

RUNNING HEAD: EFFECTS OF VICTIMIZATION

The Effects of Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying on 4th and 5th Grade Student

Attendance and Achievement

BY
SHANNON L. MEDEIROS

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Approved by

W. Steven Barnett, Ph.D., Chair

Alisa Belzer, Ph.D., Committee

Tanja Sargent, Ph.D., Committee

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Effects of Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying on 4th and 5th Grade Student Attendance and Achievement

By Shannon L. Medeiros

Dissertation Chairperson:
W. Steven Barnett, Ph.D.

PROBLEM: This study investigated the short-term effects that being a victim of harassment, intimidation, and bullying (“HIB”) had on the attendance and achievement scores of 4th and 5th grade students for the school year in which the incident occurred. The study answered the following research question: Is being a victim of HIB associated with higher absenteeism and/or lower test scores, as measured by performance on the New Jersey Skills and Assessment Test (“NJASK”)?

METHOD: This study employed a quasi-experimental design, with a sample of 126 students over the course of two full school years. Students were identified as either victims or nonvictims of harassment, intimidation, and bullying within a given school year. Other variables considered included gender, ethnicity, free/reduced lunch status, and students’ attendance and NJASK scores for the previous year. Regression analysis was used to estimate the effects of victim status on unexcused absences, unexcused tardies, NJASK Language Arts scores, and NJASK Math scores.

FINDINGS: The study found that being a victim of HIB was not statistically significant in its impact on attendance or NJASK scores. The only finding from the research was that male victims had an increased number of absences.

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SIGNIFICANCE: This study provides information for the Happyville School District, specifically the Downtown Elementary School Intervention and Referral Service committee, which designates support for students. The finding that male victims have an increased level of absences will assist in implementing support measures for this specific population. The Downtown Elementary School, and other elementary schools in the Happyville School District, can use this study's analysis as a template for analyzing the short term effects of HIB victimization on attendance and achievement.

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I dedicate this to my family who share this accomplishment with me.

Michael, Nicholas, and Thomas.

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I thank my family for tolerating the long nights on the computer, hogging the book shelves with journal articles and books, and the countless evenings of listening to me read each section aloud.

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For all the victims of HIB in New Jersey, your voices have been heard, and we will continue to work together to make your education thrive.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation will focus on the effects of being a victim of harassment, intimidation, and bullying (“HIB”) on the attendance and achievement scores of 4th and 5th grade students. The Happyville School District currently addresses HIB victimization with counseling and social skills instruction. When a student is bullied, is the disruption to the school day limited to social and emotional functioning, or is this just the tip of the iceberg? Are the current techniques being used fully addressing the needs of HIB victims? As the school’s Anti-Bullying Specialist (“ABS”), I began to think there was a connection between HIB victimization and poor achievement and increased absences. It seemed logical that a disruption to the school day of a HIB victim would correspond to some adverse academic outcome. As I discuss in my literature review, some research has found that bullying leads to school disengagement and lower achievement.

This study will investigate the extent to which being a victim of HIB is associated with decreased attendance and decreased academic success, despite the current array of services provided to victims. If the data support the hypothesis that being a HIB victim is associated with increased absenteeism and lower achievement, then the case can be made that additional supports may be needed to fully address these students’ needs. It is possible that the current treatment package of counseling and social skills instruction already addresses attendance and academic issues, but without data to support or negate the hypothesis, this remains speculative.

The problem of practice in this study is that while research tends to find that bullying is associated with adverse academic outcomes for children, school district policy does not provide academic supports for HIB victims at the elementary school level. These types of services are

reserved for students who demonstrate academic difficulty through low test scores in the previous year. For example, academic intervention in preparation for the NJASK is provided to the students with the lowest scores from the previous spring. Since research suggests that difficulties in school are associated with adverse academic outcomes, it could stand to argue that HIB victims in elementary school should have academic supports in addition to the social/emotional ones already in place. I seek to address this problem of practice by investigating whether HIB victims experience reduced achievement by analyzing standardized test scores, and increased absences by analyzing attendance records for unexcused absences and tardies.

The results of this study will aid in making a data-driven decision as to whether academic support for HIB victims should be provided as a preventative measure. If HIB victims are sufficiently more likely to have problems with attendance and academics even with the existing services in place, then the evidence would indicate that additional services may be needed, which can forestall these problems before they become serious. The Happyville School District may need to explore interventions beyond social skills training and counseling, such as test preparation, tutoring, and/or attendance incentives for students.

This dissertation study will examine attendance by looking at the frequency of unexcused absences and tardies. This dissertation study will examine achievement by looking at the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK) scores in Language Arts and Math. For the purpose of this study, “victim” refers to a student identified as such in an investigation. To date, there has not been a study conducted within the Happyville School District to prove or disprove an association between HIB victimization and NJASK scores and/or attendance for students in the Downtown Elementary School.

The social-ecological framework suggested by Espelage and Swearer (2004), provides a basis for understanding HIB's complexity. This framework looks at the various layers impacting the individual, including culture and community, and posits that victimization does not exist alone, but is influenced by other factors, including family reaction, peer support, and school climate. The impact of victimization on an individual student has the potential to affect not only how he or she behaves with family and peers, but also how well he or she functions within the school environment. The New Jersey HIB law, including what is known as the "Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act," addresses "bullying" incorporating harassment and intimidation where instances are based on, "actual or perceived characteristics," such as race, ethnicity, sexuality (P.L. 2010, c.122, and P.L. 2012, c.1). These characteristics influence how one may view the social-ecological framework, which identifies the individual as the origin point, and correlates these characteristics to bullying and its impact on the instructional environment. This is different than the definitions found in the literature, as it omits an imbalance of power between the parties involved, as specified by Olweus (1994). Utilizing the social-ecological framework and the New Jersey HIB law, we can conclude that every student is an individual, with a possible different reaction to the same situation, based on his or her unique characteristics. Such student's social supports may hinder or enable such reaction, and his or her experience in school will then be affected.

The NJ HIB law includes disruption of the school day as part of its criteria for labeling an action as harassment, intimidation, and/or bullying. The social-ecological framework's complexity emphasizes the variable nature of HIB situations, giving the law significant breadth. The law's intent is to give schools guidelines for providing students with a safe environment; such guidelines echo Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This hierarchy explores how an individual's

basic physical needs impact his or her psychological needs such as belonging and self-esteem, which thereby impact how he or she responds to the outside world. As with the social-ecological framework, the highly variable individual is the focus in the hierarchy of needs, but the repercussions of such individual's environment goes on to affect the community and society at large.

Maslow's hierarchy of need starts with safety. Accordingly, American education offers every student the right to a free and appropriate education as per educational ethics, best practices, special education law, and the *No Child Left Behind* legislation. This education should also encompass a safe instructional environment free from harassment, intimidation, or bullying. Although legislation such as the New Jersey HIB law strives to support this safe environment, it falls short because it is difficult to codify a disruption to the school day. In many schools, a normal school day is full of disruptions, and social and emotional needs are commonly tested or not adequately met. Schools are their own sub-cultures, each with unique challenges and characteristics. Lumping all schools together under the same legislation and definitions may not adequately address the nature and level of HIB in a given area and time. Espelage and Swearer (2004) describe bullying as multi-faceted, with many components contributing to its origin, duration, and maintenance throughout different communities.

Depending on the culture of a given school and community, reactions to certain HIB behaviors will vary. Espelage and Swearer (2004) take a broad view of HIB, beginning with the influence of culture and community as they connect to school, peers, family dynamics, and the individual characteristics of the participants. This framework is complemented by Maslow, as these factors are also seen as contributing to an individual's sense of well being. Maslow's

hierarchy of needs, moving from the very basic, such as breathing, to the very complex, such as a sense of morality, complements the changing dynamics of bullying in general, as all individuals will respond differently given their previous history, coping strategies, and resources. Perhaps the reason bullying is so difficult to operationally define is because so many factors can impact how an individual will react to it.

It is my hypothesis that while all children are individuals, the defining characteristics of HIB should encompass some type of short-term effects noticeable on a grander scale, as measureable through NJASK scores, attendance, or both. HIB is defined in a broad context, but disruption to a student's environment is very clearly an element. Without a specific definition which encompasses all circumstances and situations, disruption to the environment must be severe enough that a rational person can see it, and subsequently, the impact of such disruption, if it exists, should be noticeable on a statistically significant level.

The Happyville School District typically makes data-driven decisions and justifications in regards to developing and providing services for students, including HIB victims. Accordingly, administrators would require data indicating that victims of HIB have lower NJASK scores before considering additional academic supports for these students. NJASK was selected for this study because it is a standardized test with validity and reliability measures on a state-wide, state-legislated level. Other academic assessments such as grades and writing samples would be too subjective. Using the NJASK scores also ensures objectivity because an outside, impartial party scores the exams.

Attendance data is also a very objective approach to a very complex construct. Whether someone is present in school is not subject to interpretation; their physical presence is either

existent or nonexistent. Tardiness data operates on the same concept. If a student shows up to school after the start time, the doors to the school are closed and he or she must sign in through the office; they are clearly late or not late. To the extent that HIB victims display lower attendance and higher tardiness, such data would support the claim for additional academic supports for these students.

These two elements, attendance and achievement scores, were selected for two reasons. The first reason addresses the problem in practice, which is whether there are academic consequences of HIB that are not being actively addressed by the interventions currently being used with HIB victims. If a student is emotionally struggling and misses large amounts of academic content, only through academic interventions will the student be able to catch up with a curriculum designed to address the rigorous 4th and 5th grade common core standards. Without data to suggest that there is an effect on academic outcomes, additional strategies such as tutoring and test preparation may be viewed as superfluous.

The second reason these elements were selected, is based on the New Jersey HIB law definition, which states:

HIB means any gesture, any written, verbal or physical act, or any electronic communication, whether it is a single incident or a series of incidents, that:

- Is reasonably perceived as being motivated either by an actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical or sensory disability, or by any other distinguishing characteristic;
- Takes place on school property, at any school-sponsored function, or on a school bus; or off school grounds, as provided for in *N.J.S.A. 18A:37-15.3*,

- Substantially disrupts or interferes with the orderly operation of the school or the rights of other students; and that
- A reasonable person should know, under the circumstances, will have the effect of physically or emotionally harming a student or damaging the student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of physical or emotional harm to his person or damage to his property; or
- Has the effect of insulting or demeaning any student or group of students; or
- Creates a hostile educational environment for the student by interfering with a student's education or by severely or pervasively causing physical or emotional harm to the student. (New Jersey Department of Education. (2011b). *Guidance for Schools on Implementing the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act (P.L. 20120, c.122)*)

The New Jersey law is more specific than the typical definitions found in the literature. For example, the commonly used Olweus (1994) definition does not specify an impact on the student's educational environment. If the data support the hypothesis that being a victim of HIB is associated with increased absenteeism and lower NJASK scores, then under the law, a student has been put into a "hostile educational environment," and the District may be required to provide additional services.

Magnitude of the HIB Problem

Despite advances in legislation and the Department of Education's commitment to being proactive, bullying continues to proliferate in New Jersey schools. According to the 2011 New Jersey Student Health Survey, one out of every five students is bullied on school property (New Jersey Department of Education, 2011a). Note that the New Jersey definition of HIB includes cyberbullying and incidents that take place off school grounds, which may differ from the definition in other states. It is not known how incorporating cyberbullying into the criteria has affected the total number of incidents, and thereby school involvement, in New Jersey. The Bloustein Center for Survey Research compared New Jersey's survey figures to national figures,

and found that New Jersey students were at equal risk with the rest of the nation for being bullied on school property (Bloustein Center for Survey Research, 2011). According to Jessica Calefati and Jeanette Rundquist of the *Star Ledger*, the 2011-2012 school year produced 12,024 bullying instances, which is four times the amount from the previous school year. Whether this proves to be a permanent increase or a temporary result of the revised definition under the new law remains to be seen.

The Downtown Elementary School of the Happyville School District has rates of HIB that are consistent with rates statewide. This elementary school has the highest number of HIB investigations and identifications of the 12 elementary schools in the district for both the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years. There were 46 HIB investigations in 2011-12, 16 of which qualified under the state law as HIB, and 14 HIB investigations in 2012-13, three of which qualified under the state law as HIB. This decline in the 2012-13 school year will be discussed in the limitations section of the dissertation. The Downtown Elementary School serves 280-315 students annually. Although it is one of the smaller schools in the district, it accounts for more than half of the HIB incidents in the district as a whole. The 4th and 5th grade HIB victims for the two school years mentioned above comprise the sample for this study.

Role of the School in Responding to HIB Victims' Academic Needs

Public schools are required to address the problem of bullying through thorough investigations, swift contact with parents, public recording of incidents with the Board of Education, and proactive program development. All public schools are required to follow

N.J.S.A. 18A:37-14, and every school is required to have an Anti-Bullying Specialist on staff. This specialist is responsible for investigating and documenting HIB incidents. Public schools are expected to initiate and maintain various programs, including character education, in an effort to significantly reduce instances of HIB, improve the school climate, and provide services for HIB victims to reduce future negative outcomes. During the 2010-2011 school year, the Happyville School District had no guidance counselors or social workers for the general education students in any of their 12 elementary schools. However, once the state mandated the creation of Anti-Bullying Specialist positions in its schools, the district complied. Individuals in these new positions are responsible for managing intervention and referral services (I&RS), 504 plans, counseling, social skills instruction, following state mandates regarding HIB prevention, including planning around the Week of Respect (all schools are required to acknowledge this week with activities and events tied to the curriculum to advocate respect and anti-bullying throughout the school), and the investigation and documentation of HIB incidents. The goal of the Anti-Bullying Specialist position is to ensure that all students are receiving the help and services, both academic and behavioral, that they need. There is currently one specialist position for every two elementary schools in the district.

In order to discover whether HIB victimization is associated with increased absenteeism and lower NJASK scores, I will examine three cohorts of students at the Downtown Elementary School: 2011-2012 4th graders, 2011-2012 5th graders, and 2012-2013 4th graders. The 2012-2013 5th graders were not included as a cohort because they were already studied as 4th graders. The data collected will be used to make decisions impacting the accessibility of academic services to students who are victims of HIB.

