

Cyberbullying in Middle Schools in Southwestern Virginia

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R. Scott Allen

## ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying is an alarming phenomenon affecting the lives of adolescents across the country. Traditional bullying has moved from the playground to cyberspace. This online environment allows perpetrators to attack their victims beyond the walls of school, twenty-four hours a day. Advancements in and access to technology have made electronic communication the preferred method for adolescents to socialize. Although email, texts, social media sites, and websites were created to ease communication, some adolescents are using these tools to harass and harm their peers.

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the existence and prevalence of Cyberbullying in middle schools across Region VII in southwest Virginia. Cyberbullying policies and strategies used to address Cyberbullying were examined. The experiences of middle school principals with Cyberbullying incidents were explored.

The aim of this study was to address the following three research questions:

1. What is the status of Cyberbullying in Region VII of southwest Virginia?
2. What are middle school principals' perspectives regarding their schools' effectiveness in responding to Cyberbullying?
3. What are middle school principals' recommendations to strengthen Cyberbullying policies and procedures?

A quantitative method was chosen and a survey was conducted with the goal of adding to the literature that existed on Cyberbullying in public schools. Through the development and administration of a survey, quantitative data was collected. A quantitative analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics.

The study adds to the current empirical research base on Cyberbullying in middle schools, especially in the rural area of a state. The perceptions of principals working in middle schools are valuable. This study tapped into this knowledge base and added to the literature on Cyberbullying by providing insights into the feelings and perceptions of administrators. Analyzing the experiences of the participants provided valuable information for those interested in learning more about Cyberbullying in middle schools in southwest Virginia.

Findings of the study include information for Region VII of southwest Virginia on the status of Cyberbullying, middle-level schools' effectiveness in responding to Cyberbullying, and principals' recommendations to strengthen Cyberbullying policies and procedures. Based on the survey results, it is clear that Cyberbullying existed within the school systems in the region. Cyberbullying incidents occurred both at school and away from school. The largest percentage of these incidents occurred in the seventh and eighth-grades. Survey data indicated gender played a role in Cyberbullying with female students having the most reported incidents. Bullying prevention programs were being implemented in most school systems and schools in this region, and, in some cases, Cyberbullying was specifically addressed. In school systems and schools where no bullying or Cyberbullying prevention programs were implemented, overwhelmingly, principals felt they should be. Data revealed most principals found it difficult to identify Cyberbullying instances but believed they did report Cyberbullying incidents consistently. Most principals felt their school system's Cyberbullying policies were effective in dealing with Cyberbullying incidents, that the policies did not need revision, and that no additional policies were needed. Most principals felt Cyberbullying consequences implemented at their school effectively deterred Cyberbullying. Three strategies were identified by more than fifty percent of principals that would help in deterring Cyberbullying incidents. These strategies were increased parental involvement, encouraging students to report Cyberbullying, and anti-bullying education.

# Cyberbullying in Middle Schools in Southwestern Virginia

R. Scott Allen

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT**

Cyberbullying is an alarming phenomenon affecting the lives of adolescents across the country. Cyberbullying refers to any threats by one student toward another through on-line means including texting, emails, or other social media networks. Traditional bullying has moved from the playground to cyberspace. Advancements in and access to technology have made electronic communication the preferred method for adolescents to socialize. Although email, texts, social media sites, and websites were created to ease communication, some adolescents are using these tools to harass and harm their peers.

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the existence and prevalence of Cyberbullying in middle schools across Region VII in southwest Virginia. Forty-one middle schools are identified within Region VII which contains 19 school divisions.

Findings from the survey include information for Region VII of southwest Virginia on the status of Cyberbullying, middle-level schools' effectiveness in responding to Cyberbullying, and principals' recommendations to strengthen Cyberbullying policies and procedures. Based on the survey results, it is clear that Cyberbullying existed within the school systems in the region. Cyberbullying incidents occurred both at school and away from school. The largest percentage of these incidents occurred in the seventh and eighth-grades. Survey data indicated gender played a role in Cyberbullying with female students having the most reported incidents. Bullying prevention programs were being implemented in most school systems and schools in this region, and, in some cases, Cyberbullying was specifically addressed. In school systems and schools where no bullying or Cyberbullying prevention programs were implemented, overwhelmingly, principals felt they should be. Data revealed most principals found it difficult to identify Cyberbullying instances but believed they did report Cyberbullying incidents consistently. Most principals felt their school system's Cyberbullying policies were effective in dealing with Cyberbullying incidents, that the policies did not need revision, and that no additional policies were needed. Most principals felt Cyberbullying consequences implemented at their school effectively deterred Cyberbullying. Three strategies were identified by more than fifty percent of principals that would help in deterring Cyberbullying incidents. These strategies

were increased parental involvement, encouraging students to report Cyberbullying, and anti-bullying education.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Students attend school with hopes of preparing themselves for successful futures, wanting to learn. Teachers come wanting to teach. And administrators come wanting to make those things possible. Problems arise with this scenario, however, when students misuse social media. A rising misuse of social media is Cyberbullying, and when this occurs, both school safety and a conducive learning environment can be jeopardized. Schools should be safe havens where learning occurs unfettered by either real or perceived threat. All students deserve to feel safe and secure in their learning environments. Nevertheless, for students who experience Cyberbullying, schools can turn into ruthless, hostile places where learning is sidelined.

Use of the Internet increases every day, which in turn leads to the potential of more instances of Cyberbullying. People use the Internet for a variety of purposes, including work, school, and social interaction. In some instances, the Internet is used to vent frustrations and aggression (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014). Several studies have been conducted to examine increased Internet access and Cyberbullying incidents (Holladay, 2011; Allen, 2005; Lenhart et al., 2015; Madden et al., 2013).

In 2005, the Pew Internet and American Life Project study was conducted, investigating teen Internet usage (Allen, 2005). This research showed that 89% of teens used email for socialization. More than 50% of teens had more than one email address. Instant messaging was used by 75% of teens. Each of these Internet capabilities allowed teens to communicate with others by sending private messages, participating in online forums, and anonymously chatting in chat rooms.

A Kaiser Family Foundation study conducted in 2010 found that access to technology had skyrocketed since 1999 (Holladay, 2011). Specifically, 93% of students had computers at home, 66% had cell phones, and 76% had other multimedia devices, each allowing easy access to Internet activities of all kinds (Holladay, 2011).

In 2013, the Pew Research Center conducted a phone survey of 802 parents and their 802 teens aged 12 through 17 on technology and Internet usage. Results showed that 95% of teens use the Internet in some way. The research also concluded that teens' Internet use had evolved from years prior when connectivity was accomplished mainly through stationary desktop

computers hard-wired to the Internet. In recent years, Internet usage has changed and increased as Internet connectivity has become more accessible by wireless and mobile connections. About 75% of teens reported being mobile Internet users by using cell phones, tablets, or other mobile devices (Madden et al., 2013).

A national study conducted in 2015 by Pew Research Center found that 92% of teens access the Internet on a daily basis. This percentage included 2% of teens occasionally going online, 6% of teens accessing the Internet on a weekly basis, 12% of teens accessing the Internet once a day, 56% of teens accessing the Internet several times a day, and 24% accessing the Internet almost constantly. The convenience and expansion of Internet access has been aided by the development of Internet tools and mobile devices, including smartphones, causing this frenzy of access. Nearly 75% of teens have had or have access to a smartphone. Seventy-one percent of teens use more than one social network site, including but not limited to Facebook, Google, Instagram, and Snapchat (Lenhart et al., 2015).

Addressing the concern of Cyberbullying is of increasing concern for school administrators (Walker, Craven, & Tokunaga, 2013). The elusive nature (Feinberg & Robey, 2008) of Cyberbullying creates difficulty for educational leaders. Many school leaders are struggling with identifying Cyberbullying incidents, intervening, and determining their authority when incidents occur outside of school (Feinberg & Robey, 2008).

Increased scrutiny of bullying and Cyberbullying policies by school leaders has been a result of greater media attention (Bauman & Yoon, 2014; Dooley, Pyszalski, & Cross, 2009). Media have shared numerous instances of Cyberbullying with the public, “reporting on sensational incidents with particularly tragic outcomes” (Bauman & Yoon, 2014, p. 253). One notable event, caused by bullying, which drastically increased attention placed on bullying and its negative effects, was the horrific events that took place at Columbine High School in April of 1999 (Allen, 2010). Another tragic event, the Amanda Todd suicide in 2012 after being cyberbullied relentlessly, grew enormous attention after being publicized by the media, leading to public outcry (Bauman & Yoon, 2014). Since these two events took place, school systems across our nation have adopted anti-bullying policies in hopes of preventing other such tragedies (Bauman & Yoon, 2014).

Cyberbullying can negatively impact individuals and organizations in myriad ways (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014). In general, Cyberbullying

can create a harmful and destructive school climate and impede the progress of the victims in school. Safety and mental health concerns can arise for some students as a result of Cyberbullying (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). This specific type of bullying can have a significant effect on students' emotional well-being (Patchin & Hinduja, 2012). Some of these negative consequences of Cyberbullying include depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, substance abuse, absenteeism and truancy, loneliness, low self-esteem, and dropping out of school (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Kowalski et al., 2014; Thomas, Connor, & Scott, 2015).

Cyberbullying, which can cause legal consequences as well as psychological distress, cannot be overlooked by school leaders (Feinberg & Robey, 2008). In response to the negative effects caused by Cyberbullying and in the wake of increased Cyberbullying incidents, many school systems have written or adopted policies and procedures to address this specific type of bullying. Cyberbullying policies and procedures continue to evolve.

Questions about Cyberbullying remain unanswered (Dooley, Pyszalski, & Cross, 2009). Questions that came to the researcher's mind included:

- How is Cyberbullying defined?
- Are the policies and procedures in place effective in addressing Cyberbullying?
- What are successful solutions for combating Cyberbullying?
- What are the perspectives of administrators regarding Cyberbullying?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the existence and prevalence of Cyberbullying in middle schools across Region VII in southwest Virginia. Cyberbullying policies and strategies used to address Cyberbullying were examined. The experiences of middle school principals with Cyberbullying incidents were explored.

The aim of this study was to address the following three research questions:

1. What is the status of Cyberbullying in Region VII of southwest Virginia?
2. What are middle school principals' perspectives regarding their schools' effectiveness in responding to Cyberbullying?
3. What are middle school principals' recommendations to strengthen Cyberbullying policies and procedures?

## **Significance of the Study**

The study has scholarly significance and practical implications for the field of middle-level education. The study adds to the current empirical research base on Cyberbullying in middle schools, especially in the rural area of a state. The perceptions of principals working in middle schools are valuable. This study tapped into this knowledge base and added to the literature on Cyberbullying by providing insights into the feelings and perceptions of administrators. Analyzing the experiences of the participants provided valuable information for those interested in learning more about Cyberbullying in middle schools in southwest Virginia.

## **Context of the Study**

Assessing school safety in our nation's schools is continual (Robers, Zhang, Morgan, & Musu-Gillette, 2015). Students deserve a safe environment in which to learn and grow while preparing for their futures. Policies and procedures should be researched, developed, implemented, evaluated, and reviewed to decrease Cyberbullying activities and the harmful outcomes that it can produce. Administrators need to be aware of the extent of Cyberbullying, especially in the rural areas of the state. This study will provide administrators with information about the extent of this phenomena.

## **Academic Context**

“Our nation's schools should be safe havens for teaching and learning” (Robers et al., 2015, p. iii). Crime and violent incidents occurring in schools disrupt the educational process (Brookmeyer, Fanti, & Henrich, 2006; Goldstein, Young, & Boyd, 2008). Unfortunately, many students are subjected to hurtful acts on a daily basis. The amount of instructional time lost when addressing disciplinary issues causes decreases in learning and instructional opportunities. Distractions take place that affect student progress, students' well-being, and their educational attainment. Cyberbullying incidents are no different and can cause devastating, longitudinal effects (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014; Thomas, Connor, & Scott, 2015). The findings of this study added to the knowledge base on Cyberbullying in rural areas.

