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Perceptions of Elementary School Parents, Principals, and School  
Resource Officers Regarding Visitor Management  
Systems and School Safety

by

Janalee Olhausen-Kaylor

February 2019

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
School of Education

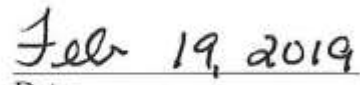
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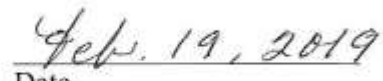
Janalee Olhausen-Kaylor

This Dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment  
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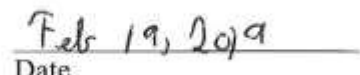
  
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Dr. Danny Humble, Committee Member

  
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Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

Full Legal Name: Janalee Olhausen-Kaylor

Signature:  Date: 2-19-19

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## **Abstract**

Currently, three out of 10 parents fear for their students' safety while attending classes within the public school setting (McCarthy, 2015). This study focused on two elements that directly affect safety within schools: visitor management and intruder prevention. To analyze each of these two elements, qualitative methodology was utilized through four focus groups to determine the perceptions of Elementary school administrators, parents, and school resource officers on school safety. After conducting multiple interviews, four common themes emerged. The first theme was monitoring access to school buildings. Participants asserted taking an active approach in this area would increase the overall safety of students. The second theme discussed by multiple participants was to take additional measures to make the entrances of school buildings secure. The third theme that emerged was the importance of the role of the school resource officer. The fourth and final theme that developed was the importance of training and communication for administrators, school resource officers, staff, students, parents, and community members. After facilitating focus groups and analyzing the data obtained, it became evident the measure of a safe school depends on two variables. These variables are (1) to create a safe building for students managed by procedures designed with student safety at the forefront and (2) to employ trained individuals with the purpose of generating a positive and secure atmosphere. The data collected in this study could prove useful to district administrators wishing to design a safe and secure learning environment for students.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

There is not an undertaking more critical than safeguarding the welfare of children and youth (National Association of School Psychologists, 2013a). More often than not, schools are considered organized and safe locations where connections between staff and visitors, particularly parents and guardians, demonstrate acknowledgment of shared duties regarding student welfare and educational advancement (National Association of Head Teachers [NAHT], 2016). Marsden (as cited in Gewertz, 2018) stated, “We want to make sure our schools are safe” (p. 38). Parental involvement is generally accepted as one of the key components of student success in school (Daniel, Wang, & Berthelsen, 2016). The conduct of some parents/guardians can cause interruptions due to their behavior toward school staff, students, or even members of school-related organizations (NAHT, 2016).

Violence against school staff or any other member of the school community, whether verbal or physical, must not be tolerated (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2015; NAHT, 2016). Members of the school community expect the building to be not only secure but also a place of safety for teachers to teach and students to learn (DeLapp, 2014; McIntyre, Alvarez-Rivera, & Owens, 2017; NAHT, 2016). School systems should take a more proactive stance toward violence prevention to avoid verbal or physical abuse altogether (Trump, 2017).

An overview of different visitor management systems and why they are needed in schools today is provided in Chapter One. A description of systems management theory and how it guided this study is also included. The research questions are presented, and

the significance of the study is explained. Finally, the limitations and assumptions of the study are detailed.

### **Background of the Study**

The need for and use of safety and security measures in public schools is increasing (Gewertz, 2018; Herlianita, 2017; Murzycki, 2012). During the 2015-2016 school year, 94% of schools controlled access to district buildings during school hours (NCES, 2016, para. 1). Schools should not be viewed as open to the general population or as gathering places, but rather as limited public forums (Cornell, 2017).

During the 2015-2016 school year, 68% of schools reported all faculty members were required to wear badges or picture identification, which was an increase of 43% from the 1999-2000 school year (NCES, 2016, para. 2). Increasing staff and student awareness of individuals wandering around on school premises and inside school structures is an area of focus for districts to concentrate on in the future (Blad, 2018; Lloyd & Ching, 2003). Murzycki (2012) concluded in the course of the last two decades, school safety has changed.

