

Running head: SCHOOL STAKEHOLDER ROLES IN BULLYING PREVENTION

SCHOOL STAKEHOLDER ROLES IN BULLYING PREVENTION

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# SCHOOL STAKEHOLDER ROLES IN BULLYING PREVENTION

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### Abstract

To better understand optimal practices for reducing bullying in schools, it is important to investigate school stakeholder roles and involvement in bullying prevention activities. The purpose of the current study is to examine differential involvement in bullying prevention among school stakeholders, barriers to stakeholders' involvement, and the degree to which perceived administrative support relates to level of involvement. Extant data were analyzed for the current study, utilizing survey responses from school stakeholders from 27 schools who participated in the School Climate Transformation Project, a school climate improvement initiative in New Jersey. A one-way ANOVA found no statistically significant differences among school stakeholders' roles in anti-bullying initiatives. The most frequent school climate team members were teachers. The greatest barrier to involvement was a lack of time, followed by a lack of perceived administrative support. A statistically significant positive correlation was found between perceived levels of principal support and involvement in anti-bullying initiatives.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES .....	v
INTRODUCTION: REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	1
Role of Teachers in Anti-Bullying Initiatives .....	1
Role of Principals in Anti-Bullying Initiatives.....	8
Role of School Mental Health Professionals.....	13
Barriers to Involvement.....	16
Gap in Current Research .....	17
METHODOLOGY .....	20
Participants .....	20
Design.....	21
Measurement/Procedure .....	21
Data Analysis Plan .....	23
RESULTS.....	25
DISCUSSION.....	26
Key Findings .....	26
Team Compositions.....	26
Level of Involvement .....	27
Principal Support.....	27
Barriers .....	28
Limitations.....	29
Implications for Future Research .....	30
APPENDICES .....	32
REFERENCES.....	35
TABLES .....	40

## LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page #
1.	Means and Standard Deviations for Extent of Involvement by..... Stakeholder Type	40
2.	One-Way Analysis of Variance of Level of Involvement by ..... Stakeholder Type	41
3.	One-Way Analysis of Variance of Involvement in Informing Parents by... Stakeholder Type	41
4.	Means and Standard Deviations for Barriers to Involvement by..... Stakeholder Type	42

## **Introduction**

### **Role of Teachers in Anti-Bullying Initiatives**

There is growing research regarding teacher involvement in anti-bullying initiatives. Orpinas and Horne (2006) highlight teachers' roles in bullying prevention with respect to classroom management, teaching subject matter, and maintaining high expectations for students. Teacher management is one of the most important components of anti-bullying initiatives (Holden, Holden, & Paterson, 2012). When teachers use activities such as group work, it cultivates a sense of belonging while decreasing the risk of bullying in schools (Solomon, Battistich, Kim, & Watson, 1996). Gregory et al. (2010) found that clearly focused teaching of school rules and the availability of supportive adults reduced both student aggression as well as victimization. Structured classrooms are defined as those with clear and consistently enforced rules. Overall, schools with more structure provided a safer learning environment as well as less bullying and victimization. The creation of a positive, collaborative, and mutually supportive atmosphere at school is linked to fewer bullying incidents (Bauman, Rigby, & Hoppa, 2008).

Researchers suggest that teachers should also form positive relationships with students in order to combat bullying. Teachers' potential to intervene in bullying situations have also been emphasized in the literature (Kennedy, Russom, and Kevorkian, 2012). Although there is a great deal of evidence that peers are effective in preventing bullying, teachers may be less effective in this regard. Teachers reported that they intervened in bullying situations; however, observational research shows that they do so

in only 15-18 percent of incidents (Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000). It may be that teachers need more professional development training on bullying prevention than they are currently receiving (Kennedy, Russom, & Kevorkian, 2012). However, it could also be that teachers are not intervening because they do not know that bullying is occurring. Boulton, Boulton, Down, Sanders, and Craddock (2017) found that high school aged students were not likely to tell their teachers about bullying, with the strongest barriers being peer disapproval, feeling weak and undermined, and preferring autonomy.

Research has shown that implementation of school-wide anti-bullying programs is a promising way to effectively reduce bullying (Ahtola, Haataja, Kärnä, Poskiparta, & Salmivalli, 2013). Whole-school prevention programs require a great deal of extra time and effort for teachers implementing the anti-bullying lessons in their classes. KiVa (an acronym for *Kiusaamista Vastaan*, “against bullying”), an anti-bullying program that was developed in Finland, is based on the idea that a positive change in bystander behavior can reduce the motivation for bullies to continue their behavior (Kärnä, Voeten, Little, Poskiparta, Kaljonen, and Salmivalli, 2011). The KiVa student lessons are the core universal component of the KiVa program. Some main themes of the student lessons include emotions, not joining in the bullying, supporting the victim, and standing up for oneself. The goals of the lessons are to demonstrate how bystander behavior maintains bullying, increase empathy toward victims of bullying, and teach children strategies to support victims. Activities such as role-play exercises, discussions, group work, and watching short films about bullying take place during lessons.



A unique component of the KiVa program is an anti-bullying computer game, which was played during lessons. The game tested student's existing knowledge about bullying as they gained new knowledge about how to act in bullying scenarios during real-life situations. A team of three teachers and school stakeholders addressed bullying incidents with victims and bullies at small group discussion meetings. Another distinct aspect of the program is that following bullying incidents, teachers met with groups of prosocial and high-status classmates to encourage them to support victims.

Research on KiVa has indicated that the more teachers felt support for and commitment to anti-bullying initiatives from the person spearheading program implementation, the more frequently teachers implemented the anti-bullying lessons in their classrooms. In addition, the program successfully reduced bullying and victimization rates in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. Students that received the intervention also reinforced bullies less, had higher self-efficacies for intervening in incidents, and bullied other less. A strength of the study was the large sample size of 8,166 students. However, a limitation of the study was that most students were native Finns (i.e. Caucasian). Long-term effects of KiVa were also not found one year after the intervention took place.