## **Limitations**

Limitations exist in research studies based on the methodology selected (Creswell, 2009). The researcher recognized limitations existed with this study and recommends the reader evaluate the content with these limitations in mind. Due to the limited population in this study, generalizations may be less applicable for other school systems (Yin, 2009). The limitations were as follows:

1. The study took place in Region VII of southwest Virginia and generalization to other regions and school systems not meeting similar characteristics will be limited.
2. Survey data collected may have been affected by the interview participants' willingness to disclose honest responses. In some Cyberbullying instances, a principal may have perceived his or her judgment or response to be poor which may have led to inaccurate or untruthful responses to questions about that instance.
3. The population was middle school principals in Region VII school divisions in southwest Virginia.
4. The study was limited by middle school principals' experiences with Cyberbullying.
5. The researcher was confronted with Cyberbullying instances as part of his administrative duties and recognized personal biases existed while conducting the study related to his experiences. The researcher purposefully avoided bias judgments and preserved the integrity of the data gathered from participants.

## **Delimitations**

The study had the following delimitations:

1. The study was conducted in 19 rural school systems in southwest Virginia.
2. The study was conducted in middle schools.
3. Survey participants were middle school principals.

## **Assumptions**

The researcher made the following assumptions for the study:

1. The methodology and design selected best answered the research questions.
2. Principals in southwest Virginia had knowledge about Cyberbullying.

3. Information was obtained on the extent of Cyberbullying in southwest Virginia from the participants.
4. All study participants understood that Cyberbullying was a problem.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

*Bullied.* Defined as a specific act of one student making fun of another student, calling the student names, or insulting the student; spreading rumors about them; threatening them with harm; being pushed, shoved, tripped, or spit on; coercing them to do something they did not want to do; excluding them from activities on purpose; or destroying their property on purpose (Robers et al., 2015, p. 187).

*Crime.* “Any violation of a statute or regulation or any act that the government has determined is injurious to the public, including felonies and misdemeanors. Such violation may or may not involve violence, and it may affect individuals or property” (Robers et al., 2015, p. 186).

*Cyberbullying.* Defined as an electronic bullying technique used by individuals and groups hoping to hurt others and is problematic at the middle level of education. It is a specific act of bullying by electronic means, including the Internet, e-mail, instant messaging, text messaging, online gaming, and online communities (Robers et al., 2015, p. 187).

*Incident.* “A specific criminal act or offense involving one or more victims and one or more offenders” (Robers et al., 2015, p. 186).

*Region VII of southwest Virginia.* This region consisted of 15 county school systems and four city school systems.

### **Organization of the Study**

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the context, problem, purpose, significance, limitations, assumptions, and delimitations of the study. Chapter 2 is a literature review associated with the problem that prompted the study. Chapter 3 is the methodology for the study and contains the detailed research design characteristics. Chapter 4 is a description of the findings of the study. Chapter 5 is a summary of the results of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **Traditional Bullying**

Bullying is a serious problem that has challenged students, teachers, and administrators for decades (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Numerous definitions of bullying exist (Scaglione & Scaglione, 2006; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) anti-bullying website defines bullying as “intentionally aggressive, usually repeated verbal, social, or physical behavior aimed at a specific person or group of people” (Stopbullying.gov, 2016). Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) defined bullying as “a form of aggression where one or more children seek to harm or disturb another child who may be perceived as being unable to defend himself or herself” (p. 101). Scaglione and Scaglione (2006) defined bullying as “aggressive behavior toward another over time that is deliberate and hurtful” (p. 5). A common theme arises from each definition of bullying is the purposeful intent of causing harm or discomfort to another person.

In 1970, before definitions of bullying were developed, Daniel Olweus, a Norwegian researcher, began studying bullying. He became a pioneer in this area of research. Olweus believed there are three types of bullying: physical, verbal, and social.

Physical bullying requires bodily action. This type of bullying is intended to intimidate or physically hurt the victim. Physical bullying occurs when one person exerts aggression on another openly, using bodily acts to gain power over the victim (Thrill, 2011). Examples of physical bullying include pinching, pushing, restraining, kicking, hitting, and destroying another's property (Beale, 2001).

Verbal bullying requires spoken words to be uttered. The goal of verbal bullying is to degrade and demean the victim as well as making the perpetrator appear more powerful. This type of bullying is intended, through the use of words to humiliate, intimidate, threaten, or hurt someone's feelings. Examples of verbal bullying include teasing, taunting, calling names, insulting, and making verbal threats (Campbell, 2005; Kowalski et al., 2008; Shariff, 2009).

Social bullying, also known as relational bullying, involves the exclusion or rejection of another. Social bullies manipulate others to exclude and reject the victim leading to social isolation. Perpetrators of this type of bullying aim to be the leader of the social group while out-

casting targeted peers. Examples of social bullying include making faces, making offensive gestures, or causing social exclusion (National Association of School Psychologists, 2005).

Social bullying can overlap with verbal and physical bullying. Examples of the overlap between verbal and social bullying include telling false stories about another, spreading rumors about another, divulging secrets, saying bad things behind a person's back, telling others not to be someone's friend, and trying to persuade others to dislike a person (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Harris & Petrie, 2002). An example of the overlap between physical and social bullying is when a bully pushes a victim around while including his peers in the aggressive action (National Association of School Psychologists, 2005).

## **Cyberbullying**

Traditional bullying has evolved into different avenues of harassment with advancements in technology. Using online capabilities to cause harm to others is called electronic bullying or Cyberbullying (Beale & Hall, 2007; Miller & Hufstedler, 2009). Although traditional bullying and Cyberbullying share some common traits, Cyberbullying does have unique characteristics (Erdur-Baker, 2010). Cyberbullying is a category of bullying that occurs in the digital arena (Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2011). This type of harassment using technology can be achieved through social websites, email, chat rooms, texting, and other online means (Beale & Hall, 2007; Miller & Hufstedler, 2009).

The word Cyberbullying did not exist until the turn of the 21st century, yet the problems it causes are detrimental for today's youth (Poland, 2010). Due to the relatively recent naming of this type of online harassment, reaching a consensus on the definition of Cyberbullying can be difficult (Tokunaga, 2010). Numerous researchers have attempted to define Cyberbullying in hopes of providing a useful and consistent tool for researchers (Durkin & Patterson, 2011; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008; Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2011). These researchers believe not having a single definition of Cyberbullying can confuse or lead research participants astray, invalidate findings, and cause difficulty for study comparisons (Durkin & Patterson, 2011; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008; Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2011).

Cyberbullies are oftentimes not the common bully from years past (Notar, Padgett, & Roden, 2013). They are not the typical schoolyard bully that many individuals encountered in their own personal experiences. These individuals can cyberbully without being large in stature

and strong. This type of bully can be anyone: large or small, popular or an outcast, an honor student or a challenged learner. A cyberbully's two most important features must be to have Internet access and possess a desire to cause harm to another (Poland, 2010).

Cyberbullies feel safe terrorizing their victims. These perpetrators believe they are “invincible” due to the anonymity offered by electronic means, giving these bullies a sense of safety from being caught (Notar, Padgett, & Roden, 2013, p. 3). Bullies behind a computer screen or on their mobile device feel secure. The anonymity makes it easy for the cyberbully to say and do things they would not say or do in person. Oftentimes, while remaining anonymous, cyberbullies turn away from moral and ethical behavior and make poor decisions (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Cyberbullies can have a sense of “false courage” when not confronting their victim face-to-face (Notar, Padgett, & Roden, 2013, p. 3). Anonymity is also given to cyberbullies through the use of pseudonyms when using social media, making it difficult to identify them (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008).

### **Traditional Bullying Versus Cyberbullying**

Past generations were safe from the pressures of peer judgment and abuse once they arrived home from school (Notar, Padgett, & Roden, 2013). Bullies normally did not call home or send letters to continue their harassment. The nuances of traditional bullying have evolved into this new realm of Cyberbullying. Cyberbullying can occur all day and all night. No longer does harassment and mistreatment occur only on school busses and during recess time. Cyberbullies can stalk their victims continuously and relentlessly (Mustacchi, 2009). Glasner (2010) made the following observation about the connection between traditional bullying and Cyberbullying:

Bullying is evolving from the classic image of a big schoolyard bully picking on smaller kids to a more technologically, sophisticated model of kids using cyber technology to electronically tease, bully, and harass their peers with texting, voicemails, emails, and posts on public websites. (p. 537)

Kowalski and Limber (2013) selected two schools in southwest Pennsylvania that did not have an implemented, formal, bullying prevention program. Participants included 485 males and

433 females in grades 6 through 12. A survey was developed and administered anonymously to examine student experiences with bullying and Cyberbullying.

For both traditional bullying and Cyberbullying, Kowalski and Limber (2013) categorized participants based on frequency as victims, bullies, bully/victims, or not involved. The researchers found that overlap existed between the involvement of students in traditional bullying and Cyberbullying. Of the 931 student participants, 14.6% stated they were a victim of traditional bullying. In comparison, 9.9% students stated they were a victim of Cyberbullying. Findings also included 17.3% of the students reported being a traditional bully. Comparatively, 6.1% of students reported being a cyberbully. In addition, findings showed 19.2% of students stated that they had participated both as a bully and a victim in traditional bullying. In comparison, 5.3% of students reported that they had participated both as a bully and a victim in Cyberbullying. Finally, Kowalski and Limber (2013) found 48.9% of students claimed that they had no involvement in traditional bullying compared to 78.7% that claimed no involvement in Cyberbullying.

### **Gender Comparisons**

Contradictory conclusions can be found in Cyberbullying research about gender victimization. Depending upon the study, findings indicate both that girls experience higher rates of becoming Cyberbullying victims than boys (Brighi, Guarini, Melotti, Galli, & Genta, 2012; Dehue, Bolman, Vollink, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Mark & Ratliffe, 2011), and at the same time that boys experience higher rates of becoming Cyberbullying victims than girls (Aricak et al., 2008; Huang & Chou, 2010; Li, 2007). Findings from these studies are summarized in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1

*Results from Studies on Gender Victimization and Cyberbullying: Girls with Higher Percentages*

Researcher(s) and year of study	Girls	Boys
	%	%
Brighi et al, 2012	15	10
Dehue et al., 2008	24.7	19.1
Kowalski & Limber, 2007	15	7
Mark & Ratliffe, 2011	25	15

Table 2

*Results from Studies on Gender Victimization and Cyberbullying: Boys with Higher Percentages*

Researcher(s) and year of study	Girls	Boys
	%	%
Aricak et al., 2008	10	13
Huang & Chou, 2010	22	28
Li, 2007	43.5	52.2

Contradictory conclusions can also be found in Cyberbullying research about gender perpetration. Study findings have indicated that girls have higher rates of becoming cyberbully perpetrators than boys (Beckman, Hagquist, & Hellstrom, 2013; Konig et al., 2010; Mark & Ratliffe, 2011), but that other studies have indicated boys have higher rates of becoming cyberbully perpetrators than girls (Campbell et al., 2013; Gardinger et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2009; Wright et al., 2009). Findings from these studies are summarized in Tables 3 and 4 below.

Table 3

*Results from Studies on Gender Perpetrators and Cyberbullying: Girls with Higher Percentages*

Researcher(s) and year of study	Girls	Boys
	%	%
Konig et al., 2010	52.3	47.7
Mark & Ratliffe, 2011	8	5
Beckman, Hagquist, & Hellstrom, 2013	4.5	2.6

Table 4

*Results from Studies on Gender Perpetrators and Cyberbullying: Boys with Higher Percentages*

Researcher(s) and year of study	Girls	Boys
	%	%
Campbell et al., 2013	45	55
Gardinger et al., 2009	3.1	7.6
Wang et al, 2009	9.7	14.1
Wright et al., 2009	14.1	16

Agatston, Kowalski, and Limber (2007) conducted a study on student perceptions of Cyberbullying at two middle schools and two high schools located in the Cobb County School District of Marietta, Georgia. One hundred forty-eight students participated in the study. Students were separated by gender and assigned to focus groups to be interviewed by a counselor. The goal of the study was to examine the impact of Cyberbullying on students ages 12-17 and to examine the need for more Cyberbullying prevention education for students, educators, and parents.

