of strategies, policies or procedures. Clarification with some responses were made prior to transitioning to Round 2. Once established, the compiled list was sent to the

respondents for Round 2. Using a five-point Likert scale, each strategy was given a score. Once completed, the data was quantified by using the mean of the scores of each given response. For Round 3 the experts were sent the top five responses from Round 2. Each panel member was asked to describe how the top five policies and procedures could best be implemented at the middle school level. Using NVivo, an online qualitative analysis tool, information from the panelists was sorted. Each answer, from each policy and procedure was sorted to determine similarities of the responses. Each similarity, from the respondents, was formed into a node to assist with the sorting of the answers. If there was a need based on a combination of information, some nodes shared references.

### **Limitations**

The Delphi technique is an effective approach that has many advantages. Because of the anonymity and confidentiality of this approach, it helps prevent a *groupthink*, which could take place within a group setting with one or two dominant participants Dalkey (1969). Also, the flexibility of the timeline presented by such an approach allows participants, who are currently working or who are limited by travel, the option of participating within a time frame that is convenient to them (Yousuf, 2007). However, these conveniences open the process up to issues. Linstone and Turoff (2002) have implied that there are five points that are limitations for the Delphi approach:

1. Imposing monitor views and preconceptions of a problem upon the respondent group by over specifying the structure of the Delphi and not allowing for the contribution of other perspectives related to the problem;
2. Assuming that Delphi can be a surrogate for all other human communications in a given situation;

3. Poor techniques of summarizing and presenting the group response and ensuring common interpretations of the evaluation scales utilized in the exercise;
4. Ignoring and not exploring disagreements, so that discouraged dissenters drop out and an artificial consensus is generated;
5. Underestimating the demanding nature of a Delphi and the fact that the respondents should be recognized as consultants and properly compensated for their time if the Delphi is not an integral part of their job function (p. 496).

In addition to the limitations that are imposed by the Delphi process itself, there are others that are the result of the nature of this study. Those limitations are delineated below:

1. Even though all of the panel experts in the field of middle school administration related to the welfare of middle school students, there was not a true quantifiable process in place to determine their expertise. This could have an impact on the results.
2. The assumption of the panelists is that they have equal expertise. Some may in fact have more experience in the area of middle school student welfare. With all having an equal value in this process, a more effective approach may be missed.
3. This study centers on panelists from Central Valley California. All the schools and districts have similar demographics. The ability to generalize other areas of California, the nation, or the world may be inhibited.
4. The focus of process focuses on middle schools. Approaches created from this study may be limited to only middle schools and may not extend to elementary schools, high schools or colleges.

## Summary

Cyberbullying has had an impact on the safety and smooth functioning of a middle school. School administrators and parents continue to struggle with finding avenues in order to mitigate the negative outcomes of this issue. Working with all factions of this issue: victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and parents are essential. Middle school administrators have been given the task of finding these avenues of prevention, causation, empowerment, retribution, rehabilitation, and resolution. Pruitt-Mentle (2011) singled out the Delphi study as a process that could produce a structure to spotlight research and define key points for others engaged in like practices. This Delphi study was designed to give those who have worked closely with these students an opportunity to share their approaches and ultimately reach consensus. This study chose participants from 18 different school administrators who had at least five years of middle school administrative experience; their approaches were solicited, quantified, and shared with other panel members in order to determine how to best limit the impact of cyberbullying.

Over three rounds this Delphi study allowed the panelists to reach consensus regarding cyberbullying. A virtual brainstorming approach occurred during Round 1 as all participants shared policies and procedures that were believed to be effective. The policies and procedures were not necessarily established by school procedures or by district policies. The panelists were able to give their professional opinion as to how to deal with this issue. The second round asked the experts to quantify their own responses as well as the responses from the other panelists. The third and final round allowed the experts to review the top five results of the panelists. All were given the opportunity to explain how these approaches could best be implemented at the middle school level.

Survey Monkey allowed the panelists to respond without outside influences and on their own time. A phone interview with panelists was conducted in order to obtain additional interview and another perspective. Results from the Delphi process will be reviewed on detail in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

The five chapters of this dissertation develop the following themes: Chapter I gives a brief review of contemporary social technology and how it's many benefits can be manipulated by middle school aged children to the detriment of themselves, peers, parents, and schools. Chapter II reviews literature associated with cyberbullying, including a review of the history of the Internet, cybercrime, the rise of and the dependency on technology that is such a large factor in our society, a historic review of bullying and how cyberbullying blossomed from bullying, and how schools, administrators, parents, and students struggle with limiting the impact and minimizing the amount of cyberbullying at the middle school level. Chapter III reviews the research process used to develop a consensus among middle school administrators related to what policies and procedures are the most effective in dealing with cyberbullying at the middle school level. Chapter IV includes detailed findings about the results of the Delphi study used to gain a consensus among middle school administrators as to the best policies and procedures to implement to minimize the impact of cyberbullying or limit the number of occurrences of cyberbullying at the middle school level.

### **Overview**

Chapter IV restates the purpose of the study and the research questions. In addition, this chapter summarizes the research methods and data collection procedures distributed through three rounds of online surveys. Also, this chapter reviews the population that provides the foundation and context for the research data and the sample used for the study. Lastly, Chapter IV reports an analysis of results that have been generated through the research process.



## **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this Delphi study was to identify what policies and procedures are most effective in reducing cyberbullying as perceived by a panel of middle school administrators.

## **Research Questions**

The following questions comprise the main focus of this dissertation:

1. What are the most effective policies and procedures that middle school administrators believe will assist with reducing cyberbullying in the middle school setting?
2. Of the policies and procedures identified in research question 1, how do middle school administrators rank them as being the most effective with reducing cyberbullying in a middle school setting?
3. What can middle school administrators do to best implement the policies and procedures identified in research question 1 and 2 in order to reduce cyberbullying in a middle school setting?

## **Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

This study aimed to identify policies and procedures that would assist to reduce the impact of cyberbullying or limit the amount of cyberbullying occurrences at the middle school level and, by generating a consensus among middle school administrators who are considered experts in dealing with this issue. An expert panel consisting of middle school administrators from Stanislaus County, which is centered in the central valley of California was used for this Delphi study. All participants were identified as experts, in the area of cyberbullying, by the superintendents of the respective districts or

by the directors of Child Welfare and Attendance from larger school districts. There are 23 public school districts in Stanislaus County, with an overall count of 32 middle schools. In total, 22 administrators were asked to participate in the study. Of those who were asked, 21 volunteered to participate, representing 12 different school districts from Stanislaus County.

The 21 administrators were sent an informed consent document that reviewed the purpose of the study, the process that was to take place, and the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity of all the participants. In addition to the informed consent document, each participant was sent a copy of the Brandman University Institutional Review Board Research Participant's Bill of Rights. By electronically signing the informed consent, participants agreed that they received and understood the Research Participant's Bill of Rights and to participate in the process consisting of an initial test and three proceeding surveys. Of the 21 administrators who volunteered, 20 returned the consent to participate in the study.

The remaining 20 administrators who returned the informed consent document to participate in the study were sent a link via Survey Monkey—an online survey website—to complete the online initial test to orient the participant with the survey process and surveys that would take place, to remind them of their rights and to ask them of preferred methods of contact for the upcoming surveys. Of the 20 participants who were sent the initial study test, 19 completed the survey.

Survey 1 asked the participants to identify the top five policies and procedures that they believed are the most effective in diminishing the impact of cyberbullying or limiting the amount of cyberbullying in a middle school setting. The policies and

procedures did not need to be listed in order of priority, preference, or perceived influence. Participants were asked to limit their responses to five policies or procedures. However, there was additional space provided to allow for additional information, if they were compelled to do so. Of the 19 who were sent Survey 1, 18 completed the survey.

The preceding Survey 2 delineated all responses from the panel. Like responses were combined with others. In total, there were 22 possible policies and procedures for the expert panel to review and score. With each response, a 5-point Likert scale was used to rate the effectiveness of each policy and procedure in reducing cyberbullying in a middle school setting with “5” being “Very successful” and “1” being “Not at all successful.” After each response, space was provided to comment if needed. Also, at the end of the survey, space was provided to add additional information if one would have wanted to do so. Of the 18 experts who were sent the survey, all responded.

The final Survey 3 displayed the score all of the responses with the top five policies and procedures identified. Panelists were asked to explain how the highest scored policies and procedures could best be implemented at the middle school level. In total, 16 of the panelists responded to Survey 3.

At the end of the survey process, nine of the panelists were contacted by phone to review responses and to ask for additional information regarding the issue of cyberbullying at the middle school level. The information from the panelists was used to accentuate specific issues regarding this issue and their beliefs as to how it can be minimized.

## **Population**

The population for this study consisted of administrators from Stanislaus County in the central valley of California. The study population consisted of administrators with experience at the middle school level who had experience in dealing with cyberbullying as well as with creating or implementing cyberbullying policy at the site, district, state or federal level. In total, there are 1,347 middle schools in California and there are 25 middle schools in Stanislaus County, which is the target population for this study.

## **Sample**

For this study, a panel of experts was selected from administrators in Stanislaus County in the central valley of California, who had multiple years of experience in the middle school arena. The sampling technique used to select the panel of experts was convenient and homogeneous in nature. For the purposes of this Delphi study, the participants must have met two or more of the following criteria:

- Must have at least five years of experience as a middle school administrator.
- Must have had direct contact with middle school students in the area of child welfare (i.e. discipline, attendance, educational progress).
- Must have been at a junior high or middle school site within the past five years.
- Must have experience with cyber activity at a middle school site.
- Must have experience with creating or implementing cyberbullying policy either at the site, district, state or federal level.

In addition to meeting the above criteria, the panelists must have been recommended, as experts in the area of cyberbullying at the middle school level, by the superintendents of smaller districts or the directors of Child Welfare and Attendance for larger districts.

**Presentation and Analysis of Data**

**Research Question 1**

*What are the most effective policies and procedures that middle school administrators believe will assist with reducing cyberbullying in the middle school setting?*

Research Question 1 was addressed during Round 1 of the Delphi process. Middle school administrators were asked to identify the most effective policies and procedures they believed would assist with reducing cyberbullying in the middle school setting. The expert panel was asked to be thorough with responses, but succinct, with a targeted length of 25 words for each policy and procedure. The expert panel identified 78 policies and procedures in Round 1. The identified policies and procedures are delineated in Table 3.

Table 3

*Policies and Procedures Identified in Round 1 by the Expert Panel*

1	Educating parents, students, and staff on what cyber bullying is and providing a consistent definition of what it is.
2	Bullying/Cyber Bullying/Harassment NO TOLERANCE BP 5131(a) CA Ed Code 48900 (r) Bullying is a conscious, willful, repeated and deliberately hostile act intended to inflict pain, discomfort, embarrassment, and/or induce fear through violence, the threat of violence or humiliation. Bullying can occur in any form of verbal abuse, emotional cruelty, physical violence, Harassment of any nature, and electronic persecution, otherwise known as cyber-bullying. Bullying of any nature WILL NOT be tolerated in the school district. The district has taken several steps to combat bullying, including, but not limited to the following: teaching students about bullies, the bullied, and bystanders during elementary and middle school PE classes; encouraging anonymous reporting of any form of bullying via Google;

	counseling with students and parents involved; informing students of the current laws about bullying, including hate crimes, sexual harassment, and cyber bullying; and disciplinary actions for bullying that range from detention to expulsion from the district.
3	Education
4	Classroom presentations defining cyberbullying and explaining the impact of it. Additionally, this presentation includes an explanation of the legal consequences of engaging in such action.
5	Communication with students about what bullying is (all types) throughout the school year.
6	We have found that our information and training assembly provides students with tools to combat cyberbullying. Our assistant principal and counselors teach our seventh and eighth graders about becoming a digital citizen, and we show a YouTube video. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VnAU2lbf2c">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VnAU2lbf2c</a> . After the video, we have a question and answer time with students.
7	Clearly communicating to parents and students that cyber bullying will not be tolerated.
8	Providing parents with insight into the various social media apps and how they can be potentially hurtful if used maliciously.
9	Procedure for reporting, there needs to be a way for parents or students to "feel safe" reporting. Traditional methods of filling out an <i>incident form</i> work for some, but the procedure should include an online access to a reporting system.
10	Computer literacy course that is taught at the beginning of the school year to all students and covers the effects and detriments of cyberbullying.
11	Internet etiquette and effect class taught to all middle school students.
12	Conduct Code: If there is a nexus between the cyberbullying and the school, consequences can be given.
13	A cyber-responsibility/awareness education curriculum that is mandatory for students to take. Most districts are in the process of putting such a curriculum in place. Many students, though they are experts with using the technology, have no real sense of the power of that technology or the consequences and dangers of misuse even if that misuse was not intentional.
14	Prohibit use of cell phones during school time.
15	Without question, the most important and effective intervention in controlling cyberbullying in the middle school setting is frequent and random parental oversight of internet use by their children. When middle aged children have unfettered ability and access to carry on destructive conversations with others, they usually will because anonymity is power.