According to Education Code section 51101(a)(1) and (2) of the Los Angeles United School District (2014), upon request, parents and legal guardians have the right to observe a class or participate in a parent-teacher conference within a realistic timeframe. Lesneskie and Block (2017) determined schools should consider this standard when reviewing and adopting visitor policies. Parent and community involvement are generally welcomed by schools (Lesneskie & Block, 2017; Rudo & Dimock, 2017; Sibley & Dearing, 2014). However, many schools now regulate building access by

requiring all visitors go through a check-in process, heightening security for all (Lacey, 2014; Murzycki, 2012).

According to Hart (2014), “The media has framed school shootings as a societal problem, and these incidents have garnered much attention in social science research, which in turn can create fear among the public” (p. 12). A 2015 Gallup Poll on school safety in the United States revealed three out of 10 parents with children in grades K-12 now fear for their child’s safety at school (McCarthy, 2015).

Lacoe (2013) determined, “A safe environment is a prerequisite for productive learning” (p. 2). Most importantly, student fear decreases student engagement and achievement (Fan & Williams, 2018; Lacoe, 2013). Other countries such as Australia have similar concerns (Department of Western Australia, 2017a). The Department of Education of Western Australia (2017a) believed the community should be allowed access to school buildings and should be made to feel welcome if visiting for legitimate reasons.

Epstein (2018) determined, educational “partnerships recognize the shared responsibilities of home, school, and community for children’s learning and development” (p. 3). According to the Department of Education of Western Australia (2017a), “People who have no good cause to be on school premises are considered to be intruders and should be dealt with according to this policy” (para. 1). The policy was first specified in the Australian School Education Act of 1999 and the Australian School Education Regulations of 2000, which give the principal the means to handle disruptive

persons appropriately while on school premises (Department of Education of Western Australia, 2017a).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that guided this study was systems theory and was selected because although a school district has many parts, all parts must function as a whole to produce a safe and secure environment for student learning (Bertalanffy, 2015; Wengrzyn, 2016). Ludwig von Bertalanffy (2015) defined a general theory of systems as “an organismic conception in biology that emphasized consideration of the organism as a whole or a system” (p. 12). The theory relies on cause and effect to explain transformations in systems (Bertalanffy, 2015).

Bertalanffy (2015) offered a comprehensive view of organizations and a new way of conceptualizing and studying organizations. Tien and Berg (2003) determined:

A system can be natural (e.g., lake) or built (e.g., government), physical (e.g., space shuttle) or conceptual (e.g., plan), closed (e.g., chemicals in a stationary, closed bottle) or open (e.g., tree), static (e.g., bridge) or dynamic (e.g., human). Regarding its elements, a system can be detailed in terms of its components, composed of people, processes and products; its attributes, composed of the input, process and output characteristics of each component; and its relationships, composed of interactions between components and characteristics. (pp. 23-24)

These framework systems are not only applicable to schools; they are multi-faceted and found in today's society (Wengrzyn, 2016). Systems have become a way of life ranging from one's daily routine of getting ready for work or school to how to wash one's car (Wengrzyn, 2016).

## **Statement of the Problem**

School personnel are finding a way to expand the protection of their structures, since making students and staff feel safe is crucial to establishing an educational environment conducive to learning (Hattersley-Gray, 2013; McIntyre et al., 2017). Without establishing and enforcing some type of security system, schools run into the possibility of the following safety concerns: child abductions, property damage, vandalism, theft, and even sexual predators (Dalton-Noblitt, 2012). Security authorities agree the weakest point of a school's security measure is visitors entering buildings during hours when school is in session (Hattersley-Gray, 2013).

School safety starts with prevention and awareness, provides for the protection of both students and staff, and engages not only schools but families and the community as partners (National Association of School Psychologists, 2013a). The culture of schools needs to change and develop in regard to security (Timm, 2014). Lloyd and Ching (2003) found districts consider security and safety of staff and students a major concern. According to Dalton-Noblitt (2012), all visitors should go through a check-in process to receive guest identification before entering a facility. Upon exiting the school campus, all visitors should then be required to turn in the guest identification for accountability purposes (Dalton-Noblitt, 2012).