The Happyville School District provides supplemental services to students in three separate and distinct categories. The first category is classification for special education services. To receive this classification, a child is evaluated through the Child Study Team. Eligible students will have a modified school day, as well as altered educational expectations, which are mapped out with an individualized education plan (IEP).

The second category of supplemental services provides instructional accommodations through a 504 plan. The category is for students who have a disability, such as muscular dystrophy or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, which has been diagnosed by a medical professional. These students are eligible for accommodations which will decrease the effects that their disabilities have on their functionality in the educational environment. A 504 plan is then generated to document what the accommodations are and who is responsible for providing them.

The third category of support provides students with intervention and referral services (“I&RS”). Students are eligible for these services when they demonstrate a learning, behavioral or health difficulty. However, there are no specific criteria for I&RS other than a student’s demonstrating observable difficulty and failing to respond to best practices. A SMART Plan is generated for students in this category. A SMART Plan identifies a specific concern exhibited by the student and the prescribed intervention to address this need including who is responsible for carrying it out and how long this will be in place.

In order to access supplemental services, a student must fit into one of these three categories. While the I&RS SMART Plan is taken seriously by the district, it is not afforded the budgetary resources and legal protections that IEP and 504 plans receive. This is partially due to

a lack of federal and state funding for I&RS supplemental supports. Support for general education HIB victims falls under this category.

During a typical I&RS meeting, the teacher, case coordinator, support team and administrator brainstorm about existing services and teaching techniques that are best applied for the students being discussed. It was during one of these discussions that I began to question whether these services provided a full range of support to students. A student who had been a HIB victim had been floundering academically, and was brought to the discussion table. It was suggested that the student be given targeted reading intervention, but the student was not technically eligible for this service, which was reserved for the students with the three lowest scores on the NJASK in the previous year. This sparked a debate among the I&RS team. Should academic supports be incorporated into HIB victim interventions? The answer was that without data to prove that victimization impacted academic achievement, there would be no way of providing access to these supports.

If being a victim of HIB impacts a child's educational environment to the extent suggested by the NJ HIB definition, then this should be statistically evident in the attendance rates and standardized achievement scores of such students. The I&RS committee has vocalized their speculation of such a connection, but without sufficient data, its voice is mute in regards to regulatory affairs for academic services. Students can receive supplemental services provided there is learning or behavioral difficulty, as identified by the I&RS referral team. However, it should be noted that the current priorities for academic interventions, including test preparation, targeted reading, and targeted mathematics, are for students with the lowest test scores by grade level. If there was data to support the study's hypothesis that being a victim of HIB is associated

with increased absenteeism and lower NJASK scores, then an argument could be made to shift or extend the priority to this population of students. Regardless of the findings of the study, Anti-Bullying Specialists in other schools could use its research design and methodology to study the impact of HIB on attendance and achievement in all grades. The small sample size for this study hinders the likelihood that the findings could generalize to the larger body of literature.

However, the findings for this study will prove invaluable to the Downtown Elementary school, regardless of whether they support the hypothesis or not.

Most HIB research has focused on the long-term effects of bullying, which include social isolation, risky behaviors such as drug and alcohol use, truancy, and low achievement. It is of interest to both me and the I&RS committee whether HIB victimization has the potential to negatively impact NJASK scores within the year the victimization took place, because standardized test scores in particular may illustrate a short term effect of HIB victimization. I&RS is a mechanism for a relatively rapid response that can monitor attendance and academic progress, and provide specific strategies to counterbalance the negative effects that a bullying incident may have on a victimized student in these regards.

The impact of HIB victimization on attendance needs to be readily identifiable in order to accurately match and assign interventions for these students. As such, an absence from school clearly indicates absence from instruction. As stated earlier, one of the factors that distinguishes HIB as defined by New Jersey law from other types of conflict is that the incident takes a toll on a student's ability to function in the educational environment (New Jersey Department of Education, 2011b). Services that are improperly matched will not be of any benefit; for example, offering a student extended time on tests is irrelevant if the student is not present to actually take the test.

Summary

This dissertation study investigates the relationship between HIB victimization and the attendance rate and NJASK scores of students in the 4th and 5th grades of the Downtown Elementary School in the Happyville School District. This research will address whether or not additional interventions are needed to support attendance and achievement for students identified as victims of HIB. The current practice is to address victimization behaviorally with counseling and social skills instruction, but it is not known whether this intervention matches the effects of being a victim. This study will answer the research question: Is being a victim of HIB associated with higher absenteeism and/or lower NJASK scores? My hypothesis is that being a victim of HIB is associated with increased absenteeism and lower NJASK scores. If HIB victims are sufficiently more likely to have problems with attendance and academics, even with the existing array of services, then the goal will be to recommend additional services designed to anticipate these academic and attendance problems before they become serious.

My experience and my literature review (presented in the next chapter) leads me to believe that there is an association between HIB victimization and academic difficulties, but I am also aware that broader research findings may not generalize to my school, and impressions not backed by actual data can be wrong. For example, in an I&RS meeting, a teacher brought concerns about attendance regarding a particular student. The teacher was adamant that absences were directly impacting the student's academic functioning. However, an examination of attendance data indicated that the student did not have a significant number of absences. This is a good example of why it is necessary to utilize data to confirm a problem before allocating resources to address it. This is why the district is so adamant about data-based decision making,

and what makes this dissertation important for our practice and policy. If it is true that HIB causes academic difficulties, then a case can be made for the development and provision of additional services to prevent or reduce such problems after victimization. Furthermore, what is learned about the nature of such difficulties, if they arise, can help the school to offer an optimal mix of such services.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The word “bullying” has become a culturally loaded word. It evokes emotional reactions, triggers long-forgotten memories, and can cloud the typically objective minds of the professionals who confront it on a daily basis. Bullying entered our living rooms with the news coverage of some cases with tragic consequences, in particular the stories of Tyler Clementi, at Rutgers University, and Phoebe Prince, in Massachusetts. In these instances, bullying ultimately claimed the lives of the young victims. Tyler Clementi killed himself after his roommate threatened to expose his homosexual relationship, and Phoebe Prince killed herself after repetitive cyberbullying from her classmates. The extremity of these cases is often what comes to mind whenever an audience is discussing or researching bullying.

I found researching “bullying” to be difficult; there are over 30 years of publications on this topic in journals, books, and various articles. Stories jumped from the pages, recounting the travesties of childhood cruelty and oblivious adults, but it was imperative that I remain focused on the topic at hand--the consequences of bullying for academic achievement and their implications for practice. This literature review examines bullying both theoretically and in the practical sense from that perspective.

The research on bullying is cyclical, repeating itself over and over again in different contexts. Common themes recur frequently. Many of the sub-topics overlap; for example, discussions of how age factors into bullying may also reveal insight into gender factors. This literature review first looks at the characteristics of bullying, beginning with the definition used in the research. What constitutes bullying is partially in the eye of the beholder-which is why examining the definition makes sense as to its characteristics, prevalence, and academic

repercussions. The review wraps up with a summary of the current state of practice, and recommendations of other possible avenues of exploration for strategies to counteract the side-effects of bullying. The reader will learn what bullying is, who is a bully, how bullying impacts the involved parties, and the current thinking about strategies that should be used to address the consequences of bullying. While bullying prevention is of vital importance in public schools today, it is not the focus of this study.

The literature in this review was selected based on two criteria. The first criterion was relevance to the study. Some studies originally identified as potentially relevant were omitted when the focus of the study was on teacher perspectives, as opposed to current practices or characteristics. While few studies in the literature focus on the academic consequences of bullying, there were many studies that partially matched the research question components of attendance and academics.

The second criterion was credibility. There are many publications available which have not necessarily been peer-reviewed or gone through a rigorous screening process. Journals used in this review had to have at least one editor who was associated with a university identified by the Carnegie Foundation Institute of Higher Education. This was selected as a criterion because of the Carnegie Foundation's credibility in identifying institutions of higher education with rigorous research protocols.

What is Bullying? The Definition Please

The concept of bullying is continually evolving and expanding. When researchers began 30 years ago, Facebook, Instagram, and XBOX360 did not exist, so the types of bullying associated with the internet, digital social media, and smart phones were not included. This section will look at the terms used synonymously with bullying, the ways in which its definition has changed over time, and what bullying looks like in practice today.

The word “bullying” is synonymous throughout the literature with a number of other terms, including “peer abuse” (Olweus & Limber, 2010), “peer harassment” (Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000), “peer maltreatment” (Idsoe, Dyregrov, & Idsoe, 2012), “peer victimization” (Raskauskas, 2010, Turner, Finkelhor, Hamby, Shattuck, & Omrod, 2011), “victimization” (Dake, Price, Telljohann, 2003, Olweus, 1994; Pellegrini & Long, 2002), and “bully/victim problems” (Olweus, 1994). For the purpose of this literature review, the word “bullying” will encompass all of these terms.

An operational definition that permits consistent measurement and analysis requires clear examples of what bullying is and what it is not. In general, the literature draws on the original Olweus (1994) definition to determine if something is “bullying.” The Olweus definition includes the following components: some form of aggression, intent to cause harm to the other person, repetition, the imbalance of power, e.g. dominance; and actual, perceivable harm, e.g. physical, emotional, or social (Cornell & Bandyopadhyay, 2010, Olweus, 1994, Olweus 2010). As research has progressed, typologies of bullying have been developed. Throughout the literature, bullying is often categorized as traditional, which includes direct and indirect bullying,

or non-traditional, which includes cyberbullying (Smith et al., 2008). These categories aid in further understanding the definition of bullying.

The technology and social media issues facing today's youth were not present when the original definition was formulated. Cyberbullying is a newer phenomenon attached to the technologies commonly used for social interactions in the new millennium, and it accounts for a growing percentage of bullying incidents (Smith et al., 2008; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Smith et al. (2008) added electronic versions of bullying to enhance the Olweus definition in recognition of its changing landscape. This includes any form of bullying through an electronic device, including computers, cell phones, and their use of various social media platforms (Smith et al., 2008; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Cyberbullying forms range from direct messaging techniques such as instant messaging, texting, and Snapchat, to posting on public forums such as Facebook, Twitter, XBOX 360 Live, and Instagram. These instances are considered bullying, provided it encompasses the components of the original Olweus definition.

Traditional bullying is categorized throughout the literature as being direct or indirect. Direct bullying refers to the physical form of bullying, including physical fighting such as hitting, smacking, punching, or kicking (Idsoe, Dyregov, & Idsoe, 2012; Olweus, 1994; Raskauskas, 2010; Smith et al., 2008). Indirect bullying refers to social exclusion/isolation, rumor spreading, teasing, and mean comments or facial expressions (Idsoe, Dyregov, & Idsoe, 2012; Olweus, 1994; Raskauskas, 2010; Smith et al., 2008). In this dissertation study, the type of bullying is not specified, and HIB investigations included direct, indirect, and cyber forms of bullying.

The Literature Definition and State of New Jersey Law

When comparing the Olweus (1994) definition to the New Jersey definition of harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB) in law (N.J.S.A. 18A:37-14), there are both similarities and differences. The NJ HIB law is similar to Olweus in that the law incorporated the perception of intent to cause harm, either physical or emotional. The New Jersey law also specifies detailed criteria regarding intent related to race, religion, sexual orientation, etc. However, in contrast to the Olweus (1994) definition, the NJ HIB law does not require the acts in question to have occurred repeatedly. A single incident can be defined as bullying. The NJ HIB law is not as specific as the Olweus (1994) definition regarding the role that power plays in defining bullying. This leaves a particularly gray area in identifying whether an incident is bullying, specifically in terms of age appropriate conflict. Conflict between students who are equally matched in strength and cognition may not be considered bullying according to the Olweus (1994) definition, but could be seen as an incident of bullying using the New Jersey definition (Cornell & Bandyopadhyay, 2010). Perhaps this is why New Jersey incorporated harassment and intimidation into the bullying definition, and did not simply take just the bullying definitions from the literature to create the HIB law. So while the New Jersey HIB law and the Olweus (1994) definitions overlap with regard to intent to cause harm, they are different regarding repetition and positions of power.

The New Jersey HIB Law also appears to have borrowed some philosophy and practice from Olweus (1994), such as being proactive in combating bullying issues, and teaching all students the social skills and coping strategies necessary to handle these types of incidents. Dr. Daniel Olweus started his research in Norway in the 1970s. The Olweus (1994) program is

extensively researched in Europe, and has become popular in the American education system as an evidence-based approach to tackle bullying. The Olweus (1994) program itself is a wrap-around program, meaning that community, home, and school are all components in the effort to identify bullying, prevent future bullying, reform previous offenders, and cope with previous offenses, both in school and in the community. The NJ HIB law seems to have borrowed this approach for their location classification system, making a HIB investigation necessary for incidents taking place off school grounds, during school functions, or in cyberspace. A unique characteristic of the New Jersey HIB law that sets it apart from the literature is the requirement of an impact on a student's ability to function at school. The Olweus (1994) definition does not specify school functioning as a criterion, perhaps because every child's set of coping strategies and reactions impacting their education varies so greatly.

All of these overlaps, gaps, and borrowed ideas have substantive consequences for the extent of school involvement in HIB investigations. If the New Jersey HIB law simply used the Olweus (1994) definition, incidents that take place after school would not be considered for investigation and no interventions could be offered. For the purpose of this study, the term "bullying" will refer to the Olweus (1994) definition commonly used in the literature, and HIB will refer to the New Jersey legal definition.

Who Is Bullied?

Type "bullying" into any search engine, and waves of statistics, advertisements for assemblies and prevention programs, and disturbing pictures of disaffected children will bombard the screen. The Center for Disease Control publishes an annual fact sheet on bullying for parents and professionals, providing resources, definitions, and risk factors for both bullies

and victims (Center for Disease Control, 2013). This resource is helpful in a general sense, but it does not provide specifics regarding bullying in school, such as age, gender, and academic ramifications.