16	Cyberbully education and awareness for students
17	Informational classroom sessions outlining what cyberbullying is and how to reduce student involvement with it are held in student advisory classes.
18	Providing digital citizenship training on appropriate cyber etiquette and outlining consequences that will occur.
19	Our middle school PE/health teacher teaches a 6-week class at the beginning of every year detailing the kinds of bullying, including cyberbullying, and what to do if you or if you see someone being bullied. This has been helpful to create a common language among the students.
20	We have taken a firm and strict stand against bullying of any kind. Our students know it.
21	Assembly in which a trained speaker presents information regarding cyberbullying.
22	Procedures for conflict resolution and reporting bullying.
23	Providing a parent training on the dangers of social media and how to monitor their children's usage of the different social medias.
24	Maintaining open lines of communication between students and their access to administrators and faculty when issues of cyberbullying occur.
25	Incorporate anti-bullying information into the classroom. The message has to be visible to students at all times. Dedicate class time through advisory or home rooms, where teachers and students can discuss anti-bullying themes and information.
26	Case by case discipline restrictions placed on students involved in cyberbullying. This includes "no-contact contracts," restrictions from technology on campus, and restitution by offending students.
27	Board policy identifying a phone as an electronic backpack, and therefore subject to same policies for a search.
28	Education: Teaching and educating students that the words they write influence students in a negative way and can alter their confidence. We use a power point in the beginning of the year.
29	A school program that builds culture at a school site by connecting students to each other and to the school and community. PBIS is often a program that is referred to and is being piloted in our district yet there are many other approaches and components. It just needs to "happen" and be sustained.
30	Contract for Electronic Use Policy to be signed by the student and the parent.
31	According to district policy, students at my school are not to have their phones on or in use at any time during the instructional day. By limiting their use, at school, we hope to limit their ability to engage in harmful conversations with and about others.
32	Cyberbully education and awareness for parents
33	Informational parent sessions outlining what cyberbullying is and how to reduce student involvement with it are held for parents.

34	Providing conflict mediation and teaching coping strategies and communication skills.
35	A set of defined consequences for cyber bullying: a. Warning/administrative counseling/parent contact(depending on the action, the victim's feelings, and first time) b. Conflict mediation (if agreed to by all involved) /parent contact c. Parent conference d. 30 to 60 minutes of detention/parent contact e. Activity restriction for a set amount of time/events f. Saturday School /parent contact g. 1-5 days in-school suspension/parent contact h. 1-5 days suspension/parent contact (depending on circumstances, may include a referral to the police) i. Recommendation for expulsion and/or return to home district.
36	We have maintained an <i>open door</i> to encourage kids to report incidents of bullying.
37	Presentation and open discussion with parents regarding cyberbullying and how it is occurring. This presentation will also include information regarding the types of social media that students are using to cyberbullying and what signs parents need to watch out for.
38	Clear investigation process and consequences for bullying.
39	Communicating with students, parents, and teachers the need to report suspected cyber bullying so that it can be investigated.
40	Working in conjunction with the offended parties through their devices to find the aggressor and taking prompt action in a way that is congruent with the progressive discipline chart in our district.
41	Establish rules and policies explicitly related to bullying/cyberbullying and educate parents, students and staff on them. Enforce them consistently and involve parents early in the process.
42	Providing evidence from offending students to parents, reporting the cyberbullying to sites (i.e. Instagram, Facebook, etc.).
43	Student led solutions team to address instances of bullying.
44	Healthy school culture: Building a culture at the school where students are more like family and are respectful of each other's differences.
45	There needs to be a cyber-social media policy for the district that parents and students can refer to that includes student and parent responsibilities, school responsibilities and district responsibilities. Discipline consequences need to be outlined.
46	Requirement of passing the Online Cyber Safety course before students can get access to school e-mail account.
47	At my school, students who are found using their phone, during the instructional day, have their phone confiscated and stored in the office until the end of the day. For second and subsequent offenses the parent is required to retrieve the phone.
48	Clearly defined consequences for cyberbullying.
49	Whole school anti-bullying assemblies are held twice per year, with cyberbullying avoidance being a part of the assemblies.
50	Flood students with positive messages regarding positive messages.



51	Consistent follow-through of consequences.
52	We administer swift discipline when we confirm bullying has occurred.
53	Focused small group sessions with students identified as those that have either been a cyberbully, or been effected by cyberbullying.
54	Counseling for both those that are bullied and bullies themselves
55	Utilizing a counselor to meet with and discuss cyber bullying to students who bully or are victims of cyber bullying. Often both students will meet using restorative practices in mediation.
56	Promote positive social media use by incorporating hashtags and our school's Facebook account to model inclusive language and school spirit rather than negativity.
57	Create a team that will plan and monitor your schools anti-bullying campaign. Planning would include devising rules/policies, and activities; motivation ideas for staff, parents and students. Part of the team's role would be to monitor and revise the plan as needed. The team should include student members who can provide student based suggestions and feedback to adults.
58	Providing informational meetings and educational opportunities for parents; we have had the FBI host these every year or so to inform parents of the dangers and consequences of cyberbullying.
59	Honest communication with parents of those students using cyberspace to bully or other inappropriate activities.
60	Parent involvement: The more parents are involved and letting the school know how their children are doing, the more the school can support them.
61	Continued professional development (PD) for teachers and staff on the successful implementation and effective use of technology in the classroom. Not only does this aid in student learning but if the PD is effective, staff is learning about cyber and media dangers that can be shared with students. The teachers can and should be monitoring what students are doing in the classroom and that can create teachable moments about cyber safety and responsibility.
62	Organizing parent education on cyberbullying.
63	When it is determined that a student has engaged in serious cyberbullying, which created an intimidating, hostile, or offensive educational environment for the victim, disciplinary consequences may be assigned. These consequences may include detention or suspension, depending on the frequency and severity. If the cyberbullying continues, after all attempts to bring about proper conduct have failed, then an expulsion recommendation may be made. The parent is always involved in the process.
64	Guest speakers who were victims of cyberbullying.
65	Parent/student handbook clearly defines the definition of cyberbullying and outlines the progressive discipline steps for violations committed by students.
66	Quick and direct response to limit bullying and to set a tone that cyber bullying is not tolerated on our campus.

67	Individual counseling and/or application of conduct code provided to students who choose to engage in cyberbullying.
68	Assemblies/programs about bullying.
69	In the event of a student committing two or more cyber bullying incidents, home suspension or alternate school placements are implemented.
70	Empowering students and their families about their legal rights both via education code and penal code.
71	Focus on building a school wide culture that recognizes and rewards good behaviors; makes it unacceptable to mistreat others; and hold all members of the school as responsible for holding each other accountable. (Don't let bystanders off the hook)
72	Meetings with parents and the offending student, along with evidence of the cyberbullying, that leads to a cyber-behavior plan for both parents and the offending student.
73	Leadership/peer modeling: Using the student body officers to set the tone at the school. To inspire leadership from the students and support of their peers.
74	Parent education. This policy is very important. Just as students do not really know or understand the impact of technology and the responsibility one must have to use it, many of our parents don't know either. In fact, I think this is common. Just look at some of your neighborhood Facebook posts if you have a neighborhood Facebook page. Holy smokes! The need the same education as the students and it must be ongoing. Parents must model responsible use of technology and monitor their children.
75	Ongoing counseling of students committing cyber bullying or becoming victims of cyber bullying.
76	My school is in the fortunate position to have an adequate number of highly effective school counselors on hand. They are in constant communication with students who are experiencing difficulties at school and in their lives, in general. They often are able to effectively intervene in cases of cyberbullying before the incidents reach a level of disciplinary consequences. This has proven to be a great asset for our students.
77	District-wide policy of cyberbullying
78	Students are provided an avenue through submission of incident reports (either electronically or on paper) to report cyberbullying. Students are encouraged to capture screenshots of comments and share with administrators.

From the data, policies and procedures were grouped together and some were eliminated. In total, 22 policies and procedures, from the list of 78 were included in Round 2. The researcher combined policies and procedures based on the similarity or on the repetitiveness of the expert panel responses. Some of the responses were eliminated

because they were considered too broad of a response, too vague or they were redundant. Other responses contained multiple policies and procedures that required them to be separated into individual responses. Additionally, some responses were edited as they were lengthy and contained information that was not necessary. Table 4 delineates the policies and procedures generated and the frequency of each one.

Table 4

*Policies and Procedures Generated with Frequency*

Policy and Procedure	Frequency
At the beginning of the year, require all students to complete a digital citizenship course that explains cyber-etiquette and cyber-responsibility. For completion, the form must include a signature from the student and parent.	5
Have education courses for parents that explains the dangers of cyberbullying, reporting processes to the school, consequences per the conduct code and appropriate cyber behavior for all, including students and adults.	15
Have conflict mediation/resolution meetings with those that are involved with cyberbullying.	2
Having on-going student education (beyond the digital citizenship course) during the school year, during class time (advisory period or a specific class) that explains what cyberbullying is, what the consequences are, how to report, and how to be cyber-responsible.	13
Having a school conduct code that has clear definitions, clear examples and clear consequences.	8
Counseling for students involved (victims and perpetrators). This may include small group sessions if needed.	6
Educating students that bystanders can assist with limiting cyberbullying by reporting or by not encouraging the perpetrator.	1
Having district board policy that explains the definition of cyberbullying and the consequences for such behavior.	2
School-wide assemblies (once or twice a year) that may include current information on cyberbullying or include guest speakers who were victims of cyberbullying.	5
Students knowing that they have clear access to report cyberbullying to site administration. This “open door” policy should include immediate access and/or a written incident report that can be completed online as well.	6
Incorporating anti-cyberbullying posters throughout the campus reminding students to be cyber-responsible and what to do if cyberbullying occurs.	1

Continued professional development for site staff regarding new avenues for cyberbullying, promoting appropriate cyber behavior and reminding staff to seize teachable moments.	4
Administrative clear, swift, consistent and complete follow through for perpetrators. Consequences and processes are communicated to the parents.	7
Building a healthy school culture that fosters (PBIS): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect for all students</li> <li>• Appropriate behavior and interactions in person and online</li> </ul>	4
Providing evidence to perpetrators and their parents in the form of screen shots, emails and the sharing of information from Facebook and social media apps.	2
Promote positive social media on the school's Facebook page.	1
Student-led solutions team that addresses instances of cyberbullying.	1
Prohibit the use of cell phones during school time.	3
Encourage parents to monitor their child's use of the Internet during non-school times.	1
Assemble a team of school leaders that would create, review and revise plans to deal with cyberbullying. The team would consist of administrators, teachers, staff, parents and students.	1
Leadership/peer modeling – Using student body officers to set the tone of the school to inspire support among the students.	1
Create board policy that allows for student cell phones to be considered "electronic backpacks," therefore can be searched with "reasonable suspicion."	1

In refining the policies and procedures to be used for the Round 2 process, the researcher strived to ensure that the intent of each of the respondent's answers was explained in the given responses in Round 2. An effort was made to keep the generated policies and procedures clear and concise. There was an attempt to keep all statements to 25 words or less. Five of the Round 2 statements were longer than 25 words, but less than 40.

## Research Question 2

*Of the policies and procedures identified in research question 1, how do middle school administrators rank them as being the most effective with reducing cyberbullying in a middle school setting?*

With this Delphi study, Round 2 asked the expert panel to review the updated policies and procedures that were generated from Round 1 and score each one using a 5-point Likert scale to rate the effectiveness of each policy and procedure as to how each one would help in reducing cyberbullying in a middle school setting. The 5-point Likert scale ranged from “5” being “Very Successful” to “1” being “Not at all successful.” After each response there was space provided for the panelists to respond the policy and procedure scored. In addition, there was additional space provided to for additional information if the panelists wanted to do so. In total, there were 22 policies and procedures to be scored. The policies and procedures that were rated by the panelists are delineated in Table 5. All panelists responded completed Round 2. However, four questions (11, 12, 20 and 21) were answered by 17 panelists and not by all 18. Table 5 lists all the items that were scored by the panelists.

Table 5

### *Round 2 Policies and Procedures*

Item No.	Round 2 Policies and Procedures
1	At the beginning of the year, require all students to complete a digital citizenship course that explains cyber-etiquette and cyber-responsibility. For completion, the form must include a signature from the student and parent.
2	Have education courses for parents that explains the dangers of cyberbullying, reporting processes to the school, consequences per the conduct code and appropriate cyber behavior for all, including students and adults.

3	Have conflict mediation/resolution meetings with those that are involved with cyberbullying.
4	Having on-going student education (beyond the digital citizenship course) during the school year, during class time (advisory period or a specific class) that explains what cyberbullying is, what the consequences are, how to report and how to be cyber-responsible.
5	Having a school conduct code that has clear definitions, clear examples, and clear consequences.
6	Counseling for students involved (victims and perpetrators). This may include small group sessions if needed.
7	Educating students that bystanders can assist with limiting cyberbullying by reporting or by not encouraging the perpetrator.
8	Having district board policy that explains the definition of cyberbullying and the consequences for such behavior.
9	School-wide assemblies (once or twice a year) that may include current information on cyberbullying or include guest speakers who were victims of cyberbullying.
10	Incorporating anti-cyberbullying posters throughout the campus reminding students to be cyber-responsible and what to do if cyberbullying occurs.
11	Students knowing that they have clear access to report cyberbullying to site administration. This <i>open door</i> policy should include immediate access and/or a written incident report that can be completed online as well.
12	Continued professional development for site staff regarding new avenues for cyberbullying, promoting appropriate cyber behavior and reminding staff to seize teachable moments.
13	Administrative clear, swift, consistent and complete follow through for perpetrators. Consequences and processes are communicated to the parents.
14	Building a healthy school culture that fosters (PBIS): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect for all students</li> <li>• Appropriate behavior and interactions in person and online</li> </ul>
15	Providing evidence to perpetrators and their parents in the form of screen shots, emails, and the sharing of information from Facebook and social media apps.
16	Promote positive social media on the school's Facebook page.
17	Student-led solutions team that addresses instances of cyberbullying.
18	Prohibit the use of cell phones during school time.
19	Encourage parents to monitor their child's use of the Internet during non-school times.