School security has become an issue of awareness and preparation, not one of fear (Trump, 2017). Twenty-two percent of school resource officers agreed the absence of a visitor management system is a primary concern they have when it comes to ensuring safety on physical grounds (Hattersley-Gray, 2013, para. 7). Lloyd and Ching (2003)

determined the most prevalent security concern to be the verbal mistreatment of school staff by intruders on school property.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine perceptions of school security in relation to visitor management and intruder prevention. This research was designed to elicit the perceptions of parents, elementary school principals, and school resource officers regarding the implementation of K-12 visitor management systems and regarding the success or failure of preventing intruder access to school facilities. Trump (2017) asserted school administrators can no longer maintain they do not know of the potential dangers their school could experience or that they are unaware of what security actions need to be taken to be prepared.

**Research questions.** The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the perceptions of public elementary school principals and school resource officers about visitor management systems and school security?
2. What are the perceptions of public elementary school principals and school resource officers about how visitor management systems manage and prepare schools for intruders?
3. What are the perceptions of parents regarding visitor management systems and school security?

### **Significance of the Study**

Regarding school visitor management and security, there are several relevant and applicable reasons schools need to screen individuals before they can enter the building (Schaeffer, 2016). Murzycki (2012) indicated, “No one, other than students and staff,



should be inside the school, unescorted, without a valid visitor badge” (para. 10). These reasons include incidents that range from trepidation of violence to custody disputes, as well as the need to monitor everybody working in the building in the event of a crisis (Schaeffer, 2016).

According to Murzycki (2012), ensuring school grounds are safe and protected from individuals who have no reason to be on campus is an essential focus of schools today. Torre (as cited in Taylor, 2018) asserted, “Our biggest challenge is keeping unauthorized individuals from accessing buildings during regular school hours, when students and staff populations are at their peak” (p. 49). Districts should have a policy and procedure in place to ensure guests are screened by trained personnel and are informed of school regulations prior to admittance (Murzycki, 2012; Taylor, 2018). Today’s visitor management systems are designed to guarantee specific rules and guidelines are followed by schools to give secure access to guests without becoming a time-consuming process (Schaeffer, 2016; Taylor, 2018).

Officer Conner (personal communication, May 28, 2017), a school resource officer, stated the best systems create a quick and easy visitor check-in process, while at the same time heightening safety and security to protect students and staff. Most school administrators believe if these systems secure even one child, they are worth it, regardless of the dollar amount spent (Schaeffer, 2016). Depending on how schools manage visitor security, visitor management systems can vary greatly, and different approaches have distinct levels of security (Murzycki, 2012).

Some school officials still believe in the paper-based identification guest log, and that is all they require; however, critical components of the security system that make it

both useful and efficient are missing (Murzycki, 2012; Taylor, 2018). According to Officer Conner (personal communication, May 28, 2017), “Without the capability of monitoring and running background checks on certain visitors, and their patterns or tendencies, schools will be unable to quickly identify people that need to be closely monitored while on campus.” Gentzel (as cited in Bidwell, 2014) recollected a generation ago, school campus doors were left unlocked, if not open, allowing anyone access. Since then, districts have adopted policies and implemented procedures to control access to buildings (Bidwell, 2014; Taylor, 2018).

School administrators are morally and legally bound to provide a safe environment for students and staff (Los Angeles United School District, 2014). Students tend to have different perceptions about what school security and safety are compared to those of school officials and administrators (Gewertz, 2018; Kennedy, 2012). This difference in perception can be an attempt to show respect or courtesy for others (Kennedy, 2012). Students may not perceive holding a door open for another individual to be a problem; however, from a security perspective, this is considered a breakdown and a security issue (Kennedy, 2012).

Trump (as cited in Bidwell, 2014) determined inconsistencies are often discovered between what should be best practice to improve safety and what occurs. For campuses to be prepared, teachers and administrators need to practice several scenarios and situations and have students to consider what they need to do to be safe (Gewertz, 2018; Kennedy, 2012). Trump (as cited in Bidwell, 2014) asserted, “What we’re finding in our assessments with schools...is, ironically, that they’re actually not doing those proven, tested fundamentals that they believe they’re doing or that they should be doing”

(para. 30). With advancements in technology continually improving prevention programs, schools can provide a learning environment that is safer and more secure (Kennedy, 2012; Taylor, 2018).