So the question posed above remains: *Who is bullied?* Are boys more likely to be bullied than girls? Does bullying occur when students are older or younger? This section will look specifically at the relationship between bullying and gender and age. These two characteristics are highly relevant to this dissertation study and its outcomes. Schools are a hub of resources for their community, but when it comes to delivering services to students, there are some boundaries, realities, and walls that constrain the availability of these resources. Schools can be responsive to children's needs with regard to age and gender when it comes to bullying support services. When forming support groups, social skills groups, and other types of interventions, structuring these groups to accommodate needs by gender and age is feasible and appropriate. It would not be beneficial to have students in kindergarten in the same group as student in 5th grade, as their age affects how they react to bullying.

Bullying and Gender. Bullying is perpetrated by and upon both male and female school children. Males are predominantly associated with the more direct, physical form of bullying; females more often are associated with the indirect, verbal, or social isolation forms of bullying (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008; Carbone-Lopez, Esbensen, & Brick, 2010; Smith, Cowie, Olafsson & Liefoghe, 2002; Smith, 2004). It stands to argue that when forming groups for intervention, groups may need to be gender specific in order to address the distinctive needs of boys and girls, e.g. direct or indirect categories of bullying.

Regardless of whether bullying is direct or indirect, both males and females participate in bullying behaviors, as both victims and perpetrators (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Brown, Birc, & Kancherla, 2005; Card et al., 2008; Seals & Young, 2003; Smith et al., 2002; Veenstra, Lindenberg, Munniksma & Dijkstra, 2010). The fact that males are more likely to engage in direct forms of bullying does not have any implications about the frequency of bullying as compared to females. Research indicates that both males and females are victimized by same sex, mixed sex, and opposite sex groups (Beaty & Alexeyev, 2008; Seals & Young, 2003; Rodkin & Berger, 2008; Veenstra et al., 2010a). So to summarize, male and female genders bully, are bullied, and will intermix between the genders in order to engage in bullying behavior, which may take different forms.

It is a possibility that the societal perception of males as more aggressive than females may have been a contributing factor to males being studied as bullies more so than females (Arch & Coyne, 2005, Felix & Green, 2010). Arch and Coyne (2005) found that females tend to bully more often than originally perceived, in fact, they found that females engage in bullying just as much as males, particularly in the form of indirect bullying. Felix and Green (2010) reported that one perception of female bullying was that “Females are like vipers, they strike quickly and only the strongest can hold them off...Males, however...are like bears, using muscle and brawn over brain.” (p. 173). These studies help society grow in its understanding of who bullies are. As both genders engage in the behavior, bullying specialists need to hold both genders accountable.

Bullying is complex in nature, and not all studies have broken new ground with regard to breaking the stereotypes of who bullies whom. Seals and Young (2003) found in their study that

males are more likely to be bullied by other males. Veenstra et al. (2010a) had similar stereotypical findings regarding gender acceptance in their study. Veenstra et al. (2010a) found that those who bullied both genders were less accepted by both genders, whereas bullies who bullied within their gender were rejected just by that gender. Bullying occurs across the genders, but Archer and Coyne (2005) found age to be a factor in gender-centric bullying as children get older.

Whether the findings of the studies agree with or disagree with commonplace assumptions about gender, many of them stress the importance of gender-specific interventions in designing proactive strategies for handling bullying within schools. It should be noted that regardless of how researchers and the law define bullying, the perception of bullying may vary based upon the gender of the victims and perpetrators (Underwood & Rosen, 2004). This goes back to the social-ecological framework specified by Espelage and Swearer (2004), which roots perception in culture and community, which then influences the climate at school. Bullying in one context can change based on individual experience. The complex nature of bullying should always be taken into account when examining the question of who bullies whom.

Bullying and Age. Bullying is present throughout all years of school, from kindergarten through middle school, into secondary school and early adulthood (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Perren & Alsaker 2006; Smith et al. 2002; Staub 1999). However, there is a decline in reports of bullying as children get older (Brown, Birch & Kancherla, 2005; Pepler, Jiang, Craig, & Connolly, 2008; Smith, Madsen, & Moody 1999; Smith et al., 2002). When bullying starts, and how long bullying continues, are important considerations when looking at age as a factor for who is bullied.

Addressing the issue of bullying should start when children are young and continue as they age. Bullying that occurs at a young age and continues into adolescence is associated with long-term negative effects, including damage to mental health (Guerra, Williams & Sadek, 2011; Rudolph, Troop-Gordon, Hessel & Schmidt, 2011). Long-term effects will be explored further in the next section, but is mentioned here because of its relevance to the argument that schools need to address bullying at a young age. An important finding in the literature is that students who perceive themselves as victims as early as kindergarten will continue to perceive themselves this way throughout elementary school (Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000). When addressing groups of students for preventative programs, age should be a high priority under consideration. Smith and Shu (2000) found that as children get older, they are less likely to report incidents of bullying or to ask for help. Therefore, perhaps a more useful question than at what age does bullying begin is at what age should bullying prevention begin? Research suggests that it is important to place focus on elementary-aged students in order to increase their practice and exposure to positive interaction.

The conventional definition of bullying looks at the components of dominance, harm, and frequency (Cornell & Bandyopadhyay, 2010, Smith et al., 2008; Olweus 1994; Olweus 2010). Neither this definition nor the New Jersey HIB law makes any reference to specific ages. Smith et al. (2002) argue that cognitive maturity and development of coping skills may be a factor in the natural reduction of bullying incidents as children mature. This is supported by Seals and Young (2003) in their study of 7th and 8th graders, where more 7th graders were identified as bullies than 8th graders. Whether or not a student is at the cognitive age to realize the harm inflicted on another person, his or her actions can be equally damaging (Staub, 1999). It has been debated in the literature whether or not young children have the cognitive ability to bully

one another (Alsaker & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2010). Swearer, Espelage, and Napolitano (2009) address this issue from the viewpoint that young children can go back and forth from victim to bully, but truly aggressive children remain as such throughout their age progression. Conflict is inevitable at any age, but the specific impact of age on bullying should be considered when the HIB law for New Jersey is revised.

How Does Bullying Affect Victimized Students?

If studies were to backwards map the life of an individual from adulthood to childhood, what would they find in regards to the effects of bullying? Which occurs first, bullying or the characteristics that lead one to be bullied? With many contributing factors, there may not be a clear answer, and in fact, the literature offers support for both arguments.

Bullying and Achievement. The factors that are associated with achievement in school include school functioning (Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000), academic adjustment (Wang, Iannotti & Luk, 2011), and to some extent class participation (Ladd, Herald-Brown & Reiser, 2008). Each of these factors makes logical sense: the more secure students are academically, the more secure they will be in their role as a peer, and thusly the less secure a student is within their role as a student, the less secure they will be in their role as a peer. This logic would support the idea that developing characteristics for vulnerability to bullying occur first. The literature indicates that there are negative ramifications for students who encounter rejection and academic instability, will have negative ramifications throughout elementary school (Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Ladd, Herald-Brown & Reiser, 2008; Miles & Stipek, 2006). Victims who are repeatedly victimized from a young age have hindered

achievement (Glew et al., 2005), so perhaps there is not a clear answer as to which came first, and the answer may be different from student to student.

The study by Hamre and Pianta (2005) was more focused on students' achievement for those considered to be at risk, meaning they had reportable deficits regarding behavior and social skills as well as academic achievement. The sample for this study ranged across the nation and was considered "non poverty"(p.954), with 49% females and a white majority (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). This study is important because it defends the need for both academic and emotional supports for students with behavioral and academic deficits. This study's sample is different than that of Miles & Stipek (2006), whose research sampled low-income families, across three states, with a more diverse population. A study by Ladd, Herald-Brown and Reiser (2008) used a wide range of incomes and variable socio-economic status, with a less diverse population. All three of these studies found their population of students to have academic risks associated with behavior, despite the differences in socio economic status, ethnicity, and gender.

Poor academic achievement can be the cause of bullying as well as a result of it. Miles and Stipek (2006) found that poor literacy scores in first and third grade were predictors of aggression in fifth grade. The sample for the Miles and Stipek (2006) study consisted of low-income students, diverse ethnicities, and an almost equal split between genders. Miles and Stipek (2006) found that social skills did not impact literacy in later grades the way as they did in the early years. As mentioned in the previous section, bullying prevention needs to start young and continue as children age to combat the potential cycle of failure and rejection. While this study's focus was not on bullying per se, the researchers' definition of aggressive behavior matches the definition of direct bullying behavior. Similarly, Ladd, Herald-Brown & Reiser

(2008), did not focus on bullying per se, but on peer rejection, which is used synonymously. Their study found that when students are rejected by peers, their classroom participation is negatively impacted. Being well-adjusted and accepted has a positive impact on classroom participation (Ladd, Herald-Brown & Reiser, 2008).

In addition to the age when bullying takes place being a factor which influences academic success, repetition of HIB behavior plays a role as well. Jovonen, Nishina, and Graham (2000) found in their study that a perception of poor school functioning in the younger grades continued into later grades. The sample for this study was extremely diverse, with more female than male participants on the West Coast (Jovonen, Nishina, and Graham, 2000). It is notable that the data used in their study consisted of questionnaires, as opposed to actual bullying data. Ladd, Herald-Brown and Reiser (2008) found that across ages, the degree of rejection from one's peers influences school functioning, specifically in participation.

The more students are accepted among their peers, the more they will participate, and therefore the less they will miss during class. In the study by Staub (1999), bullying is viewed not just an individual problem, but that of the culture and climate of an individual's surroundings. Wang, Iannotti, and Luk (2011) found, using a U.S. Health Behavior in School-Aged Children study, that victimized females were more affected in their academic achievement than males; they also found that classmates' perception of a student can impact his or her success. If a school climate allows for a student's repeated rejection and low achievement, then the long-term effects will be greater. Perpetrators who bully at a young age are more likely to continue bullying even up to high school (Ttofi, Farrington, Losel, Friedrich & Loeber, 2011). The factors that reinforce behavior should be analyzed more deeply through functional behavior

analysis, in order to put interventions in place which address the specific conditions which serve to maintain students' maladaptive behaviors (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007; O'Neil, et al., 1997).

Bullying and Truancy. Truancy is an ongoing problem in schools. Parents may be subject to fines upwards of \$100 a day for a child's excessive unexcused absences. Students may be subject to retention if their unexcused absences climb beyond 30 days. Yet despite these consequences, truancy still exists. The literature on truancy identifies several contributing factors, including family values, lack of school engagement, and transportation difficulties (Eaton, Brener, & Kann, 2008; Gottfried, 2013; Henry, 2007; Jones, Toma, & Zimmer, 2008). For the purpose of this study, truancy is a variable to be looked at in regards to student involvement in bullying and HIB incidents. Eaton, Brener, and Kann (2008) used a questionnaire for their study of high school aged students, but not actual attendance records. Their study found students with unexcused absences had higher potential for engaging in high risk behaviors (Eaton, Brener, & Kann, 2008). Similarly, Henry (2007) used a survey as opposed to actual attendance data. This study yielded more information to the general body of literature on the dangers of truancy, and how being disaffected with school can have detrimental consequences in this area (Henry, 2007). Esbensen and Carson (2009) also used survey data, across several states and matched evenly for gender and diverse ethnicity, which make this study strong for generalization. Overall, the majority of studies on this topic utilize surveys and/or questionnaires, allowing a large proportion of the data to be based on perception and self-reporting.

Studies that stepped away from the survey and questionnaire design and toward actual attendance data found similar results to one another. The Jones, Toma, and Zimmer (2008) study used attendance data over a span of several years in Texas. The results of this study support the connection between attendance and achievement, adding in the variable of school size as being important to attendance as well (Jones, Toma, & Zimmer, 2008). Gottfried (2013) also utilized attendance data, as well as direct observations, in his study of 3rd and 4th grade students in Philadelphia. This study found standardized achievement was compromised as a student acquired more absences (Gottfried, 2013). Both these studies clearly demonstrate the link between truancy and achievement.

The research indicates that victims of bullying are more likely to be school avoidant and have more absences than students who are not bullied (Aalsma & Brown, 2008; Dake et al., 2003; Brown, Birch & Kancherla, 2005). In their study, Brown, Birch, and Kancherla (2005) found that one in seven students report not wanting to go to school because of fear inflicted by a bully. The literature also suggests that the perpetrators have high rates of absenteeism (Brown, Birch & Kancherla, 2005). A perpetrator, unlike a victim, may not come from fear of being bullied, but from being disengaged with their school community (Brown, Birch, & Kancherla, 2005; Dake, Price, & Telljohann, 2003). Both bullies and victims have higher rates of truancy/absenteeism than those students uninvolved in such incidents. It stands to reason that due to these repeated absences, a student's academics have a high potential for being affected as well.

Hutzell and Payne (2012) found that young students with poor academic skills are more likely to be avoidant of school. It is noteworthy that this study was more focused on location as

the focusing factor of school avoidance, though it did use academic achievement as a variable. Hutzell and Payne (2012) looked into the issues of bullying and attendance through survey data, as opposed to observation or attendance data, but their large sample size allowed for a high degree of generalization on the national level. Esbensen and Carson (2009) found that victimization negatively impacts students' feelings of safety, and in turn increases their likelihood for absences while decreasing their academic achievement. Rothman, Head, Kleinberg, and Stansfeld (2011) found that students who were victims of bullying were less likely to reach benchmarks on national assessments. This finding indicates a need for bullied students to be offered academically-centered interventions. These studies indicate that while there are many factors associated with truancy, when looking at its link to bullying, academic performance should also be considered.

Other Long-Term Effects. The school-related long-term effects on attendance and achievement are not the only negative effects of bullying. Being a victim of bullying has long term effects on mental health, with victimization over time contributing to mental health issues varying from depression and aggression (Rudolph et al., 2011) to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Idsoe, Dyregrov, & Idsoe, 2012). The severity of these long-term effects depends on the extent to which the bullying took place, as well as the individual coping strategies of the victim (Rudolph et al., 2010; Idsoe, Dyregrov, & Idsoe, 2012). Children respond to stimuli differently. The effects of bullying on the stress levels of students is individualized by student and by incident (Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Newman, Holden, & Delville, 2005), meaning that the resulting stress from bullying varies considerably. However, victimization at a young age has been shown to affect a student's development of social skills and coping ability

(Guerra, Williams & Sadek, 2011). This is another indicator that it is important to address issues of bullying in the elementary school.