20	Assemble a team of school leaders that would create, review and revise plans to deal with cyberbullying. The team would consist of administrators, teachers, staff, parents and students.
21	Leadership/Peer Modeling – Using student body officers to set the tone of the school to inspire support among the students.
22	Create board policy that allows for student cell phones to be considered “electronic backpacks,” therefore can be searched with “reasonable suspicion.”

Following Round 2, the mean and median score were calculated for each policy and procedure. In addition, the percentages for “Very Successful” and “Successful” were tabulated for each policy and procedure. These mean, median, and percentage scores from Round 2 are delineated in Table 6. Four scores had a mean average of over 4 (descriptions 3, 6, 13 and 15). Three scores had a mean average of under 3 (description 9, 10 and 16). No score had a median over 4. Twelve scores had a median of 4 (description 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 20 and 22). One score had a median under 3 (description 18). For percentages descriptions marked “Very Successful” or “Successful,” two scores were over 80% (description 12 and 13). Five scores were over 70% (description 3, 4, 6, 14 and 15). Three scores were under 30% (description 9, 10 and 16). In addition, description 10 had a score that was under 10%.

Table 6

*Round 2 Ratings with % Very Successful and Successful, Mean and Median*

<b>Description:</b>	<b>% Very Successful and Successful</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>
Description 1: At the beginning of the year, require all students to complete a digital citizenship course that explains cyber-etiquette and cyber-responsibility. For completion, the form must include a signature from the student and parent.	50%	3.44	3.5

Description 2: Have education courses for parents that explains the dangers of cyberbullying, reporting processes to the school, consequences per the conduct code and appropriate cyber behavior for all, including students and adults.	50%	3.39	3.5
Description 3: Have conflict mediation/resolution meetings with those that are involved with cyberbullying.	72.30%	4.06	4
Description 4: Having on-going student education (beyond the digital citizenship course) during the school year, during class time (advisory period or a specific class) that explains what cyberbullying is, what the consequences are, how to report and how to be cyber-responsible.	73.30%	3.83	4
Description 5: Having a school conduct code that has clear definitions, clear examples, and clear consequences.	61.10%	3.67	4
Description 6: Counseling for students involved (victims and perpetrators). This may include small group sessions if needed.	77.80%	4.06	4
Description 7: Educating students that bystanders can assist with limiting cyberbullying by reporting or by not encouraging the perpetrator.	66.70%	3.67	4
Description 8: Having district board policy that explains the definition of cyberbullying and the consequences for such behavior.	50%	3.39	3.5
Description 9: School-wide assemblies (once or twice a year) that may include current information on cyberbullying or include guest speakers who were victims of cyberbullying.	22.30%	2.89	3
Description 10: Incorporating anti-cyberbullying posters throughout the campus reminding students to be cyber-responsible and what to do if cyberbullying occurs.	5.60%	2.67	3
Description 11: Students knowing that they have clear access to report cyberbullying to site administration. This “open door” policy should include immediate access and/or a written incident report that can be completed online as well.	64.70%	3.82	4



Description 12: Continued professional development for site staff regarding new avenues for cyberbullying, promoting appropriate cyber behavior and reminding staff to seize teachable moments.	82.40%	3.82	4
Description 13: Administrative clear, swift, consistent and complete follow through for perpetrators. Consequences and processes are communicated to the parents.	83.30%	4.12	4
Description 14: Building a healthy school culture (PBIS) that fosters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect for all students</li> <li>• Appropriate behavior and interactions in person and online.</li> </ul>	77.70%	3.83	4
Description 15: Providing evidence to perpetrators and their parents in the form of screen shots, emails and the sharing of information from Facebook and other social media apps.	77.70%	4.11	4
Description 16: Promote positive social media on the school’s Facebook page.	27.80%	2.89	3
Description 17: Student-led solutions team that addresses instances of cyberbullying.	50%	3.39	3.5
Description 18: Prohibit the use of cell phones during school time.	33.40%	3.39	2.5
Description 19: Encourage parents to monitor their child’s use of the Internet during non-school times.	33.40%	3.33	3
Description 20: Assemble a team of school leaders that would create, review and revise plans to deal with cyberbullying. The team would consist of administrators, teachers, staff, parents and students.	52.90%	3.41	4
Description 21: Leadership/peer modeling – Using student body officers to set the tone of the school to inspire support among the students.	47.10%	3.29	3
Description 22: Create board policy that allows for student cell phones to be considered “electronic backpacks,” therefore can be searched with “reasonable suspicion.”	55.10%	3.39	4

Five policies and procedures had the highest mean rating. Policy and/or procedure 13: Administrative clear, swift, consistent, and complete follow through for perpetrators. Consequences and processes are communicated to the parents had the highest mean rating (4.12). Policy and/or procedure 15: Providing evidence to perpetrators and their parents in the form of screen shots, emails, and the sharing of information from Facebook and other social media apps had the next highest rating (4.11). Policy and/or procedure 3: Have conflict mediation/resolution meetings with those that are involved with cyberbullying and Policy and/or procedure 6: Counseling for students involved (victims and perpetrators). This may include small group sessions if needed had the third highest mean rating (4.06). Policy and/or procedure 14: Building a healthy school culture (PBIS) that fosters: Respect for all students and appropriate behavior and interactions in person and online had the next highest mean rating (3.83).

The top five policies and procedures are important to review as they were the essential piece for the Round 3 survey, where will the expert panel will explain how these policies and procedures can best be implemented at the middle school level. In contrast, Policy and/or procedure 10: Incorporating anti-cyberbullying posters throughout the campus reminding students to be cyber-responsible and what to do if cyberbullying occurs had the lowest mean rating (2.67). The five policies and procedures having the highest mean ratings are delineated in Table 7.

Table 7

*Round 2 Highest Mean Rating*

<b>Policy/Procedure:</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Policy/Procedure 13: Administrative clear, swift, consistent and complete follow through for perpetrators. Consequences and processes are communicated to the parents.	4.12

Policy/Procedure 15: Providing evidence to perpetrators and their parents in the form of screen shots, emails and the sharing of information from Facebook and other social media apps.	4.11
Policy/Procedure 3: Have conflict mediation/resolution meetings with those that are involved with cyberbullying.	4.06
Policy/Procedure 6: Counseling for students involved (victims and perpetrators). This may include small group sessions if needed.	4.06
Policy/Procedure 14: Building a healthy school culture (PBIS) that fosters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect for all students.</li> <li>• Appropriate behavior and interactions in person and online.</li> </ul>	3.83

### Research Question 3

*What can middle school administrators do to best implement the policies and procedures identified in research question 1 and 2 in order to reduce cyberbullying in a middle school setting?*

During Round 3, panelists were asked to review the top five policies or procedures that were scored as the most effective to reduce cyberbullying in a middle school setting. Panelists were to describe how these policies or procedures could best be implemented. At the end of the survey, there was additional space provided for panelists to provide additional information if they wanted to do so. Using NVivo, an online qualitative analysis tool, information from the panelists was sorted. Each answer, from each policy and procedure was sorted to determine similarities of the responses. Each similarity, from the respondents, was formed into a node to assist with the sorting of the answers. If there was a need based on a combination of information, some nodes shared references. For all five policies and procedures responded to, 16 nodes were created.

**Policy/Procedure 1: Administrative clear, swift, consistent and complete follow through for perpetrators. Consequences and processes are communicated to the parents.** With Policy/Procedure 1, four nodes were created (Handbook, Parents,

Website and Follow Through) with a total of 34 references. The node titled *Handbook* focused on the parent/student handbook or the student conduct code, which clearly communicates types of offenses, progressive steps and consequences. The Handbook node had a total of nine references from the respondents. The node titled *Parents* centered on the importance of informing parents proactively, tracking parent contacts and communicating with parents after an event occurred. The Parent node had 16 references from the panel. The node titled *Website* concentrated on ensuring that the information was communicated regarding the conduct code, the parent/student handbook and policies, consequences for cyberbullying. Overall, there were three references from the panel of experts associated with the school’s website. The *Follow Through* node was associated with the need for the school to consistently and thoroughly investigate incidences of cyberbullying. In total, there were six references from the panel with the Follow Through node. Table 8 delineates the nodes and references associated with Policy/Procedure 1.

Table 8

*Nodes for Policy/Procedure 1*

<b>Policy/Procedure 1: Administrative clear, swift, consistent and complete follow through for perpetrators. Consequences and processes are communicated to the parents.</b>
<b>Node 1: Handbook</b>
Parent/Student handbook
Clear rules/consequences in student handbook
Board approved conduct code
Consequences should be clearly explained in the student handbook
Parents via student handbook
Disciplinary action plainly stated within the student handbook
Put info in handbook, spell out policy to students and parents
Develop a matrix of possible offenses to the conduct code with progressive discipline steps clearly defined.
It would be helpful if consequences were spelled out in handbook/code of conduct.
<b>Node 1: Parents</b>

Distributed to all students/parents
Shared at parent events (i.e. Back to School Night),
A parent meeting
Be able to have a difficult conversation with a parent
Parents should sign the school cyberbullying policy
A parent information night
Involve communication with parents each step of the way
Bring parents into discussion early
Contact parent of perpetrators and victim throughout investigation
Effective communication with the parents
Clearly communicated to students and parents
Parent phone logs kept by teachers
Culture of follow through when calling parents
Communicate the policy to the parents and teach the policy to the students.
Parent communication should be done in person or at the very least on the phone.
Parents receive a copy of suspension reports or referrals.
<b>Node 1: Website</b>
Information on school website
Policies should be made available online. The school website
School website that detail consequences
<b>Node 1: Follow Through</b>
This policy must be implemented with fidelity by all administrators.
Follow through on appropriate consequences after investigation.
On-going meetings are quite useful.
Consistency in following the matrix established for dealing with different cyber bullying actions
Follow through immediately at any hint of an issue.
Once it has been proven that perpetrator/s did commit cyberbullying, follow through is a must.

**Policy/Procedure 2: Providing evidence to perpetrators and their parents in the form of screen shots, emails and the sharing of information from Facebook and other social media apps.** With Policy/Procedure 2, three nodes were created (Acquiring Information, Visual Evidence, and Law Enforcement) with 22 references in total. The node titled *Acquiring Information* focused on the importance of training staff to access information and having rules in place that allow school officials to search for the

information. The Acquiring Information node had a total of seven references from the respondents. The node titled *Visual Evidence* centered on the importance of sharing concrete evidence with those involved and with parents. For the Visual Evidence node, there were 12 references. The *Law Enforcement* node centered on the need to involve law enforcement when the evidence pointed to the possibility of a law being broken or when the safety of the students, staff or school becomes a concern. In total, there were

Table 9

*Nodes for Policy/Procedure 2*

<b>Policy/Procedure 2: Providing evidence to perpetrators and their parents in the form of screen shots, emails and the sharing of information from Facebook and other social media apps.</b>
<b>Node 2 Acquiring Information</b>
Administrator that is assigned discipline.
Train staff to find evidence on social media.
Administrators should have a clearly defined procedure for acquiring this information.
The consequence. Implementation could be helped by administrators having social media accounts that they can sign into.
Ask students to email me evidence
Write and adopt board policy that considers devices are the same as <i>electronic backpacks</i> subject to the same search rules.
Generally one strategy that is extremely important is to having another staff member present when acquiring this information so that the evidence is above reproach
<b>Node 2 Visual Evidence</b>
It is extremely important for the administrator to gather evidence and print out any screen shots.
You provide proof via printouts from the social media used.
Visual evidence to parents.
Real life examples are often a more powerful message.
Screenshots, and other media provide great opportunities for the truth.
Print that evidence out and share.
Cyber evidence should be collected and saved as soon as the incident occurs.
Parents see the evidence against them rather than just reports or <i>word-of-mouth</i> .
Evidence of this nature is highly compelling, especially when parents deny that their child is negligent.
Providing to the parents, the activities committed by their child, has proven effective in convincing the parent that their child's behavior is unacceptable.

Include details from this evidence in any written documentation/reports/suspensions/log entries.
Often the middle school students do not think that a message posted by them becomes a permanent evidence.
<b>Node 2 Law Enforcement</b>
In the event the incident rises to the level of law enforcement, this evidence would be given to them.
Forms of evidence could be easily forwarded to local law enforcement.
Involve PD when necessary.

three references created by the panelists. Table 9 displays the references created for Policy/Procedure 2.

**Policy/Procedure 3: Have conflict mediation/resolution meetings with those that are involved with cyberbullying.** From Policy/Procedure 3, four nodes were created from the respondents (Counselor, Students, Training and Issues), generating a total of 16 responses. The *Counselor* node focused on who should be assigned the process of conflict mediation with those who are involved with cyberbullying. The Counselor node had four responses. With the *Students* node, information generated centered on when students should be involved, the type of student who should lead the conflict mediation process, and why conflict mediation is important. From the Students node, three responses were generated. *Training* node was the next set of responses generated from the expert panel of middle school administrators. The focus on the Training node centered having multiple staff members and students in-serviced on with conflict mediation/resolution process in order to assist with issues between students. Overall, there were five responses from the Training node. The last group of responses from the panelists was titled the *Issues* node. This node centered on the fact that not all of the panelists surmised that conflict mediation/resolution was in fact a worthy process

to assist with limiting the impact of cyberbullying or with reducing the number of cyberbullying incidences in a middle school setting. The Issues node had four responses overall. Table 10 displays the information from the four nodes from Policy/Procedure 3.