### **Definition of Key Terms**

For the purposes of this study, the following term is defined:

**School visitor management system.** A school visitor management system is a computerized web-based software check-in system that identifies, monitors, and tracks guest access and entrance to a school facility (Lacey, 2014).

### **Limitations and Assumptions**

The following limitations were identified in this study:

**Sample demographics.** The research focused on only a small population of schools in northwest Arkansas. The findings and conclusions may not be representative of all school districts.

**Instrument.** The interview questions were created by the researcher for this particular study and are therefore a limitation.

The following assumptions were accepted:

1. The responses of the participants were offered honestly and without bias.
2. The participants selected by administrators were a snapshot of district demographics.

### **Summary**

Creating safe and supportive schools is a central focus of this purpose and must be considered a national priority (National Association of School Psychologists, 2013b). School safety and security are not achieved with a single program or even a piece of

security equipment (Trump, 2017). As the awareness of potential dangers for schools improves, schools will become better prepared to respond to and deal with security threats (Taylor, 2018; Timm, 2014). Chapter One included a background of the study and an overview of systems theory, which guided this study. The statement of the problem and the purpose of the study provided evidence for pursuing this research to determine if visitor management systems actually provide schools with heightened security and prevent intruders from accessing campuses. The research questions, significance of the study, key terms, and limitations and assumptions were detailed.

A more thorough explanation of the relevance of systems management theory to this research is included in Chapter Two. A comprehensive history of visitor management systems is also discussed. Finally, the different types of systems and their components used in schools today are detailed.

## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Issues regarding school security have increased more and more rapidly in recent decades (Hanover Research, 2013). School boards have been forced to enhance security measures on school campuses due to reports of violence (Skiba, Morrison, Furlong, & Cornell, 2013). Administrators need to find the best avenue or approach for school security by fully grasping and comprehending the strengths and weaknesses of each facility (Hanover Research, 2013). Once compromised areas are determined through the use of hazard scenarios, administrators can then put more stringent security practices into place to fit the particular school or district's needs (Hanover Research, 2013). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in its *Survey on Crime and Safety*, stated security measures most often found in schools include the following: the installation of security cameras (87.4%), some form of electronic notification system (74.5%), locked entryways to buildings (93.8%), and the mandatory use of identification badges by faculty and staff alike (69.4%) (Jackson et. al., 2018, pp. D5-D12).

Larger schools are becoming more proactive than their smaller counterparts when it comes to controlling access to facilities during school hours (Jackson et al., 2018). This control calls for the necessity of all students to carry some form of a badge or picture identification, the indirect use of metal detectors on both students and visitors, and the installation of security cameras for monitoring (Zhang, Musu-Gillette, & Oudekerk, 2016). The use of alternative security and procedures has dramatically increased since 1999 (Hanover Research, 2013).

According to Jackson et al. (2018), 65% of upper elementary and secondary students are enrolled in a school district with one or more security guards on site (p. D-

28). Furthermore, according to Perumean-Chaney and Sutton (2013), students believe school security officers have a positive impact on their feelings of safety and effectively keep the school environment safe. Policies on armed and unarmed security personnel vary by district; some districts decide to hire school resource officers, while others outsource security positions to local law enforcement personnel (Hanover Research, 2013).

Security measures such as metal detectors and cameras, as well as policies such as visitor sign-in and locked doors, have been implemented as a result of publicized school violence (Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2013; Tanner-Smith, Fisher, Addington, & Gardella, 2018; Taylor, 2018). There has been no clear direction regarding the effectiveness of each type of security measure (Hanover Research, 2013; Tanner-Smith et al., 2018). Furthermore, researchers have found that with the use of more stringent and pervasive security practices, an increased hostile environment may result (Hanover Research, 2013; Richmond, 2018; Tanner-Smith et al., 2018).

The most effective security practices in use seem to be those that focus on a positive approach (Gewertz, 2018; Hanover Research, 2013). School rules and policies have tightened up, as have the consequences for any infractions against those rules and policies (Hanover Research, 2013; Richmond, 2018). While these changes in how schools handle security may decrease incidents of school violence, little has been done to measure the effects of school security protocols on student perceptions regarding school safety (Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2013).