Prevention activities in schools include establishing anti-bullying policies as well as staff trainings. Hirschstein, Edstrom, Frey, Snell, and MacKenzie (2007) examined the relationship between teacher implementation of a bullying prevention program, *Steps to Respect*, in third- through sixth-grade classrooms. They found that teachers were key agents of change at both the classroom level and individual level. The mixed methods

study was different in that it used multi-informant (teacher, student) questionnaires as well as observations of playground behaviors. Teachers' roles include presenting classroom lessons that provided guidance for students involved in bully-victim scenarios. This included prompting and reinforcing a child to make eye contact and to use a strong voice as a victim of an interaction.

During staff training, teachers were provided a script with topics such as types of bullying, including responsible bystander behavior. In the classroom, instructional strategies included direct instruction, discussions, skill rehearsal, and interactive games. Results showed that teacher coaching of students involved in bullying incidents was associated with less observed victimization and destructive bystander behavior for fifth and sixth grade students. One disadvantage of the study was that among the schools that were surveyed, the majority of students were of Caucasian descent. In addition, all school districts were located in Suburban areas. Therefore, findings may not be generalizable to students from varying backgrounds and communities.

Letendre, Ostrander, and Mickens (2016) examined the implementation of a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program for bullying prevention within pre-K to 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. The program trained school stakeholders to model and provide practice opportunities for children to learn skills for stopping bullying behavior. Teachers, support staff, and principals were all trained in the curriculum and had different roles in implementing the program. Teachers introduced initial skill-building lessons and incorporated the lessons into their academic units. The support staff worked with individuals and small groups of students who had difficulty with initial skill-building due

to emotional, behavioral, or language difficulties. The principals worked with students who had disciplinary referrals and required more problem solving as well as consequences during sessions. The program emphasized skill building for all students including active participation and support for bystanders who would have otherwise failed to intervene.

In Letendre and colleagues' study, teachers noted that having a universal language regarding bullying and the easy integration of the PBIS program into the classroom curricula contributed to the success of the intervention. They indicated that role-playing not only allowed for the practice of assertive skills, but also prompted students to take further action due to the development of empathy for the victims. Barriers to implementation included starting the program after the school year began, lack of visual cues and posters, not enough reinforcement for students, and generalizability of scenarios outside the classroom. This qualitative study was unique in that it used focus groups to analyze the successful elements of the intervention as well as barriers to success from the viewpoint of school stakeholders (teachers, support staff, administrators). A drawback of the study was that it examined implementation of PBIS in one urban elementary school located in Connecticut, which could mean that successes and failures of the program in the current school may not be generalizable to schools in other locations. More research is needed to explore the roles of various school stakeholders, the specific anti-bullying activities they are involved in, and the barriers to their involvement.

Due to the high frequency of interactions between teachers and students, studying teacher perceptions is vital for determining optimal approaches for reducing bullying.

Dake, Price, Telljohann, and Funk (2003) assessed 359 teachers' perceptions and practices of bullying prevention activities as well as reported barriers to implementing those activities. One fourth-grade teacher at each of the 700 randomly selected public elementary schools was asked to participate and 359 of them responded. Schools in the United States that served students in grades pre-K to 6<sup>th</sup> grade were eligible to participate in the study. More specifically, teachers were mailed four-page questionnaires about the frequency with which they carried out each bullying prevention activity including: creating rules, having serious talks, and setting aside time for discussion. Teachers also provided information about their perceptions regarding the extent of bullying in their schools and the effectiveness of each of these activities. Most teachers' participation in anti-bullying was limited to serious talks with bullies when a bullying situation arose.

In Dake and colleagues' study, teachers reported involving students in creating classroom rules regarding bullying, having serious talks about bullying, and setting aside time for regular classroom discussions about bullying prevention. Two-thirds of teachers reported that they were not engaging in setting aside regular classroom time to discuss bullying, whereas less than one-third of respondents reported that they involved students in creating classroom rules about preventing bullying. The current study suggests that teachers were engaging in reactionary rather than preventative activities, which should be the focus of a whole school approach. Half of teachers perceived no barriers to implementing these activities. The greatest perceived barriers were students' lack of knowledge about bullying, low prioritization of bullying compared to other issues, a lack of perceived problem, and students not taking responsibility seriously.

Limitations of Dake and colleagues' study included a low response rate, which posed a threat to the study's external validity. In addition, most responding teachers were female, held a Master's degree, taught in urban schools, and lived in the South. Other bullying prevention activities should be analyzed and evaluated in order to expand the growing research on effective strategies that can be used to reduce the amount of bullying and victimization that students are experiencing. It is important for future research to look more closely at teacher roles in specific bullying prevention activities, as well as their perceptions regarding the importance of anti-bullying initiatives.

In contrast, Richard, Schneider, and Mallet (2011) found that schools with a positive school climate were less prone to bullying and victimization. In a survey study, 18,222 students, 701 teachers, and 478 principals were randomly chosen from 478 schools in France to identify the aspects of school climate linked to bullying issues. Participants were found through a larger study that looked at middle-school students' social and emotional experiences. The study was unique in that it examined differences at the school level from individual differences among pupils. Students completed a questionnaire developed by Dauphin and Trosseille (2004) on physical and verbal bullying, as well as school climate. It was found that students who reported high levels of impulsivity, anxiety, and peer conflict reported higher rates of victimization. In addition, higher achieving students were at a higher risk of being victimized.

Results from Richard and colleagues' study showed a link between positive school climate within schools and a reduction in bullying incidents. Specifically, there were fewer bullying scenarios in schools that endorsed positive student-teacher

relationships. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that having positive student-teacher relationships is a crucial anti-bullying initiative (RasKauskas, Gregory, Harvey, Rifshana, & Evans, 2010). An advantage of the study included its large sample size. Limitations included potential social desirability effects associated with the data collection approach.