Results from the study indicated that females felt Cyberbullying was problematic at school in contrast to the male students who reported Cyberbullying was not a problem. Both male and female students agreed that the majority of Cyberbullying incidents occurred beyond school hours with the exception of text messaging. All students were concerned with violating

the school's cell phone policy and were not likely to report incidents of Cyberbullying to teachers or administrators at school in fear of losing privileges or being disciplined. Students reported that school officials were not able to help them if incidents were reported. Both female and male students stated that they were more likely to report to school officials incidents of a Cyberbullying that include threatening language than other Cyberbullying incidents.

Questions related to solutions and strategies to address Cyberbullying were also included in the study (Agatston et al., 2007). Students responded to these questions by noting strategies such as blocking the messages and not encouraging retaliation. Both male and female students were unlikely to report strategies to address concerns viewed on websites and how best to respond as a bystander when observing Cyberbullying behaviors.

### **Effects of Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying can have devastating effects. Committing suicide is considered the most tragic consequence of being victimized by Cyberbullying (Lickona, 2012). However, cyberbullied victims report a wide range of harmful effects. Through research studies conducted, problems associated with Cyberbullying have been examined, including absenteeism, academic performance, and emotional well-being.

**Absenteeism.** Researchers have found a connection between Cyberbullying and school absences (Beran & Li, 2005; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Patchin and Hinduja (2006) found 24.3% of their study participants admitted to skipping school due to Cyberbullying issues. Beran and Li (2005) found that 17% of the 58% of students who reported being a cyberbully victim admitted to increased absenteeism as a result. Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) found that 26.8% of the 93% of students who claimed to be victims of Cyberbullying stated that they were afraid to go to school. These increased absences for cyberbullied victims may be a result of the anonymity of the harassment incidents. Not knowing who the perpetrator is can leave the victim feeling uncomfortable and vulnerable in the school environment.

**Academic performance.** Researchers have found a connection between Cyberbullying and academic performance (Beran & Li, 2005; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). In many instances for the cyberbullied victim, school is hard enough without the added pressures of anonymous, online harassment. Learning is particularly difficult for a cyberbullied student who is consumed by thoughts of the hurtful words and acts of an aggressor. In a study by Patchin and Hinduja (2006)

that included 384 student participants, 31.9% stated that Cyberbullying negatively affected them at school. Patchin and Hinduja found that of cyberbullied victims:

- 64% earned a bad grade on a test
- 30% cheated on a test
- 56% had poor concentration
- 21% had lower school achievement
- 13% had increased absenteeism

Beran and Li (2005) found 22% of victims experienced a drop in their grades and 43% had poor concentration as a result of being cyberbullied. Lickona (2012) found that cyberbullied victims had significantly lower grades than their peers.

A meta-analytic review conducted by Nakamoto and Schwartz (2010) was designed to examine the mean effect size of the association between peer victimization and academic achievement. Results from the study indicated, “Victimization in the peer group is related to concurrent academic functioning difficulties” (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010, p. 234). These researchers found a small, but negative, correlation between peer victimization and academic achievement. These findings were in contrast to previous research conducted by Woods and Wolke (2004) who found the variable of peer victimization and academic achievement to be unrelated.

The correlation between peer victimization and academic achievement across genders was also included in the study. Results from previous studies had yielded mixed results. Hanish and Guerra (2002) found a stronger correlation between peer victimization and academic achievement for boys while in a more recent study, Hoglund (2007) found that girls had the stronger correlation. Nakamoto and Schwartz (2010) combined the results from 16 studies and found that the effect sizes between peer victimization and academic achievement across genders were almost the same.

**Emotional well-being.** Researchers have found a connection between Cyberbullying and the emotional well-being of students (Cowie, 2013; Nixon, 2014). Through research conducted to study the consequences of Cyberbullying, it has been found that a significant relationship exists between Cyberbullying and mental health difficulties (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Nixon, 2014). Cyberbullying can cause negative mental health consequences for both the perpetrator and the victim. This type of online harassment can cause short-term and long-term

health concerns for these individuals. Table 5 outlines the commonalities and differences between the effects experienced by perpetrators and victims of Cyberbullying. Differences are reported in the first and third columns of the table. The middle column represents the commonalities between the mental health effects of Cyberbullying on perpetrators and victims. The information contained in the table is beneficial to understand that both perpetrators and victims can experience harmful mental health effects.

Table 5

*Findings from Nixon’s Study on the Impact of Cyberbullying on Student Mental Health*

Mental health effects on Cyberbullying perpetrators	Commonalities between the mental health effects on perpetrators and victims	Mental health effects on Cyberbullying victims
aggression	depression	sadness
conduct problems	fear	hopelessness
delinquency	suicidal behavior	powerlessness
hyperactivity	stress	worry
substance abuse	anger	loneliness
social difficulties	anxiety	hurt
sadness	frustration	self-blame
lower levels of empathy	embarrassment	feelings of isolation
weak emotional bonds		helplessness
		lower school attachment
		more empathy
		low self-esteem

Nixon’s (2014) findings highlighted the devastating effects of Cyberbullying on all individuals involved. Cowie (2013) similarly concluded that individuals involved in Cyberbullying likely experienced “emotional disturbances” (p. 167). According to Cowie (2013), “[Cyberbullying] is an interpersonal problem grounded in a social context” (p. 167).

## **Responses to Cyberbullying**

School leaders have responded to Cyberbullying to ensure the safety of students and in an effort to mitigate its harmful impact to learning. In the hopes of providing students with safe environments both at school and at home, and realizing the devastating effects of Cyberbullying, school leaders have developed multiple prevention programs and policies to address Cyberbullying. The main thrust of these programs is to ensure students' safety so true learning can occur.

**Bullying prevention programs.** Researchers suggest that schools develop a comprehensive prevention and intervention plan to specifically address Cyberbullying (Diamonduros et al., 2008). A study conducted by Roberto, Eden, Savage, Ramos-Salazar, and Deiss (2014) provided educators with helpful insights and recommendations. This study focused on 425 sixth, seventh and eighth-grade students attending a public middle school in the southwest United States. The researchers examined the short-term effects of showing a Cyberbullying prevention video to a selected group of students. The research design for this study was posttest-only control-group. Students were randomly assigned to the control or experimental group for the study. Students assigned to the experimental group were shown a video from the Arizona Attorney General's Office, Social Networking Safety Promotion and Cyberbullying Prevention. Students assigned to the control group did not view the video and attended classes as normal. The video presentation educated middle school students on Cyberbullying and focused on issues related to social networking safety and Cyberbullying prevention. A survey was then administered to all students. The survey instrument developed by Roberto et al. (2014) contained items which measured four key components of Cyberbullying: (a) susceptibility, (b) severity, (c) response-efficacy, and (d) self-efficacy (p. 1033).

Results indicated that the experimental group who viewed the video outperformed the control group in multiple areas of the survey. At no time during the survey did the control group outperform the experimental group. The results show the effectiveness of prevention programs in the short term, but also indicate areas for more targeted interventions over a longer period of time. Another idea generated by the study focused on gender differences and the need for gender specific interventions with unique questions specific to boys and girls. The study also highlighted the problematic trends of increased technology use as students enter higher grades.

Other findings from the study indicate the decline of students' attitudes toward Internet and social media safety.

**Cyberbullying policies.** Developing school policies and procedures to address Cyberbullying can be complicated. Nevertheless, having policies and procedures in place and continuously reviewing and updating those policies and procedures to ensure effectiveness should be an ongoing process (Beale & Hall, 2007; Diamonduros, Down, & Jenkins, 2008). Researchers suggest that within current school divisions' bullying policies, Cyberbullying should be specifically addressed (Beran & Li, 2005; Diamonduros et al., 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Patchin & Hinduja, 2008).

Beale and Hall (2007) recommended that school systems address Cyberbullying by:

- Creating awareness programs for educators, parents, and students
- Addressing Cyberbullying through policy
- Including Cyberbullying information and policy statements within the student code of conduct
- Developing acceptable-use policies for school and student-owned technological devices
- Providing training for faculty and staff members
- Providing lessons for students
- Developing and sharing reporting avenues for students

Wiseman (2011) conducted a mixed-methods study in Nevada to examine the Cyberbullying policies being implemented by principals. Sixty-six middle school principals were surveyed and three were randomly chosen for interviews. Middle schools were selected because previous research indicates that between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade the prevalence of Cyberbullying tends to peak (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). The data collected from the surveys and interviews revealed the following recommendations for an effective Cyberbullying program:

Table 6

*Recommendations from Wiseman’s Study on Cyberbullying in Middle Schools*

Survey data (66 respondents)	Interview data (3 participants)
Educating students about Cyberbullying	Instituting consistent reporting procedures
Communicating with parents	Integrating Cyberbullying into the curriculum
Developing school climate	Providing opportunity for student voice through presentations
Establishing expectations for off-campus behaviors	Focusing on prevention rather than punishment
Developing a range of disciplinary consequences	Implementing effective punishment practices
Creating procedures for investigating incidents	Tracking changes and trends in technology
Developing reporting procedures	
Instituting consequences for wrongful accusations	
Creating notification procedures for parents	
Posting signs in the building	
Providing counseling opportunities	
Educating parents about Cyberbullying	

**Prevalence of Cyberbullying in Virginia**

The Virginia Secondary School Climate Survey (VSSCS) was conducted in the spring of 2015 through a partnership between the Department of Criminal Justice Services Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety, the Virginia Department of Education, and the Virginia Youth Violence Project at the University of Virginia in the Curry School of Education. The purpose of the survey was to assess the quality of school climate and safety conditions in an effort to provide school systems with valuable information for school improvement. The VSSCS instrument was completed by 56,508 students and 8,585 teachers and staff members in grades

seven and eight, which included 415 public school systems. All schools that included 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades were surveyed regardless of the other grade configurations within the building.

Results from the VSSCS indicated that 80% of students felt safe in their respective schools; nevertheless, a particular area of concern that emerged was 46% of all students reported bullying as a problem, and 35% reported being bullied once or more per week during the school year. Additionally, students reported that others physically hit (30%) or threatened to hurt them (29%). Students were asked questions regarding the prevalence of bullying, which revealed that 68% of students felt they were teased about physical appearance, and 51% of students felt they were teased about sexual topics, with only 29% of students indicating that they reported incidents of bullying to a teacher or to an adult.

The survey also reported data that revealed mental health problems occurring as a result of bullying. Students reported that experiences with bullying made them feel a range of negative emotions. Occurrence statistics and percentages are reported in Table 7 below.

Table 7

*VSSCS Results for Mental Health Problems as a Result of Bullying*

Emotions reported by survey participants	Number and percentage	
	N	%
Felt anger	35,600	63
Felt sad	31,079	55
Wanted to avoid school	20,907	37
Felt life was not worth living	12,996	23

**Study Rationale**

Based on the information shared through the literary analysis, the argument can be made that more research is necessary on Cyberbullying due its negative impact on students' well-being (Beran &Li, 2007; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Evidence exists that school climate and student health can be jeopardized by the cruel actions associated with Cyberbullying. Advancements in technology and inappropriate online behaviors continue to cause concern for school leaders who

are working to provide a safe environment that is conducive to student learning. Due to consistency concerns about Cyberbullying policies and procedures, research shows the need to periodically review these practices to aid in the effectiveness of dealing with these types of harassments incidents (Bauman, 2009; Beran & Le, 2007). Although progress has been made to better understand Cyberbullying and its consequences, school leaders require additional information if they are to be optimally effective in supporting students who have suffered the harmful effects of Cyberbullying (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of the chapter is to describe the procedures used for this study. The chapter includes a description of the (a) research design, (b) population, (c) data collection, (d) data management, and (e) data analysis. Quantitative methods were used for this study with the goal of adding insightful knowledge to the research base on Cyberbullying.