Tragedies such as Columbine and Sandy Hook have left many school administrators with the task of developing more efficient systems to keep students and

staff safe (Hanover Research, 2013; Karaptian, 2017). A review of the literature pertinent to this research is provided in Chapter Two. A deeper look into visitor management systems, both past and present, and information on the components of these systems are included.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Bertalanffy (2015) introduced a new systems theory idea that changed the views of many when it came to a system or framework. Bertalanffy (2015) no longer looked at the system as several single pieces put in place, but he viewed it as a whole new relationship. The new awareness revealed how the relationships and interactions, of the system as a whole provided for better change and growth within the system (Bertalanffy, 2015; Fullan, 2004; Learning Theories, 2017; Wengrzyn, 2016). The overall foundation of systems theory shows how all the pieces of the process fit together like a puzzle (Bertalanffy, 2015; Learning Theories, 2017; Wengrzyn, 2016).

Systems theory can be taken a step further with the belief that a system is a compilation of parts combined to achieve a common goal (Bertalanffy, 2015; Friedman & Allen, 2014; Fullan, 2004; Learning Theories, 2017; Wengrzyn, 2016). Using this perspective, even if a portion of the system fails, the current system as a whole can still work according to its original function (Bertalanffy, 2015; Friedman & Allen, 2014; Fullan, 2004; Learning Theories, 2017; Wengrzyn, 2016). One security step that can be worked into the morning procedure of school staff is to greet students upon arrival to school at the same doorway every day with an assigned staff partner (Trump, 2017).

If by chance and for some unknown circumstance, the second staff member fails to arrive and no additional coverage is provided as stated per policy or procedure, this

particular step in the process has now become at risk for failure (Friedman & Allen, 2014). Even though there is still a system in place for greeting students and providing security, one individual is only capable of monitoring a particular part of the activities taking place at the door (Friedman & Allen, 2014). Part of the normal process is now impaired (Friedman & Allen, 2014). Teachers gain the capability to respond accordingly or change the current process to maintain a certain security level without hesitation through training and practice (Wengrzyn, 2016).

The slight change may involve closing the exterior door and standing inside the building until students approach to enter instead of keeping the door open (Wengrzyn, 2016). Even when the original functionality of the process becomes impaired, the system remains capable of functioning with appropriate adaptation and change (Bertalanffy, 2015; Friedman & Allen, 2014; Wengrzyn, 2016). Systems management theory can be utilized within any type of business allowing managers to focus on how it works and functions (Bertalanffy, 2015; Grimsley, 2015; Learning Theories, 2017).

According to Friedman and Allen (2014), “Systems theory enables us to understand the components and dynamics of client systems in order to interpret problems and develop balanced intervention strategies, with the goal of enhancing the ‘goodness of fit’ between individuals and their environments” (p. 3). Every business has a specific process that they follow, and that process is a direct result of a system that has been created (Grimsley, 2015). Managers and employees alike should become familiar with the concept of how their system works and the associated way of thinking (Grimsley, 2015; Monat & Gannon, 2015).



With the knowledge and familiarity of how each element of a system works and has a direct effect on the overall functionality of the system, employees gain a better understanding of how every component of the process is brought together as one unit to work as a whole (Monat & Gannon, 2015). This study was focused on school districts and the structural adjustments that often need to be made (Grimsley, 2015), since understanding the function a particular system serves allows an evaluation of the successes and weaknesses of that system (Friedman & Allen, 2014).

The conceptual pillars of systems theory based on both adaptive and proactive behaviors must be used to encourage sustainable and long-term performance (Grimsley, 2015). Hill (2019) defined adaptive behaviors as “everyday living skills such as walking, talking, getting dressed, going to school, going to work, preparing a meal, cleaning the house, etc. They are skills that a person learns in the process of adapting to his/her surroundings” (para. 2). According to Bindl and Parker (2010) proactive behavior “involves self-initiated, anticipatory action aimed at changing either the situation or oneself” (p. 567). Systems thinking offers the discipline and means required to support the visualization of interrelationships instead of objects (Shaked & Schechter, 2013). This shifting of the mindset is necessary to deal with the dynamics of the organizational system (Shaked & Schechter, 2013).