Victims are not the only ones who could experience adverse long term effects; research reports adverse associations for perpetrators as well. Being a bully in elementary school is correlated with other types of risky behavior later in life, including drug use, drinking, and violence (Kim, Catalano, Haggerty & Abbott, 2011). It should be pointed out that the Kim et al (2011) found a correlation between bullying and risky behavior, but that this does not, in any way, imply causation. There are numerous factors that can influence drug use, drinking, and violence.

Students experience both positive and negative social interactions within the school environment (Cooper & Snell, 2003). Early victimization increases the risk of juvenile delinquency (Wong & Schonlau, 2013), repeated peer rejection (Hodges & Perry, 1999), and impacts school engagement, e.g. how well-bonded one is to their school community (Cunningham, 2007; Hutzell & Payne, 2012). The younger the students are, the more experiences they will be exposed to over time, and the more likely it is that they will come to accept the maladaptive aspects of bullying behaviors (Ross & Horner, 2013). Wong and Schonlau (2013) found that young victims are more likely to engage in theft, assault, property damage and vandalism, selling drugs, and running away from home. Victims who are repeatedly bullied are more likely to have significant damage to their self-esteem, as well as increases in fear for their safety in the school environment (Cunningham, 2007; Esbensen & Carson, 2009). Being a victim, in and of itself, is likely to cause repeated rejection and targeting for further victimization (Hodges & Perry, 1999). Young students who are victimized are more likely to

avoid school, as well as activities associated with the school, out of fear of further victimization (Hutzell & Payne, 2012). By focusing anti-bullying efforts on the elementary level, perhaps some of these long-term effects can be minimized if not eliminated altogether.

In Cunningham's (2007) work comparing perception of the environment by bullies and victims, she found that students who have little or no experience of victimization are considered well-bonded to their school environment, engaging in societal norm social behaviors and abiding by societal rules. This is not the case for students who are victims of bullying. There are a variety of characteristics associated with victimization that alter their experiences within the school environment, as compared to students who have experienced little or no victimization. Hodges and Perry's (1999) work on peer victimization identified personal skill deficits, specifically internalizing problems and physical weakness, to be contributing factors to repeated victimization. Similarly, Fox and Boulton (2005) identified looking scared, appearing as weak, and a general look of malaise as social skill deficits that make students vulnerable for victimization. Smith and Shu (2000), in their survey of children who were victims, found crying and running away to be common among young children who were victimized.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Support for achievement in school is something that should be afforded to all students, including both bullies and victims. It stands to reason that those involved in bullying incidents in school, whether as bully or victim, may require additional emotional and academic supports in order to succeed in school. Hamre and Pianta (2005) found that students who were identified as at risk for school failure had more successes when placed in a structured academic environment

with additional supports than students who were not placed in this type of environment. This further supports the view that both academic and behavioral supports are important.

The social aspect of bullying plays a large role in the interventions deployed by school districts. Given the strong negative outcomes associated with victimization, it is crucial that schools develop programs to reduce bullying through proactive strategies, while concurrently providing interventions for students involved in the incident (Cooper & Snell, 2003; Domino, 2013; Esbensen & Carson, 2009, Polanin & Vera, 2013). The literature clearly makes the case that something is wrong with the system; it is considerably leaner when it comes to presenting a solution.

From Research to Practice. Elementary students, whether considered well-adjusted or not, are all thrown together in the same room throughout the school day. The social dynamics of these classrooms are subject to ebbs and flows of cooperation and harmony. In regards to social adjustment, bullies seem to be popular, while victims are socially isolated and perceive school to be uncaring from a social standpoint (Cunningham, 2007). Esbensen and Carson (2009) found that victims had difficulty with conflict resolution skills, while Fox and Boulton (2005) identified coping skills deficits, such as crying and giving up. Hodges and Perry (1999) found that poor interpersonal and personal skills can cause continued victimization over time. The repetition associated with peer rejection over time can decrease the likelihood that victims have opportunities to practice new social skills, contributing to the social isolation which negatively impacts students and increases the likelihood that they will be victimized again (Hodges & Perry, 1999; Esbensen & Carson, 2009; Polanin & Vera, 2013). All of these findings suggest that

interventions surrounding social/emotional development and other types of social skill development are well matched to the needs of victims of bullying.

What do we know about existing social skills programs? Social skills programs have a wealth of literature for specific groups of students, including those on the autism spectrum and those with emotional disturbances. Most of the literature about social skills instruction for the victims of bullying is tied to the prevention and intervention research discussed later in this section. Jeb Baker's (2003) social skill training, for example, is designed for the specific population of students with Asperger Syndrome. Quinn, Kavale, Mathur, Rutherford, and Forness (1999) conducted a meta-analysis of social skills interventions for students with behavioral disorders, which yielded very little evidence of behavior change among the sample population. Kavale (2001) specified the necessity of social skills instruction for working with students with learning disabilities. Kavale (2001) also made the recommendation for academic intervention in addition to social skills instruction, to combat negative self-esteem and peer-rejection. Perhaps the answers for victim intervention should be closely tied to the work done with students who have learning disabilities. Despite these findings, social skills instruction was still highly recommended as a necessary component in designing educational programs for students with emotional and behavioral difficulties (Simpson, Peterson, & Smith, 2011). The Happyville School District currently utilizes the Watson Institute package for social skills instruction, which derives its strategies from working with students on the autism spectrum.

Programs, Interventions, and Academics. A major shift in the approach toward bullying is for schools to step away from a consequence-based approach, heavy on detention and suspension (Ross & Horner, 2013), and toward an antecedent-based approach, emphasizing

social skills development, emotional competency building (Cooper & Snell, 2003; Domino 2013), and creating a school climate that focuses on tolerance and social justice (Polanin & Vera, 2013). As with all school interventions, best practices and evidence-based procedures are included in the vocabulary of the popular choices.

The roles of school climate, culture, sense of belonging, and safety are just some of the themes that surround prevention and intervention for victims of bullying (Cunningham, 2007; Esbensen & Carson 2009; Ma et al, 2009b; Polanin & Vera, 2013; Wang, Berry, & Swearer, 2013; Wong & Schonlau, 2013). Ma et al (2009b) recommend intervention programs that focus on “educational expectations” and “school engagement” (p.889), as these factors are more linked to academic success than bullying status or parent/teacher supports. Wong and Schonlau (2013) recommend looking at the school itself as a community, and the impact of school climate and culture on the likelihood of students engaging in delinquent behaviors. Polanin and Vera (2013) share a similar view, emphasizing the importance of culture and social justice as aspects of intervention and prevention for students involved with bullying incidents. These suggestions support the whole environment approach, similar to the Olweus (1994) program, as imperative when handling bullying.

Current bullying intervention programs vary considerably in both their theory and practice. They are mostly about proactive approaches, including social-emotional learning (Domino, 2013), positive youth development (Domino, 2013; Ma, 2009b), non-punitive problem solving (Rigby & Griffiths, 2011), social skills interventions (Domino, 2013; Esbensen & Carson, 2009), positive behavior supports (Ross & Horner, 2013), whole curriculum (Battey &

Ebbeck, 2013), linking school and home (Olweus, 2003), and improving school climate (Wang, Berry & Swearer, 2013).

Consider the following three models for dealing with bullying, all which have evidence of effectiveness. Domino (2013) found that students who participated in the *Take the Lead* (TTL) social skills program reduced the amount of both bullying and victimization for boys and girls, with the control group experiencing more bullying and victimization. Rigby and Griffiths (2011) found the *Method of Shared Understanding*, a problem-solving approach, to be effective in reducing bullying in schools. These two methods focus on adult facilitation in conjunction with student application and generalization. This is also similar to the method Battey and Ebbeck (2013) analyzed, the *Bully Prevention Challenge Course Curriculum* (BPCCC), a series of rope challenges combined with metaphorical bullying situations. Students showed improvement in peer relations and how they viewed themselves and others in regard to problematic behavior (Battey & Ebbeck, 2013). However, these three programs require more replication before their effectiveness can be accepted with great confidence.

Taking a different approach, Ross and Horner (2013) chose to embed bullying prevention into the evidence-based *Positive Behavior Support* (PBS) system. This process deployed a technique from applied behavior analysis, known as extinction, where the targeted behavior is no longer paired with the stimuli that had previously reinforced it (Cooper, Heron, & Howard, 2007). Ross and Horner (2013) found that by removing the peer attention reinforcing the bullying behaviors, these behaviors were less likely to occur in the future.

Perhaps the best known and most iconic bullying prevention program is the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program*. With over 20 years of research on its effectiveness, this package

deploys the wraparound technique (Olweus, 2003), an approach combining interventions at home and school. The program utilizes adult peer models, clear expectations, and consistent non-punitive consequences to counteract bullying behavior (Olweus, 2003). The effectiveness of this approach has been extensively researched in Europe, though it has not been studied as rigorously in the United States (Olweus, 2003). The Olweus wraparound requires parents and the school community to significantly buy into the approach, making it less utilized as compared to other intervention packages advertised in email inboxes of U.S. Anti-Bullying Specialists, including *Bully-Busters* and *Steps to Respect*. In their analysis of the current programs available to school districts, Wang, Berry, and Swearer (2013) identified common areas of focus for bullying prevention programs, including developing a caring school climate, increasing awareness among both staff and students, and decreasing bullying in overall. In general, these models lack the research base of the Olweus model or the PBS model, but they are readily accessible and widely marketed.

The programs discussed thus far in this literature review are all missing any acknowledgment of the academic ramifications of being a bullying victim. What does the current research say about helping students who are not meeting their benchmarks in academic achievement? A popular yet somewhat controversial method is *Response to Intervention* (RTI). Possessing the ability to span multiple academic subjects, such as writing, language arts, and math, RTI is an individualized approach with a specific goal, which increases the intensity of instruction (e.g. start with whole group, move to small group, and then move to 1:1 instruction) until the goal is met (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). This customized approach features data-driven decision making and stringent monitoring of student progress (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). This process is researched as an intervention for students with and without learning disabilities

(Fuchs & Fuchs, 2009; Fuchs, Fuchs & Vaughn, 2014; Kearns & Fuchs, 2013) once again suggesting that perhaps interventions for victims of bullying incidents can utilize the same types of supports and strategies.

Borrowing from the field of learning disabilities is not a far-fetched idea when designing academic programs for victims of bullying. The philosophy behind providing academic supports for students with learning disabilities is that with the right materials, instruction, and monitoring, students can achieve just as much as their peers without disabilities (Williams, 2003). Students who have had their learning environment disrupted may benefit from learning under the same philosophy; with the right amount of instruction and monitoring, gaps from disruption may be able to be filled. Wong, Harris, Graham, and Butler (2003) have found that providing children who have learning disabilities with cognitive strategies to utilize in their work is effective. Perhaps utilizing similar techniques would be an effective strategy for victims of bullying as well.

Chapter 3 Methods

Theoretical Framework

The expanded social-ecological framework developed by Espalage and Swearer (2004) offers guidance in navigating the complicated subject of bullying. Espalage and Swearer (2004) argue that the complexity of the situations themselves, the persons involved, and the environment are essential into what categorizes an incident as bullying; change to a single element may change its classification entirely. This framework starts with the individual and then branches off into other components, including peers and school. Recall that the NJ HIB law specifies that disruption to the school day is an element for classifying a HIB incident. It was my thought that this disruption to the school day would have some impact on academics and/or attendance, and the literature supports the hypothesis that a victimizing a child will have negative impacts on his or her academics and attendance.

In exploring the hypothesis, the social-ecological framework provides an excellent broad context for this study's logic model, which flows like a stack of dominoes knocked over. As illustrated in Figure 1, the initial effect of HIB incidents, and the potential impact it may have on achievement and attendance, are all started after a HIB incident occurs. If interventions could be put in place prior to academic and attendance inconsistencies, then these students would be able to circumvent the "wait to fail" model. Even a small sample should demonstrate an impact in some way, shape, or form if the hypothesis is true.

a. Effects on Achievement



b. Effects on Attendance



Figure 1. The Effects on the Individual Following a HIB Incident

Espelage and Swearer (2004) expand the social-ecological framework by drawing a series of circles, beginning with a small circle representing the individual victim and expanding out to the large circle representing the victim's culture. The chain of victim, family, peers, school, community, and culture influenced the decision to include several variables in the statistical analysis for this study. Each variable speaks to one or more links in this chain. For example, the variable of grade level speaks to the individual, but how a child is viewed at a particular age also speaks to the links representing school, family, and friends. A 5th grade student may be expected to behave a certain way because he or she is the oldest of the elementary level children, but the same child's experience may also be colored by being the youngest child in the family. The social-ecological framework model is able to address all of these variations between individual students.

Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental design to estimate the association of HIB victimization with attendance and achievement in the year in which victimization occurred, controlling for student characteristics including grade level, family income, ethnicity, and gender. Table 1 provides a list the dependent and independent variables and the precise measures that will be used for each of them.

Table 1

Variables Utilized in the Study and How They Are Measured

| Variable | How it is measured |
|----------------------|--|
| Grade Level | Identified as 4 th or 5 th grade student |
| Family Income | Qualify for free/reduced lunch |
| Ethnicity | African American/Latino or White/Other |
| Gender | Male or Female |
| Victimization Status | Victim or not a victim |
| Attendance | Number of unexcused absences, number of unexcused tardies |
| Achievement | NJASK Score (average score and identification as: partially proficient, proficient, advanced proficient) |

This study analyzed data collected in the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 school years from the Downtown Elementary School from the Happyville School District. The data analyzed included general demographics, HIB investigations, attendance records, and NJASK scores. The mean, median, mode, range, standard deviation, and variance were calculated for victims and nonvictims on unexcused absences, unexcused tardies, and NJASK scores for Language Arts and Math. These data sets were selected not only for relevance to the research

question, but because as part of the school's official records, they were accessible without interfering with the school's daily operations.