### **Role of Principals in Anti-Bullying Initiatives**

Various school-based bullying prevention programs have been developed and evaluated for their effectiveness. However, Ahtola, Karna, Poskiparta, & Salmivalli, (2013) indicated that teachers either implement these programs with less quality over time or choose not to implement the innovation at all. Principal support for anti-bullying initiatives is associated with teachers' use of bullying prevention programs. In addition, teachers' perceived level of principal support has been found to be positively correlated with teachers' self-efficacy for working with bullies (Skinner, Babinski, & Gifford, 2013). Thus, principal support is a crucial factor to consider when developing school-based anti-bullying initiatives.

According to Austin, Reynolds, and Barnes (2012), the first vital step of bullying prevention is to eliminate the element of denial associated with bullying as well as implement effective school policies. This requires consistency, a focus on positive behaviors, active teacher participation, and supportive personnel (Young, Hardy, Hamilton, Biernesser, Sun, & Niebergall, 2009). School principals' roles in anti-bullying initiatives are to coordinate the implementation of school wide bullying intervention

policies. In order for the policy to be effective, the principal must train staff and faculty. Other key stakeholders in implementing anti-bullying policies in schools are school counselors, as they are change agents for positive school climate.

Young and colleagues (Young et al., 2009) examined the effectiveness of a middle school bullying program by analyzing the extent of bullying, student strategies to resist bullying, and teacher perceptions of bullying. Participants were seventh and eighth grade students from a large, mid-Atlantic public school. School counselors worked with school principals to support teachers and other school personnel in understanding bullying. Specifically, school principals and school counselors worked in collaboration to provide targeted professional development for students, parents, community leaders, and faculty. The school counselors taught bullying lessons to students during health and physical education classes. These lessons focused on the role of the bystander in bullying scenarios. In addition, school counselors presented strategies to teachers to identify and address bullying incidents.

A distinct aspect of the program studied by Young and colleagues was an anonymous bullying-reporting web site that was created for students. Administrators regularly monitored student concerns in collaboration with counselors. Another standout aspect of the program was a safety and cyberbullying presentation that was given to parents on a day that they were in the building for parent teacher conferences. Results showed that bullying was a school-wide issue that required support from the entire staff. Findings showed a decrease in the number of students reporting bullying after anti-

bullying lessons. School counselors, principals, and teachers reported fewer conflict mediation referrals, fewer suspensions, and fewer teacher referrals.

School principals' primary roles in anti-bullying initiatives can include leading and structuring program implementation, as well as providing opportunities for coordination among school stakeholders who are actively providing training and implementing the programs. Specifically, they provide seminars and training to staff. They also plan, organize, and evaluate these programs. For example, the Zero program is an evidence-based bullying prevention program from Norway that uses a whole-school approach to preventing bullying (Roland & Midthassel, 2012). The term zero comes from the Norwegian Manifesto Against Bullying, in which zero tolerance for bullying was a key approach. The program begins with principals leading a "project group" made up of key staff, parents, and students. With the Zero program, school stakeholders engage in activities that include providing three seminars throughout the school year about bullying dynamics, prevention, and intervention. The schools receive materials such as books, films, posters, and presentations for parent meetings to aid with bullying prevention. Although students play an important role in the reduction of bullying behavior, the interventionists are mainly responsible for setting standards for general bullying prevention, authoritative classroom leadership, intervention, and resilience.

Results from a pre-post student survey evaluation of the Zero program implemented in more than 360 Norwegian primary schools showed that school leadership had a significant influence on program implementation (Roland & Midthassel, 2012). Key roles of school principals included having a plan and following it well, building



structure into the organization, and conducting follow-up procedures. Schools with firm leadership also exhibited the best implementation. Schools that implemented The Zero Program showed significant decreases in bullying. The number of victims and bullies involved in bullying incidents weekly or more often decreased between 40 and 70 percent. This research suggests that bullying prevention requires the support of school leadership for successful program development. The limitations of the study include the homogenous student population. It is unclear how these results would transfer to a diverse study body.

Cron (2010) conducted a three-year long case study that examined how a leadership team in Boston Massachusetts implemented mandatory legislative policy throughout a suburban K-12 public school district. More specifically, the study identified and analyzed influences on leadership during the design and implementation of an anti-bullying program. Teachers, guidance and adjustment counselors, and an elementary school principal that were members of the Bullying Prevention Advisory Committee (BPAC) were interviewed about their role in the program. Findings showed that state law, programs, competing programs, district goals, budget, facilities, and experiences are all structural components that influenced how leadership was carried out within the school system. Respondents indicated that identifying these structures early on maximized their resources without spending an overwhelming amount of time combating structural issues. BPAC members defined their role as a liaison that transferred information between the committee and their original school building or an outside place. The building principal described the main part of her role as communicating with the

other building principals at each elementary school in the district. The principal indicated that the committee brought cohesion among the schools in the district. The BPAC's Chair described her role as a "formal leader" through establishing goals and deadlines, as well as coaching and supporting members while they collaboratively solved important issues. Important issues included identifying and clarifying aspects of the situation such as creating a district-wide working definition of bullying. For example, the committee developed the Merton's Reporting Protocol, a script that adults in the district could use when confronted with a bullying situation. The reporting protocol was developed through a multi-step, collaborative process, and was then reviewed by the committee as well as a range of stakeholders before being implemented. The chair delegated responsibilities to members of the committee, as well as challenged committee members to step out of their comfort zone.

A unique aspect of Cron's (2010) study was the use of structured interviews to identify what factors influence leadership practices of a team. Additionally, it distinctively examined how legislation is received and assimilated by schools. However, the generalizability of this study's findings may be limited.