#### **Research Design**

Yin (1989) explained that the research design is the “blueprint of research” (p. 29). Researchers must select the appropriate methodology from three basic research methodologies: (a) quantitative, (b) qualitative, and (c) mixed methods (Creswell, 2009). For the purpose of this study, quantitative research is applicable to descriptively analyze survey data.

A quantitative method was chosen and a survey was conducted with the goal of adding to the literature that existed on Cyberbullying in public schools. Through the development and administration of a survey, quantitative data was collected. A quantitative analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics.

#### **School System Selection**

The study took place in Region VII of southwest Virginia. Region VII consisted of 15 county school systems and four city school systems. Diversity existed within this region with regard to the size of school districts, socioeconomic status, and grade configuration of schools.

There was limited research available on Cyberbullying in rural school systems. Region VII in southwest Virginia was no different. This study focused on gaining insightful knowledge from middle level administrators in this region on their experiences with Cyberbullying.

#### **Access to School Systems: Superintendents**

The following steps were taken to gain access to the 19 school systems and 42 schools to receive permission to conduct the study:

1. Permission was obtained from the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB).

An IRB research application was completed (see Appendix B).

2. An email was sent to each superintendent asking permission to conduct the study. The email included the purpose of the study and an explanation of the data collection process (see Appendix C).
3. Within the email, the following instructions were provided:
  - a. Researcher contact information;
  - b. Superintendents were encouraged to reply with questions or concerns they had regarding the study;
  - c. Superintendents were prompted to reply with their approval or disapproval of access to the school system.

### Population

Schools chosen to participate in the study were identified by the Virginia Middle School Association (VMSA) as schools serving middle-level students. Forty-two schools met the criteria. Grade configurations varied as seen in Table 8. Interestingly, all middle schools within Region VII included the seventh grade.

Table 8

#### *Grade Configurations of Schools in the Study*

Grade configurations									
PK-7	PK-8	1-7	4-7	5-7	5-8	6-7	6-8	7-8	7-9
<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>
10	3	1	1	3	3	1	18	1	1

All middle school principals in the 42 schools were invited to participate in the study. A list was constructed with the names of all middle school administrators in each school system along with the number of years each one possessed in school administration. The list was kept confidential on a password-protected computer. Using the Virginia Department of Education’s website, an email list was constructed listing all potential participants.

## Content Validation

A content validation instrument was developed to check for survey item clarity, neutrality, and alignment (see Appendix D). Clarity of the survey questions was important in order for respondents to fully understand what was being asked in each question. Neutrality was also crucial to eliminate survey question bias. The content alignment of the survey questions to the research questions was important in order to be certain that data collected from respondents met the needs for the study's purpose.

A panel of two experts was constructed for content validation purposes. One panel member was the former middle-level supervisor in Washington County Public Schools and also served as a former president of the VMSA. At the time the study was conducted, the second panel member served as middle-level supervisor in Washington County Public Schools and served as the Director of Region VII of the VMSA. Each panel member was asked to participate in the study by completing the content validation instrument. The panel members were sent an email requesting their participation (see Appendix E). The email described the purpose of the study and included the content validation document.

Analysis of the content validation data assisted in survey question refinement. The recommendations made by the panel were reviewed. Survey questions were altered to help with clarity concerns, neutrality issues, and to strengthen the alignment between the survey questions and the research questions.

Content validation participants were sent an email containing information about the study and requesting their participation (see Appendix E). Upon agreement to participate in the study, each participant completed the following steps:

1. Contacted the researcher with questions regarding the study
2. Downloaded the instrument attached to the email
3. Completed the form either digitally or as a hard copy and returned it to [sallen@wcs.k12.va.us](mailto:sallen@wcs.k12.va.us)

Content validation participants were assigned a code to ensure their confidentiality. Codes used were CV1 and CV2. The names of the participants and corresponding codes were kept in a separate file on a password-protected personal computer. Analysis of the returned content validation instruments led to the following changes to the survey items:

Table 9

*Changes Made to Field-Test Survey after Analysis of Content Validation*

Survey question 2	
Content validation instrument form	How often are you notified of Cyberbullying incidents that occur away from school? Never Rarely Monthly Weekly Daily
Field-test survey form	How often are you notified by non-school personnel of Cyberbullying incidents that occur away from school? Never Rarely Monthly Weekly Daily
Survey question 3	
Content validation instrument form	Do you have knowledge of Cyberbullying outside of the school environment? Yes No Don't Know
Field-test survey form	Omit due to redundancy
Survey question 4	
Content validation instrument form	If so, how extensive is it? Not Extensive Somewhat Extensive Extensive Don't Know
Field-test survey form	Omit due to redundancy

(table continued)

Table 9 (cont.)

Survey question 13	
Content validation instrument form	Are the policies being implemented effective in dealing with Cyberbullying incidents? Yes No Don't Know
Field-test survey form	Are the school system's policies being implemented effective in dealing with Cyberbullying incidents? Yes No Don't Know
Survey question 14	
Content validation instrument form	Do you feel that current policies need to be revised? Yes No Don't Know
Field-test survey form	Do you feel that the current school system's policies need to be revised? Yes No Don't Know
Survey question 15	
Content validation instrument form	Do you think additional policies are needed? Yes No Don't Know
Field-test survey form	Do you think additional school system policies are needed? Yes No Don't Know

(table continued)

Table 9 (cont.)

Survey question 18	
Content validation instrument form	<p>How involved are the following individuals in Cyberbullying incidents?</p> <p>Central office staff members?            Not Involved            Somewhat Involved            Very Involved</p> <p>School resource officer personnel?            Not Involved            Somewhat Involved            Very Involved</p> <p>Law officials?            Not Involved            Somewhat Involved            Very Involved</p> <p>School administrators?            Not Involved            Somewhat Involved            Very Involved</p> <p>Teachers?            Not Involved            Somewhat Involved            Very Involved</p>

(table continued)

Table 9 (cont.)

<p>Field-test survey form</p>	<p>How involved are the following individuals in Cyberbullying incidents?</p> <p>Central office staff members?          Not Involved          Somewhat Involved          Very Involved          Don't Know</p> <p>School resource officer personnel?          Not Involved          Somewhat Involved          Very Involved          Don't Know</p> <p>Law officials?          Not Involved          Somewhat Involved          Very Involved          Don't Know</p> <p>School administrators?          Not Involved          Somewhat Involved          Very Involved          Don't Know</p> <p>Teachers?          Not Involved          Somewhat Involved          Very Involved          Don't Know</p>
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**Informed Consent**

Informed consent was gathered from study participants [see Appendix H]. Survey participants were sent an email containing information about the study as well as the informed consent statement. The email requested their participation, and researcher contact information was provided to address questions or concerns. Participants accessed the online survey using the link provided on the email. Question one contained the informed consent statement and prompted participants to accept or decline participation. Upon accepting, participants were

directed to the survey instrument. Participants that chose to decline participation bypassed the survey and were directed to exit the survey.

## **Data Collection**

Data for the study were collected from survey information gathered from middle school principals in Region VII of Virginia. A web-based survey was developed using Qualtrics. This was an online survey product available to Virginia Tech faculty, staff, and students. Qualtrics was an online research and survey tool used to assist in data collection and analysis. By using this web-based survey instrument, participants had complete anonymity, which facilitated the researcher's effort in obtaining truthful responses.

**Field-test survey.** Two field-tests were conducted to practice the web-based survey. Two high school principals from Washington County Public Schools were asked to complete the online survey. Individual face-to-face meetings were scheduled with each field-test participant. In each meeting, the following occurred:

1. An explanation of the purpose of the study.
2. An opportunity for field-test participants to ask questions concerning the study.
3. Review the informed consent document.
4. An opportunity for participants to ask questions about the informed consent.
5. Informed consent acquisition.
6. Explanation of the process for completing the survey, including:
  - Receipt of email with survey link;
  - Visit the survey link;
  - Prompt to indicate voluntary agreement to participate;
  - Upon agreement, access to the survey questions;
  - Estimate of time to complete survey stated;
  - Prompt to submit responses.
7. An opportunity was given to participants to ask questions about the online survey process.
8. Researcher's contact information was provided.
9. Closure of the meeting.

Field-test participants completed the online survey. Data from the field-test surveys were gathered through Qualtrics. By analyzing the data from each test survey, information was gathered about logistical or technological issues that arose with the online survey. No changes were made to the survey protocol.

**Survey.** In each school system in Region VII where access was granted by the superintendent, all middle school principals were invited by email to participate in the study. Email addresses were obtained through the Virginia Department of Education website. The email contained:

1. An explanation of the purpose of the study and informed consent statement.
2. An invitation to reply with questions concerning the study.
3. A link to the online Qualtrics survey.

Survey participants visited the survey link and followed the survey directions.

***Instrumentation: Development of the survey.*** Research questions and sub-questions were used in the development of the survey questions. Survey questions are listed in Table 10. The table is arranged in three sections, each of which includes (a) the research question, (b) the corresponding sub-question(s), and (c) the survey questions.

Table 10

*Research Questions, Sub-Questions, and Survey Questions*

Research question 1: What is the status of Cyberbullying in Region VII of southwest Virginia?	
1a. To what extent do middle school principals in southwest Virginia experience Cyberbullying?	Survey questions:
	<p>How often do Cyberbullying incidents occur on your school premises?            Never            Rarely            Monthly            Weekly            Daily</p> <p>How often are you notified of Cyberbullying incidents that occur away from school?            Never            Rarely            Monthly            Weekly            Daily</p> <p>Do you have knowledge of Cyberbullying outside of the school environment?            Yes            No            Don't Know</p> <p>If so, how extensive is it?            Not Extensive            Somewhat Extensive            Extensive            Don't Know</p>

(table continued)

Table 10 (cont.)

Research question 1: What is the status of Cyberbullying in Region VII of southwest Virginia?	
1b. What grade level is Cyberbullying most prevalent?	Survey questions:
	<p>As a middle school principal, in what grade level do Cyberbullying incidents most often occur?</p> <p>6<sup>th</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> 8<sup>th</sup> Equal instances across 6-8 grades Other grades</p>
1c. Is gender a factor in the prevalence of Cyberbullying?	<p>Do you believe gender plays a role in Cyberbullying incidents?</p> <p>Yes No Don't Know</p> <p>If so, which gender has the most reported incidents of Cyberbullying?</p> <p>Male Female Don't Know</p>

(table continued)

Table 10 (cont.)

Research question 2: What are middle school principals' perspectives regarding their schools' effectiveness in responding to Cyberbullying?	
2a. What bullying prevention programs are being implemented in your school to address Cyberbullying?	Survey questions:
	Is there a bullying prevention program implemented at your school? Yes No Don't Know
	If there is a bullying prevention program implemented at your school, is Cyberbullying specifically addressed in the program? Yes No Don't Know
	If there is no bullying prevention program implemented at your school, do you believe one should be implemented in your school? Yes No Don't Know
	If you believe a bullying prevention program should be implemented, should Cyberbullying be addressed in the program? Yes No Don't Know

(table continued)

Table 10 (cont.)

Research question 2: What are middle school principals' perspectives regarding their schools' effectiveness in responding to Cyberbullying?	
2b. What are middle school principals' perspectives regarding policies implemented to address Cyberbullying?	Survey questions:
	<p>Does your school system's policy on bullying address Cyberbullying?                      Yes                      No                      Don't Know</p> <p>Are the policies being implemented effective in dealing with Cyberbullying incidents?                      Yes                      No                      Don't Know</p> <p>Do you feel that current policies need to be revised?                      Yes                      No                      Don't Know</p> <p>Do you think additional policies are needed?                      Yes                      No                      Don't Know</p>
2c. What are middle school principals' perspectives on identifying and reporting Cyberbullying incidents?	Survey questions:
	<p>How easy or difficult is it to identify Cyberbullying instances?                      Very difficult                      Difficult                      Easy                      Very easy</p> <p>Do you believe that you report Cyberbullying incidents consistently?                      Yes                      No                      Don't Know</p>

(table continued)

Table 10 (cont.)