To test the hypothesis of this study, I needed to see if students who are bullying victims have more difficulties concentrating in class, finishing homework, or display other inconsistencies of performance. This, in turn, would decrease their effectiveness in learning, ultimately leading to lower test scores. Additionally, I needed to see if students who are victims are more likely to avoid going to school, decreasing their exposure to the curriculum and potentially leaving them lacking the preparation they need to succeed. This would be measured by tardiness and absenteeism. Lower attendance is expected to result in lower test scores, though this may not be immediately evident on the NJASK. It should be noted that the possibility of students who are naturally resilient test takers and/or students who compensate by other means, such as private tutoring, might be able to make up the difference in lack of instruction from lower attendance.

Site

Happyville is located on the shore line of central New Jersey. The Downtown Elementary School is one among 12 elementary schools within the district. In the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 school years, Downtown Elementary followed an inclusion model. The inclusion model for this school incorporates all students, those classified with a disability and those who are not, in the same classroom. There are no self-contained classrooms or resource room for special education students. Students do not have direct knowledge of classified students, e.g. identification by being in the special education room, or working with a special education teacher. Co-teachers are available in each grade, and assist all students

regardless of classification within the classroom setting. While it is possible that students who are classified might be at higher risk for experiencing a HIB, there is not general knowledge among the students regarding who is and who is not classified. This variable is not addressed in the study, and will be discussed in the limitations section. The school receives Title1 funding, and was one of the few elementary schools within the district to receive this type of funding during the collection of the data set. The school participates in the free/reduced lunch and breakfast program, which is not available in every school in the district.

For the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 school years, the Downtown Elementary School was close to a state of homeostasis. The building was supervised by the same principal. There were a handful of maternity leaves, but overall the school staff remained consistent, with the exception of two new teachers hired to accommodate the growing student population. There were no unexpected medical leaves or retirements during the data collection phase. During the 2012-2013 school year, the Happyville School District was affected by Superstorm Sandy. Luckily, no students in the Downtown Elementary School were reported as displaced due to the storm. The school building was not damaged, and when the district returned to school two weeks later, the Downtown Elementary School opened on schedule with no extraordinary maintenance issues. The support staff remained the same throughout the data collection procedures. The only exception was the Anti-Bullying Specialist, who was not officially appointed until the middle of the 2010-2011 school year.

Downtown Elementary School participates in the district-wide HIB investigation data collection procedure. The support staff available to the Downtown Elementary School includes the school psychologist, who is also the case manager for classified students, and the social

behavior support specialist, who is also the school's Anti-Bullying Specialist, and I&RS and 504 case managers. Both of these staff members are split between two schools, and are not full-time at Downtown Elementary School. The school uses I&RS to serve non-classified students with academic and behavioral supports when they experience difficulty that is not better explained by a learning disability or other diagnoses.

Sample

The sample for this study includes students enrolled for the 2011-2012 school year in grade 4 (n=45), 2011-2012 school year grade 5 (n=36), and 2012-2013 school year in grade 4 (n=45). The subjects were selected because elementary staffs only have access to data for students in this school. Once a student moves on to the 6th grade, their data files are admitted to the middle school, and no longer accessible via Downtown Elementary databases. This means the highest grade level I have access to is the 5th grade. The NJASK is first administered in the 3rd grade. Therefore only 4th and 5th graders have test score data for the prior year to use as a control for their previous academic achievement level, which also makes 4th grade students the lowest grade level available for the study. Table 2 illustrates the sample as a whole in terms of ethnicity (students identified as African American/Latino American), number of students who qualify for free/reduced lunch, number of males, and number of students identified as victims.

Table 2

The Demographics of the Sample by Cohort

| Cohort | Total Students | African American/Latino American #(%) | Free/Reduced Lunch #(%) | Males #(%) | Victims #(%) |
|---------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------|--------------|
| 4 th grade 2011-2012 | 45 | 9 (20) | 23 (51) | 26 (57) | 12 (26) |
| 5 th grade 2011-2012 | 36 | 8 (22) | 21 (58) | 19 (52) | 10 (27) |
| 4 th grade 2012-2013 | 45 | 4(8) | 18 (40) | 20 (44) | 2 (4) |
| Total | 126 | 21 (16) | 62 (49) | 65 (51) | 24 (19) |

Data Collection

Each student was assigned an identifying code when entered into the Excel Spreadsheet. Once all of the information was entered, these codes were used and the names deleted, so no link between names and information was in the data set. The following data was entered into the Excel Spreadsheet:

- Attendance
 - This includes unexcused absences and unexcused tardiness. Excused absences and excused tardiness are not included.
 - An unexcused absence and/or tardy is defined as being out of school without medical documentation.
 - Each cohort used the attendance entered from both the year of the HIB incidents and the year before, e.g. Cohort 1 (4th grade 2011-2012) used attendance entered from both the 2010-2011 school year and the 2011-2012 school year.
- HIB investigations
 - Students involved in an investigation are labeled as victim or perpetrator. For the purpose of this study, only the identification as victim will be used.

- For an incident to be included as HIB, there must have been a formal investigation by the school Anti-Bullying Specialist, and the decision must have been reviewed by the Board of Education.
- Cohorts 1 and 2 used HIB investigations from the 2011-2012 school year.
- Cohort 3 used HIB investigations from the 2012-2013 school year.

- NJASK Scores
 - This includes both Language Arts and Mathematics.
 - The score from the previous school year will be used as a baseline to establish trend e.g., Cohort 1 has scores entered from both the 2010-2011 school year and the 2011-2012 school year.

- Power School Demographic Information
 - Ethnicity
 - Students were coded into one of two categories, either African American/Latino American, or White/Other
 - This information is based on student records data.
 - Socio-Economic Status
 - Students were identified as qualifying for the free/reduced lunch program based on reported household income.
 - Gender
 - Students were identified as either male or female based on student record data.

Measures

The New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK) scores from the 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 school years were utilized. The NJASK is a statewide standardized test intended to assess the extent to which the individual student has mastered the core curriculum content standards (CCCS) in math, language arts, and science (New Jersey Department of Education, 2012). The test was administered following the time frame specified by the state (New Jersey Department of Education, 2012). Validity and reliability of the NJASK is monitored at the state level. Information regarding the validity and reliability of the test is

assessed annually. This can be found in the technical report for the NJASK available from the New Jersey Department of Education (2012). Regarding validity, the technical report states:

Content-related evidence supporting validity is presented in terms of the adequacy and appropriateness of the state content standards and the representation of the content standards on the tests. Then, validity evidence based on the internal structure of NJASK is provided through a correlational analysis of NJASK content clusters with each other. (pg. 140)

Regarding reliability, the technical report states:

The New Jersey Department of Education is required by federal law to ensure that the instruments it uses to measure student achievement for school accountability provide reliable results. This section shows that results of the NJASK 2012 3–8 measure student achievement in a reliable manner. The size of the measurement error associated with test scores is reasonable and can be taken into account when interpreting the scores for individual students. (pg.114)

Student absences are recorded daily by the student's appointed teacher. Grades 4 and 5 have the same teacher throughout the school day. The daily results are sent to the office and entered into the Power School Database. Parents are required to call and report a child being absent, regardless of whether the absence is excused or unexcused. Parents who have not notified the school receive a call from the office by the secretary, nurse, or principal. Excused absences are recorded and a doctor's note must be provided. Parents are given numerous chances to provide this documentation, but records are finalized at the close of the school year. The records obtained and used for this study reflect the final list.

HIB investigations must be completed within 10 days of the reported complaint. Anyone can report a HIB, including teachers, students, and/or parents. A "bullying box" is provided to the students where they can leave information anonymously if they feel they are being bullied or if they had witnessed someone being bullied. The box is checked daily. A spreadsheet reflecting

victim and perpetrator information, gender, grade, time of incident, date incident was reported, who reported the incident, antecedent, consequence, and method of informing parents/guardians is updated per incident. This information is collected by the Anti-Bullying Specialist, double checked by the principal, and submitted to the district Anti-Bullying Specialist, who submits the documentation to the Board of Education, and later to the state. The Board of Education's final decision is available online, and a notification letter is sent within 10 days of the meeting to the parent/guardian of both the perpetrator and the victim. Parents are allowed to contest the decisions made by the Board of Education. The HIB decisions for the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years were not changed based on parent objection to any of the decisions. All decisions were upheld by the school board.

Power School is a software program used by the Happyville School District, which was utilized throughout the entire data collection procedure. School level access is yearly, meaning that school level employees, such as teachers and support staff, only have access to students who are currently enrolled. Once a student leaves the school building, e.g. transfers to another elementary school or moves on to middle school, the staff no longer has access to that student's file. Power School includes basic demographics, attendance and discipline records, and other data. The extent to which a school utilizes Power School varies, but Downtown Elementary School uses Power School for demographics, health information, classification, attendance, and other non-academic purposes, e.g. pick up status if parents are divorced.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel. All student information was kept confidential and transferred to anonymous data files so that students could not be identified. I was the only person with access to a separate code sheet linking student name and ID, which was kept in a secure location. When the information was reported, care was taken to ensure that the level of aggregation prevented anyone from being able to identify specific students.

As described below, the data analysis followed the procedures specified by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2010). Initial analyses provided descriptive statistics. The mean (or percentage as relevant), median, mode, range, standard deviation, and variance were reported for all independent and dependent variables. Regression analysis was employed to assess the effects of HIB victimization on attendance and NJASK scores controlling for student background characteristics and measures of these outcomes from the prior year. The regression equations were specified as follows:

$$1) Y^2 = \beta_1 D_{\text{victim status}} + \beta_2 D_{\text{gender}} + \beta_3 D_{\text{grade level}} + \beta_4 D_{\text{year}} + Y^1 + \beta_5 D_{\text{ethnicity}} + \beta_6 D_{\text{free/reduced lunch}} + \varepsilon$$

where Y^2 represents NJASK Math Score in the current year with respect to HIB reports, Y^1 represents NJASK Math Score in the previous year, $D_{\text{victim status}}$ is a dummy variable indicating whether the student is identified as a victim or not, D_{gender} is a dummy variable indicating whether the student is male or female, D_{grade} is a dummy variable indicating whether the student is in 4th or 5th grade, $D_{\text{ethnicity}}$ is a dummy variable indicating whether the student is African American/Latino, $D_{\text{free/reduced lunch}}$ is a dummy variable indicating whether the student qualified for the free/reduced lunch program.

$$2) Y^2 = \beta_1 D_{\text{victim status}} + \beta_2 D_{\text{gender}} + \beta_3 D_{\text{grade level}} + \beta_4 D_{\text{year}} + Y^1 + \beta_5 D_{\text{ethnicity}} + \beta_6 D_{\text{free/reduced lunch}} + \varepsilon$$

where Y^2 represents NJASK Language Arts Score in the current year with respect to HIB reports, Y^1 represents NJASK Language Arts Score in the previous year, $D_{\text{victim status}}$ is a dummy variable indicating whether the student is identified as a victim or not, D_{gender} is a dummy variable indicating whether the student is male or female, D_{grade} is a dummy variable indicating whether the student is in 4th or 5th grade, $D_{\text{ethnicity}}$ is a dummy variable indicating whether the student is African American/Latino, $D_{\text{free/reduced lunch}}$ is a dummy variable indicating whether the student qualified for the free/reduced lunch program.

$$3) Y^2 = \beta_1 D_{\text{victim status}} + \beta_2 D_{\text{gender}} + \beta_3 D_{\text{grade level}} + \beta_4 D_{\text{year}} + Y^1 + \beta_5 D_{\text{ethnicity}} + \beta_6 D_{\text{free/reduced lunch}} + \varepsilon$$

where Y^2 represents attendance in the current year with respect to HIB reports, Y^1 represents attendance in the previous year, $D_{\text{victim status}}$ is a dummy variable indicating whether the student is identified as a victim or not, D_{gender} is a dummy variable indicating whether the student is male or female, D_{grade} is a dummy variable indicating whether the student is in 4th or 5th grade, $D_{\text{ethnicity}}$ is a dummy variable indicating whether the student is African American/Latino, $D_{\text{free/reduced lunch}}$ is a dummy variable indicating whether the student qualified for the free/reduced lunch program.

$$4) Y^2 = \beta_1 D_{\text{victim status}} + \beta_2 D_{\text{gender}} + \beta_3 D_{\text{grade level}} + \beta_4 D_{\text{year}} + Y^1 + \beta_5 D_{\text{ethnicity}} + \beta_6 D_{\text{free/reduced lunch}} + \varepsilon$$

where Y^2 represents tardies in the current year with respect to HIB reports, Y^1 represents tardies in the previous year, $D_{\text{victim status}}$ is a dummy variable indicating whether the student is identified as a victim or not, D_{gender} is a dummy variable indicating whether the student is male or female, D_{grade} is a dummy variable indicating whether the student is in 4th or 5th grade,

Dethnicity is a dummy variable indicating whether the student is African American/Latino, Dfree/reduced lunch is a dummy variable indicating whether the student qualified for the free/reduced lunch program.

Researcher Role

As the school appointed Anti-Bullying Specialist (ABS) and coordinator of I&RS, I may present as biased because of my close relationship to the data that was collected. However, all HIB incidents used in this study were already investigated, and their decision approved by the Board of Education, prior to identifying this data set as needed for the study. This decreases the threat to the study's validity and/or my potential bias as a researcher.

As the social behavior support specialist, I am involved daily with these students, acting as investigator, counselor, and social skills instructor. The students' names were coded, and throughout the analysis subjects were not identifiable by name. This study used a quantitative approach with already existing data. This was selected as opposed to a qualitative study because of the close relationship I have with the subjects. It would be a greater threat to the validity and reliability of the study to use current investigations, since this researcher is the one conducting said investigations.

Currently, the Happyville School District utilizes an approach that is similar to response to intervention (RTI) monitored through I&RS. The approach applies varying levels of instruction and assessments for an individual student throughout the year to monitor his or her progress. Unfortunately, the most intense supports are reserved for students who have low achievement scores from the previous year. It was my goal that if the data supported the

hypothesis, that this study be influential in making intense supports available for victims of bullying as well.