In addition to considering ongoing research on principals' involvement in anti-bullying initiatives, it is also important to take into account legislation that may influence principals' actions. Schools are required to protect students from any and all abuse (Willard, 2010). Currently, forty-five states have anti-bullying laws. Anti-bullying laws include policies and procedures that outline how school officials should report against and properly investigate incidents of bullying (Limber, 2010). These laws affect school

principals' roles and responsibilities regarding bullying prevention. Many of these statutes include findings about the seriousness of bullying, including its relationship to school violence and school performance.

For example, in the state of New Jersey, the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act requires that schools have programs or initiatives in place to prevent and address harassment, intimidation, and bullying (HIB). Districts are required to form school safety teams to develop, foster, and maintain a positive school climate (N.J.S.A 18A:37-21). School safety teams are composed of the school principal, a teacher, a school anti-bullying specialist, and a parent. They are responsible for strengthening school climate policies, preventing and intervening with HIB incidents of students, educating the community as well as school stakeholders, and participating in professional development trainings.

In considering principals' compliance with legislation, Williard (2011) notes that it is important for principals to respond to verbal interactions that threaten students' safety and emotional well being, both inside and outside of the school building. Williard (2011) suggests that once a situation has begun to create a hostile environment at school, principals have the authority to respond. As Williard (2010) notes, principals also have the authority to respond to off-campus student incidents of cyber bullying if it has or could cause a disruption at school. Regardless of whether or not they are motivated by legislation, more research is needed to explore principals' existing roles and their influence on bullying prevention.

### **Role of School Mental Health Professionals in Anti-Bullying Initiatives**

School mental health professionals have a crucial role in anti-bullying initiatives. Their specific roles include supporting teachers, monitoring program adherence and fidelity, and implementing programs. For example, Hirschstein and colleagues (Hirschstein et al., 2007) studied school psychologists' role as program consultants within schools supporting teachers with an anti-bullying initiative, *Steps to Respect*. School psychologists' responsibilities included supplying teachers with photocopied materials from the curriculum, as well as meeting bi-weekly to discuss and monitor implementation efforts. School psychologists were responsible for completing ratings of observed teacher lesson adherence and instructional quality. They followed a checklist related to specific learning objectives to assess the quality of instruction.

Previous research has shown that having a positive school climate is associated with fewer bullying incidents in schools (Richard, Schneider, & Mallet, 2004). School psychologists are involved in improving a school's climate in multiple ways, such as teaching social behavior and initiating discussions regarding bullying. Their role can include visiting classrooms in order to assess bullying-prevention programs. School psychologists have been shown to increase positive social climates within classrooms via small group and classroom wide discussions (Hertz-Lazarowitz & Od-Cohen, 1992).

In order to more accurately understand how schools were intervening to address peer victimization, O'Malley (2009) surveyed school psychologists from public schools in Northern California. Interventions and their perceived importance were analyzed. School psychologists reported that the most available and important interventions were whole-school no tolerance policies, communication between home and school, and

school climate interventions. More specifically, school psychologists endorsed teaching social behavior as well as giving classroom social skills training to teach positive interaction skills. A limitation of the study included the small number of peer victimization interventions used.

Research has also detailed the role of school counselors in bullying prevention programs (Midgett, Dumas, Sears, Lundquist, & Hausheer, 2015). As the role of school counselors has shifted into a leadership position as a systemic change agent, they are in a position to prevent bullying at the school-wide level. As teachers already have many demands placed on them with regard to bullying prevention, school counselors are now being called upon to implement these programs. Thus, school counselors are also implementation leaders.

Midgett, Dumas, Lundquist, and Hausheer (2015) developed a counselor-based psychoeducation program for middle school students, specifically to teach students to intervene as bystanders. The leadership role of the school counselor was the main component of this program. School counselor's main roles were to implement the program with the help of graduate students. Seventy-four students were selected as peer advocates and were trained by graduate students. Graduate students, who were also mental health counselors in training, taught students how to identify bullying scenarios and confidently intervene in them. School counselors then met with students individually and in small groups to provide continued support around responding to bullying scenarios. The intervention was modified off of the Bully-Proofing CARES strategies (Garrity et al., 2004b).

Midgett and colleagues' program was adapted for school counselors to implement without having to rely on teacher instructional time to carry out the initiative. School counselors leading the programs saved schools both time and resources. After the training, students showed a significant increase in their ability to identify different types of bullying, increased knowledge of the bullying intervention strategies, and general confidence intervening. Student knowledge was measured with The Student-Advocates Pre-and Post-Scale, which was developed by researchers to measure the effectiveness of the training. A limitation of the study was that the sample was not ethnically diverse, as 89.2% of the student population was of Caucasian descent. Another point to consider in the limited generalizability of results was the small sample size.

Based on the current body of research, school mental health professionals such as school psychologists and school counselors appear to have similar roles regarding anti-bullying initiatives. More research is needed to more clearly distinguish anti-bullying roles among school stakeholders, by breaking down their level of involvement in specific activities.

### **Barriers to Involvement in Anti-Bullying Initiatives**

Dake, Price, Telljohann, and Funk (2004) argued that the most effective strategy to prevent bullying in schools is a whole school approach that utilizes several activities to decrease bullying incidents. Researchers surveyed 378 elementary principals on barriers to implementing bullying prevention activities, as well as their perceptions of the extent of bullying in their schools. They found that a whole school approach was rarely being used in elementary schools. The results showed that schools were more likely to have a

bullying prevention committee if their principal had received bullying prevention training. Results also showed that schools that already had bullying prevention committees also perceived a greater extent of bullying occurring in their schools. The barriers to anti-bullying initiatives identified included bullying not being perceived as a priority relative to other problems, a lack of training, and a lack of resources. According to teachers, lack of training and a lack of perceived effectiveness of bullying prevention activities were the most significant barriers to implementation (Dake, Price, Telljohann, and Funk, 2003).