Research question 2: What are middle school principals' perspectives regarding their schools' effectiveness in responding to Cyberbullying?	
2d. Who is involved in investigating and remediating Cyberbullying processes?	Survey questions:
	<p>How involved are the following individuals in Cyberbullying incidents?</p> <p>Central office staff members?            Not Involved            Somewhat Involved            Very Involved</p> <p>School resource officer personnel?            Not Involved            Somewhat Involved            Very Involved</p> <p>Law officials?            Not Involved            Somewhat Involved            Very Involved</p> <p>School administrators?            Not Involved            Somewhat Involved            Very Involved</p> <p>Teachers?            Not Involved            Somewhat Involved            Very Involved</p>

(table continued)

Table 10 (cont.)

Research question 3: What are middle school principals' recommendations to strengthen Cyberbullying policies and procedures?	
3a. What are middle school principals' perspectives on preventive Cyberbullying strategies?	Survey questions:
	<p>Choose any of the following strategies you believe would deter Cyberbullying incidents.</p> <p>Increased supervision of student technology use            More effective school policies            Anti-bullying education            Encouraging students to report Cyberbullying            Professional development for teachers            Increased consequences            Increased parental involvement</p>
3b. What are middle school principals' perspectives on Cyberbullying school level consequences?	Survey questions:
	<p>Are the Cyberbullying consequences currently implemented in your school effectively deterring Cyberbullying?</p> <p>Yes            No            Don't Know</p>

### Data Management

Data were carefully and responsibly managed. By utilizing Qualtrics as an on-line survey instrument, confidentiality was ensured for participants. There were no identifying elements for school systems, schools, or participants in the study.

### Data Analysis

Data returned from surveys were displayed in data summary tables. The data summary tables were organized by the individual survey questions. See the tables below for the organization of the data summary tables. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Graphic analysis, measures of central tendency, and visual representations were conducted for the data collected.

Table 11

*Survey Question 1: Summary Table for Survey Data*

Survey question 1: How often do Cyberbullying incidents occur on your school premises?									
Never		Rarely		Monthly		Weekly		Daily	
<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%

Table 12

*Survey Question 2: Summary Table for Survey Data*

Survey question 2: How often are you notified of Cyberbullying incidents that occur away from school?									
Never		Rarely		Monthly		Weekly		Daily	
<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%

Table 13

*Survey Question 3: Summary Table for Survey Data*

Survey question 3: As a middle school principal, in what grade level do Cyberbullying incidents most often occur?							
6th		7th		8th		Equal instances across grade levels	
<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%

Table 14

*Survey Question 4: Summary Table for Survey Data*

Survey question 4: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Cyberbullying causes long-term negative effects.									
Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%

Table 15

*Survey Question 5: Summary Table for Survey Data*

Survey question 5: Do you believe gender plays a role in Cyberbullying incidents?					
Yes		No		Don't know	
<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%

Table 16

*Survey Question 6: Summary Table for Survey Data*

Survey question 6: Is there a bullying prevention program implemented at your school?					
Yes		No		Don't know	
<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%

Table 17

*Survey Question 7: Summary Table for Survey Data*

Survey question 7: If there is a bullying prevention program implemented at your school, is Cyberbullying specifically addressed in the program?					
Yes		No		Don't know	
<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%

Table 18

*Survey Question 8: Summary Table for Survey Data*

Survey question 8: If there is no bullying prevention program implemented at your school, do you believe one should be implemented in your school?					
Yes		No		Don't know	
<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%

Table 19

*Survey Question 9: Summary Table for Survey Data*

Survey question 9: If you believe a bullying prevention program should be implemented, should Cyberbullying be addressed in the program?					
Yes		No		Don't know	
<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%

Table 20

*Survey Question 10: Summary Table for Survey Data*

Survey question 10: Does your school system’s policy on bullying address Cyberbullying?					
Yes		No		Don’t know	
<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%

Table 21

*Survey Question 11: Summary Table for Survey Data*

Survey question 11: Are the policies being implemented effective in dealing with Cyberbullying incidents?					
Yes		No		Don’t know	
<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%

Table 22

*Survey Question 12: Summary Table for Survey Data*

Survey question 12: Do you feel that current policies need to be revised?					
Yes		No		Don’t know	
<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%

Table 23

*Survey Question 13: Summary Table for Survey Data*

Survey question 13: How easy or difficult is it to identify Cyberbullying instances?							
Very difficult		Difficult		Easy		Very easy	
<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%

Table 24

*Survey Question 14: Summary Table for Survey Data*

Survey question 14: Do you feel you report Cyberbullying incidents consistently?					
Yes		No		Don't know	
<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%

Table 25

*Survey Question 15: Summary Table for Survey Data*

Survey question 15: How involved are the following individuals in Cyberbullying incidents?					
Not involved		Somewhat involved		Very involved	
<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%

Table 26

*Survey Question 16: Summary Table for Survey Data*

Survey question 16: Choose three of the following strategies you believe would have the most impact to deter Cyberbullying incidents.													
Increased supervision		More effective school policies		Anti-bullying education		Encouraging students to report Cyberbullying		Professional development for teachers		Increased consequences		Increased parental involvement	
<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%

Table 27

*Survey Question 17: Summary Table for Survey Data*

Survey question 17: How effective do you believe the consequences currently implemented are in deterring Cyberbullying?							
Ineffective		Somewhat ineffective		Somewhat effective		Effective	
<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%

### Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 described the quantitative methods that were used in the study. Descriptions of the research design included explanations for choosing the study population, collecting the data, managing the data, and analyzing the data. Data analyses using descriptive statistics were conducted. Results are shared in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the existence and prevalence of Cyberbullying in middle schools across Region VII in southwest Virginia. Cyberbullying policies and strategies used to address Cyberbullying were examined. The experiences of middle school principals with Cyberbullying incidents were explored.

The following research questions were asked:

1. What is the status of Cyberbullying in Region VII of southwest Virginia?
2. What are middle school principals' perspectives regarding their schools' effectiveness in responding to Cyberbullying?
3. What are middle school principals' recommendations to strengthen Cyberbullying policies and procedures?

#### **Research Methods**

The online survey utilized in the research protocol helped to gain insights into Cyberbullying events encountered by middle school principals in southwest Virginia by tapping into their knowledge and experience. The research results may help in the development and implementation of effective Cyberbullying policies, procedures and practices.

#### **Analyses and Displays of the Research Results**

Research data were displayed graphically and statistically. Visual representations are presented. A data summary table including number and percentages of responses are presented for each survey item. Graphical analyses of the number of responses are represented by bar graphs. Results of the survey are organized by the research questions.

#### **Response Rates**

The study was conducted in Region VII of southwest Virginia. Region VII consists of 15 county school systems and four city school systems for a total of nineteen districts. Forty-two middle schools as identified by the Virginia Middle School Association exist in the region. Each school system superintendent was sent an email requesting permission to conduct the study in his or her division. All superintendents granted permission for their middle school principals to

participate (100%). Forty-two middle school principals were sent links to the online survey. Thirty-one of the forty-two middle school principals completed the online survey (74%).

**Survey Item 1 Results**

Although thirty-one middle school principals completed the online survey, two of these completed only survey item number one thereby indicating their unwillingness to complete the remainder of the items. Therefore, twenty-nine of the thirty-one survey participants (94%) chose to proceed with the additional survey items. Table 28 shows the number and percentages for survey participation numbers.

Table 28

*Data for Survey Item 1*

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate in the study you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. By choosing “accept” you are agreeing to participate in the study. Choosing "decline" will prompt you to the end of the survey. Thank you for your time and for sharing your experiences.		
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Accept	29	94
Decline	2	6

**Results of Survey for Research Question 1: What is the status of Cyberbullying in Region VII of southwest Virginia?**

The first research question for the study included the following survey items:

- 2) How often do Cyberbullying incidents occur on your school premises?
- 3) How often are you notified by non-school personnel of Cyberbullying incidents that occur away from school?
- 4) As a middle school principal, in what grade level do Cyberbullying incidents most often occur?
- 5) Do you believe gender plays a role in Cyberbullying incidents?
- 6) If so, which gender has the most reported incidents of Cyberbullying?
- 7) Is there a bullying prevention program implemented at your school?

- 8) If there is a bullying prevention program implemented at your school, is Cyberbullying specifically addressed in the program?
- 11) Does your school system's policy on bullying address Cyberbullying?
- 15) How easy or difficult is it to identify Cyberbullying instances?
- 16) Do you believe that you report Cyberbullying incidents consistently?
- 17) How involved are the following individuals in Cyberbullying incidents? Central office staff members? School resource officer personnel? Law enforcement officials? School administrators? Teachers?

### Survey Item 2 Results

Twenty-nine survey participants answered item number 2. Table 29 shows the number and percentages for the survey data.

Table 29

*Data for Survey Item 2*

How often do Cyberbullying incidents occur on your school premises?		
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Never	1	3
Rarely	4	14
Monthly	13	45
Weekly	10	34
Daily	1	3

### Survey Item 3 Results

Twenty-nine survey participants answered item number 3. Table 30 shows the number and percentages for the survey data.

Table 30

*Data for Survey Item 3*

How often are you notified by non-school personnel of Cyberbullying incidents that occur away from school?		
	<i>N</i>	%
Never	1	3
Rarely	5	17
Monthly	14	48
Weekly	9	31
Daily	0	0

**Survey Item 4 Results**

Twenty-nine survey participants answered item number 4. Table 31 shows the number and percentages for the survey data.

Table 31

*Data for Survey Item 4*

As a middle school principal, in what grade level do Cyberbullying incidents most often occur?		
	<i>N</i>	%
6th Grade	1	3
7th Grade	9	31
8th Grade	17	59
Equal instances across 6-8 grades	2	7
Other grades	0	0

### Survey Item 5 Results

Twenty-nine survey participants answered item number 5. Table 32 shows the number and percentages for the survey data.

Table 32

*Data for Survey Item 5*

Do you believe gender plays a role in Cyberbullying incidents?		
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	24	83
No	3	10
Don't Know	2	7

### Survey Item 6 Results

Twenty-six survey participants answered item number 6. Table 33 shows the number and percentages for the survey data.

Table 33

*Data for Survey Item 6*

If so, which gender has the most reported incidents of Cyberbullying?		
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Male	0	0%
Female	26	100%
Don't know	0	0%

### Survey Item 7 Results

Twenty-nine survey participants answered item number 7. Table 34 shows the number and percentages for the survey data.

Table 34

*Data for Survey Item 7*

Is there a bullying prevention program implemented at your school?		
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	21	72
No	8	28
Don't know	0	0

### Survey Item 8 Results

Twenty-eight survey participants answered item number 8. Table 35 shows the number and percentages for the survey data.

Table 35

*Data for Survey Item 8*

If there is a bullying prevention program implemented at your school, is Cyberbullying specifically addressed in the program?		
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	16	57
No	11	39
Don't know	1	4

### Survey Item 11 Results

Twenty-nine survey participants answered item number 11. Table 36 shows the number and percentages for the survey data.

Table 36

*Data for Survey Item 11*

Does your school system's policy on bullying address Cyberbullying?		
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	23	79
No	4	14
Don't know	2	7

### Survey Item 15 Results

Twenty-nine survey participants answered item number 15. Table 37 shows the number and percentages for the survey data.

Table 37

*Data for Survey Item 15*

How easy or difficult is it to identify Cyberbullying instances?		
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Very difficult	1	3
Difficult	20	69
Easy	8	28
Very easy	0	0

### Survey Item 16 Results

Twenty-nine survey participants answered item number 16. Table 38 shows the number and percentages for the survey data.

Table 38

*Data for Survey Item 16*

Do you believe that you report Cyberbullying incidents consistently?		
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	18	62
No	9	31
Don't know	2	7

**Survey Item 17 Results**

Table 39 shows the number and percentages for the survey data.