Table 10

*Nodes for Policy/Procedure 3*

<b>Policy/Procedure 3: Have conflict mediation/resolution meetings with those that are involved with cyberbullying.</b>
<b>Node 3 Counselor</b>
Our school counselor
Assistant principal or designee
Student assistance specialist (SAS) who is able to use her counseling skills to resolve differences between students.
Counselors or learning directors would support the mediation meetings before school, at lunch, or afterschool.
<b>Node 3 Students</b>
Unless egregious, mediation between parties with strategies like <i>restorative justice</i> should be used.
In the future, I would like my leadership students to have an active role in this area.
Here, I think peer mediation works best; allow the students to mandate the culture.
<b>Node 3 Training</b>
Train staff in conflict mediation/resolution.
We need more students and staff trained in conflict resolution
Have your people trained to hold these types of meetings.
The priority in this case is ensuring there are multiple people at a school site who are training to engaging in this strategy.
For each person responsible for conflict mediation/resolution, training be provided.
<b>Node 3 Issues</b>
This is not always the appropriate avenue to use but can be effective.
I have reservations about students, however good natured, holding meetings with the offending students. This information should come from administrators to students. Students willing to engage in cyberbullying are, in my opinion, not likely to adhere to suggestions or even directives, from a peer.
I have experienced little benefit from this. In fact, it has served to further empower the bully by formally informing them of the pain they've inflicted on another.
Students willing to engage in cyberbullying are, in my opinion, not likely to adhere to suggestions or even directives, from a peer.



**Policy/Procedure 4: Counseling for students involved (victims and perpetrators). This may include small group sessions if needed.** With Policy/Procedure 4, only one node was generated from the panel of middle school cyberbullying experts. An assortment of responses from the panelists led to the generation of this node. Responses focused on the benefits of counseling, who should lead the counseling sessions, the need for additional counseling and for referrals for additional counseling using out of school agencies. In total, 10 responses were generated for Policy/Procedure 4. The responses are delineated in Table 11.

Table 11

*Node for Policy/Procedure 4*

<b>Policy/Procedure 4: Counseling for students involved (victims and perpetrators). This may include small group sessions if needed.</b>
Utilizing available counselors who are qualified to deal with these social issues is key.
Train staff in counseling.
Having additional counselors has been helpful.
Small group counseling for cyber bullying perpetrators and victims should happen at a middle school on an ongoing message.
The counseling department to encourage more productive discussions between and among students.
Utilize counseling services and require students to participate when involved in a situation.
Between the school and local agencies who provide a variety of counseling types. Agencies such as Center for Human Services, Aspirinet, etc.
Again, this may be helpful in the area of proper use of social media.
School counselor facilitates or provides information to outside resources.
Counseling is only effective if (a) both parties are willing and (b) parents are in favor.

***Policy/Procedure 5: Building a healthy school culture: (PBIS) that fosters:***

- ***Respect for all students***
- ***Appropriate behavior and interactions in person and online***

Policy/Procedure 5 focused on generating a healthy school culture with the goal of mitigating the impact of cyberbullying or reducing the number of cyberbullying incidences on campus through expecting specific behaviors for all and modeling appropriate interactions, in person and online. PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support) has been considered a comprehensive process for developing a healthy atmosphere for schools to develop. Other similar programs may be referred to from the respondents. However, all panelists were familiar with the basics of PBIS. For this policy/procedure, four nodes were generated (Training, Modeling, Fidelity and Other Points). The first node titled *Training* focused on the need on the process for training a school's staff in developing a healthy school culture. Responses ranged from ongoing training of all staff members, administration, teachers, support staff and parents to having a small team officially trained in PBIS and having that team facilitate the training at the sites. For the Training node, six responses were recorded. The second node, titled *Modeling* focused on the need to have all staff members model appropriate respectful behavior online and in person to reinforce the onus of PBIS. In total, the Modeling node had three responses. The next node was labeled, *Fidelity*. This node centered on the fact that PBIS implementation is most successful when all staff members incorporate the essential points of the program. Overall, there were four responses to the Fidelity node. The last node was classified as *Other Points*. This node represented other points associated with PBIS implementation at the middle school level. Most points centered on the fact that such a program takes time to implement effectively. Another point suggested that bringing in students to assist with the implementation would be beneficial. Another recommended that even with successful implementation, there still needs to be

consequences when students violate established policies. In total, there were four responses for the Other Points node. The responses for Policy/Procedure 5 are delineated in Table 12.

Table 12

*Node for Policy/Procedure 5*

<b>Policy/Procedure 5: Building a healthy school culture: (PBIS) that fosters:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Respect for all students</b></li> <li>• <b>Appropriate behavior and interactions in person and online</b></li> </ul>
<b>Node 5: Training</b>
Staff training in PBIS (certificated and classified)
The administration and staff should receive ongoing training in implementing positive interventions and support.
School-wide training for administration, teachers and support staff in programs like Capture Kid's Heart, etc.
It is essential that the students, parents, and staff are included in the development of the PBIS plan.
Train in PBIS.
The team is trained or a smaller group from the team; who then return to their site to facilitate the implementation.
<b>Node 5: Modeling</b>
Model and reward positive behaviors, including respect and appropriate interactions among students (face to face and online).
I believe demonstrating positive, respectful, and appropriate actions between all school parties reinforces the expectation of what the school is promoting.
Modeling appropriate school conduct by promoting social media.
<b>Node 5: Fidelity</b>
This is a school wide effort that needs to be consistently taught by all stakeholders and modeled by the adults on campus.
The staff support our mission to provide a safe environment to our students.
Developing a healthy school culture can only be done if everyone on staff is in agreement as to what that means.
It is also important that once the plan is developed, the administration ensure that it is being implemented with fidelity.
<b>Node 5: Other Points</b>
This initiative does not happen overnight. At the middle school level it may take two to three years to fully integrate staff, students, and parents.

We are building two new programs with our leadership students and adviser to support more student body issues.
We need to regularly educating and reminding our students to avoid cyber bullying.
Follow through on consequences when students violate the policies.

After the surveys were completed, nine of the panel members were contacted by phone to thank them for their participation and to add additional information if they wanted to do so. All stated that cyberbullying is an issue that is difficult to deal with but one that requires on-going attention. One panelist stated, “Cyberbullying can be detrimental to the learning environment and can have lasting effects on the students.” Also, all stated that continuous access and lack of accountability, the ease of access, and anonymity plays a strong part with allowing cyberbullying to occur. One expert coined the term *Keyboard Commando*, implying that because of the perceived distance that one has, the perpetrator of cyberbullying is allowed the opportunity to say hurtful comments without consequences that may occur if the same comment was made in person. Another described their frustration with dealing with pseudo names that allow perpetrators the anonymity. Finding the student who violated a school rule is difficult to solve because they are using the name, *Labybug123*. Another stated, “One hurtful message that is sent out via social media can be seen by many others. This allows for the opportunity to develop a pack mentality, where others can add more hurtful messages.”

Many discussed the need for developing a healthy school atmosphere using PBIS or another like approach. However, the key to developing and maintaining such an atmosphere at the middle school level is the need for staff to implement the PBIS approaches thoroughly and with fidelity. One administrator stated, “PBIS is a valued approach if all staff members embrace it. If not all staff members are on the same page, it

can be confusing for students to grasp the idea.” Many suggested that students need to know that there will be immediate follow through with appropriate consequences when a cyberbullying incident is brought to the school’s attention. Social-economic status was suggested as a factor, meaning that cyberbullying could be more prevalent at higher socio-economic schools because they have access. However, one participant stated that this was no longer the case. The panelist stated, “Socio-economic status used to be an issue in terms of access to a smartphone. However, my school is 98% socio-economically disadvantaged and well over 70% of the students have access to the Internet with a smartphone.”

Many suggested that parents need to take a more active role with their children. Providing concrete evidence to parents can assist with educating parents as far as their child’s role in a cyberbullying incident. This lack of involvement was accentuated by one panelist who stated, “Students are natives to the information age and parents are immigrants. Parents need to become more aware of the Internet and how it is used by their children.”

### **Summary**

Data analysis for this study was designed to address the three research questions for this study. Twenty-one Stanislaus County middle school experts agreed to participate in this Delphi study with 16 completing all three required rounds. The three questions that were answered focused on developing policies and procedures that would help diminish cyberbullying or limit the impact that cyberbullying had at the middle school level. For Round 1, the panel of experts identified 78 policies and procedures that were believed to help diminish the effects of cyberbullying. Each response from the list was

scrutinized for commonalities in order to develop a list that was not redundant. From the list, 22 policies and procedures were found.

For Round 2, the panel of experts were asked to rate the 22 policies and procedures using a 5-point Likert scale. The mean, median and percentages of each policy and procedure that the panel believed would be “Very Successful” or “Successful” were calculated. From the list of 22, the top five policies and procedures, based on the mean were selected for the next round. Four of the policies and/or procedures had a mean score of over 4 and were brought to the next round.

During Round 3, each expert was given the list of the top five policies and procedures. They described how each policy and procedure could best be implemented in the middle school setting. Using NVivo, an online coding website, the responses from Round 3 were scrutinized and combined based on commonalities. Themes were developed from Round 3 to assist with the implementation of policies and procedures that would help mitigate the impact of cyberbullying or limit the amount of cyberbullying at the middle school level. Additionally, follow up phone calls allowed the panel members to provide information and thoughts regarding the issue of cyberbullying in the middle school setting.

## CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Internet is a tool that has increased everyone's ability to gain information and to communicate easily, and for those reasons, people view the Internet as an essential tool in everyday life. However, the Internet also has allowed for an increase in crime as well as mischievous, hurtful, even dangerous behavior. Laws to mitigate the negative aspects of the Internet cannot keep pace with the rapid change and variety of ways this tool is used. This has created complications in our daily lives, including the lives of middle school students. At the middle school level, cyberbullying has become a destructive and divisive force that has limited the socio-emotional growth of our youth, frustrated parents, and pre-occupied middle school administrators. The need is obvious for middle school administrators to implement effective policies and procedures to limit the impact and to lessen the amount of cyberbullying.

For this Delphi study, a panel of experts in cyberbullying at the middle school level as identified by the superintendents or the directors of child welfare and attendance, were asked to reach a consensus regarding the most effective policies and procedures that can be implemented at the middle school level that would assist with limiting the impact of cyberbullying at the middle school level and to lessen the amount of cyberbullying incidences. The study consisted of three rounds of surveys. The first round asked the experts to identify policies and procedures they believed would assist with limiting the effects of the cyberbullying phenomenon. The second round asked the panelists to score each response from the first round using a five point Likert Scale, with 5 being "Very successful" and 1 being "Not at all successful," to determine how effective each policy and procedure would help diminish cyberbullying in a middle school setting. Results

from the second round were used to determine the five most effective policies and procedures that would help diminish cyberbullying in a middle school setting. Those top five policies and procedures were used for the next round. With the third round, panelists were asked to review the top five policies and procedures and describe how these policies and procedures could be implemented in a middle school setting.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this Delphi study was to explore what policies and procedures are most effective in reducing cyberbullying as perceived by a panel of middle school administrators.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the most effective policies and procedures that middle school administrators believe will assist with reducing cyberbullying in the middle school setting?
2. Of the policies and procedures identified in research question 1, how do middle school administrators rank them as being the most effective with reducing cyberbullying in a middle school setting?
3. What can middle school administrators do to best implement the policies and procedures identified in research question 1 and 2 in order to reduce cyberbullying in a middle school setting?

### **Major Findings**

Upon review of the research associated with cyberbullying, it is evident that this issue begins both to surface in and peak during the middle school years. There is ample evidence pointing to the impact that cyberbullying has on the victims, perpetrators,



bystanders, parents, and the school environment. However, there is a gap in research regarding policies and procedures that are or could be implemented at the middle school level to help reduce the amount of cyberbullying that occurs or to limit the impact of cyberbullying. The research found that clear, upfront and ongoing communication and thorough follow through is essential to reducing the amount of cyberbullying that occurs in the middle school setting. Also, research suggested that creating a positive and healthy school environment can assist with limiting the amount of cyberbullying. Additionally, having conflict resolution and counseling for students who are involved with this type of behavior can help limit the impact of cyberbullying and prevent it from occurring in the future.

### **Research Question One**

Research Question 1 asked: *What are the most effective policies and procedures that middle school administrators believe will assist with reducing cyberbullying in the middle school setting?*

For Round 1 of this Delphi Study, the panel of experts were asked to identify the five most effective policies and procedures they believed would assist with reducing cyberbullying or limiting the impact of cyberbullying in a middle school setting. From the survey, 78 policies and procedures were identified. The responses from the expert panel were combined if they were found to be repetitive. In addition, some of the responses were eliminated if they were considered to be too broad or too vague or redundant. Also, some responses were edited if they were lengthy and contained information that was not necessary. From the 78 responses generated a total of 22 policies and procedures were analyzed during Round 2.

The 22 responses pulled from question 1 were analyzed based on frequency from the panel of experts. In total, two responses were found to have been repeated 10 or more times by the panel:

- 1) Have education courses for parents that explains the dangers of cyberbullying, reporting processes to the school, consequences per the conduct code and appropriate cyber behavior for all, including students and adults. (15 responses)
- 2) Having on-going student education (beyond the digital citizenship course) during the school year, during class time (advisory period or a specific class) that explains what cyberbullying is, what the consequences are, how to report and how to be cyber-responsible. (13 responses)

Conversely, 11 responses had only one or two like responses:

- 1) Have conflict mediation/resolution meetings with those who are involved with cyberbullying. (2 responses)
- 2) Educating students that bystanders can assist with limiting cyberbullying by reporting or by not encouraging the perpetrator. (1 response)
- 3) Having district board policy that explains the definition of cyberbullying and the consequences for such behavior. (2 responses)
- 4) Having district board policy that explains the definition of cyberbullying and the consequences for such behavior. (1 response)
- 5) Having district board policy that explains the definition of cyberbullying and the consequences for such behavior. (2 responses)
- 6) Promote positive social media on the school's Facebook page. (1 response)

- 7) Student-led solutions team that addresses instances of cyberbullying. (1 response)
- 8) Student-led solutions team that addresses instances of cyberbullying. (1 response)
- 9) Assemble a team of school leaders that would create, review and revise plans to deal with cyberbullying. The team would consist of administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and students. (1 response)
- 10) Leadership/Peer Modeling – Using student body officers to set the tone of the school to inspire support among the students. (1 response)
- 11) Create board policy that allows for student cell phones to be considered “electronic backpacks,” therefore can be searched with “reasonable suspicion.” (1 response)

The expert panel did not see the results of the frequency analysis for Round 2 as it was determined that such information could sway the results of the Likert scale that was used for that survey.