Schools with the greatest number of barriers to anti-bullying efforts were schools that had not yet established a bullying prevention committee. Schools that had a bullying prevention committee for two or more years reported the least number of barriers. A strength of the study was the large number of elementary schools in the United States that were surveyed, which could make findings generalizable to broader populations. Limitations of the study included a lower than ideal response rate, as well as the chance that principals may have responded in a socially desirable way. More research is needed to determine what specific barriers school stakeholders are facing that interfere with their involvement in anti-bullying initiatives.

### **Gap in the Current Research**

Much of the research on school stakeholder involvement in anti-bullying initiatives focuses on teachers. This research fails to adequately address the role that school stakeholders (principals, psychologists, counselors) have in anti-bullying initiatives. School mental health professionals such as psychologists and counselors may

have similar responsibilities in anti-bullying initiatives, such as supporting teachers and implementing programs. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between school stakeholders specific roles by looking at their level of involvement with specific activities. Involvement is defined by school leaders participation in various anti-bullying initiatives such as planning and implementing bullying interventions, facilitating school-wide anti-bullying workshops, attending trainings, meetings and discussion groups, and monitoring progress towards goals.

More research is needed to explore the crucial aspect principal support plays in implementing anti-bullying initiatives as well as address the level of support that principals provide. It is also important to recognize whether principal support could be affecting level of school stakeholder involvement in anti-bullying initiatives. Further, it may be that school stakeholders do not have time allocated in their schedule dedicated to bullying prevention activities. A lack of resources could mean that schools may not have money in their budgets to allocate toward bullying prevention programs, and therefore, do not have the necessary materials to implement them. Stakeholders may have competing responsibilities that their job role requires, which prevent them from participating in anti-bullying initiatives.

The purpose of the current study was to determine differences in the level of involvement among school stakeholders with regard to anti-bullying initiatives as well as examine the barriers to their involvement. Barriers such as a lack of time and resources, competing responsibilities, and logistical challenges were explored. The level of support from school principals and perceived receipt of appropriate training such as knowing how



to appropriately and efficiently implement activities were also explored. In addition, the study aimed to pinpoint the degree that principal support regarding bullying prevention was related to school stakeholders' (principals, counselors, psychologists, and teachers) level of involvement in anti-bullying initiatives.

The research questions were as follows:

**Research Question #1: Who are the members of the school climate teams?**

It was hypothesized that school climate teams would consist of principals, teachers, counselors and psychologists.

**Research Question #2a: What is the difference among school stakeholders (principals, mental health professionals, teachers) level of involvement in anti-bullying initiatives?**

**Research Question #2b: Which activities define each stakeholder's involvement in these initiatives?**

It was hypothesized that school counselors would have the most involvement in anti-bullying initiatives, followed by school principals. School principals coordinate bullying prevention program implementation. They also work in collaboration with school counselors to provide targeted professional development for students, parents, and faculty. (Young, Hardy, Hamilton, Biernesser, Sun, & Niebergall, 2009). Additional research has shown that school counselors are often being called upon as implementation leaders of bullying intervention programs (Midgett, Dumas, Sears, Lundquist, & Hausheer, 2015).

**Research Question #3: What are the most significant barriers to school stakeholders involvement in anti-bullying initiatives?**

It was hypothesized that a lack of appropriate training would be the most significant barrier to school stakeholders' lack of involvement in anti-bullying initiatives. In past research, both teachers and principals identified a lack of training as a barrier to carrying out bullying prevention activities (Dake, Price, Telljohann, & Funk, 2003; Dake, Price, Telljohann & Funk, 2004)

**Research Question #4: What is the relationship between level of perceived principal support regarding bullying prevention efforts and level of school stakeholder (principals, teachers, mental health professionals) involvement in anti-bullying initiatives?**

It was hypothesized that higher levels of perceived principal support would be associated with higher levels of school stakeholders' direct involvement in anti-bullying initiatives. Skinner, Babinski, and Gifford (2013) found that principal support was positively associated with teacher expectations and self-efficacy for working with bullies. In addition, schools with firm leadership also had the best anti-bullying initiative implementation (Roland & Midthassel, 2012). Taken together, these results suggest that perceived principal support may be a key factor in promoting higher levels of school stakeholder involvement in anti-bullying initiatives.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Data for the study was collected from school stakeholders who were members of school climate initiative teams. Stakeholders were from 27 schools in New Jersey, ranging from elementary to high school level, as well as combined elementary-middle schools. The schools were participants in the School Climate Transformation Project, an initiative conducted by Rutgers University funded by the New Jersey Department of Education. For the current study, extant data from the School Climate Transformation Project was used. The schools were involved in school climate improvement to varying degrees; 14 were in their first year of participating in the initiative and the remaining schools had been a part of the initiative for two years. The school systems served a socioeconomically and culturally diverse student population identified as White (46.2%), Hispanic (23.6%), Black (22.4%), Asian/Pacific Islander (6.3%) and Alaskan/American Indian (1.5%). School stakeholders ( $n = 85$ ) included 39 teachers, 27 mental health professionals and 19 principals, with an average of three to five stakeholders from each school.

### **Design**

The study utilized a survey approach with a correlational design. Descriptive statistics were calculated, including means, ranges, and standard deviations. A One-way ANOVA was used to analyze the differences among school stakeholders' specific roles in anti-bullying initiatives. A correlational analysis was conducted to examine the association between perceived administrative support and school stakeholder involvement in anti-bullying initiatives.