Potential Limitations

Measurement Error. Perpetrators and victims who are familiar with the HIB investigation process, such as repeat offenders and/or repeat victims, may have developed ways to maintain and/or hide bullying behavior without being detected by staff and other students. Students involved in HIB investigations are interviewed by the Anti-Bullying Specialist or another individual appointed by the Anti-Bullying Specialist to assist in the investigation, such as a school psychologist, teacher, or principal. Students who wish to go undetected may take measures such as deleting cyber evidence or providing several witnesses who can corroborate an alternative story. Unidentified incidents are addressed further in the limitations section.

It should be noted that students who were involved in a HIB incident may share their experiences with other students, which may or may not influence student reactions. While students who are not involved in a HIB incident are used as a control, they may still bear witness to HIB, have friends involved in HIB, or may be a student who suffers in silence and does not report a situation. In other words, bullying could well have broad consequences, potentially affecting students who are not direct victims or who are unidentified victims. This will lead to an underestimation of the effects of bullying in this study. Students who are perpetrators or victims cannot be separated from the other students; therefore, the extent to which others are exposed to the details of an incident cannot be formally controlled in the given setting. This is a limitation because it may influence students who are victimized to not come forward, therefore not giving a full sample of victimized students.

Additionally, the protocol for addressing HIB incidents is the same regardless of the nature or severity of the incident. Personal interpretation has the ability to overshadow professional judgment in determining whether an incident is a conflict or a true instance of HIB. In order to counteract this effect, the district follows the procedure described above, submitting all HIB investigations to the district Anti-Bullying Specialist, these decisions are then reviewed by the Board of Education. This serves as a check and balance for the district, and for the students as well. Active investigations were rejected for this study, due to the risk of mislabeling potential incidents before the investigative process was complete. Still, personal interpretation will remain a potential factor. Protocols may be a starting point for consistency, but they are only one small factor when many different individuals are involved in investigating HIB incidents.

Omitted Variables. The data set encompasses an entire school year, which can influence the way the students behave and interact. This includes both events that occur individually throughout the school year, such as death of a loved one or parents divorcing, as well as events that influence the entire school, such as policy changes or storms. Developmentally, the students involved in the study will have a naturally occurring maturity because they are entering puberty.

This study's sample used subjects that were present for the entire school year to expose all groups to the same effects. Of the students identified as victims in the study, none left the school district during the data set. Students who were removed from the final data had moved from out of state and did not have NJASK scores for comparison. None of these students were identified as victims.

A high rate of absenteeism, also known as truancy, is a factor that is addressed in the limitations section. Truancy may occur for other reasons besides the HIB victimization

hypothesis being tested here, including family dynamics, transportation issues, and school avoidance due to anxiety which is unrelated to bullying. The data may therefore show high rates of absenteeism for some students who are not HIB victims. This study looked closely at the average and range of the number of absences and tardies among the nonvictim group versus the victim group. The other factors that create a high risk of truancy are not a focus in this study, but are still noted as a possible limitation. Additionally, this study does not look at calendar times with truancy, only the frequency of a student's absences and tardies.

Context. While the this study is useful to the Downtown Elementary School for determining the association between HIB victimization, truancy, and low NJASK scores, the findings cannot be generalized to all elementary schools. The information was obtained from the 2011-2012 school year, which has a different environment and social dynamic than the 2012-2013 school year. Each cohort in the study is under a different set of expectations than the other, due to such variations as teacher style, classroom management, and student interpersonal skills. The information obtained from the data analysis may be limited in its ability to generalize for the next school year as the student groups change, children are separated from potential harm, and the school's climate alters.

Measuring HIB. The 2011-2012 school year also reflects the first year in which the NJ HIB law regulations were put into place. As a result, the investigations from the beginning of the year may be more novice than those at the end of the year. The student and parent understanding of what constitutes bullying may have led to an initial over-identification of perpetrators and victims.

The number of incidents from the 2011-2012 school year is larger than the number of incidents from the 2012-2013 school year. While this may suggest that familiarity with protocols decreased the over-identification of HIB incidents, it is noteworthy that when compared to the other elementary schools in the district for 2012-2013, Downtown Elementary School still maintained the highest number of incidents. It is difficult to assess which factor or factors contributed to the reduction of HIB incidents. In addition to fluctuating variables within a typical school environment, the 2012-2013 school year was marked by Superstorm Sandy, which created a sense of unity within the community. Further studies should be done to see if there is a correlation between natural disasters and reduction in conflict and/or HIB among elementary school students, because this may help with community interventions. This is addressed more thoroughly in both the final limitations section and suggestions for further research.

A limitation that is part of all bullying research is the rate at which students report an incident, as there remains a group of students who suffer in silence. These students fly under the radar of bullying specialists, parents, teachers, and peers. As a result, their experience goes undetected, or reported years later, after the damage has been done. Included in this study are only HIB incidents which were investigated, and thus victimization is limited only to those students who identified as such. Incidents may be reported by the victim, a bystander, or a parent. Incidents that are not seen by others will not be included in this study, and unreported incidents are addressed further in the limitations section.

Trustworthiness

In order to maximize the trustworthiness of the study, the data used is from the daily operations for the elementary school, which means that there were no additional steps or protocols that needed to be modified and/or added for these data to be collected. The HIB data collection is part of my position. The HIB data from 2011-2012 was taken before this study was proposed and the HIB data from 2012-2013 was identified as useful for the study after it had already been collected. Since the data sets were not identified prior to the development of the research question, this decreases the likelihood that the results would drift toward supporting the hypothesis. Because the data was a part of daily school operations, I was not able to manipulate the data or the students who went through these ordeals in any way.

Use of Findings

This study came to fruition to benefit the I&RS team, creating a data set to investigate whether or not HIB victims had short-term consequences to their attendance and/or academics. The results of this study were shared with the Downtown Elementary School in order to enhance the services provided to students who are victims of HIB. If the hypothesis is unsupported, then the results could still be used to help students in general, but not the specific population of victims. The results should be shared with other Anti-Bullying Specialists, as they may want to formally address similar issues in their own schools regarding academic and attendance issues of HIB victims.

Chapter 4

Findings

Data for this dissertation were collected across three cohorts of students at the Downtown Elementary School over the course of two full school years, 2011-2012 and 2012-2013. Students were removed from the study if they were not present for both school years in their entirety, or if students had transferred the previous year from out of state, as they would not have a comparable standardized achievement score. The entire study consisted of 126 students. The results of the analyses are presented below.

Within a typical school year a variety of information is collected daily, including absences and tardies. As a result of the New Jersey HIB legislation, bullying incidents for investigation were added to a school's data collection on a per occurrence basis with monthly updates, monthly board of education reviews, and bi-annual state reports. While standardized testing takes place in the spring, the results are shared with the school the following fall. The 2013 NJASK was held in May 2013, and the results were submitted to the administration in August, and shared with staff in September, of that same year. The data were not identified for use in the study until after they had been collected. All of the general information and demographics regarding the students are available to school staff as part of the students' files. No additional information on students, their achievement scores, absences, or tardies was collected outside of the typical scope of daily operations.

Following the sample description with the descriptive statistics are the regression analyses of the data set. A total of four regression analysis equations were conducted. Results are reported within each sub-heading. The regression analysis was conducted separating for

gender; these results were similar to the results of the initial regression analyses, with one exception.

Sample Description

Table 3 reports descriptive statistics for independent variables for the sample as a whole. The sample consists of three cohorts across the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years with 126 students. A total of 24 students were identified as victims, which is 19% of the sample. Table 4 reports victim status by cohort. Victim status was identified for the school year, 2011-2012 or 2012-2013, other student characteristics include grade level, gender, free lunch status, and ethnicity. Victim status was coded with a 1 for students identified as a victim and 0 otherwise. Grade level was coded with a 1 for the 4th grade 2011-2012, a 2 for 5th grade 2011-2012, and a 3 for 4th grade 2012-2013. Gender was coded with a 1 for male and 0 for female. Free lunch status was coded as a 1 for yes and a 0 for no. Ethnicity was coded as a 1 for African American/Latino or a 0 for White/Other.

It should be noted that the 4th grade 2012-2013 cohort had significantly fewer victims than the 4th and 5th grade 2011-2012 cohorts. This reduction in number could be attributed, in part, to a decrease in reporting rather than a decrease in actual bullying. This will be discussed further in the limitations section of Chapter 5.

Table 5 provides descriptive statistics for attendance-related dependent variables for the full sample and by victim status. The year prior to victim status being identified, the students identified as victims have an average of 6.83 absences, while nonvictims have 6.21 absences. For the year victim status was identified, students identified as victims have an average of 6.46 absences, while the nonvictims averaged 4.86 absences.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Independent Variables for the Whole Sample and by Victim Status

| Characteristic | Full Sample (n=126) | HIB Victims (n =24) | NonVictims (n = 102) |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Gender, Percent Male | 51.5% | 66% | 48% |
| Ethnicity, Percent Minority | 16.7% | 12% | 17% |
| Percent Free or Reduced Price Lunch | 50% | 70% | 44% |
| Percent HIB Victims | 19% | 100% | 0% |

Table 4

Victim Status by Grade and Year

| Grade | Percent Victimized |
|---|--------------------|
| 4 th grade 2011-2012 (n=45) | 26.7% |
| 5 th grade 2011-2012 (n=36) | 27.8% |
| 4 th grade 2012-2013 (n=45) | 4.4% |
| Total (n = 126) | 19% |

A chi-square analysis was conducted with each of the variables in Table 5 to determine if there was a significant difference between victims and nonvictims. Using a p-value of 0.05 with

Table 5

Absences and Tardies Accrued the Year Prior and the Current Year of Victim Status Identification separated by victim status.

| | Victims (n=24) | | | Nonvictims (n=102) | | | Whole Sample (n=126) | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|--------|-------|-----------------------|--------|-------|-------------------------|--------|-------|
| | Mean (SD) | Median | Range | Mean (SD) | Median | Range | Mean (SD) | Median | Range |
| Absences Prior Year* | 6.83 (5.41) | 6 | 1-24 | 6.21 (4.3) | 6 | 0-20 | 6.35 (4.5) | 6 | 0-24 |
| Absences Current Year | 6.46 (4.16) | 5.5 | 0-15 | 4.86 (3.93) | 4 | 0-20 | 5.17 (4.01) | 4.5 | 0-20 |
| Tardies Prior Year | 2.38 (3.28) | 1 | 0-14 | 4.53 (11.48) | 1 | 0-72 | 4.06 (10.46) | 0 | 0-72 |
| Tardies Current Year | 1.92 (3.91) | 0 | 0-17 | 2.90 (6.26) | 1 | 0-50 | 2.71 (5.98) | 1 | 0-50 |

Note: SD=Standard Deviation

The asterisk above indicates significance when the chi-square analysis was conducted.

1 degree of freedom, accepting the null hypothesis means there was no significant difference found affecting the outcomes. The asterisk in Table 5 indicates that absences accrued prior to the year of identification were significant. A school year consists of a minimum of 180 days. On average, the year prior to identification, victims are absent 3.7%, nonvictims 3.4% and the whole sample 3.5%. On average the year victim status was identified, victims were absent 3.5% of the school year, nonvictims 2.7%, and the whole sample 2.8%.

Regarding the tardiness data in Table 5, the year prior to identification, victims have an average of 2.38, nonvictims 4.53, and the whole group 4.06. The year identification occurred,

victims have an average of 1.92, nonvictims 2.90, and the whole group 2.71. Given that a school year consists of a minimum of 180 days on average, in the year prior to identification, victims were tardy 1.3% of the time, nonvictims 2.5%, and the whole sample 2.2%. The year victimization was identified; victims were tardy 1%, nonvictims 1.6%, and the whole sample 1.5%.

Table 6 summarizes data for the absences and tardies the year victim status was identified separated by gender. The nonvictim female (n=53), victim male (n=16), and nonvictim male (n=41) sample size were comparatively similar, while the female victims (n=8) sample size is less than all three of these categories. From these data it is apparent that the elevated absence rate is concentrated among male victims. Tests for significant differences are reserved for the multivariate regression analyses presented later in this chapter.

Table 6

Absences and Tardies by Victim Status for Gender and Whole Group in the Year Victim Status was Identified

| | Victims | | Nonvictims | | Whole Group | |
|----------------|-------------|-------|-------------|-------|-------------|-------|
| | Mean (SD) | Range | Mean (SD) | Range | Mean (SD) | Range |
| Females | n=8 | | n=53 | | n=61 | |
| Absences | 4.75(3.40) | 0-12 | 4.85 (4.35) | 0-20 | 4.83(4.21) | 0-20 |
| Tardies | 1 (2.07) | 0-6 | 2.3 (3.96) | 0-20 | 2.13(3.78) | 0-20 |
| Males | n=16 | | n=49 | | n=65 | |
| Absences | 7.31 (4.33) | 0-15 | 4.96 (3.46) | 0-13 | 5.47(3.81) | 0-15 |
| Tardies | 2.37 (4.55) | 0-17 | 3.63 (8.11) | 0-50 | 3.26(7.32) | 0-50 |

Note: SD=Standard Deviation

For the purpose of this dissertation, achievement is measured by the NJASK Language Arts and Math scores. Table 7 summarizes the results of these tests for victims, nonvictims, and the whole group for the year prior to identification and the year victim status was identified. NJASK test scores fall into three categories, partially proficient (100-199), proficient (200-249), and above proficient (250-300); 300 is a perfect score. A t-test by victim status was run on all test scores; none of the means for test scores differed significantly by victim status.

Table 7

NJASK Language Arts and Math Scores for the Year Prior to and Current Year of Victim Status Identification separated by Victim Status.

| | Victims (n=24) | | Nonvictims (n=102) | | Whole Sample (n=126) | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|---------|-----------------------|-------------|-------------------------|---------|
| | Mean (SD) | Range | Mean (SD) | Range | Mean (SD) | Range |
| Language Arts Previous Year | 200.4 (25.47) | 156-260 | 201.9 (20.71) | 154- 250 | 201.25 (22) | 154-250 |
| Language Arts Current Year | 200.38 (18.21) | 161-238 | 198.08 (20.72) | 158- 250 | 198.10 (20.4) | 158-250 |
| Math Previous Year | 215.29 (27.59) | 167-288 | 218.41 (32.21) | 133- 285 | 218.15 (30.98) | 133-288 |
| Math Current Year | 222.58 (21.69) | 185-275 | 222.45 (34.41) | 129- 300 | 222.74 (32.29) | 129-300 |

Note: SD=Standard Deviation

Categorically, for the year prior to identification, the average Language Arts score for the three groups places them in the proficient range (200-249): victims (200.4), nonvictims (201.9), and whole group (201.25). For the year victim status was identified, the average Language Arts score is only proficient for the victims (200.38) and partially proficient (100-199) for nonvictims (198.08) and the whole group (198.10).