Dalkey (1969) suggested that the importance of the Delphi study relates to the old adage, “Two heads are better than one,” or in the case of a Delphi study, “Several heads are better than one.” The researcher found that this approach of using multiple experts to reach a consensus as to the most effective policies and procedures to reduce the impact of cyberbullying or limit the amount of cyberbullying in a middle school setting, would be effective.

Round 1 was structured with open-ended responses to allow for the panel to brainstorm effective policies and procedures for this issue. In total, there were 78

responses from the panel, with the number of words ranging from one to over 150. In terms of topics, the panelists described policies and procedures that covered taking a student's cell phone away, to search laws, to parent education, to schools promoting and modeling appropriate social media etiquette. As the researcher needed to ensure that all viewpoints were presented in Round 2, all responses were analyzed. Some responses were combined with others, some were edited and others were eliminated as it was determined that they were too vague, too broad or too specific. As this was the brainstorming portion of the study, findings were limited. The major findings of this study will be reviewed with the upcoming review of questions 2 and 3.

### **Research Question Two**

Research Question 2 asked: *Of the policies and procedures identified in research question 1, how do middle school administrators rank them as being the most effective with reducing cyberbullying in a middle school setting?*

For Round 2, the expert panel rated each of the 22 responses generated using a 5-point Likert scale with "5" being "Very successful" and "1" being "Not all successful." Additional space, after each policy and procedure, was provided for the respondents to add more information if they wished to do so. Also, there was additional space provided at the end of the survey for panelists to add more information. The mean and median score for all policies and procedures were tabulated. Furthermore, the percentages scored "Very successful" and "Successful" were calculated as well. Of the experts that originally volunteered to participate, 18 completed Round 2. However, four of the policies and procedures did not receive a rating from all of the respondents. Five strategies were found to have the highest mean averages:

- 1) Administrative clear, swift, consistent, and complete follow through for perpetrators. Consequences and processes are communicated to the parents.
- 2) Providing evidence to perpetrators and their parents in the form of screen shots, emails, and the sharing of information from Facebook and other social media apps.
- 3) Have conflict mediation/resolution meetings with those that are involved with cyberbullying.
- 4) Counseling for students involved (victims and perpetrators). This may include small group sessions if needed.
- 5) Building a healthy school culture (PBIS) that fosters:
  - Respect for all students.
  - Appropriate behavior and interactions in person and online.

Conversely, three policies and procedures were scored relatively low compared to the others. All three had average scores that were below a score of 3:

- 1) School-wide assemblies (once or twice a year) that may include current information on cyberbullying or include guest speakers who were victims of cyberbullying.
- 2) Promote positive social media on the school's Facebook page.
- 3) Incorporating anti-cyberbullying posters throughout the campus reminding students to be cyber-responsible and what to do if cyberbullying occurs.

Rounds 2 and 3, of this Delphi study went to the heart of the issues associated with cyberbullying. Hsu and Sandford (2007) described Round 2 of the Delphi study where consensus begins to take place and the participants can begin to see authentic

results. As previously stated, the 78 responses from Round 1 were combined, edited, or removed to generate 22 policies and procedures to be scored using a 5-point Likert scale. Many of the policies and procedures that were generated focused on preventive measures such as educating the students and parents as to what cyberbullying is, how to report such behavior to the school, and the consequences for such behavior. In addition, there were policies and procedures that focused on mechanisms that concentrated on avenues to work with those who were directly involved with cyberbullying (i.e. counseling and conflict mediation/resolution), as well policies and procedures that revolved around swift and consistent follow through by the school when cyberbullying occurred, followed by presenting concrete evidence to students and parents. Furthermore, there were policies and procedures that centered on ongoing staff development for teachers, support staff, and administration associated with this topic. Also, there were policies and procedures that stressed the importance of ensuring that the schools and the school districts have clear communication in the form of board policy, student conduct codes, and parent/student handbooks. Building a positive and healthy school culture was a focus of the policies and procedures as well. Lastly, there were more traditional preventive policies and procedures described in the form of prohibiting cell phone usage and parents monitoring their child's use of the Internet.

The top five policies and procedures scored revealed the consensus of the expert panel. The highest scored policy and procedure centered on administrative follow through when cyberbullying occurred. Obviously, the panel believed that when cyberbullying occurs, it is the responsibility of administration to ensure that the incident is thoroughly investigated, consequences are given, and the parents of those involved are

notified. Although researchers such as Holfeld and Grabe (2012) have suggested that once the cyberbullying is reported, there is a only a 42% chance that the behavior would stop, which implies that a large number of reported incidences would continue after it is reported to administration, the panel from this current research countered this by stating that they were committed to following through with each reported incident of cyberbullying. One panelists stated in the follow up interview that at the school site, “All incidences of cyberbullying are taken seriously and thoroughly investigated. This gives victims and parents the willingness to reach out and puts the cyberbullies on notice.”

The next highest policy and procedure focused on providing evidence to perpetrators and their parents, by using screenshots and other types of information. Along with the first, this policy and procedure is primarily completed by school administration in order to determine who is involved with the specific act. This proof of a violation is an important step in reaching a resolution. It can open the eyes of the perpetrators and to their parents. Droser (2013) implied that parents will often place their own children on a pedestal, knowing that cyberbullying takes place on a regular basis, yet just not perpetrated by or committed upon their own children. This lack of acknowledgement by parents can only serve to perpetuate this issue. By providing proof to parents and to students, this can allow administrators to begin the restorative process.

Counseling for students involved (victims and perpetrators), including small group counseling, was the next highest policy and procedure recommended, according to the panel of experts. This policy/procedure focuses on dealing with the aftermath of the incident. Counselors can assist the victims in dealing with hurt feelings that are often associated this type of incidence. As stated by Lyons (2013), counselors can follow

through on the aftereffects of cyberbullying. In addition, Menzies-Murlette (2012) wrote that counselors can assist with how to best communicate with parents. Counseling for the offenders was also supported by the panelists. This can assist in minimizing the perpetrators sense of disinhibition mentioned by Hunley-Jenkins (2012) and with deindividualization as suggested by Hinduja and Patchin (2015a). If counselors can assist with creating a feeling of empathy in the offender, there might be less of a tendency to commit such an action in the future.

Having conflict mediation/resolution meetings with those involved with cyberbullying was the next highest policy and procedure scored by the panel of experts. The attempt with this policy and procedure is to provide the victim and the perpetrator the opportunity to mediate or resolve differences in a safe environment with a school official or another trained student to act as the mediator. As will be seen with the analysis completed from Round 3, there is some controversy with this policy and procedure. There is little and conflicting evidence found from the literature review completed by the researcher that found conflict mediation or resolution as an effective tool to combat cyberbullying in the middle school setting. In fact, Limber and Small (2003) suggested that mediation is effective to resolve conflicts. However, with cyberbullying, there is an imbalance of power which limits the impact of reaching a mediation or resolution. It is possible that the panelists had other intentions for the use of this policy and procedure rather than a reaction to a cyberbullying incident.

Building a healthy school culture that encourages respect for all students and appropriate interactions was the last policy and procedure scored. This is a proactive approach to the issue. The thrust behind this policy/procedure is that if there is a healthy



school culture, where it is common and practiced that students and staff treat each other with respect and positive behaviors are encouraged, there is a less likelihood of negative behaviors, such as cyberbullying occurring. As stated previously in this study, there is limited evidence regarding building such a school culture. Ross (2012) described the success of implementing PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support) at an elementary school. Sprague (2012) asserted that a benefit of such a program is that students feel more comfortable intervening and reporting inappropriate or hurtful behavior. PBIS had not been fully implemented at any of the schools that were a part of the study. However, as the experts in this field, the panelists were aware of the potential of such a program. There is also the understanding that creating a successful program, such as PBIS, takes years to develop and requires extensive and ongoing training of all staff members.

### **Research Question Three**

Research Question 3 asked: *What can middle school administrators do to best implement the policies and procedures identified in research question 1 and 2 in order to reduce cyberbullying in a middle school setting?*

With Round 3, the expert panel was to review the top five policies and procedures and describe how they could best be implemented at the middle school level to effectively mitigate the impact of cyberbullying or limit the amount of cyberbullying. Of the 18 experts that completed Rounds 1 and 2, 16 experts responded to Round 3. Using NVivo, an online qualitative data analysis software program, the responses for each policy and procedure were coded. From all the responses from the expert panel, 16 nodes

were created from the top five policies and procedures. The nodes created for each policy and procedure are delineated below:

- 1) Administrative clear, swift, consistent, and complete follow through for perpetrators. Consequences and processes are communicated to the parents.
  - Handbook
  - Parents
  - Website
  - Follow Through
- 2) Providing evidence to perpetrators and their parents in the form of screen shots, emails, and the sharing of information from Facebook and other social media apps.
  - Acquiring Information
  - Visual Evidence
  - Law Enforcement
- 3) Have conflict mediation/resolution meetings with those that are involved with cyberbullying.
  - Counselor
  - Students
  - Training
  - Issues
- 4) Counseling for students involved (victims and perpetrators). This may include small group sessions if needed. One node was created for this policy and/or procedure.

5) Building a healthy school culture: (PBIS) that fosters: Respect for all students and, Appropriate behavior and interactions in person and online.

- Training
- Modeling
- Fidelity
- Other points

Round 3 provides the mechanics of implementing the policies and procedures that were developed from this study. The nodes developed from the NVivo process provides the details for the implementation process. For the first policy/procedure developed, the panelists wanted to ensure that in the event that cyberbullying occurred, there would be thorough follow through by administration and that parents would be aware of the consequences and processes. The first node, Handbook, was created as a preventative measure in order to establish support for administration in the form of documentation that was well communicated to all stakeholders. In the event that cyberbullying occurred administration need support from school or district documentation that was board approved. This would ensure that consequences that were levied against a perpetrator were not arbitrary but were pulled from documents that were established and communicated to all. The second node from the first policy/procedure focused on parent notification and education. In the event of cyberbullying, parents may question the actions of administration or the consequences levied against their child. With proof of effective communication to parents, they have weaker grounds or reasons with which to file a complaint against an administrator's actions. Also, this node states that parents should be brought into process when their child has been involved with a cyberbullying

incident either as the victim or perpetrator. This process can assist with educating the parents as to their child's Internet behavior and to the process that the school uses to combat this issue. The third node from the first policy/procedure is another attempt by the panelists to ensure that information is disseminated as to what cyberbullying is and what are the consequences of cyberbullying. Once again, this is a preventative and proactive measure that supports the thrust of communicating to parents and others district and school expectations. The fourth node from the first policy/procedure is the first of a theme that is part of other nodes that will be seen throughout the results: follow through. The panelists believed that to limit the amount of cyberbullying that occurs, administration needs to immediately respond to any hint of a cyberbullying incident. This gives the students the impression that the schools takes this issue seriously. Also, parents will have less of an opportunity to complain if it is believed that administration is doing what is necessary and required to resolve a situation. Not only should follow through be in the form of an investigation, but it should also be in the form of ongoing meetings with those involved with the incident to ensure that the actions have not resurfaced.

The second policy/procedure focused on providing concrete evidence of cyberbullying to perpetrators and to parents. Having such evidence can streamline the investigative process and move the discussion from "If your child did it," to "Here is the evidence, "Now let's move to a resolution." The first node of the second policy/procedure focused on administration acquiring information associated with a cyberbullying event. A series of points from this node center having the administrator or other staff trained to search for and to access information associated with a cyberbullying

event. In addition, it was suggested that as the information is accessed, it is encouraged to have another staff member with the one searching. This can help counter any statement that would suggest that the information was falsified, or that the information was immediately deleted by the perpetrator. Another entry suggested that students could email administration proof of an event. Lastly, a panelist encouraged districts to adopt board policy allowing administrators to search student phones as they are considered “electronic backpacks,” which will allow for acquiring information as well.

The second node of the second policy/procedure centers on actual visual evidence. This node had the most responses from the panelists with a total of 12. The thrust of this node pointed to having sufficient evidence to answer any questions regarding the participants with a specific cyberbullying incident. This points to a key difference between cyberbullying and its parent: bullying. Unless bullying is observed by an adult, it is challenging for those who are investigating to determine the perpetrators of the event. However, as Wiseman (2011) stated, once an event takes place online, it becomes a permanent record. This was reiterated by the panelists. One panelist states that the visual evidence that is created by a perpetrator becomes much more concrete than “word of mouth,” which is often the case with bullying.

The information contained in node 2 lends itself to the onus in node 3. Law enforcement officials often rely on concrete evidence to cite perpetrators and pursue convictions. The panelists understood this point and suggest that, when an event rises to the level of breaking a law, police need to have clear affirmation in the form of tangible proof in order to cite or even arrest a student.