### **History and Background of Management Systems**

There are currently over 800,000 registered sex offenders in the United States (Parents for Megan’s Law, 2018). According to security statistics reported by SchoolGate Guardian (2017), of the juvenile (under 18) sexual assault victims who reported assaults to law enforcement agencies, only 34% of victims were children under

the age of 12 (para. 1). According to the Registered Sex Offender List in Arkansas, as of September 2018, there were 15,800 sex offenders registered in Arkansas alone (Curcio, 2018, para. 1).

There are more than 350,000 family abductions each year, which is approximately 1,000 per day (SchoolGate Guardian, 2017, para. 2). In 54% of child abduction cases, the mothers flee with the children, while the father is the abductor in 46% of cases (SchoolGate Guardian, 2017, para. 2). Incidents such as parent abductions from a school campus can be limited, if not prevented, with the use of a strictly followed visitor management system (AlphaCard, 2014).

The majority of schools today are still relying on the outdated method of signing in visitors on a sheet of paper to track them (SchoolGate Guardian, 2017; Taylor, 2018). There have been many occasions when unwanted visitors such as sex offenders have gained access to school campuses (Gewertz, 2018; SchoolGate Guardian, 2017). Campus entrances, unless strictly monitored by audio-video surveillance and secondary locked doors, still introduce potential threats on a daily basis (SchoolGate Guardian, 2017; Taylor, 2018). The first line of defense against unauthorized intruders should be sufficient policies regarding the building access control system, but 27% of campus resource officers state their campus lacks such policies (Hattersley-Gray, 2013, para. 14).

Many steps are being taken to increase the safety of campus buildings to create a healthier learning environment (Gewertz, 2018; Hattersley-Gray, 2013). During school hours, the entrance of outside visitors onto campus is shown to be the weakest point of any security system (Hattersley-Gray, 2013; Lacey, 2014). With the use of a visitor management system, a district is one step closer to promoting the safety of students and

staff alike (Gewertz, 2018; Hattersley-Gray, 2013; Taylor, 2018). Visitor management policies not only help ensure only authorized visitors have contact with students, but the policies also allow for quick reference of who is in the building at all times, which can be essential in an emergency situation (AlphaCard, 2014).

A primary concern for school administrators, teachers, and parents alike is how students perceive the safety of their school (Espelage, 2014; Gewertz, 2018). Three frameworks were studied nationally using sample students ages 10 to 15 to gather their perceptions regarding school safety (Espelage, 2014). The three elements were microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem (Hong & Eamon, 2012). Of the three named elements, microsystems are the most influential to the child's perception of school safety (Hong & Eamon, 2012). Many argue the child's perception of school safety may be based on the level of attachment the child has with parents (Hong & Eamon, 2012).

Parent and school interrelation, or the mesosystem, is how parents show the child support and the importance of a valued education (Espelage, 2014). Parents attendance at school events directly affects the child's perception of the school's safety (Hong & Eamon, 2012). The exosystem is related to school safety through the community in which the child lives (Hong & Eamon, 2012). If a child is brought up in an area with unsafe community conditions, high crime rates, or excessive poverty, the student's perception of the school will more likely be that it is unsafe (Hong & Eamon, 2012).

The impact of school violence on students has garnered much attention (Mooij & Fettelaar, 2013; Richmond, 2018). Success and a positive continuous learning experience are necessary factors within the campus environment for students to feel safe and secure (Mooij & Fettelaar, 2013). Leadership and instructional quality play a key role in

improving both the social and teaching components of the prevention of violent incidents (Gewertz, 2018; Mooij & Fettelaar, 2013). Different areas must be analyzed and addressed to promote student feelings of safety at school (Hong & Eamon, 2012). Increases in security monitored by police, student involvement in school activities, collaboration with external institutes, and adequate instructions from teachers all appear to be variables that affect how safe a student feels at school (Gewertz, 2018; Mooij & Fettelaar, 2013).

According to Hong and Eamon (2012), “In the aftermath of several school shooting incidents in recent years, students’ perceptions of unsafe schools has been a major concern for parents, teachers, school officials, school practitioners, and policy makers” (p. 428). Concern for school safety is imperative not only because society is accountable for ensuring the safety of students at school, but also because schools without a safe environment generally have other issues as well (Hong & Eamon, 2012). For students to function well in school, they need to feel safe (Gewertz, 2018; Mooij & Fettelaar, 2013; Richmond, 2018).