Categorically, for the year prior to identification, the average Math score for the three groups places them in the proficient range (200-249): victims (215.29), nonvictim (218.41), and the whole group (218.15). For the year victim status was identified, the average Math score is again proficient (200-249) across the three groups: victims (222.58), nonvictims (222.45), and the whole group (222.74).

Regression Analysis

Four regression analysis equations were estimated to investigate the association between victim status and the outcomes of attendance and achievement controlling for other student characteristics and cohort. The first equation analyzes absences, the second analyzes tardies, the third analyzes language arts scores, and the fourth analyzes math scores. The results are illustrated in Table 8. These were all analyzed in relation to the following variables: grade, gender, free/reduced lunch, ethnicity, victim status, and the previous year's number (pertaining to absences and tardies) or score (pertaining to NJASK Language Arts or Math). In other words, the analysis controls for prior attendance and achievement when analyzing these outcomes, as well as for other student characteristics.

The analysis reported in Table 8 indicates that prior year outcomes are by far the strongest predictors of current year outcomes for attendance and achievement. None of the other variables have a statistically significant association with outcomes at a conventional level, with one exception. Victim status is significant with $p < .10$ for absences. This indicates that victimization is associated with an additional one and a half days absent in the year.

Table 8

Regressions Analysis Results for Each Variable and Outcome

| Variable | Absences | | | Tardies | | | NJASK LA | | | NJASK Math | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------|-----|-----|---------|------|-----|----------|------|-----|------------|------|------|
| | Coeff | se | p | Coeff | se | p | Coeff | se | p | Coeff | se | p |
| Grade | 0.73 | .39 | .06 | -0.60 | .48 | .22 | 0.31 | 1.6 | .85 | 4.17 | 2.50 | .10 |
| Gender | 0.13 | .63 | .84 | 0.76 | .80 | .35 | -6.51 | 2.63 | .01 | 2.48 | 4.15 | .55 |
| Free/ Reduced Lunch | 0.77 | .66 | .25 | 0.49 | .83 | .56 | -3.92 | 2.75 | .16 | -2.51 | 4.27 | .56 |
| Ethnicity | -0.21 | .87 | .81 | 1.26 | 1.09 | .25 | 5.44 | 3.56 | .13 | -0.02 | 5.66 | 1.00 |
| Victim Status | 1.47 | .84 | .08 | -0.62 | 1.07 | .56 | 4.93 | 3.46 | .16 | 4.88 | 5.50 | .38 |
| Previous Year Number/S core | 0.44 | .07 | .00 | 0.36 | .04 | .00 | 0.62 | .06 | .00 | 0.75 | .07 | .00 |

Note: Coeff=Coefficient, se=Standard Error, p=P-value

As there are many social and school-related behaviors that differ by gender, the four regression equations estimated previously were estimated separately by gender (Tables 9 and 10). The results are essentially the same as for the analyses on the full example, except that the association between absences and victimization is limited to males. This analysis indicates that victimization is associated with an additional 2 days absent for males only ($p < .04$), a finding that is significant at conventional levels (less than .05).

Summary of Findings

The results of this study produced no evidence that being a victim of bullying had a significant impact on achievement as measured by NJASK Language Arts and Math scores. Looking at attendance, the study found no evidence that lateness (tardies) was significantly affected by bullying, but did find evidence that a lack of attendance was associated with being a victim. When the sample was divided by gender, this study found that for this particular sample the association between absences and bullying victimization was limited to males. The estimated difference associated with being bullied for male victims was 2 additional days.

Table 9

Regression Analysis Results for Each Variable and Outcome Separated by Gender-Females

| Variable | Absences | | | Tardies | | | NJASK LA | | | NJASK Math | | |
|-------------------------------|----------|------|-----|---------|------|-----|----------|------|-----|------------|------|-----|
| | Coeff | se | p | Coeff | se | p | Coeff | se | p | Coeff | se | p |
| Free/ Reduced Lunch | 0.51 | 1.02 | .61 | -0.68 | .91 | .45 | -1.59 | 3.45 | .64 | -0.27 | 5.76 | .96 |
| Ethnicity | -0.44 | 1.45 | .76 | 1.18 | 1.31 | .36 | 6.27 | 4.95 | .21 | -0.03 | 8.64 | .99 |
| Victim Status | -0.05 | 1.49 | .70 | -0.42 | 1.36 | .75 | 5.38 | 5.09 | .29 | 2.57 | 8.50 | .76 |
| Previous Year Number/Score | 0.45 | .10 | .00 | 0.15 | .04 | .00 | 0.62 | .07 | .00 | 0.76 | .08 | .00 |

Note: Coeff=Coefficient, se=Standard Error, p=P-value

Table 10

Regression Analysis Results for Each Variable and Outcome Separated by Gender-Males

| Variable | Absences | | | Tardies | | | NJASK LA | | | NJASK Math | | |
|----------------------------|----------|------|-----|---------|------|-----|----------|------|-----|------------|------|-----|
| | Coeff | se | p | Coeff | se | p | Coeff | se | p | Coeff | se | p |
| Free/Reduced Lunch | 1.25 | .90 | .17 | 1.09 | 1.09 | .32 | -6.73 | 4.62 | .15 | -5.03 | 6.83 | .46 |
| Ethnicity | -0.53 | 1.17 | .65 | -0.57 | 1.36 | .67 | 5.97 | 5.27 | .26 | -0.13 | 8.45 | .98 |
| Victim Status | 2.05 | .96 | .04 | 0.15 | 1.17 | .89 | 4.42 | 4.60 | .34 | 2.84 | 7.26 | .69 |
| Previous Year Number/Score | 0.38 | .10 | .00 | 0.61 | 0.05 | .00 | 0.59 | .10 | .00 | 0.71 | 0.11 | .00 |

Note: Coeff=Coefficient, se=Standard Error, p=P-value

Chapter 5

Discussion

The findings of this study have implications for practice for the Happyville School District, specifically for Downtown Elementary School. In addition, using the approach specified within this study as a model, others can replicate the process to examine the short-term effects of HIB victimization on achievement and attendance for their schools. By using this model to analyze the same data collected in this study, administrators, support staff, and others can obtain insights which will help them better serve their students.

Overview

The original hypothesis for this study was that being the victim of bullying would have short-term negative effects, including increases in absences and tardies, as well as decreases in standardized test scores, specifically in Language Arts and Math. Overall, this study found no evidence that HIB victims at Downtown Elementary school were negatively affected in ways that decreased achievement as measured by standardized test scores in Language Arts and Math. Similarly, there was little evidence that HIB victims had increased attendance problems, with one exception. Males who were HIB victims had higher levels of absence than male nonvictims, being absent approximately two additional days per year. While the original hypothesis was not supported by the data, there exist circumstances in which this data would still be useful. For example, the current study showed the data for the year prior was the strongest predictor for scores the following year, demonstrating that the current policy in place is supported by data and not just a decision made in hopes of boosting test scores.

As the sample for this study was drawn from a limited period of time in a single school, the results cannot be generalized across other schools or contribute strongly to the larger body of literature regarding bullying. What can be generalized from this study is how to use data routinely collected by schools to investigate how bullying may be impacting students' attendance, tardiness, or standardized test scores to better develop services for this population of students. One other logical conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that findings for a specific school may not always be similar to those in the literature generally.

Below, strengths and limitations of this study are first reviewed. Next, the findings of the study are discussed with respect to findings in the existing literature. The discussion is divided into three sections, one each focusing on absences and tardies, achievement, and gender. Following this discussion, I explore implications for future practice, and conclude with suggestions for further research.

Strengths and Limitations

While there are a handful of strengths to this current study, there is also a long list of limitations. One of the strengths of the study was being able to conduct statistical analysis using a program accessible to all Anti-Bullying Specialists in the district. Originally, SPSS software was going to be purchased and utilized, but this would make replication outside of Downtown Elementary complicated and less feasible. By using Microsoft Excel to run descriptive statistics and regression analyses, these procedures can be easily replicated by others at Downtown Elementary, as well as the other 11 elementary schools within the Happyville School District, and at schools throughout New Jersey and the nation.

An additional strength of this study was the use of information that is readily accessible through daily operations of the school day. The amount of data collected on a daily basis is astounding within a school, and often this information is not used for purposes beyond record keeping. For example, attendance is just a way of monitoring who is and who is not present in the school building. Since this information is readily accessible on a daily basis, it could be used to see patterns, such as to investigate whether there are more absences following HIB investigations (or, to use an example not related to HIB, to see if there are more absences on Mondays after a Friday off). When patterns are identified, more supports from both the school and community can be marshaled to improve attendance throughout the school year.

Limitations to the study include the following: a modest sample size, the fact that I could not identify classified students for subgroup analysis, unreported HIB incidents, potential over-identification of HIB incidents, and side effects of a natural disaster. Two of the limitations are quite broad and would occur with any such study intended to serve a particular school. First, the small sample size limits the study's ability to identify HIB effects on a population of moderate size. Second, Downtown Elementary may differ in a variety of ways from other schools which might impact results, including the fact that most students scored proficient or better on their NJASK to begin with.

Another school-specific limitation is that the site used in this study follows an inclusion model as described above, where students classified with a disability and those not classified are taught together in the same general education setting. The data used in this study does not account for whether or not a student is classified. While students are not aware who is and who is not classified, excepting cases where a student knows and has told someone, does not change

the fact that classified students remain a more vulnerable population. These children fall within a range of disability categories, including specific learning disabilities, autism, and emotional disturbance. Classified students are more susceptible to lower achievement, lower social awareness, and higher risk of being victimized. Not identifying students with a disability remains a limitation of this study.

While all children and parents are annually trained on recognizing and preventing HIB, how to report HIB, and HIB procedure and paperwork, there are some children who suffer in silence, and some HIB incidents that go unreported. It is a limitation in this and many other bullying studies that these students are not formally identified as victims. Downtown Elementary School continues to advertise HIB reporting and procedure, making information readily accessible to families outside of school by posting contact information on its website, and making hard copies of forms available at all times in the office. However, these efforts do not guarantee that every student has been reached. A clear limitation of this study is that it relates only identified cases of victimization to achievement and attendance, rather than encompassing all incidents of victimization, including those which go unreported.

Although some HIB victimization may have been missed or unreported, there is also a distinct possibility that HIB incidents were over-identified during part of the time this study's data was collected, as well. The 2011-2012 school year was the first year of the NJ HIB law regulations implementation, and as such, the investigations from the beginning of the year may be more novice than those at the end of the year, resulting in a higher number of reported incidents. When comparing the number of investigations from both years to the district as a whole, Downtown Elementary School has a higher number than those of its sister schools, and

also more than the local middle school and high school. Over-identification could account for this relatively high number of incidents, and the decrease in incidents over time could indicate over-identification in the first year. However, the decrease also could be accounted for by changes in the population of 5th grade students, and in the social dynamics of the school climate. The decrease may also be accounted for by the presence of the law itself, which was enacted in an effort to decrease bullying in schools.

The broad language of the NJ HIB legislation could also contribute to over-identification for the state of NJ as a whole. The law states that a “reasonable person” should be able to identify what will and will not be a potential HIB, but the term “reasonable” is not defined. People reporting information for a HIB investigation may be emotionally linked to the alleged victim, such as parents or guardians. Does being emotionally linked decrease the likelihood that a person is “reasonable?” We live in a world of conflict, and some individuals have more readily accessible coping strategies than others. The definition should have more succinct parameters beyond identifying what a “reasonable person” perceives as having the potential to harm another person.

While the data were being collected for this study, the natural disaster Superstorm Sandy wreaked havoc on New Jersey, impacting many families in the Happyville School District. Luckily for Downtown Elementary School, no homes were rendered unlivable by flood damage, and while power was lost for an extended period of time, no families reported displacement as a result of the storm. During this time the number of HIB investigations and incidents decreased. At this time, it is speculated that the decline in incidents could be contributed to the amount of

community unity seen throughout Downtown Elementary School, as well as through Happyville School District as a whole.

Discussion – Findings in Relation to the Literature

The research indicates that victims of bullying are more likely to be school avoidant and to have more absences than students who are not bullied (Aalsma & Brown, 2008; Dake et al., 2003; Brown, Birch & Kancherla, 2005). This study found evidence in support of the literature but limited to male victims. This is not what was found in Brown, Birch and Kancherla's study (2005), where male victims reported that they were not afraid to come to school, even in the face of being bullied on a daily basis. It should be noted that the Brown, Birch and Kancherla (2005) study was based on survey data and not actual attendance records. It is possible that male victims reported that they were not afraid to come to school, but that their actual attendance rates reflected a different response.

The literature on gender differences regarding bullying is centered on perception, definition, and form, as opposed to achievement and truancy. In the truancy literature, Eaton, Brener, and Kann (2008) did a study regarding high risk behavior associated with absenteeism. Their study found both genders were equally absent for permission granted absences; females acquired more absences than males for non-permission granted absences (Brener & Kann, 2008). This study analyzed unexcused absences, and found the opposite: male HIB victims acquired more unexcused absences. This study's finding on male absences is not what was found in Henry's (2007) study on characteristics of the truant, which found that gender was not an impacting variable. Again, it should be noted that these studies relied on data from surveys as opposed to actual attendance data. It should also be noted that this current study did not compare

male victims to female victims but compared victims to nonvictims separately for males and females.