Table 39

*Data for Survey Item 17*

How involved are the following individuals in Cyberbullying incidents?								
	Not involved		Somewhat involved		Very involved		Don't know	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Central office staff members	9	31	18	62	1	3	1	3
School resource officer personnel	3	10	7	24	19	66	0	0
Law enforcement officials	8	28	16	55	5	17	0	0
School administrators	0	0	1	3	28	97	0	0
Teachers	0	0	21	72	8	28	0	0

**Results of Survey for Research Question 2: What are middle school principals' perspectives regarding their schools' effectiveness in responding to Cyberbullying?**

The second research question for the study included the following survey items:

12) Are the school system's policies being implemented effective in dealing with Cyberbullying incidents?

19) Are the Cyberbullying consequences currently implemented in your school effectively deterring Cyberbullying?

### Survey Item 12 Results

Twenty-nine survey participants answered item number 12. Table 40 shows the number and percentages for the survey data.

Table 40

*Data for Survey Item 12*

Are the school system's policies being implemented effective in dealing with Cyberbullying incidents?		
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	24	83
No	3	10
Don't know	2	7

### Survey Item 19 Results

Twenty-nine survey participants answered item number 19. Table 41 shows the number and percentages for the survey data.

Table 41

*Data for Survey Item 19*

Are the Cyberbullying consequences implemented in your school effectively deterring Cyberbullying?		
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	16	55
No	8	28
Don't know	5	17

**Results of Survey for Research Question 3: What are middle school principals' recommendations to strengthen Cyberbullying policies and procedures?**

The third research question for the study included the following survey items:

- 9) If there is no bullying prevention program implemented at your school, do you believe one should be implemented in your school?
- 10) If you believe a bullying prevention program should be implemented, should Cyberbullying be addressed in the program?
- 13) Do you feel that the current school system's policies need to be revised?
- 14) Do you think additional school system policies are needed?
- 18) Choose any of the following strategies you believe would deter Cyberbullying incidents: Increased supervision of student technology use, more effective school policies, anti-bullying education, encouraging students to report Cyberbullying, professional development for teachers, increased consequences, and increased parental involvement.

**Survey Item 9 Results**

Twenty-two survey participants answered item number 9. Table 42 shows the number and percentages for the survey data.

Table 42

*Data for Survey Item 9*

If there is no bullying prevention program implemented at your school, do you believe one should be implemented in your school?		
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	21	95
No	0	0
Don't know	1	5

**Survey Item 10 Results**

Twenty-three survey participants answered item number 10. Table 43 shows the number and percentages for the survey data.

Table 43

*Data for Survey Item 10*

If you believe a bullying prevention program should be implemented, should Cyberbullying be addressed in the program?		
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	22	96
No	1	4
Don't know	0	0

**Survey Item 13 Results**

Twenty-eight survey participants answered item number 13. Table 44 shows the number and percentages for the survey data.

Table 44

*Data for Survey Item 13*

Do you feel that the current school system's policies need to be revised?		
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	9	32
No	16	57
Don't know	3	11

### **Survey Item 14 Results**

Twenty-nine survey participants answered item number 14. Table 45 shows the number and percentages for the survey data.

Table 45

*Data for Survey Item 14*

Do you think additional school system policies are needed?		
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	10	34
No	14	48
Don't know	5	17

### **Survey Item 18 Results**

Table 46 shows the number and percentages for the survey data.

Table 46

*Data for Survey Item 18*

Choose any of the following strategies you believe would deter Cyberbullying incidents.		
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Increased supervision of student technology use	11	38
More effective school policies	6	21
Anti-bullying education	24	83
Encouraging students to report Cyberbullying	25	86
Professional development for teachers	10	34
Increased consequences	9	31
Increased parental involvement	27	93

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY, FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter contains the following sections: a summary of the purpose and methodology used to drive the study, findings and conclusions based on the research questions, recommendations for Region VII in southwest Virginia, and recommendations for future research.

#### **Summary of the Purpose and Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the existence and prevalence of Cyberbullying in middle schools across Region VII in southwest Virginia. Cyberbullying policies and strategies used to address Cyberbullying were examined. The experiences of middle school principals with Cyberbullying incidents were explored.

Three research questions guided the study:

1. What is the status of Cyberbullying in Region VII of southwest Virginia?
2. What are middle school principals' perspectives regarding their schools' effectiveness in responding to Cyberbullying?
3. What are middle school principals' recommendations to strengthen Cyberbullying policies and procedures?

An online survey was conducted using Qualtrics. Forty-two middle school principals in Region VII of southwest Virginia were invited to participate in the study. A deadline was set for surveys to be submitted and at the conclusion of the window, 31 principals had responded. This response yielded a return rate of 74%. Descriptive statistics using reporting tools and displays in Qualtrics were presented with information about principals' perspectives on the status of Cyberbullying, the effectiveness of responses to Cyberbullying, and principals' recommendations to strengthen Cyberbullying policies and procedures.

#### **Findings**

Survey data were evaluated to identify the major findings and conclusions for this study. In this section, each research question is revisited with corresponding survey items, and conclusions are shared.

**Findings: Research Question 1: What is the status of Cyberbullying in Region VII of southwest Virginia?**

**Survey item 2.** Analyses of the data showed most middle school principals (97%) had encountered instances of Cyberbullying on their school premises. The rate of occurrences varied with the most frequently reported (45%) occurring on a monthly basis. Weekly occurrences of Cyberbullying were reported by thirty-four percent of the principals. Therefore, more than seventy-nine percent of middle school principals reported encountering Cyberbullying between one and four times each month.

Table 47 displays the number of Cyberbullying incidents that occurred on school premises during one month. The total number of monthly, school-based Cyberbullying incidents equals 83. This means that 83 victims were targeted monthly, by individuals wanting to cause them harm.

Table 47

*Data for Cyberbullying Occurrences on School Premises*

How often do Cyberbullying incidents occur on your school premises?			
	<i>N</i>	Formula	Number of instances per month
Monthly	13	<i>N</i> times 1	13
Weekly	10	<i>N</i> times 4	40
Daily	1	<i>N</i> times 30	30

**Survey item 3.** Analyses of the data showed most middle school principals (97%) reported being notified by non-school personnel of Cyberbullying incidents that occurred away from school. The percentage rates of these types of notifications varied with the most frequently reported (48%) occurring on a monthly basis. Weekly occurrences of being notified of Cyberbullying instances away from school were reported by thirty-one percent of the principals. Therefore, in total, more than seventy-nine percent of middle school principals reported being notified of Cyberbullying incidents that occurred away from school between one and four times each month.

Table 48 displays the number of Cyberbullying incidents that occurred away from school during one month. The total number of monthly, Cyberbullying incidents that occurred away from school equals 77. This means that 77 victims were being targeted away from school monthly, by individuals wanting to cause them pain.

Table 48

*Data for Cyberbullying Occurrences away from School*

How often are you notified by non-school personnel of Cyberbullying incidents that occur away from school?			
	<i>N</i>	Formula	Number of instances per month
Monthly	14	<i>N</i> times 1	14
Weekly	9	<i>N</i> times 7	63

**Survey item 4.** Analyses of the data show that fifty-nine percent of principals reported that the majority of Cyberbullying incidents occurred with students at the eighth-grade level. When combining response data for seventh and eighth-grades, principals reported 90% of Cyberbullying incidents occurred at these grade levels. Only three percent of principals reported Cyberbullying incidents occurred in the sixth-grade. The remaining seven percent of principals reported Cyberbullying incidents occurred equally across sixth through eighth-grade levels.

**Survey item 5.** Analyses of the data showed overwhelmingly that principals reported gender does play a role in Cyberbullying. Eighty-three percent of principals agreed that gender is a factor. Additionally, ten percent of principals reported gender plays no role in Cyberbullying incidents. Seven percent reported they did not know if gender plays a role in Cyberbullying.

**Survey item 6.** Analyses of the data showed complete agreement by principals regarding which gender had the most reported incidents of Cyberbullying. One hundred percent of those responding indicated that reported incidents of Cyberbullying were made by female students.

**Survey item 7.** The majority of schools in Region VII had implemented a bullying prevention program. Only twenty-eight percent of principals reported not having a bullying prevention program implemented in their school. Seventy-two percent had implemented a bullying prevention program.

**Survey item 8.** Schools that had a bullying prevention program implemented may or may not have included Cyberbullying within that program. Just over half of the principals (57%) surveyed stated that Cyberbullying was specifically addressed in their bullying prevention program. Thirty-nine percent of principals reported that the bullying prevention program implemented did not specifically address Cyberbullying. Four percent of principals reported not knowing.

**Survey item 11.** Seventy-nine percent of principals reported that Cyberbullying was addressed in their school system's bullying policy. Fourteen percent reported that Cyberbullying was not addressed in their school system's bullying policy. Seven percent reported not knowing.

**Survey item 15.** Principals were given four choices when responding to how easy or difficult it was for them to identify Cyberbullying instances. The choices included very difficult, difficult, easy, and very easy. Three percent of principals reported that identifying Cyberbullying instances was very difficult. Sixty-nine reported it was difficult to identify Cyberbullying instances. Twenty-eight reported it was easy. No principals indicated that identifying Cyberbullying instances was very easy.

**Survey item 16.** Sixty-two percent of principals felt they reported Cyberbullying incidents consistently. Thirty-one percent felt they did not report Cyberbullying incidents consistently. Seven percent did not know.

**Survey item 17.** Principals were asked how involved central office staff members, school resource officer personnel, law enforcement officials, school administrators, and teachers were in Cyberbullying incidents. The principals were given four options to choose from including not involved, somewhat involved, very involved, and don't know.

Thirty-one percent of principals reported that central office staff members were not involved in Cyberbullying incidents. Sixty-two percent reported that they were somewhat involved. Three percent reported that they were very involved. Three percent of principals reported that they did not know how involved central office staff members were in Cyberbullying incidents.

Ninety percent of principals reported that school resource office personnel were involved with Cyberbullying incidents at some level. Twenty-four percent reported they were somewhat involved. Sixty-six percent reported that they were very involved. Ten percent of principals reported that school resource officer personnel were not involved in Cyberbullying incidents.

Twenty-eight percent of principals reported that law enforcement officials were not involved in Cyberbullying incidents. Fifty-five percent reported that they were somewhat involved. Seventeen percent reported that law enforcement officials were very involved with Cyberbullying incidents.

Ninety-seven percent of principals reported school administrators were very involved with Cyberbullying incidents. Three percent reported that school administrators were somewhat involved in Cyberbullying incidents.

Twenty-eight percent of principals reported teachers were very involved with Cyberbullying incidents. Seventy-two percent reported teachers were somewhat involved.

**Findings: Research Question 2: What are middle school principals' perspectives regarding their schools' effectiveness in responding to Cyberbullying?**

**Survey item 12.** Eighty-three percent of principals reported that their school system's bullying policy was effective in dealing with Cyberbullying. Ten percent reported that their school system's bullying policy did not effectively deal with Cyberbullying. Seven percent reported they did not know.

**Survey item 19.** Fifty-five percent of principals reported the consequences being implemented at their school were effectively deterring Cyberbullying. Twenty-eight percent reported that Cyberbullying consequences were not effective. Seventeen reported that they did not know.

**Findings: Research Question 3: What are middle school principals' recommendations to strengthen Cyberbullying policies and procedures?**

**Survey item 9.** Principals at schools where there was not a bullying prevention program in place reported that a program should be implemented within their school (95%). Only 5% of principals reported not knowing whether a bullying prevention program was necessary to implement.

**Survey item 10.** Most principals at schools with no bullying prevention program in place that would like to have a program implemented, reported that Cyberbullying should be addressed in that program (96%). Four percent of these principals reported Cyberbullying should not be addressed in the program.

**Survey item 13.** Fifty-seven percent of principals surveyed felt their school system's bullying policy was effective and did not need revisions. Thirty-two percent of principals reported that their school system's bullying policy needed revisions or updates. Eleven percent reported they did not know.