The third policy/procedure focused on using conflict mediation/resolution among those who are involved with cyberbullying. This policy/procedure presented the most conflicting results in the study. There were four nodes created for this policy and procedure. The first three nodes focused on the most effective avenues to implement such a policy/procedure. The last node centered on issues associated with such a practice being implemented at the middle school level. The first node focused on the counseling aspect of conflict mediation/resolution. For the most part, the middle school counselor would be assigned this intervention as this approach does focus on the socio-emotional side of education. However, conflict mediation/resolution does not require a counselor to perform this duty. This can also be completed, or led by an administrator or another professional in the office if necessary. The next node focused on the students. Some panelists believed that having the students themselves lead this process would be of benefit as it allows for the students to lead the established culture of the school. With specific situations, especially in the event that the violation was not too egregious, the panelist believed that having students lead this process would be of benefit.

The third node centered on training with having multiple staff and students trained and available to work with students who are having issues with others. With several people available for conflict mediation/resolution, there is a likelihood for an immediate opportunity to reach out to students who are having issues. The last node presented conflicting reports from the panelists. Even though this policy/procedure was among the top selected, some panelists were hesitant to use this at their middle school. Three panelists were adamant that this approach would not be of benefit. They stated that such an approach may serve to empower the perpetrator to continue such activity if they

believe that all that will happen is a meeting between him/her and the victim. This might convey to the victim that they did something wrong as well, compelling him/her to not report in the future and search for another, possibly inappropriate response. One panelist did concede that in the right circumstance, this could be an appropriate avenue.

The fourth policy/procedure centered on counseling for the participants in a cyberbullying event. This should be distinguished between conflict mediation/resolution led by a counselor. This node focused on appropriate counseling after the event was resolved and consequences were levied. Counseling made available to the participants of cyberbullying would help with the healing process for the victims and the development of empathy for the perpetrator. Only one node was created for this policy/procedure and it centered on the need and the role for counselors to deal with cyberbullying at the middle school level. Having counselors on hand can help elevate the activity, but as a panelist stated, the students and their parents have to be willing to allow this to occur. Many stated that there is a need for more counselors at the middle school level.

The last policy/procedure alludes to a school-wide approach to dealing with cyberbullying. Having a program that builds a healthy school culture that fosters respect for all and appropriate behavior has been viewed as tantamount for dealing with cyberbullying and overall better operations for a middle school. Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS), is such a program and was known and obviously supported by the expert panel. Other programs were referred to during the survey process, but the intent is to build a healthy school culture and PBIS is a “catch-all” term used to refer to a program that would assist with building such a program.

The first node focused on training to build such a program. Most of the responses from the panel centered mainly on training the entire staff, certificated and support staff, with this program. One panelist stated that parents and students should be included in the development of the plan. This would help with student and parent buy-in and would help with promoting the program as well. Another panelist stated that the training should not be only once but ongoing as programs such as PBIS take years to develop and implement effectively.

The focal point of the second node was on modeling. The panelists stated that for students to interact and behave appropriately and positively with each other online and in person, they should see these types of interactions modeled by all staff at the middle school. Panelists were in support of this action. Some made mention of the parents doing the same with their online behavior. However, the panel conceded that staff should be the focus of this node. The next node is similar to modeling, but distinct in regards to who should be modeling appropriate behavior. For programs like PBIS to be effective, it should be done with fidelity. All stakeholders, should model such behavior with constancy. If not, this will cause confusion in the minds of middle school students and will give them more of a cause to continue inappropriate behavior online and in person. Other points that are important to implementing PBIS in the schools was the focus of the last node. Panelists stated that this programs takes multiple years to implement and there is a need to regularly educate students and train staff regarding the process of PBIS. In addition, a panelist stated that when the program has not been effective and there is a violation of the policy/procedure, appropriate consequences should be levied.



## **Unexpected Findings**

This research process did bring some findings that were surprising to the researcher. The rapid growth of online applications and other Internet tools has outpaced schools' and other government agencies' abilities to create board policies, policies, procedures, and laws to combat the negative and hurtful aspects of student behavior, such as cyberbullying. Also, when laws are implemented, dictating board policies and school rules, there is a changing process that has to take place. A panelist wrote as an additional point from Round 1, that with the new state law, SB 178, administrators are not allowed to search a cell phone unless consent is given by the student or the parent. The panelist stated that this does slow the investigative process and allows for a student to delete information that may be considered evidence in an investigation. However, another panelist stated that the district, where this panelist works, has board policy that addresses this issue and does not violate the intent of SB 178. The panelist stated that districts should write and adopt board policy that considers phones as "electronic backpacks" subject to the same search rules as a backpack or locker. Once again, board policies and school rules take time to develop and how districts address SB 178 in the future will dictate how schools are able to investigate cyberbullying incidences.

Policy/Procedure 3: Have conflict mediation/resolution meetings with those that are involved with cyberbullying was another finding that was surprising as this policy/procedure was among the top based on scoring from the panelists. The expert panel, in Round 3, made many comments stating that conflict mediation/resolution would not be effective as a consequence for a cyberbullying incident. This was supported by the research conducted. However, a point of clarification regarding this policy/procedure in

necessary. Based on a phone interview, a panelist suggested that conflict mediation/resolution will only be effective before the event rises to cyberbullying. The panelist stated that two students may have a conflict online. There is banter that takes place between the two and if this continues, what has happened is that one is no longer able to “handle” the situation, becomes frustrated, and states that he/she is being cyberbullied. Conflict mediation/resolution is an effective tool to utilize when this is a conflict and has not risen to the level of cyberbullying, when there is issue of a power imbalance between the participants. As another panelist suggested in the Issues node, under the right circumstances, conflict mediation/resolution can be effective. This approach would be the case if those involved were on “equal ground,” and one did not have a distinct power advantage over the other. Another way to state this would be that if the participants were involved in a dispute or conflict, a mediation or resolution approach would be effective. Once one participant gained the upper hand and the event rose to cyberbullying, another policy/procedure should be utilized. This perceived power imbalance occurs more expediently when and if bystanders become involved, as it has been shown that bystanders, if they side with the perpetrator, can give the perpetrator an imbalance of power.

Based on the scores from Round 2, where administrative follow through was the highest scored policy/procedure, rather than relying on implementing a program, panelists believed that commitment from the staff, especially administration, to address this issue was more important than developing a healthy school culture. From the research conducted panelists stated that parents appreciate a committed reaction from administration when an event has taken place. Also, if a complaint from a parent makes

its way to the district office, efforts made and steps followed will be analyzed more than a reliance on a program, such as PBIS.

Bystanders did not make its way into the top five policies nor did it come up with the phone call interviews after the surveys were completed. Barlinska et al. (2013) established that empathetic behavior by the bystander, such as not forwarding information or not encouraging a cyberbully, has proven to be effective in limiting the impact of the act. As schools begin to implement PBIS or other programs, students, who are bystanders, may feel compelled by empathy to stand up for others when they are cyberbullied or be more willing to report such activity to administration. Also, if administrators respond as expeditiously as described in the top policy/procedure, student bystanders may be more willing to report as well if they believe that their reports will be thoroughly followed through upon.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to understand how middle schools can best implement policies and procedures that will assist in limiting the amount of cyberbullying that occurs or minimize the impact that cyberbullying has on middle school students in order to provide a safe and comfortable learning environment for the students and therefore, maximize learning. This was completed by using the Delphi study process to generate a consensus among a panel of middle school experts, identified as experts in the field of cyberbullying. According to the findings from the panelists, the five most effective policies and procedures to reduce the amount of cyberbullying or to limit the impact of cyberbullying at a middle school level are:

1. Policy/Procedure 1: Administrative clear, swift, consistent and complete follow

through for perpetrators. Consequences and processes are communicated to the parents.

2. Policy/Procedure 2: Providing evidence to perpetrators and their parents in the form of screen shots, emails and the sharing of information from Facebook and other social media apps.
3. Policy/Procedure 3: Have conflict mediation/resolution meetings with those that are involved with cyberbullying.
4. Policy/Procedure 4: Counseling for students involved (victims and perpetrators). This may include small group sessions if needed.
5. Policy/Procedure 5: Building a healthy school culture (PBIS) that fosters:
  - Respect for all students.
  - Appropriate behavior and interactions in person and online.

### **Conclusion 1**

This policy/procedure is essential with addressing the issue of cyberbullying. Perpetrators need to be aware that middle school administrations take cyberbullying seriously and they will address an incident immediately and thoroughly. Initially, middle schools should complete preparative ground work regarding cyberbullying. Rules, steps, consequences, examples, and reporting processes should be communicated to all stakeholders, especially students and parents. This ground work centers on having information well communicated in the form of parent/student handbooks, conduct codes, and board policies. This ground work frames the preventative and proactive stance that the school and district have taken regarding cyberbullying. If a process or outcome is ever questioned by a parent or another party, the rules and procedures delineated in these

documents will be first line of defense for the school and will assist to help parent understanding. Communicating these policies and procedures should be done via hard copies delivered to all students and parents and should be available on the site and district website as well.

Once the background work of communicating information via handbooks and conduct codes has been completed, swift action by middle school officials should be completed. Victims and parents should know that school officials take this issue seriously and completing investigations, levying consequences and following through with support is essential. Victims and their parents need to know that this issue will be addressed. As parents should be educated of the aspects of cyberbullying and policies and procedures in place for this, so to, they should be notified when their child is involved in a cyberbullying incident. All events should be well documented with an explanation of what took place, procedures that were followed, interventions and consequences that were implemented and parent notifications.

## **Conclusion 2**

Once a cyberbullying incident has taken place, providing concrete evidence is essential in order to best support an administrator's decision to clarify parent understanding as to an event and to levy consequences. Businesses have begun to view social media sites, Facebook and other sites, as part of the hiring process or as part of monitoring employee work habits. Some businesses have personnel trained in this area. Schools should have staff trained to investigate cyberbullying as well. Acquiring information by these means can assist schools with gathering necessary evidence. Also, students and parents should be educated in taking screen shots of evidence that can be

shared with administrations. Students and parents should know that they can email evidence to the principal or other administration. Lastly, school administrators should bring in law enforcement when the evidence acquired indicates that a law has been broken or that student, staff or other lives or safety are in danger.

### **Conclusion 3**

Having conflict mediation/resolution can be an effective tool addressing the issue of cyberbullying provided that it is implemented as a preventative approach and not done as result or a consequence of cyberbullying. Encouraging counselors, other trained adults, or even trained students to work with students who are having a conflict or disagreement is seen as a positive action; conflict mediation/resolution can help solve issues between students before the situation grows to a point of confrontation or a cyberbullying incident. Having several staff or students trained in this area will provide schools with a wide range of resources that will allow for an immediate mediation or resolution. Students, who are selected to be trained in conflict mediation/resolution, should be respected by others, be leaders among their peers and be confidential with their meetings with other students. Once again, conflict mediation/resolution should be done only with participants who are willing and if the situation has not risen to a level where there is a power imbalance among those involved with the situation, which would be the case in cyberbullying. In the event that there is a power imbalance, other policies or procedures should be implemented.

### **Conclusion 4**

Counseling at the middle school level for victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying is an effective tool after a cyberbullying event has taken place. If students

are willing to be counseled and parents are willing to allow this to occur, this process can assist victims in dealing with hurt feelings or resentment that may occur with cyberbullying. Also, counseling for perpetrators should take place as well. This can assist with the development of a perpetrator's sense of empathy towards others and help them to address conflict with others in a healthy manner, rather than relying on inappropriate or hurtful online behavior.

Schools and districts need to make a financial commitment to having counselors on site and available for students. In the event that there is limited financial resources, there should be contracts with outside agencies to provide periodic, but ongoing counseling. If there is no financial commitment to bring in additional counseling, schools should provide a pool of outside agencies that can provide counseling services if the student and the parent would like to do so.

### **Conclusion 5**

Building a healthy school culture, where all are educated or trained to treat others with respect and to have appropriate interactions in person and online is paramount to limiting the amount or reducing the impact of cyberbullying in a middle school setting. Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) or similar programs can provide the framework to building such a culture. Successful training should incorporate all staff members, administration, certificated, and support staff. This training should be implemented and then be ongoing as well. Parents, students, community members and other stakeholders should be involved with the process or at least well informed of the program.

Once implemented, the practices should be modeled by all staff members. As the adults and respected members of the school community, staff should model respectful, responsible and appropriate behaviors at all times. Staff who engage in ridicule, condescending or other inappropriate behavior, especially if that behavior is observed by students or parents, will derail the tenets of the program and bring the questioning of the school's commitment to the program to light. This should be done with fidelity as well. Once again, if students or parents see one staff member behave in a way that is not in line with the thrust of the program, it will cause confusion. In addition, all need to be patient with a program like PBIS. It may take years for a school-wide program like PBIS to show positive results. Mistakes should be anticipated and should be used as an opportunity for growth and change to refine the program, rather for an opportunity to end the program. Patience, commitment to the program, modeling and fidelity will see this program through with success.

### **Implications for Action**

The results of this study realistically place the onus to mediate the degree of cyberbullying or reduce the amount of cyberbullying on a middle school setting on the administrator. As the research for this study came solely from a sample of middle school administrators, it is refreshing to see that administrators are willing to take such a stance. Leadership does make a difference. As the site administrators are the ones given the responsibility of leading their respective schools, they have accepted this challenge and are willing to make a difference in order to allow students to feel safe and comfortable in order maximize learning.