This current study did not look into the underlying causes of the specific bullying incidents which later led to identifying a student as a victim in a HIB investigation. It therefore cannot be concluded why male victims are more likely to have higher rates of absenteeism, but there are two possibilities. The first is that the sample size is small, and perhaps such a difference would not be present in a larger sample. The second is that the current literature indicates that males are predominantly associated with the more direct, physical form of bullying (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008; Carbone-Lopez, Esbensen, & Brick, 2010; Smith, Cowie, Olafsson & Liefoghe, 2002; Smith, 2004). Perhaps the male-associated direct form of bullying is more likely to result in absences to avoid these altercations, whereas indirect bullying is more difficult to avoid, so absences do not stop the altercations from occurring. These are speculations, as this study does not have data on the types of bullying experienced by each victim from which to draw further conclusions. Further research could be done to target specific responses for different types of bullying in this school.

Why were male victims more likely to be absent than male nonvictims? Looking back at the social-ecological framework of Espelage and Swearer (2004), there are several layers of contributing factors, which may or may not be related to HIB. Perhaps there is gender discrimination with respect to the level of acceptance for truancy. Males going through puberty may be perceived as lazier, more tired, or more noncompliant. Perhaps their absence in schools is not seen as uncharacteristic, or perhaps families, community, and schools are not as strict about male attendance. Looking at the study as a whole, a difference in absenteeism of 2 days

could easily be overlooked, especially if the days were not consecutive. This study looks at attendance with respect to frequency only, and not in relation to calendar dates.

Arch and Coyne's (2005) study found that females tend to bully more often than originally perceived. They found that females engage in bullying just as much as males, particularly in the form of indirect bullying (Arch & Coyne, 2005). This is not evident in the current study, where out of a sample of $n=126$, eight females were victims and 16 males were victims. While perpetrator data was not a part of this study, these numbers show that twice as many males were victims as females. The literature does suggest that gender-mixed bullying is possible, so perhaps factoring in the gender of the perpetrators would push the numbers to be more equal; this is currently an unknown factor. The question as to why there was a higher incidence of male victims should be followed up by future research analyzing whether the HIB incidents were direct or indirect forms of bullying. Perhaps the overall assumption that males bully more than females was present in the rate of reporting incidents.

The results of this study are inconsistent with studies that did find an association between victimization and reduced academic achievement. For this sample, being a victim of bullying did not affect achievement, as originally hypothesized. Nor did this study find that victimization had more adverse effects on one gender or the other regarding academic functioning. This is different than what Wang, Iannotti, and Luk (2011) found in their study, where victimization affected academic adjustment in females more than males. Juvonen, Nishina, and Graham (2000) found no differences by gender in their study on school functioning. However, their study did find negative effects of victimization on the factors associated with poor achievement (Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000). It should be noted that this study used

data from HIB investigations and NJASK scores; whereas Juvonen, Nishina, and Graham (2000) used survey reports, and found the perception of victimization to be associated with factors leading to poor achievement, rather than to actual achievement per se.

Return to Framework

The social-ecological framework used by Espelage and Swearer (2004) may shed some light as to why Downtown Elementary School varied away from the suggestions in the literature. As suggested by Espelage and Swearer (2004), changing one aspect of a complicated bullying situation can alter the perception of the presence of bullying. Perhaps the NJ HIB law does not fit the culture or school climate of Downtown Elementary School, which is a title 1 school; 49% of the students in the sample qualify for free/reduced lunch. Students with a low socioeconomic status may have large concerns, such as where their next meal is coming from, and may therefore be less phased by a HIB incident. Perhaps the NJ HIB law's broad definition is not a match for all NJ schools.

During Superstorm Sandy, there was a decline in HIB investigations. Why would a natural disaster decrease such happenings? It must go beyond the simplistic "good will towards man" complex; if this was a major factor, there would also be a decrease in HIB during the "Elf on the Shelf" season. Was it community altruism or pride that influenced the culture of the town to place their efforts and focus elsewhere? Or is this imparting too much power on Sandy's impact? It could be that a lack of school and lack of power led to less communicative exchanges between students, and therefore there was less opportunity for bullying to take place.

Why did this study find no academic discrepancies? Is the NJASK truly the best fit for analyzing the academic repercussions of HIB victimization? Within the framework, timing is not mentioned as a factor. Perhaps the same bullying event that took place in September would not have the same impact as if the event happened in May, which is much closer to the actual testing dates. This study did not look at HIB investigations with respect to calendar dates. It is possible that children in Downtown Elementary are already low on the achievement scale, and therefore a decline would be less noticeable. Alternately, maybe being a victim of HIB does not have short-term effects. The literature primarily reports on the long-term effects of perpetual bullying, which it does find leads to academic deficits over time.

The literature specified repetition as a defining characteristic of “bullying” (Olweus, 1994). On the other hand, the NJ HIB law allows for a single event to meet the criteria for HIB. Maybe negative effects on academics and attendance are not seen as a result of single instances of bullying, but are associated with repetitive bullying cases. Figure 2 compares and contrasts the NJ HIB definition with that found in the literature. Focusing too closely on single HIB events may not be well-matched to finding a negative impact on student academics, and this study did not differentiate between single offenses and repetitive bullying.

It could also be possible that using the NJASK as the tool for measuring achievement is not a good match. The NJASK is an annual assessment given only in the spring. It is possible that incidents of bullying victimization that occur in the fall have been resolved by the time the test is administered in the spring. Another possibility is that the test is too broad to see the impact. The test is supposed to cover the knowledge a student has acquired over the course of the entire school year. If a student has not mastered one small section due to disruption, it may

not reflect on the NJ ASK as clearly. It may be beneficial for future studies to focus on academics that are weekly based, such as homework or weekly assessments.

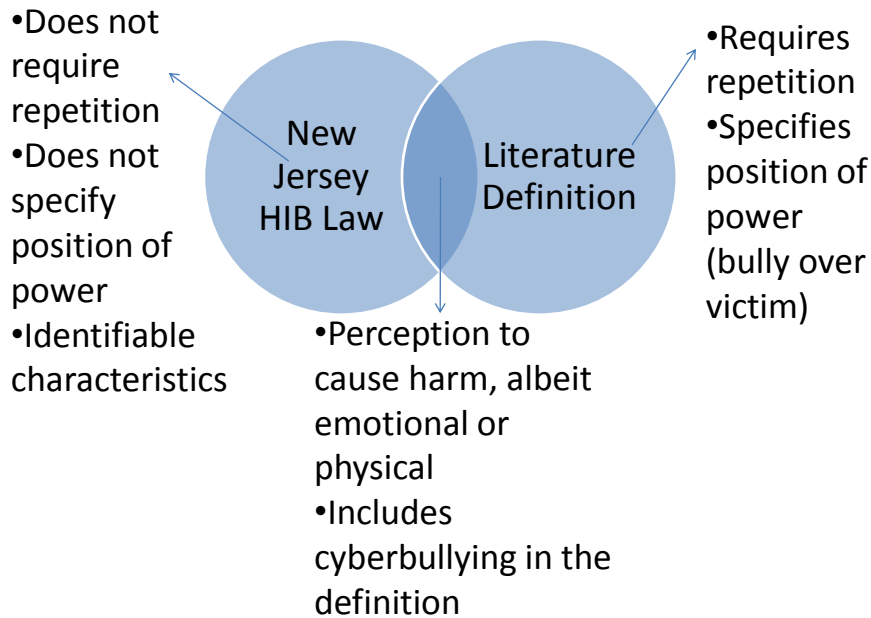


Figure 2. The NJ HIB Law and Literature Definition Venn diagram

Implications for Practice

This study investigated whether there are academic consequences of HIB that are not being actively addressed by the interventions currently available for HIB victims in Downtown Elementary School. This study did not find HIB victims to have lower standardized achievement scores on the NJASK Language Arts or Math sections. This study intended to provide the school with information on whether bullying affects academic outcomes, in order to gauge the need for additional interventions and strategies, such as tutoring and test preparations, for HIB victims. This study suggests that these intervention packages were correctly focused on students who had

low achievement, regardless of HIB victim status. This study also found that the previous year's scores were the strongest predictors of achievement scores for the following year. This study justifies the current emphasis on students who have already scored low on achievement tests as being the most in need of interventions and strategies to improve achievement.

The model for analyses that this study provides can be used in future years to continue to monitor and secure services for the students which needs it most. Further, although the hypothesized effects were not found in this cohort of students, this does not guarantee that future cohorts will follow the same pattern. This model can be used within all 12 elementary schools in the district for data collection. While the sample size of this study was too small to generalize outside of the site, it works very well for addressing problems in practice, and can be used as intended.

This study found that male victims are more likely to have increased absences when compared to male nonvictims. Even this small finding can be helpful in guiding school resources appropriately. Such data allows the school to access community-based supports, and can be used to demonstrate to the district and the Board of Education that additional supports may be needed for these students. Schools using data-driven policies have more opportunities for grant application, as well as for a more effective use of supportive programming. This study will support Downtown Elementary School in securing the necessary resources for male HIB victims to help improve their attendance rates.

As previously discussed, truancy is a complex issue. The literature on truancy identifies several contributing factors, including family values, lack of school engagement, and transportation difficulties (Eaton, Brener, & Kann, 2008; Gottfried, 2013; Henry, 2007, Jones,

Toma, & Zimmer, 2008). It may be beneficial to the Downtown Elementary team to look into these other factors for students who have a high rate of absenteeism, and to focus less on bullying victimization as the underlying cause. During the study, some outlier data were identified; one student had 24 unexcused absences, and another had 71 unexcused tardies. These high numbers need to be addressed. Neither of these students were identified as HIB victims, suggesting that these high numbers are caused by something other than victim status.

Further Research

A future study could be conducted to see if there is an association between natural disasters and decreases in HIB. This might provide evidence in support of the idea that Superstorm Sandy was partially responsible for a reduction in HIB because of impacts on community unity. If a link is found, it could inform efforts to improve school climate and decrease HIB. Happyville is an extremely polarized school district regarding socio-economic status, with a strong line drawn across the highway identifying the “underprivileged” section versus the “privileged” section. During Sandy, the support from the entire district came pouring through the school doors, perhaps relieving some of the unspoken tension across the highway. Perhaps recreating this sense of unity would benefit the district climate and result in a decrease in HIB incidents.

Future studies should also analyze the effects of HIB victimization on students with disabilities. For this study, this subgroup was not analyzed separately to see if there is a statistically significant difference between classified and non-classified students in regards to attendance, tardies, and standardized achievement. This information would be beneficial, particularly because Downtown Elementary School follows the inclusion model. Such studies

could also contribute to the literature on the successes and potential downfalls of the inclusion model.

While this study identified both male and female victims of bullying investigations, there were twice as many males identified as females. Why the number discrepancy? Is this due to the different types of bullying each gender tends to employ? Is it a result of gender reporting trends? It appears that more research relating to gender differences in bullying and victimization is warranted. This future research should also analyze perpetrator data in using quantitative and qualitative methods, with qualitative data perhaps offering a more in-depth understanding of student experiences of HIB. A study of this nature could answer more questions about mixed and same gender bullying incidents, and also contribute to the literature on the gender-specific types of bullying behaviors in which children engage.

This particular study analyzed short-term effects of bullying only. A longitudinal study could follow up with these cohorts of students to see if long-term effects occur from being identified as a victim of bullying. The literature points to the presence of long-term effects, and a longitudinal study could make a strong case for more preventative measures to be put in place. In addition, such a study could further analyze whether supports originally seen as superfluous were beneficial in preventing long-term consequences, such as being disaffected with school and truancy. Such a study might also examine whether long-term effects were the result of persistent bullying, and whether long-term effects were seen in cases of one-time bullying.

The small sample sized used by this study may be the root of the problem, and the hypothesis may in fact hold true for a larger set of students. The studies of Henry (2007), Ebensen and Carson (2009), Hamre and Pianta (2005) had sample sizes that were well into the

hundreds of participants. Perhaps if this study were expanded across the entire district, there would be more findings to support an increase of absenteeism and decrease in NJASK scores associated with HIB victimization.

This study utilized a quantitative approach, as discussed in the limitations section of the methods chapter. Further research, conducted by someone other than the Anti-Bullying Specialists, could use a qualitative approach to gain further insights on bullying. Qualitative data may shed some additional light on the who, what, where, when, and why of bullying. This information could be used to further understand relationships to gender, achievement, truancy, and other variables. A survey approach using questionnaires may yield results more similar to the studies in the greater body of literature.

A future study could be done on the district as a whole and then broken down by school to demonstrate how demographics from elementary schools can change the entire make-up and perception of HIB data. Happyville School district is highly polarized. On one side of town, CEOs send their children to school with iPads and sushi for lunch, while on the other side of town families live on welfare checks and eat free lunches provided by the state, hoping their teacher will provide them with a new notebook to use that school year. A district-wide analysis may prove fruitful in showing the state and the Board of Education that not all schools within the same district are equal, and perhaps division of resources should be better matched to students' needs. Perhaps attendance for male victims is only an issue for Downtown Elementary, but further analysis may find that decreased attendance for female victims in a more uptown elementary school is present.

Throughout this study, I have continually returned to the social-ecological framework by Espalage and Swearer (2004). A crude metaphor for this particular framework would be the butterfly effect: change one aspect of the framework, and the whole picture shifts significantly. Each school needs to be identified as its own culture, with its own norms and policies. HIB, as defined by NJ law, may not be an applicable definition for a school in a low socio-economic area. Perhaps schools with extremely high standardized achievement scores would not even notice if a small proportion of their population's test scores dropped by 10 points. These are all speculations, and certainly further research is needed into how the individualization of a school and a culture can be taken into account when a statewide policy is being created.

In conclusion, this study provides a model for local research in specific schools and districts, as well as some implications for further research on HIB in general. Both types of studies should move beyond the short-term focus of this study to include the long-term outcomes relating to attendance and achievement as well. The information generated from such studies will help school personnel and state policy makers formulate better responses to HIB. While the findings may not have supported the original hypothesis to the study, the results can nonetheless be utilized by the Downtown Elementary School I&RS Team. The model of this study can be replicated, and future cohorts of students will have quantitative analyses supporting the use of specific interventions for particular groups of students. In the case of this study, students who have partially proficient scores should receive academic supports to enhance their achievement for the following year.

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