**Measurement/Procedure**

To assess the role of school stakeholders in bullying, barriers to their involvement, and level of principal support around bullying, school stakeholders from 29 schools across New Jersey were asked to complete a survey as part of their participation in the School Climate Transformation Project. Data was collected during both the spring and fall of 2017. All team members of chosen schools were identified, and were individually and sent links to an online survey. They were each given a two-week follow up email, prompting them to take the survey. Team members included principals, student assistance counselors, social workers, school psychologists, teachers, guidance counselors, support staff, and other. Among existing survey items, the following items were used for this study.

**Level of involvement.** The survey assessing the specific roles of school stakeholders in bullying prevention allowed participants to endorse their level of involvement in various anti-bullying initiatives. School stakeholder involvement in anti-bullying initiatives was measured with a list of ten items encompassing various bullying prevention activities. These ten items were then summed into one total level of involvement score. School stakeholders were asked to endorse whether they feel they are significantly involved in these specific initiatives. Responses ranged on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 “Strongly Agree” to 4 “Strongly Disagree.” These items were reversed scored prior to data analyses. Therefore, higher scores represented greater levels of

involvement in these initiatives. The scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .92, which is indicative of good reliability.

**Barriers.** Barriers to school stakeholder involvement in anti-bullying initiatives were measured with a list of six items describing various barriers that school stakeholders might encounter when trying to implement these initiatives. The survey included a list of six total potential barriers, including lack of time, lack of resources, competing responsibilities, lack of support from school principals, logistical barriers, and lack of appropriate training. School stakeholders were asked to endorse whether they felt each of those barriers was significant to their own involvement in anti-bullying initiatives. Responses for these items ranged on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 "Strongly Agree" to 4 "Strongly Disagree." These items were reversed scored prior to data analyses. Therefore, higher scores represented greater levels of involvement in these initiatives.

**Principal support.** Principal support was measured with a list of fifteen items describing various ways that administration may have supported school climate team members. School stakeholders were asked to endorse whether they felt they were supported by administration in each of those ways. Responses for these fifteen items ranged on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 "Strongly Agree" to 4 "Strongly Disagree." These items were reversed scored prior to data analyses. Therefore, higher scores represented greater levels of involvement in these initiatives. The responses for these sixteen items were then summed into one scale. The scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .95, which is indicative of good reliability.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

#### **Research Question #1: Who are the members of the school climate teams?**

Descriptive statistics were obtained to identify the frequency with which each type of school was a member of school climate teams.

#### **Research Question #2a: What is the difference among school stakeholders' level of involvement in anti-bullying initiatives?**

A one-way ANOVA was used to assess for significant differences among school stakeholders in mean ratings of level of involvement in anti-bullying initiatives.

#### **RQ 2b: Which activities defined their involvement in these initiatives?**

Follow-up exploratory analyses were conducted to investigate differences between stakeholders in specific aspects of involvement measured by individual survey items.

#### **Research Question #3: What are the most significant barriers to school stakeholders involvement in anti-bullying initiatives?**

Descriptive statistics were obtained to identify frequencies for various barriers to school stakeholders' involvement in anti-bullying initiatives. Frequencies for lack of time, lack of resources, competing responsibilities, lack of support from school principals, logistical barriers, and lack of appropriate training were examined.

#### **RQ #4: What is the relationship between perceived level of administrative support regarding bullying prevention efforts and level of school stakeholder involvement in anti-bullying initiatives?**

A Pearson correlation was calculated to assess the relationship between perceived school principal support regarding bullying prevention efforts and the level of school stakeholder involvement in anti-bullying initiatives.

### **Results**

The largest stakeholder group on school climate improvement teams were teachers (N=39), followed by school mental health professionals (N=27) and administrators (N=19). A breakout of the extent of involvement indicated by each stakeholder type is shown in Table 1. As shown in the table, principals had a slightly higher level of involvement in bullying prevention activities, followed by mental health professionals and teachers.

A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to examine differences among school stakeholders' level of involvement in anti-bullying initiatives. The independent variable was school stakeholder role, which was divided into three categories: (a) administrators, (b) mental health professionals and (c) teachers. The dependent variable was level of involvement in anti-bullying initiatives. An alpha level of .05 was used for all analyses. As shown in Table 2, the one-way ANOVA revealed that the differences between the three groups of school stakeholders were not statistically significant [ $F(2,77) = 1.92, p > .05$ ].

Follow-up exploratory analyses were conducted to investigate the differences between stakeholder types in specific aspects of involvement measured by individual survey items. As shown in Table 3, results from a one-way ANOVA indicated a statistically significant difference between stakeholder types in their reported level of i

involvement in informing parents about school climate concerns [ $F(2,80) = 3.22, p < .05$ ]. A post-hoc Tukey test indicated that principals had a significantly greater level of involvement than teachers in informing parents about school climate concerns,  $p = .03$ . No other statistically significant differences were found between stakeholder types in specific aspects of involvement.

The extent of perceived barriers by stakeholder type are shown in Table 4. Overall, perceptions were very similar, regardless of stakeholder type. The most significant barrier to school leader involvement in anti-bullying initiatives were lack of time ( $M = 3.21, SD = .75$ ), followed by competing responsibilities ( $M = 3.05, SD = .81$ ). Other barriers included limitations in resources, a lack of training, and a lack of administrative support. The means and standard deviations for each of the rated barriers to school leader involvement in anti-bullying initiatives are shown in Table 3.

A Pearson correlation was calculated to assess the relationship between perceived school principal support regarding bullying prevention efforts and level of school stakeholder involvement in anti-bullying initiatives. Perceived principal support regarding bullying prevention efforts was positively associated with the level of school stakeholder involvement in anti-bullying initiatives ( $r = .58, p < .001$ ).

## **Discussion**

### **Key Findings**

The current study extended previous work focusing exclusively on teachers by examining the compositions of school climate teams, differences between school stakeholders' in their level of involvement in anti-bullying initiatives, and perceived



barriers to stakeholders' involvement. This study also examined the relationship between perceived principal support regarding bullying prevention and school stakeholders' level of involvement in anti-bullying initiatives.