The first step of action is to establish a positive school culture. Toward achieving this goal, the initial and ongoing training of staff is the first action to be taken. The principal should take the lead regarding this process, ensuring that all staff are trained and that all are modeling the expected behavior with fidelity. Administrators should have difficult conversations with staff who are not complying with cultural expectations. Parents should also be reminded by administration of the school culture and that their inappropriate online statements or interactions can negatively influence their own child to do the same.

As part of the proactive approach with PBIS, support should be in place in the form of conflict mediation/resolution during conflict before a situation rises to the level of cyberbullying. Training staff and qualified students should be ongoing so that this process can be implemented on an as needed basis. Counselors, or whoever is assigned to oversee conflict mediation/resolution, should regularly evaluate the program and those who are trained to lead these processes. Changes in training or changes to student staffing should take place if the program is not meeting the needs of those participating or a conflict mediator is not performing at the expected levels. Also, site and district administrators need to review the collective bargaining agreements that include counselors to ensure that counseling students after a cyberbullying event has taken place is within the purview of the counselors' job description. If it is not, changing the job descriptions for counselors through the collective bargaining process, to include such actions, should take place.

Additionally, all staff, administrators, certificated and classified staff should have ongoing training in the area of Internet usage and netiquette. Staff need to be trained to

exemplify appropriate netiquette and to impart this knowledge on the students.

Developing students to become appropriate digital citizens is something that is essential as students begin to use the Internet during their middle school years.

Next, administration needs to ensure that expectations, rules and consequences are in place and that these are well communicated through various avenues, including online. These expectations, rules, and consequences should be reviewed with all staff and students on an ongoing basis and not just when a cyberbullying incident has occurred. Administrators should consider cyberbullying a relevant issue that is not a trivial action done by students just seeking attention but one that can disrupt the educational environment and cause undue harm for students involved. They should swiftly and thoroughly respond to any cyberbullying incident. If a victim does not believe their concern was responded to in such a manner, they will be less likely to report such an incident in the future. Parents of victims who do not believe that the school responded appropriately will often not support the school's efforts in the future. Also, perpetrators who believe that they were able to commit such behavior with no consequence will be more apt to repeat this behavior in the future. A strong part of the investigative process is having concrete evidence that can be shared with students and parents. Having staff members who are skilled at searching the Internet for proof is essential for providing concrete evidence. Also, students should be encouraged to take screen shots of cyberbullying events to share with school officials. Once a cyberbullying event has transpired, students and their parents have been notified, and the consequences have been levied, counselors should be in place to provide support. This should be in place for perpetrators as well as victims.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

The research results and findings from this study have brought other recommendations for further research to light:

1. Much was said by the expert panel about Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS). None of the schools where the administrators from the expert panel worked had implemented PBIS. Also, the literature review revealed a study regarding one elementary school's implementation of PBIS and the results did not review cyberbullying. A study should be conducted of a middle school's implementation of PBIS and how that has had an impact on cyberbullying.
2. Research revealed much about bystanders and the impact that has on limiting cyberbullying at the middle school level. The expert panel did not share much information about bystanders during the research. As PBIS is implemented and students develop a better sense of empathy for their peers, a study would be warranted to gauge the impact that PBIS has had on bystander involvement to end a cyberbullying act, to support victims of cyberbullying, and the effects of reporting cyberbullying to school staff.
3. A number of panelists, including the researcher of this study, have experienced issues with parents becoming involved with students who have exacerbated a cyberbullying incident. Jones (2014) stated that further research involving parents and cyberbullying would be beneficial because there is almost no research on the topic. A study for developing plans for educating parents on appropriate reporting processes and on appropriate online behaviors for themselves is recommended.

4. Two panelists mentioned how the new state law, SB 178, has impacted investigative processes. A study revealing how California middle schools change policies and procedure to fall in line with SB 178 and other state laws is recommended.
5. As research regarding cyberbullying at the middle school level is still in its infancy, continued research as to who is cyberbullied, specifically regarding gender, race, socio-economics, rural versus urban schools is suggested.
6. All of the panel members stated that the schools and districts where they work, have training for students on *netiquette* at the beginning of the school year and some have ongoing student training throughout the year. A study examining the impact of netiquette training and the impact that has on appropriate Internet behavior is suggested.
7. As this study was the only one to date in Stanislaus County, other studies, possibly a longitudinal study or with other approaches, focusing on this county is warranted.

### **Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

Technology has dramatically changed the way in which we live our lives. Most people are constantly connected to others via a smartphone and the Internet. In addition, the way in which we gather and use information has changed: our ability to reach others quickly and the accepted ease of communicating has increased dramatically. The avenues with which we communicate has increased as well. These changes have found their way into the school setting. Driven by these changes, schools are forced to consider or they already have embraced these changes.

For the most part, these changes have benefitted our lives and have been advantageous in the educational setting. Indeed, gathering information for comprehensive research and school projects has changed from spending hours in the library to being able to pull research documents from the comfort of one's own home via the Internet. Schools use technology to provide support and intervention for all students. These changes, though beneficial, have had a negative impact on the social-emotional realm of our lives. Privacy is limited and access to other's personal information is much more open-ended than ever before.

As a middle school administrator for 14 years, I have observed the transition of this technology in our schools. Early on, I observed students' lives changing. Disputes went to from face-to-face confrontations, to veiled, caustic, and even dangerous online conflicts that were difficult to solve or even monitor. These issues were difficult for students and parents. The onus to solve these issues, in the middle school setting, was and still is, placed on the administrators. Through my own observation, during current times, I have observed what appeared to be a close relationship between students who fought with the dispute starting via the students' smartphones. In addition, I have been surprised with the reactions of adults, specifically parents or other adult relatives, as they become involved with cyberbullying with respect to their middle school students. More often than I would like to say, I would conduct an investigation related to cyberbullying, only to find out that an adult was either a participant in the activity or was swayed into it by a teen who was unwilling to adhere to the adult's request. Something that I believe that has been difficult for teens to adjust to is the transparency of cyberbullying, especially in the area of isolation. With Instagram, Vine, Facebook and other social

media sites, gone are the days of private gatherings among friends. With social media, all are able to see the activities of others, especially those who were not invited to the gatherings. Teens who are searching for weekend diversions with friends may view the fun of others alone. This feeling of isolation has been a difficult pill for some teens to swallow. Connect these feelings with the lack of boundaries that is present with cyberbullying and a victim will not only have feelings of isolation, but nowhere to escape the negative outcomes of this negative phenomenon.

The Internet and all it has to offer has been beneficial to our lives. The ease of gathering information, especially for lengthy writing processes, like a dissertation, has brought a transformation to research and scholarly work. I have enjoyed viewing the lives of friends and family through social media outlets. The simplicity of purchasing goods has benefitted many and has helped spur the economy. The path of communicating with others has been greatly widened by the Internet. Overall, the Internet has been a tool that has benefitted our lives. However, it has forced people to make adjustments in their behavior. Parents have to deal with the fact that the home is no longer a “safe haven” from bullies. Cyberbullying has forced teens to deal with difficult issues on an on-going basis.

Parents need to continue to support their children and provide the attention that their teenage students need. Even though students may distance themselves from their parents, they still need to know that their parents are there for love, guidance, and support. Administrators and other school officials have to remain diligent with their efforts to provide a safe campus. Even though schools cannot solve all issues related to cyber safety, they must be willing to support the process of limiting harm and promoting

prevention. I have found that there are fewer issues, when there is clear evidence that a diligent effort has been made to deal with cyberbullying, even when parents still have a complaint. Parents may disagree with the outcome. However, they should not disagree that an effort was made to solve the issue.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### **Email Invitation to Participate in the Delphi Study and Delphi Study Initial Test Form**

Date: March 21, 2016

To: Delphi Panel Member

From: Dave Kline, Delphi Coordinator

Subject: Participation in the Delphi study

Expert Panel Member:

To begin, I want to thank you for your willingness to participate in this Delphi study.

The intent of this study is to identify policies and procedures that are in place to effectively deal with cyberbullying in a middle school setting. This study will ask a panel of experts with extensive experience with middle school aged students and who also have direct experience dealing student welfare and discipline. The intended outcome is to identify policies and procedures that effectively limit the influence of cyberbullying.

#### **Delphi Study Process**

This Delphi study will consist of three rounds of input and feedback.

1. The first round will ask panelists to identify policies and procedures that school administrators use to deal with cyberbullying in the middle school setting.
2. The second round will list the responses in Round 1. As the expert, you will be asked to score each response, related to limiting the impact of cyberbullying using a five-point Likert scale.
3. The third round will provide you results from the top five responses. Each expert will describe how these policies and procedures can best be implemented at the middle school level.

4. If additional rounds are necessary to reach consensus, they will be conducted after Round 3.

### **Study Dates**

The study will be conducted starting on March 21, 2016 and is estimated to finish on April 29, 2016. Each round's input is scheduled for one week, with the three rounds being separated by a minimum of one week. The time period has been selected to move quickly through the process, but has built in flexibility to accommodate response time of the expert panel and any logistical problems that may arise.

### **Study Requirements**

There are requirements of the study design to ensure its validity and timely completion. As an expert panelist participant, you are asked to review these requirements and confirm your participation in the Delphi study process and your ability to complete the study.

Anonymity of the expert panel participants is essential to the Delphi process. Neither your name nor your answers will be shared with other members of the expert panel. You are asked not to discuss your participation in the process with others until completion of the study.

The selection criteria and selection process for the study has served to ensure that the chosen experts are qualified to both identify and rank the influence of policies and procedures that administrators should use to limit the influence of cyberbullying at the middle school level. Therefore, you are assumed to have experience and expertise to contribute effectively. Your ideas for strategies and your opinions shared through the identification and ranking process are vital to the outcomes of the study.

Survey Monkey is being used as the primary vehicle for completing the study. Survey forms will be emailed directly to you with a link to complete and submit your responses. Each form is a secure document and only requires that you have the link to submit your response.

In each round, instructions will be included to guide the process. Instructions are designed to inform you of the process and are not meant to influence your responses in any way.

Prompt response in each round of the study will assist in the timely completion of the process. The time to complete each round should range from fifteen to thirty minutes. The study timeline is based upon expert panel members responding within one week.

E-mail will be the primary means of communication with all panel members. E-mails will be sent to inform you of each round. Your input within five working days will be appreciated and will assist with keeping the process on schedule.

In the event of e-mail or computer failure, survey instruments can be sent by fax, or hand delivered to participants. If either of these problems take place, please contact the Delphi Coordinator by cell phone to arrange an alternate delivery and collection of the survey instrument. The Delphi Coordinator can be reached at (209) 484-7129.

At the completion of the study, each participant will receive a copy of the results of the study. Individual members will be given recognition in the final summary of the results. No individual responses will ever be published or shared by the researcher.

All questions should be directed to me at [dkline1@mail.brandman.edu](mailto:dkline1@mail.brandman.edu), or you can call me at (209) 484-7129. I will return your e-mail or phone call as soon as possible, in most cases that will be within 24 hours.

### **Delphi Study Test Form**

You can access the Delphi Study Test Form by going to:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BKPLJ2J>

Please take a few minutes to complete the form. This will provide the researcher your contact information and your informed consent to participate in the study. If you are unable to access the form, please contact the researcher to develop a solution as quickly as possible.

Please complete the test form by March 28, 2016.

Thank you for our participation in this study.

Dave Kline  
Delphi Coordinator

## **APPENDIX B**

Brandman University  
16355 Laguna Canyon Road  
Irvine, CA 92618

### **Informed Consent**

#### **BUILDING STRUCTURE IN A LAND WITHOUT RULES: A DELPHI STUDY TO DECIPHER THE BEST AVENUES TO DIMINISH CYBERBULLYING IN A MIDDLE SCHOOL SETTING**

Dear Participant:

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Dave Kline, a doctoral student at Brandman University under the supervision of Dr. Tamerin Capellino. Your participation is voluntary. Please read the information below and ask any questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether to participate. By checking "agree" on this permission slip, you are willing to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this form.

#### **Purpose of the study:**

The purpose of this research study is to generate a consensus as to the most effective policies and procedures that can limit the impact that cyberbullying has on middle school students.

#### **What will be done:**

If you decide to participate in this study there will a series of three electronic surveys that will take approximately 20 minutes each to complete. Your responses will be confidential. The survey questions will pertain to your perceptions regarding effective policies and procedures that could be used to effectively limit the impact of cyberbullying in a middle school setting.

#### **Confidentiality of the study:**

Each participant will take part in anonymity. Results of your answers will be online to which the researcher is the only one who has access. When the results of the research are published or discussed, no identifiable information will be included. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

**Questions or Concerns:** If there any questions or concerns about completing this survey or any aspects of this research, please contact Dave Kline at dkline1@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at 209.484.7129; or Dr. Tamerin Capellino, Advisor, at capellino@brandman.edu.

**Consent (Please review as the signee):**

No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the Investigator, Dave Kline will protect my confidentiality and research materials secured online that is available only to him. I understand that I may refuse to participate in or I may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641

**Electronic Consent:** Please select your choice below.

Checking agree indicates that you have read the informed consent form and the information in this document and that you voluntarily agree to participate.

If you do not wish to participate in this electronic survey, you may decline participation by checking disagree.

\_\_\_\_\_AGREE: I acknowledge receipt of the complete Informed Consent packet and “Bill of Rights.” I have read the materials and give my consent to participate in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_DISAGREE: I do not wish to participate in this electronic survey.