**Survey item 14.** Forty-eight percent of principals reported that they believed no additional school system policies were needed to address Cyberbullying. Thirty-four percent of principals reported that additional school system policies were needed to address Cyberbullying. Seventeen percent reported they did not know.

**Survey item 18.** Principals were given seven strategies to consider that they felt would effectively deter Cyberbullying incidents. All seven strategies were chosen but with varying percentage levels ranging from 93% to 21%. In order from the highest percentage to the lowest the results are as follows: 93% increased parental involvement, 86% encouraging students to report Cyberbullying, 83% anti-bullying education, 38% increased supervision of student technology use, 34% professional development for teachers, 31% increased consequences, and 21% more effective school policies.

## **Discussion**

Based on the survey data collected and revisited above, several observations are made. The status of Cyberbullying in Region VII of southwest Virginia indicated by survey data showed alarming frequency, specific grade-level concerns, prevalence in gender, differences with programs and policies, difficulties in identification and reporting processes, and varying levels of involvement by school personnel.

The alarming frequency of Cyberbullying incidents in Region VII of southwest Virginia in the middle-level of education was exhibited throughout the survey data gathered from middle school principals. Eighty-two percent of principals reported that Cyberbullying incidents occurred on school premises daily, weekly, or monthly. Seventy-nine percent of principals reported that Cyberbullying incidents occurred away from school weekly or monthly. These numbers show that the prevalence of Cyberbullying in Region VII is of great concern. These staggering numbers indicated victims were being targeted with harmful online acts of aggression far too often both at school and away from school. The effects of these behaviors can cause negative effects for victims, other individuals, and school culture. One incident of Cyberbullying

can have a devastating impact. Therefore, one incident of Cyberbullying is too much to tolerate or accept. Even one case of Cyberbullying can cause immeasurable, long-lasting consequences. Students' lives are being negatively impacted by such actions as avoiding school, developing a low self-esteem, increasing stress levels, or decreasing academic performance.

The survey data gathered indicated Cyberbullying incidents were reported most frequently at specific grade levels. Ninety percent of principals reported Cyberbullying incidents occurred most often at the seventh and eighth-grade levels. Thoughts occur to the researcher as to why the difference in students' online behaviors occurs at these levels of education. Students' lives are changing greatly during these years. Adolescence is a challenging, confusing, and unsettling time. When coupled with increased online activities, some individuals choose to intentionally harm and harass others through these online means.

The survey data gathered from middle school principals showed that gender played a role in Cyberbullying. Specifically, eighty-three percent reported that gender did play a role in Cyberbullying. One hundred percent of principals indicated females were the gender group that had the most reported incidents of Cyberbullying. Overwhelmingly, middle school principals in Region VII of southwest Virginia reported Cyberbullying was related to female students rather than their male peers.

Middle schools and school systems in Region VII of southwest Virginia had differences in their bullying programs and policies. Alarming, twenty-eight percent of principals indicated that there was no bullying prevention program being implemented in their schools. Fifty-seven percent of principals that reported having a bullying prevention program implemented at their school shared that the program did not specifically address Cyberbullying. These data could be problematic when protecting students from both traditional bullying and Cyberbullying attacks. Without an effective bullying program, students could be left on their own to develop their own strategies and coping mechanisms to deal with a problem they may not even understand. Without specifically addressing Cyberbullying within a bullying policy and providing students with resources to help combat harmful acts such as these, students could be left with painful experiences that could lead to detrimental effects. Without such programs, students could be missing opportunities to discuss their experiences about negative online behaviors with an individual that could potentially help them.

Survey data showed inconsistencies with identifying and reporting Cyberbullying instances. Seventy-two percent of principals reported identifying Cyberbullying instances as difficult or very difficult. Thirty-one percent of principals reported not consistently reporting Cyberbullying incidents. These numbers showed there was a lack of regularity to help guide middle school administrators within Region VII of southwest Virginia when addressing Cyberbullying. The identification process is important to accurately describe the status of Cyberbullying in this region. The reporting process is equally as important to ensure accurate data be recorded that may be utilized in alleviating Cyberbullying occurrences.

Within Region VII of southwest Virginia, middle school principals reported varying levels of involvement by school personnel in Cyberbullying incidents. Notably, school administrators were chosen by ninety-seven percent of principals as being very involved with incidents of Cyberbullying. These are the individuals who most likely are the first school personnel to receive information about the Cyberbullying incident. Upon the school administrator's notification about a Cyberbullying incident, contact is frequently made to the school resource officer personnel. Understandably, this leads to the data gathered which showed sixty-six percent of principals reported resource officer personnel as being very involved with incidents of Cyberbullying. This high percentage of resource officer involvement could indicate the seriousness of the threat and the impact it can have on students.

Based on the survey data collected and revisited above, several observations are made. Most principals in Region VII of southwest Virginia felt their school system's bullying policy was effective in dealing with Cyberbullying. The data revealed that principals were confident in their leaders' ability to form and implement policy that helped to promote school safety, especially in the area of Cyberbullying threats. Keeping students safe should be a priority for all, and the data indicated central office staff members took this role seriously when developing bullying policy.

Survey data indicated inconsistencies from principals about the Cyberbullying consequences that were implemented to deter Cyberbullying. Although fifty-five percent of principals responded they believed these consequences were effective, forty-five percent were left with either not knowing or believing these Cyberbullying consequences were not effective. Based on these data, it is reasonable to believe adjustments and improvements to Cyberbullying consequences may be warranted. If consequences are not meeting the desperate need to help

deter Cyberbullying, then improvement efforts must be made. Student safety has to be a focus of such policy and consequences.

Based on the survey data collected and revisited above, several observations are made. Middle school principals in Region VII of southwest Virginia believed Cyberbullying policies and procedures could be improved. Recommendations were made by principals to help strengthen Cyberbullying policies and procedures.

Overwhelmingly, principals felt bullying and Cyberbullying policies should be implemented in schools. Ninety-five percent of principals at schools with no bullying policy believed one should be implemented. Ninety-six percent additionally felt that Cyberbullying should be specifically addressed in the bullying policy implemented at the school. Safety is of great concern to these individuals and they were seeking ways to help students whom encountered bullying and Cyberbullying threats.

Survey data showed inconsistent results with principals' views on whether or not school systems' bullying and Cyberbullying policies needed to be revised. Fifty-seven percent of principals believed their school system's policy needed no revisions, thus indicating their confidence. Thirty-two percent of principals believed their school system's policy needed revision. In these cases, revisions would most likely mean that areas of the bullying and Cyberbullying policies were weak and needed adjustments in order to strengthen. Eleven percent of principals felt they did not know if revisions were needed, thus indicating perhaps they were unfamiliar with these policies. Principals must be well versed in the nuances of all policies implemented within their individual school system to act fairly and consistently with all types of incidents, including those of bullying and Cyberbullying.

Survey data showed inconsistent results with principals' views on whether or not additional school system Cyberbullying policies were needed. Forty-eight percent of principals believed no additional policies were needed, again indicating their confidence in current policies being implemented. Thirty-four percent felt additional school system Cyberbullying policies were needed. In these cases, implementing additional policies most likely indicate they felt their current school system Cyberbullying policies were inadequate. Seventeen percent of principals indicated they did not know whether additional school system Cyberbullying policies were needed. Perhaps these principals were not familiar with the policies being implemented at the time of the study.

Survey data indicated principals in Region VII believed all strategies suggested to deter Cyberbullying incidents would aid in alleviating this type of harmful behavior. Of the seven strategies suggested in the survey, three had fifty percent or higher response rates from principals. These three strategies were increased parental involvement, encouraging students to report Cyberbullying, and anti-bullying education.

Principals indicated their belief that parents should be more involved by an overwhelming ninety-three percent, the highest of the seven strategies posed. Apparently the principals believed parents held the key to many aspects of an adolescent's life, and survey data indicate that principals in Region VII believed Cyberbullying is no different. Involving parents in the conversation on Cyberbullying can be of great benefit.

Eighty-six percent of principals believed encouraging students to report Cyberbullying would be a useful strategy to help deter Cyberbullying incidents. The researcher wondered if cyberbullied victims at these schools viewed available avenues for students' voice as accessible. Were these students comfortable in sharing their experiences with school leadership, school counselors, or teachers? Did students feel safe in reporting Cyberbullying incidents? Clearly, based on the survey data, principals felt students reporting of Cyberbullying incidents could be increasingly encouraged.

Eighty-three percent of principals believed anti-bullying education would be a useful strategy to help deter Cyberbullying incidents. The researcher believes giving students opportunities to learn more about bullying and Cyberbullying can be of great benefit and survey data indicated that principals in Region VII agree. Educating students on the effects of Cyberbullying in particular may help in deterring Cyberbullying incidents.

## **Conclusions**

Major themes emerged from analyses of the data gathered from middle-level principals. The data from this study indicated Cyberbullying is very prevalent. Principals are dealing with incidents of Cyberbullying in middle schools almost daily, nearly 25 incidents each month. These frequency numbers are alarming, with as many, if not more than 25 students each month being targeted and harassed by cyberbullies, intentionally wanting to cause them harm. Likely, many more victims exist due to unreported Cyberbullying incidents.

These statistics cause concern as to whether or not the policies were effective in dealing with Cyberbullying. Analyses of the data indicated principals believed their school systems' Cyberbullying policies were working effectively. They felt that no additional policies were needed. However, with the high number of Cyberbullying incidents reported, the number of unreported incidents, and the high victim count, policies need to be reviewed on an annual basis. Additions and adjustments in policies are needed in response to bullying and Cyberbullying frequency statistics.

Data from the study also revealed that Cyberbullying is more prevalent for female students than male students. Additionally, Cyberbullying incidents occur mostly at the eighth-grade level. Female, eighth-grade students, therefore, need attention and educational resources to help combat their experiences with Cyberbullying and increase their knowledge about the consequences and harmful effects this type of bullying can create.

Analyses of the data from the study did indicate alarming information. Twenty-eight percent of principals reported that there was no bullying prevention program being implemented in their schools. This percentage converts to nine out of 31 schools that did not have an implemented bullying prevention program at the time this study was conducted. Perhaps implementing such a program would help schools in deterring negative, on-line behavior.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the research findings and on the conclusions shared above, the following recommendations are made for Region VII and for further study.

**Recommendations for Region VII.** The following recommendations are made for school leaders in Region VII of southwest Virginia:

1. It is recommended for middle school principals to conduct a reflective analysis on the status of Cyberbullying in their schools. This analysis should include the frequency of Cyberbullying incidents both on-campus and off-campus, the number of victims identified, and the number of perpetrators.
2. It is recommended for middle school principals to conduct an annual survey of students to gather information and draw conclusions about the status of Cyberbullying in their schools. Suggested survey items would include:
  - a. Is Cyberbullying a problem in this school?

- b. Have you personally experienced Cyberbullying in this school?
  - c. In your opinion, what are some proactive strategies that could be implemented at this school to help prevent Cyberbullying?
3. It is recommended for middle school principals to utilize the information gathered from the reflective analysis and the student survey. Principals are encouraged to use this feedback to develop specialized programs, policies, and professional development opportunities to meet the needs of their school.
  4. It is recommended for central office staff members to assess their system's Cyberbullying policies and procedures including implementation fidelity, effectiveness, and necessary revisions and updates.

**Recommendations for further study.** The following recommendations are made for further research based on the findings of this study:

1. A replication of this study in other regions across Virginia and a comparison of results regarding the status, effectiveness in responding, and recommendations to strengthen Cyberbullying policies and procedures.
2. This study was conducted in rural Southwest Virginia. A study should be conducted focused in urban middle schools in Virginia comparing the statuses of Cyberbullying.
3. This study solely focused on surveying middle school principals. Previous research showed that Cyberbullying peaks during the middle-level grades (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009); however, it does not stop and continues into the high schools. A study should be conducted to assess the status of Cyberbullying at the high school level, the effectiveness of strategies implemented to respond to Cyberbullying at the high school level, and the differences in Cyberbullying policies between middle school and high school.
4. A replication of this study to survey guidance counselors, faculty, and parents about their perspectives regarding Cyberbullying. To effectively combat Cyberbullying, perspectives from all stakeholders are essential. This replication would provide comparative data from other stakeholders to ensure an accurate assessment of Cyberbullying at the middle level.