**Team composition.** Results indicated teachers were the largest stakeholder group on school climate teams, followed by school mental health professionals and administrators. This may be an indication that schools are utilizing a school-wide approach to bullying prevention that requires that teachers, who have the most direct access to students, be actively involved in the school climate improvement planning and implementation process. Given mental health professionals' consultation with teachers, they may have played a secondary role. This finding coincides with previous research indicating that teachers are implementing anti-bullying lessons as a part of academic units (Hirschstein, 2007).

**Level of involvement.** In this study, differences between teachers, administrators, and school mental health professionals' levels of involvement were not statistically significant. This may also be a reflection of schools using a team-based approach with all stakeholders engaged at a similar level. Stakeholders may have had additional involvement that was not assessed. However, it is important to consider that all groups perceived themselves as being highly involved in anti-bullying initiatives. Additionally, after examining specific aspects of involvement, principals were found to have a greater level of involvement than teachers in informing parents about school climate concerns. This finding suggests that principals' roles in bullying prevention include the component of communicating with parents.

**Principal support.** Perceived principal support regarding bullying prevention efforts was strongly associated with level of school stakeholder involvement in anti-bullying initiatives. Previous research has indicated that perceived level of principal support for anti-bullying initiatives is associated with teacher use of bullying prevention programs and teachers' self-efficacy for working with bullies (Skinner, Babinski, & Gifford, 2013). The current study extends previous research by demonstrating a connection between principal support and level of involvement not only among teachers, but also with school mental health professionals. Previous research has shown that school leadership had a significant influence on program implementation. Schools with firm leadership were also the schools with the best implementation (Roland & Midthassel, 2012). Taken together, these findings suggest that bullying prevention efforts may require the support of school leadership for successful program development. Principal support may be a crucial factor for schools to consider when developing anti-bullying initiatives.

**Barriers.** The most frequently endorsed barriers to school stakeholder involvement in anti-bullying initiatives were time constraints, followed by competing responsibilities. These findings suggest that school stakeholders may need specific time in their schedules allocated towards carrying out anti-bullying initiatives. Additionally, activities may need to be more specifically coordinated into each stakeholder's job role. Other barriers listed included limitations in resources, a lack of training, and limitations in support from administrators. This finding differs from previous research in that teachers and principals both identified a lack of training as the most significant barrier to their involvement in bullying prevention activities (Dake, Price, Telljohann, & Funk,

2003; Dake, Price, Telljohann & Funk, 2004). Overall, perceptions were very similar, regardless of stakeholder type. It may be different for this sample, as the participants in this study included not only teachers and principals, but also mental health professionals. Training barriers were perceived the same for teachers, principals, and mental health professionals. Therefore, training may not have been a barrier for these particular participants because they were involved in an initiative where they were aware that they would be receiving support from well-trained consultants.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of the present study associated with using an extant data set included a limited sample size for each type of stakeholder. Psychologists, social workers, and student assistant counselors participated in the study, but due to the low number of each of these participants, they were combined into one group of school mental health professionals. Therefore, differences among those specific groups of stakeholders were unable to be examined.

Additionally, there were restrictions in the types of information gained due to the nature of questions asked. For example, stakeholders were only able to rate their level of involvement and principal support for bullying prevention activities that were part of school climate improvement planning. There might have been other activities that they felt involved with or supported on that were not listed in the survey. Furthermore, questions about barriers only listed five possibilities, and there could have been other factors impeding their involvement.

A self-report approach was used to measure involvement, barriers, and principal support. This method has possible drawbacks, such as the potential for a social desirability bias. However, surveys were anonymous, which may have increased the possibility of respondents' honesty in answering questions. Finally, although perceived administrative support regarding bullying prevention efforts was strongly correlated with level of school stakeholder involvement in anti-bullying initiatives, this correlation does not imply a causal effect.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Next steps should include research conducted on larger sample sizes to assess for significant differences in level of involvement among stakeholders that couldn't be addressed in the current study. Current and previous research using fixed-survey response methods may not adequately address what impedes involvement in these initiatives. Instead of providing respondents with a fixed list of barriers, methodology could be improved by using open-ended survey items, interviews, or focus groups with specific stakeholder groups. Focus groups could engage in discussing team member's roles in activities and factors that impact their own involvement. To further extend the current study, respondents would be asked about specific competing responsibilities that impede each stakeholder groups' involvement. An open-ended format would allow stakeholders to explain their involvement in more detail, without being asked in a pre-determined way. With extended research on barriers school stakeholders are facing, steps can then be taken to increase their involvement.

More research must be conducted in order to discern whether increased levels of principal support leads to higher levels of school stakeholder involvement in bullying prevention activities. To extend the current research, an experimental study could be conducted where schools are assigned to (a) a group where principals are instructed to implement specific supports (i.e. allocating time to stakeholders' schedules specifically allocated toward anti-bullying initiatives) and (b) a control condition. School stakeholders in intervention schools and non-intervention schools would then be measured again for level of school stakeholder involvement. Findings from this research have the potential to show a casual link between principal support and level of stakeholder involvement in bullying prevention activities. Future research should also explore ways that principals can offer more support to school stakeholders, as that seems to be a crucial aspect of bullying prevention implementation. Future studies such as these have the ability to then inform practice towards improving bullying prevention initiatives as well reducing bullying and victimization among students.

Appendix

Bullying Prevention Involvement

What is/are your roles in the school? Please select all that apply.