## APPENDIX C

### Research Participants Bill of Rights

#### BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

#### Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be

contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

## APPENDIX D

### Delphi Study Initial Study Test

Thank you for participating in this Delphi Study designed to identify policies and procedures implemented at the middle school level that are effective with reducing cyberbullying and/or limiting the impact of cyberbullying. This is the first input form and is designed to familiarize you to the forms you will be utilizing in the various rounds of the Delphi study process. Please give the information requested for each item. At the bottom of each page, please click on the "Next" button. When complete, please click on the "Submit response" button at the bottom of the form. You should receive an immediate confirmation message of receipt of your submission. If you have difficulty, please e-mail me at [dkline1@mail.brandman.edu](mailto:dkline1@mail.brandman.edu) or call: Cell Phone (209)484-7129.

Thank you.

To access the Researcher's Bill of Rights, please click the following link:  
[https://irb.brandman.edu/Guidelines\\_Forms/ResearchParticipantsBillofRights.pdf](https://irb.brandman.edu/Guidelines_Forms/ResearchParticipantsBillofRights.pdf)

Last Name:

First Name:

E-mail Address:

Where do you prefer to be contacted by phone?

Office

Home

Cell Phone

Will you be able to participate in all three rounds of the Delphi study scheduled to last between January, 2016 and March 2016?

Yes

No

Following Round Three of the Delphi study, phone interviews may be conducted. Are you willing to participate in a face-to-face or phone interview regarding your responses and feedback within the three rounds of the Delphi study?

Yes

No

Please use the space below to ask questions and provide comments or concerns regarding the process of the study. Additional input can e-mailed to the Delphi study coordinator at [dkline1@mail.brandman.edu](mailto:dkline1@mail.brandman.edu).

Informed Consent: Selecting yes, means you understand and agree to the statement below. \*

I understand that I may refuse to participate in or I may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time. I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed I will be so informed and my consent obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns, about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, Ca 92618 Telephone (949)349-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research Participant's Bill of Rights.

Yes:

No:

## APPENDIX E

### Round 1 Email and Survey Form

#### Delphi Study

Policies and procedures that are most effective in reducing cyberbullying as perceived by a panel of middle school administrators.

#### Round One Input Form

Instructions:

Round One asks you to respond to the question:

What five policies and procedures do you believe are the most effective in reducing cyberbullying at the middle school level?

In the spaces below, please identify the top five policies and procedures you have selected. Policies and procedures do not need to be listed in order of priority, preference or perceived influence. You may choose more than five policies or procedures, but you must submit at least one policy or procedure.

Each of your policies or procedures should be a summary statement of your approach, idea, procedure or policy. The targeted length is 25 words, but you are not limited to that response to describe your response. Please be thorough in communicating your idea, but succinct in your description.

Name:

Date:

Description 1:

Description 2:

Description 3:

Description 4;

Description 5:

Additional Descriptions:

## APPENDIX F

### Round 2 Email and Survey Form

#### Delphi Study

Policies and procedures that are most effective in reducing cyberbullying as perceived by a panel of middle school administrators.

#### Round Two Input Form

Instructions:

Round One asked you to respond to the question:

What five policies and procedures do you believe are the most effective in reducing cyberbullying at the middle school level?

All responses were reviewed and some like responses have been combined with others. In this round, you will use a 5-point Likert scale to rate the effectiveness of each policy and procedure in reducing cyberbullying in a middle school setting with “5” being “Very successful” and “1” being “Not at all successful.” After each response, there is space to comment if you wish. Also, at the end of the survey, there is additional space provided for you to add information if you would like to do so.

**Name:**

**Date:**

**Description 1: At the beginning of the year, require all students to complete a digital citizenship course that explains cyber-etiquette and cyber-responsibility. For completion, the form must include a signature from the student and parent.**

5 - Very successful

4- Successful

- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 2: Have education courses for parents that explains the dangers of cyberbullying, reporting processes to the school, consequences per the conduct code and appropriate cyber behavior for all, including students and adults.**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 3: Have conflict mediation/resolution meetings with those that are involved with cyberbullying.**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 4: Having on-going student education (beyond the digital citizenship course) during the school year, during class time (advisory period or a specific class) that explains what cyberbullying is, what the consequences are, how to report and how to be cyber-responsible.**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 5: Having a school conduct code that has clear definitions, clear examples and clear consequences.**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 6: Counseling for students involved (victims and perpetrators). This may include small group sessions if needed.**



- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 7: Educating students that bystanders can assist with limiting cyberbullying by reporting or by not encouraging the perpetrator.**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 8: Having district board policy that explains the definition of cyberbullying and the consequences for such behavior.**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful

- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 9: School-wide assemblies (once or twice a year) that may include current information on cyberbullying or include guest speakers who were victims of cyberbullying.**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 10: Incorporating anti-cyberbullying posters throughout the campus reminding students to be cyber-responsible and what to do if cyberbullying occurs.**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 11: Students knowing that they have clear access to report cyberbullying to site administration. This “open door” policy should include**

**immediate access and/or a written incident report that can completed online as well.**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 12: Continued professional development for site staff regarding new avenues for cyberbullying, promoting appropriate cyber behavior and reminding staff to seize teachable moments.**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 13: Administrative clear, swift, consistent and complete follow through for perpetrators. Consequences and processes are communicated to the parents.**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful

- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 14: Building a healthy school culture (PBIS) that fosters:**

- **Respect for all students**
- **Appropriate behavior and interactions in person and online**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 15: Providing evidence to perpetrators and their parents in the form of screen shots, emails and the sharing of information from Facebook and other social media apps.**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful

- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 16: Promote positive social media on the school's Facebook page.**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 17: Student-led solutions team that addresses instances of cyberbullying.**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 18: Prohibit the use of cell phones during school time.**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful

- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 19: Encourage parents to monitor their child's use of the Internet during non-school times.**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 20: Assemble a team of school leaders that would create, review and revise plans to deal with cyberbullying. The team would consist of administrators, teachers, staff, parents and students.**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 21: Leadership/Peer Modeling – Using student body officers to set the tone of the school to inspire support among the students.**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Description 22: Create board policy that allows for student cell phones to be considered “electronic backpacks,” therefore can be searched with “reasonable suspicion.”**

- 5 - Very successful
- 4- Successful
- 3 - Moderately successful
- 2 - Minimally successful
- 1 - Not at all successful

Comment:

**Additional Information:**

## **APPENDIX G**

### **Round 3 Email and Survey Form**

#### **Delphi Study**

Policies and procedures that are most effective in reducing cyberbullying as perceived by a panel of middle school administrators.

#### **Round Three Input Form**

Instructions:

Thank you for your participation in Round One and Two.

Round One asked you to respond to the question:

What five policies and procedures do you believe are the most effective in reducing cyberbullying at the middle school level?

Round 2 asked you to score all policies and procedures generated using a 5-point Likert scale to rate the effectiveness of each policy and procedure in reducing cyberbullying in a middle school setting with “5” being “Very successful” and “1” being “Not at all successful.”

Round 3 asks what middle school administrators can do to best implement the policies and procedures identified in Rounds 1 and 2. Review the scores of the top five policies and procedures that the panel believed would be successful in reducing cyberbullying at a middle school. Describe how you believe middle school administrators could best implement these identified policies and procedures. Also, at the end of the survey, there is additional space provided for you to add information if you would like to do so.

**Name:**

**Date:**



**Police/Procedure 1:**

**Administrative clear, swift, consistent and complete follow through for perpetrators. Consequences and processes are communicated to the parents.**

Comment:

**Police/Procedure 2:**

**Providing evidence to perpetrators and their parents in the form of screen shots, emails and the sharing of information from Facebook and other social media apps.**

Comment:

**Police/Procedure 3:**

**Have conflict mediation/resolution meetings with those that are involved with cyberbullying.**

Comment:

**Police/Procedure 4:**

**Counseling for students involved (victims and perpetrators). This may include small group sessions if needed.**

Comment:

**Police/Procedure 5:**

**Building a healthy school culture (PBIS) that fosters:**

- **Respect for all students**
- **Appropriate behavior and interactions in person and online**

Comment:

**Additional Information:**

## APPENDIX H

### Synthesis Matrix

	Traditional vs. Cyberbullying	Psychological and physical impact	Cyberbullying Prevalence	Types of Cyberbullying	Laws	Parents	Schools	Bystanders	Other
Abbott, M.K., (2011), <i>Cyberbullying experiences of ethnic minorities.</i>	x		x				x		x
Aggarwal, P, Arora, P., Neha, & Poonam. (2014). Review on cyber crime and security. <i>International journal of research in engineering and applied sciences.</i>					x				x
Albin, K.A. (2012). Bullies in a wired world: The impact of cyberspace victimization on adolescent mental health and the need for cyberbullying legislation in Ohio.		x	x		x		x		x
Ang, R.P, & Goh, D.H. (2010) Cyberbullying among adolescents: The role of affective and cognitive empathy, and gender.		x	x	x			x	x	
Blue Coat Blog (2014) <i>Cybercrime vs. non-cyber crime: What are the comparative effects?</i>					x				x
Badaly, D., Kelly, B.M., Schwartz, D., & Dabney-Lieras, K. (2013). Longitudinal associations of electronic aggression and victimization with social standing during adolescence.	x	x	x			x			

Barlinska, Szuster, Winiewski (2012) Cyberbullying among Adolescent Bystanders: Role of the Communication Medium, Form of Violence, and Empathy.	x	x						x	x
Bauman, S., (2007). <i>Cyberbullying: a virtual menace</i> . Paper to be presented at the National Coalition Against Bullying National Conference.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Belsey, B. (2004). Cyberbullying: An emerging threat to the “always on” generation.	x	x	x		x	x	x		
Beran, T., & Li, Q. (2007). The relationship between cyberbullying and school bullying.	x	x	x				x		
Brody, N.P. (2013). <i>Bystander intervention in cyberbullying</i> .			x	x		x	x	x	
Brown, C.F., Kilpatrick-Demray, M. & Secord, S. (2014). Cyber victimization in middle school and relations to social emotional outcomes.		x	x			x	x		
Brewer, E.A. (2011). <i>Fighting fire with fire: The use of a multimedia webquest in increasing middle-school students’ understandings of cyberbullying</i> .		x	x				x	x	
Bullying Statistics (2013). Cyber Bullying Statistics.			x	x			x	x	
Bullying in U.S. Schools: 2013 Status Report (2013)					x		x		x

California Education Code 48900 (r) Public Safety.	x				x				
Carter, J (2011). <i>Examining the relationship among physical and psychological health, parent and peer attachment, and cyberbullying in adolescents in urban and suburban environments.</i>	x	x	x	x		x			
Carter, J.W., (2011). <i>Local law enforcement in the realm of cyberspace: the role of local law enforcement agencies in controlling internet crime.</i>			x		x				
Coroloso, B. (2010) <i>The bully, the bullied, and the bystander: From preschool to high school-how parents and teachers can help break the cycle.</i>						x	x	x	x
Couvillon, M., & Illeva, V., (2011) Recommended practices: A review of school-wide preventative programs and strategies on cyberbullying. <i>Preventing school failure.</i>	x	x		x			x		x
Cary, P.T., (2004) <i>Bully/victim status from a social information-processing perspective: A comparative path analysis of competing models</i>						x	x	x	x
Castille, H. (2013) <i>Cyberbullying: An exploration of secondary school administrators' experiences with cyberbullying incidents in louisiana.</i>	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
Chibbaro, J.S. (2007). <i>School counselors and the cyberbully: Interventions and implications.</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	

Dehue, F., Bolman, C., & Vollink, T. (2008). <i>Cyberbullying: youngsters' experiences and parental perception.</i>		x		x		x	x		
Donegan, R. (2012). <i>Bullying and cyberbullying: History, statistics, law, prevention and analysis.</i>	x			x	x		x		x
Droser, V.A. (2013) <i>Talking the talk: An exploration of parent-child communication about cyberbullying.</i>						x	x		x
Favela, F.O. (2010). <i>Female cyberbullying: Causes and prevention strategies.</i>		x	x	x				x	x
Force, C. (2013) <i>An Exploratory Case Study of How Middle School Principals of Small Rural Schools Address Cyberbullying.</i>	x		x	x	x		x		
Fox, S., Rainie, L., & Duggan, M. (2014). <i>The web at 25 in the U.S. the overall verdict: The internet has been a plus for society and an especially good thing for individual users.</i>									x
Froeschle, J. G., Crews, C., & Li, J. (2011). <i>A school and technology based program: Healing families affected by cyberbullying.</i>						x	x		x
Gilmour, S. (2014) <i>Policing crime and terrorism in cyberspace: An overview. The european review of organized crime.</i>					x				x
Graves, T. (2013) <i>Bridging the divide: A case study investigating digitally-wise teacher perceptions of middle school cyberbullying.</i>		x	x		x		x		

Guckert, M. (2013) <i>Understanding bystander perceptions of cyberbullying in inclusive classroom settings.</i>	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Harcey, T.D., (2007). <i>A phenomenological study of the nature, prevalence and perceptions of cyberbullying based on student and administrative responses.</i>	X		X	X					
Hartwell-Walker, M. (2011). <i>Cyberbullying and teen suicide.</i>		x	x	x		x			
Henson, B., Reyns, B. & Fisher, B. (2011). <i>Key issues in crime and punishment: Crime and criminal behavior.</i>					x				x
Herbeck, D. (2010). <i>J. S. v. Bethlehem area school district.</i> Informally published manuscript, Department of Communication					x		x		
Hester, W.P. (2012). <i>Cyberbullying intervention: A case study analysis of stakeholder perceptions regarding the authority of school administrators in addressing cyberbullying issues.</i>			x		x	x	x		x
Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J.W. (2009). <i>Bullying beyond the schoolyard: Preventing and responding to cyberbullying.</i>	x	x	x		x	x	x		x
Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J.W. (2012) <i>Cyberbullying prevention and response: Expert opinions.</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
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