### **Types of Visitor Management Systems**

New standards for visitor management systems at campuses across the country are quickly becoming software-based (Lacey, 2014; Raptor Technologies, 2017b; Taylor, 2018; Thompson, 2018). The software, which is database-driven, can be customized to fit campus needs (AlphaCard, 2014; Lacey, 2014; Taylor, 2018; Thompson, 2018). Not only can the software provide parents or guardians information, but it also has the capability to show the relationship of a student to an individual (Lacey, 2014; Raptor Technologies, 2017a; Taylor, 2018).

Pre-defined fields can be added to the database to show visitors' names, photos, driver's licenses, background check data, details regarding custodial status, and even who is authorized to retrieve a student from the campus (AlphaCard, 2014; Lacey, 2014; Taylor, 2018; Thompson, 2018). With all visitor information now stored and accessible on a database, visitor check-in becomes easier and more convenient for all involved (Lacey, 2014; Raptor Technologies, 2017a; Taylor, 2018; Thompson, 2018). Not only does visitor management software provide information regarding parents or guardians, but it also has the ability to do the following:

- Perform instant background checks
- Screen guests and issue badges
- Vet and track volunteers, vendors, and contractors
- Automatically log tardies and early dismissals
- Identify registered sex offenders
- Alert staff to parental custody issues
- Create detailed visitor reports
- Allow schools to share real-time information. (Taylor, 2018, p. 48)

The badges can be easily carried by all visitors, and all information regarding visitors is easily and readily accessible to campus security or school administration via scanners (Officer Conner, personal communication, May 28, 2017). With the use of handheld scanners, authorized employees no longer have to enter in visitor information manually (AlphaCard, 2014).

**Nationwide background check.** With the use of real-time online systems, campuses now have the capability to compare the identity of any visitor against a national

database consisting of over 800,000 registered sex offenders (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children [NCMEC], 2017, p. 2). The visitor's identification only has to be scanned a single time for it to be checked, with the results near-instant (Lacey, 2014; Raptor Technologies, 2017b). No other information pertaining to an individual's background, such as felonies or misdemeanor charges, is stored on the system (Raptor Technologies, 2017b).

When a positive match occurs, the software allows the district to see a comprehensive list of information about the individual in question (Lacey, 2014; SchoolGate Guardian, 2017; Taylor, 2018). Included are the person's picture and other identifying characteristics, such as eye color, height, weight, and body markings (SchoolGate Guardian, 2017). Also included in the printout are crimes committed and aliases utilized (SchoolGate Guardian, 2017; Taylor, 2018). This information helps prevent the likelihood of an intruder entering the facility (Gewertz, 2018; SchoolGate Guardian, 2017).

**Registry of visitors.** Online systems are set up with software that can allow a facility to create customizable lists, or watch lists, of visitors who are not permitted on the premises (Lacey, 2014). These lists include parents who have restraining orders, limited visitation rights, or protection orders (Lopez & Lahti, 2017). The list can even be expanded to contain threats in the community that may carry over to the school, such as students who have been suspended or expelled or drug dealers (Lacey, 2014; SchoolGate Guardian, 2017; Taylor, 2018; Thompson, 2018).

In the event an unwanted visitor attempts to enter the facility, a discreet pop-up warning appears alerting the staff member (SchoolGate Guardian, 2017). According to Broschart (2017):

In the event a parent, or some other individual with legitimate business at the school is found to appear on a sex offender registry, the person will not be categorically banned from being on school property. Instead, school administrators will decide on a case-by-case basis as to how that person's access to the school will be managed. (para. 6)

This type of system also “identifies individuals who have parental approval to pick-up children from your facilities. In the event of an emergency situation the primary caregiver's information is displayed so your staff can attempt to contact them to allow a temporary authorization” (SchoolGate Guardian, 2017, para. 1). Management systems have changed school management in several areas but most importantly in the field of school security (Shah, 2014).