- Principal
- Student Assistance Counselor
- Social Worker
- School Psychologist
- Teacher
- Guidance Counselor
- Support Staff
- Other

I feel that I'm significantly involved in the following aspects of anti-bullying initiatives:

- selecting and implementing evidence-based practices
- helping to develop a SCIP
- writing smart goals
- collecting data
- monitoring progress towards goals
- attending faculty meetings and discussion groups to discuss efforts
- enforcing rules against bullying
- planning interventions for individual students
- keeping parents informed of bullying incidents
- facilitating school-wide anti-bullying workshops
- attending trainings and professional development workshops

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The following were the most significant barriers to my own involvement in anti-bullying initiatives:

Lack of time

Lack of resources

Competing responsibilities

Lack of support from school principals

Logistical barriers

Lack of appropriate training

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

It was challenging for our team to find enough time to work together on school climate efforts.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Our school administration was supportive of school climate efforts during the current school year.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Please rate how well your school administration supported your team's school climate improvement efforts in the following areas:

*(If you are an administrator, please respond according to how well you believe you supported your team in these areas).*

Our administration supported our team:

- in developing a vision for the school.
- in forming a representative school climate team.
- by providing planning time for school climate efforts.
- by providing necessary resources for school climate efforts.
- by attending events and activities.
- in communicating about school climate efforts with families and the community.
- by advocating for school climate efforts with the district/Board of Education.
- by providing professional development related to school climate.
- by supporting data collection efforts.
- in coordinating this project with other programs and efforts going on in the school.
- by viewing school climate improvement efforts as an ongoing process.
- by promoting collaboration among key stakeholders.
- in reflecting on areas of improvement for school climate efforts.
- by celebrating and recognizing team success in school climate improvement efforts.
- by recognizing staff members who are dedicated to school climate improvement in professional reviews.

Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

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## Tables

Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations for Extent of Involvement by Stakeholder Type*

	Stakeholders			
	Principals	Mental Health Professionals	Teachers	Total
Total Involvement	33.88 (.541)	31.12 (.536)	30.86 (.554)	31.59 (.552)
Data Use	3.28 (.75)	3.11 (.50)	3.00 (.83)	3.10 (.72)
Goal Development	3.28 (.67)	3.22 (.58)	3.10 (.72)	3.18 (.66)
Strategy Selection	3.41 (.62)	3.11 (.58)	3.15 (.71)	3.19 (.65)
Strategy Implementation	3.39 (.85)	3.07 (.62)	3.10 (.75)	3.15 (.74)
Progress Monitoring	3.17 (.79)	2.89 (.64)	2.79 (.80)	2.90 (.75)
Focus Group Use	3.39 (.70)	3.33 (.62)	3.28 (.69)	3.32 (.66)
Modeling Behaviors	3.39 (.70)	3.26 (.66)	3.47 (.60)	3.39 (.64)
Enforcing Policies	3.56 (.62)	3.08 (.80)	3.36 (.58)	3.31 (.68)
Informing Parents	3.22 (.80)	2.85 (.73)	2.67 (.77)	2.84 (.79)
Attending Training	3.33 (.77)	3.15 (.72)	2.89 (.92)	3.07 (.84)

Table 2

*One-Way Analysis of Variance of Level of Involvement by Stakeholder Type*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between groups	2	114.65	57.32	1.92	.15
Within groups	77	2294.74	29.80		
Total	79	2409.39			

p &gt; .05

Table 3

*One-Way Analysis of Variance of Involvement in Informing Parents by Stakeholder Type*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between groups	2	3.80	1.90	1.92	.15
Within groups	80	47.16	.59		
Total	82	50.96			

p &gt; .05

Table 4

*Means and Standard Deviations for Barriers to Involvement by Stakeholder Type*

	Principals	Mental Health Professionals	Teachers	Total
Time	3.37 (.76)	3.19 (.74)	3.16 (.75)	3.21 (.75)
Resources	2.89 (.81)	2.92 (.74)	2.63 (.75)	2.78 (.76)
Responsibilities	3.21 (.71)	3.26 (.60)	2.82 (.93)	3.05 (.81)
Administrative Support	1.74 (.56)	2.00 (.76)	2.03 (.72)	1.95 (.70)
Training	2.21 (.63)	2.35 (.80)	2.29 (.77)	2.29 (.74)



Table 5

*Means and Standard Deviations for Principal Support by Stakeholder Type*

	Stakeholders			
	Principals	Mental Health Professionals	Teachers	Total
Developing a Vision	3.58 (.51)	3.44 (.51)	3.32 (.62)	3.42 (.56)
Forming Teams	3.58 (.61)	3.44 (.51)	3.39 (.60)	3.45 (.57)
Planning Time	3.21 (.79)	3.22 (.58)	3.19 (.85)	3.20 (.75)
Providing Resources	3.42 (.61)	3.26 (.53)	3.24 (.64)	3.29 (.60)
Attending Events	3.47 (.61)	3.41 (.50)	3.24 (.64)	3.35 (.59)
Families	3.26 (.73)	3.20 (.50)	3.11 (.81)	3.17 (.70)
Advocating with District	3.53 (.51)	3.21 (.59)	3.25 (.78)	3.30 (.67)
Professional Development	3.26 (.73)	3.04 (.54)	3.00 (.78)	3.07 (.70)
Data Collection	3.47 (.61)	3.31 (.47)	3.30 (.62)	3.34 (.57)
Program Coordination	3.37 (.76)	3.26 (.45)	3.27 (.56)	3.29 (.57)
Monitor Progress	3.68 (.48)	3.41 (.50)	3.32 (.58)	3.43 (.55)
Collaboration	3.63 (.50)	3.23 (.59)	3.16 (.69)	3.29 (.64)

SCHOOL STAKEHOLDER ROLES IN BULLYING PREVENTION

44

Improvement	3.63 (.60)	3.28 (.54)	3.27 (.61)	3.36 (.60)
Celebrating success	3.47 (.61)	3.23 (.59)	3.16 (.73)	3.26 (.66)
Recognizing staff	3.42 (.60)	3.38 (.80)	3.14 (.81)	3.29 (.77)

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