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APPENDIX A  
IRB TRAINING CERTIFICATION



**APPENDIX B**  
**IRB APPROVAL NOTIFICATION**



**Office of Research Compliance**  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959  
email [irb@vt.edu](mailto:irb@vt.edu)  
website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** May 18, 2016  
**TO:** Glen I Earthman, Roger Scott Allen  
**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Cyberbullying in Middle Schools in Southwestern Virginia  
**IRB NUMBER:** 16-501

Effective May 18, 2016, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

**PROTOCOL INFORMATION:**

Approved As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 2,4**  
Protocol Approval Date: **May 18, 2016**  
Protocol Expiration Date: **N/A**  
Continuing Review Due Date\*: **N/A**

\*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

**FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:**

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

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VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY  
*An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution*

## APPENDIX C

### GAINING ACCESS TO THE SCHOOL SYSTEMS: EMAIL TO SUPERINTENDENTS

Dear Superintendent,

As a doctoral student at Virginia Tech, I am conducting a study in Region VII of southwest Virginia on Cyberbullying. The purpose of this study will be to examine the perceptions of middle school principals regarding the extent of Cyberbullying in their schools and the effectiveness of policies and strategies used to address this phenomena. Findings from this study may help school leaders with information and ideas for addressing incidents of Cyberbullying. I am respectfully requesting permission to conduct this study in your school system, which is part of Region VII.

Data for the study will be collected through an online survey. I would like to invite each of your middle school principals to participate. Completing the survey should not take longer than 30 minutes. Anonymity of study participants will be ensured. You will receive a written report of my findings at the conclusion of the study.

Please feel free to contact me either at the email provided below or by reaching me by phone at 276-739-3300 if you have any questions or concerns regarding this study. With the hopes of including all school systems in Region VII, I am asking your permission to conduct the study and contact potential participants within your division. Please let me know of your decision as soon as possible at [sallen@wcs.k12.va.us](mailto:sallen@wcs.k12.va.us). I appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Scott Allen

**APPENDIX D**  
**CONTENT VALIDATION: INSTRUMENT**

**VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**Content Validation Instrument**

**Title of Project:** Cyberbullying in Middle Schools in Southwestern Virginia

**Researcher(s):** Glen Earthman, Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Scott Allen, Doctoral Student, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies,  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

**Introduction**

The purpose of this content validation instrument is to assist with the development and improvement of survey questions to be used in surveying middle school principals in Region VII of southwest Virginia on Cyberbullying.

Your consent will be indicated with the submission of the content validation instrument.

**Instructions**

There are three steps for completing the content validation instrument: (1) clarity ratings, (2) neutrality ratings, and (3) wording recommendations.

**Clarity Ratings.** In the column labeled “Clarity,” please indicate how clear you think the question or statement is. Please use the following scale:

(1) Unclear (2) Somewhat clear (3) Very clear

**Neutrality Ratings.** In the column labeled “Neutrality,” please indicate yes or no for each question regarding neutrality.

(1) Yes, the question is neutral (2) No, the question is not neutral

**Wording Recommendations.** For any item you rated a one (1) or two (2) in the clarity or neutrality ratings, please enter your recommendations for improving the item.

Survey question	Clarity	Neutrality	Wording recommendation
1. How often do Cyberbullying incidents occur on your school premises? Never Rarely Monthly Weekly Daily	1 2 3	Yes No	
2. How often are you notified of Cyberbullying incidents that occur away from school? Never Rarely Monthly Weekly Daily	1 2 3	Yes No	
3. Do you have knowledge of Cyberbullying outside of the school environment? Yes No Don't Know	1 2 3	Yes No	
4. If so, how extensive is it? Not Extensive Somewhat Extensive Extensive Don't Know	1 2 3	Yes No	
5. As a middle school principal, in what grade level do Cyberbullying incidents most often occur? 6 <sup>th</sup> 7 <sup>th</sup> 8 <sup>th</sup> Equal instances across 6-8 grades Other grades	1 2 3	Yes No	

Survey question	Clarity	Neutrality	Wording recommendation
<p>6. Do you believe gender plays a role in Cyberbullying incidents?</p> <p>Yes No Don't Know</p>	<p>1 2 3</p>	<p>Yes No</p>	
<p>7. If so, which gender has the most reported incidents of Cyberbullying?</p> <p>Male Female Don't Know</p>	<p>1 2 3</p>	<p>Yes No</p>	
<p>8. Is there a bullying prevention program implemented at your school?</p> <p>Yes No Don't Know</p>	<p>1 2 3</p>	<p>Yes No</p>	
<p>9. If there is a bullying prevention program implemented at your school, is Cyberbullying specifically addressed in the program?</p> <p>Yes No Don't Know</p>	<p>1 2 3</p>	<p>Yes No</p>	
<p><b>10.</b> If there is no bullying prevention program implemented at your school, do you believe one should be implemented in your school?</p> <p>Yes No Don't Know</p>	<p>1 2 3</p>	<p>Yes No</p>	
<p>11. If you believe a bullying prevention program should be implemented, should Cyberbullying be addressed in the program?</p> <p>Yes No Don't Know</p>	<p>1 2 3</p>	<p>Yes No</p>	

Survey question	Clarity	Neutrality	Wording recommendation
<p><b>12.</b> Does your school system’s policy on bullying address Cyberbullying?  Yes  No  Don’t Know</p>	<p>1 2 3</p>	<p>Yes No</p>	
<p><b>13.</b> Are the policies being implemented effective in dealing with Cyberbullying incidents?  Yes  No  Don’t Know</p>	<p>1 2 3</p>	<p>Yes No</p>	
<p><b>14.</b> Do you feel that current policies need to be revised?  Yes  No  Don’t Know</p>	<p>1 2 3</p>	<p>Yes No</p>	
<p><b>15.</b> Do you think additional policies are needed?  Yes  No  Don’t Know</p>	<p>1 2 3</p>	<p>Yes No</p>	
<p><b>16.</b> How easy or difficult is it to identify Cyberbullying instances?  Very difficult  Difficult  Easy  Very easy</p>	<p>1 2 3</p>	<p>Yes No</p>	
<p><b>17.</b> Do you feel you report Cyberbullying incidents consistently?  Yes  No  Don’t Know</p>	<p>1 2 3</p>	<p>Yes No</p>	

Survey question	Clarity	Neutrality	Wording recommendation
<p>18. How involved are the following individuals in Cyberbullying incidents?</p> <p>Central office staff members?  Not Involved  Somewhat Involved  Very Involved</p> <p>School resource officer personnel?  Not Involved  Somewhat Involved  Very Involved</p> <p>Law officials?  Not Involved  Somewhat Involved  Very Involved</p> <p>School administrators?  Not Involved  Somewhat Involved  Very Involved</p> <p>Teachers?  Not Involved  Somewhat Involved  Very Involved</p>	<p>1 2 3</p>	<p>Yes No</p>	
<p>19. Choose any of the following strategies you believe would deter Cyberbullying incidents.</p> <p>Increased supervision of student technology use  More effective school policies  Anti-bullying education  Encouraging students to report Cyberbullying  Professional development for teachers  Increased consequences  Increased parental involvement</p>	<p>1 2 3</p>	<p>Yes No</p>	

**APPENDIX E**  
**CONTENT VALIDATION: EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS**

Dear (Content Validation Participant),

As a doctoral student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, I am conducting a study in Region VII of southwest Virginia on Cyberbullying. The purpose of this study will be to examine the perceptions of middle school principals regarding the extent of Cyberbullying in their schools and the effectiveness of policies and strategies used to address this phenomena. Findings from this proposed study may help school leaders with information and ideas for addressing incidents of Cyberbullying.

Data for the study will be collected through an online survey. I would like to respectfully request you to participate in the study by completing the content validation instrument, which will help in the development of the survey questions. The survey questions were developed to obtain data from middle school principals on Cyberbullying. Your insights about the proposed survey questions will help strengthen this study. Completing the content validation instrument should not take longer than 30 minutes. Your anonymity will be ensured.

Please feel free to contact me either at the email provided below or by reaching me by phone at 276-739-3300 if you have any questions or concerns regarding this study. If you agree to participate, please follow the following steps:

1. Contact me with any questions you may have regarding the study
2. Download the attached document titled Content Validation: Instrument
3. Complete the form either digitally or as a hard copy and return it to [sallen@wcs.k12.va.us](mailto:sallen@wcs.k12.va.us)

I appreciate you considering my request.

Sincerely,

Scott Allen

Attachment: Content Validation: Instrument

**APPENDIX F**  
**FIELD-TEST SURVEY: EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS**

Dear Principal,

Thank you for agreeing to participate as a field-test participant in this study on Cyberbullying.

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me to discuss the purpose, procedures, and your role in this study. Please feel free to contact me either at the email provided below or by reaching me by phone at 276-739-3300 if you have any questions or concerns regarding this study. Please visit the link (ENTER LINK) to complete the field-test online survey.

I appreciate your willingness to participate and complete this survey.

Sincerely,

Scott Allen

**APPENDIX G**  
**SURVEY: EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS**

Dear Principal,

As a doctoral student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, I am conducting a study in Region VII of southwest Virginia on Cyberbullying. The purpose of this study will be to examine the perceptions of middle school principals regarding the extent of Cyberbullying in their schools and the effectiveness of policies and strategies used to address this phenomena. Findings from this study may provide school leaders with information and ideas for addressing incidents of Cyberbullying.

I would like to respectfully request you to participate in the study by completing an online survey. Completing the survey should not take longer than 20 minutes. Your anonymity will be ensured.

Please feel free to contact me either at the email provided below or by reaching me by phone at 276-739-3300 if you have any questions or concerns regarding this study. If you agree to participate, please follow the following steps:

1. Read the attached document titled Survey: Informed Consent
2. Contact me with any questions you may have regarding the informed consent
3. Visit the link (ENTER LINK) to complete the online survey

I appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Scott Allen

Attachment: Survey: Informed Consent

## APPENDIX H

### SURVEY: INFORMED CONSENT

#### VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY Informed Consent for Survey Participant

**Title of Project:** Cyberbullying in Middle Schools in Southwestern Virginia

**Researcher(s):** Glen Earthman, Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
Contact information: earthman@vt.edu

Scott Allen, Doctoral Student, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies,  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
Contact information: (276) 739-3300 or rsallen@vt.edu

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study as a survey participant. This form reviews the purpose of this study, the nature of your involvement, and your rights as a participant.

The purpose of this study will be to examine the perceptions of middle school principals regarding the extent of Cyberbullying in their schools and the effectiveness of policies and strategies used to address this phenomena. Information will be gathered from middle school principals through an online survey. Findings from this study may provide school leaders with information and ideas for addressing incidents of Cyberbullying.

Your role in this study is to share your experiences with Cyberbullying by completing the online survey. The survey should take less than 20 minutes to complete. I appreciate the time you are willing to spend. You will remain anonymous throughout the entire process. The results of the study will be used for a dissertation and published. Superintendents in Region VII of Virginia will receive a summary of the results for the study without identifying school districts or survey participants in any way. Survey data will not be disaggregated by individual school systems, potentially leading to identification.

You may withdraw from participation at any time during the study. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all information will be destroyed.

By completing the online survey, you agree to be a willing participant in this study. You understand the purpose of the study, how data will be collected, and that you may withdraw at any time.

Please contact the researcher at the above information if you have any questions regarding the study.

If questions arise concerning: (1) the study's conduct, (2) your rights as a research subject, or (3) your need to report a research-related injury or event, please contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at [moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu) or (540) 231-4991.