### **Student Information System**

Tech&Learning (2017) reported, “Student Information System (SIS) is a web-based application software designed to introduce a conducive and structured information exchange environment for integrating students, parents, teachers and the administration of a school or college” (para. 1). Furthermore, Tech&Learning (2017) determined:

These software systems enable educational institutions to supervise student-related activities such as keeping records of tests or examinations conducted, attendance, appraisal on performance including details of marks scored, particulars of everyday school attendance, and all other institution-related

activities; in short, they provide a complete student records system. They are designed with diverse application potential ranging from simple management of students' records at school to management of all student-related functions as well as administrative functions or a chain of educational establishments. (para. 1)

The web-based visitor management software can be easily incorporated with a school's Student Information System and will eliminate the need for downloading information about students and approved guardians manually (Lacey, 2014; SchoolGate Guardian, 2017; Taylor, 2018). The data link with SIS programs to alert personnel of who can and cannot pick students up and of restraining and no contact orders and will also keep track of and process students who check in late or leave early due to multiple export options which allows easy import of data to district Student Information Systems (Lacey, 2014; SchoolGate Guardian, 2017; Taylor, 2018; Thompson, 2018).

### **Other Forms of Security**

The main purpose of school security procedures is to prevent crime by deterring and detecting it before it occurs (Gewertz, 2018; Hevia, 2018; Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2013). Furthermore, "Stringent security measures are increasingly being used in U.S. public schools" (National Association of School Psychologists, 2013b, p. 1).

Theoretically, potential threats will be deterred by the presence of security measures, increasing the likelihood perpetrators will be caught during the early detection of a crime (Gewertz, 2018; Hevia, 2018; Lacey, 2014; Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2013; Taylor, 2018, Thompson, 2018). Furthermore, the crime will either be prevented, or the measures will reduce the possibility of the event escalating into a serious incident (Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2013).



**Check-in system/hall pass.** The main positive feature of the traditional pen and paper system is the cost (Lobbyguard, 2013). Training is minimal, and no equipment is required to implement the system (Lacey, 2014; SchoolGate Guardian, 2017; Taylor, 2018). There are several negative points of the pen and paper system; for instance, it is more time-consuming, and if there is more than one visitor at a time, visitors have to wait in line in public entryways (Hanover Research, 2013). Security officers must check individual credentials and run security checks, call for background checks, or initiate other actions (Lobbyguard, 2013). Traditional visitor management systems offer a false sense of security and are no longer a viable solution to school safety (Raptor Technologies, 2017b).

**Locked doors and controlled entrances.** Hanover Research (2013) found the purpose of locking and monitoring doors and gates was an attempt to control access to school facilities. Schneider and Coleman (1993) concluded it is of little value to lock front doors if back and side doors remain unlocked and unmonitored. Trump (as cited in Griffin, 2016) stated there are a number of procedures schools can use to improve safety such as “reconfiguring main entranceways to funnel visitors into the office while preventing people from walking into the building” (para. 15). Griffin (2016) added, “Many schools have also improved their visitor management systems and added measures like vestibules to keep people with ill intentions from gaining access to buildings” (para. 13). Access control is useless if windows and doors are not secured and supervised (Schneider & Coleman, 1993). Perumean-Chaney and Sutton (2013) indicated students actually worry more about being a victim at school when doors are locked and hallways are supervised, indicating students’ perceptions of their safety while at school diminished.

**Surveillance cameras.** According to the National School Safety Center, the expectation of school personnel is that they provide reasonable care in establishing safety policies (Morones, 2013). School safety teams choose different safety approaches based on their school conditions (Hevia, 2018; Jinghong, 2018). Local school boards must determine which security practices meet that standard for their districts (Morones, 2013). Many administrators believe surveillance cameras not only deter poor student behavior but also improve security and overall school climate (Hanover Research, 2013). School administrators and officers should be monitoring cameras at all exterior doors and the corners of all buildings (Thompson, 2018)

According to Morones (2013), the potential risks or threats a school or district may face will be the determining factors for which standard is required. Studies have shown that security measures such as surveillance cameras can change students' perceptions of school and actually make some students feel less safe (Gewertz, 2018). Some families feel the use of surveillance cameras intrudes upon the students' expectation of privacy and are an unreasonable seizure of a person's image (Steketee, 2012). Some believe the Fourth Amendment is being violated (Steketee, 2012). Courts have determined and continue to uphold that there is not an expectation of privacy when surveillance cameras are located in public places, and there is not a violation of the Fourth Amendment (Steketee, 2012; U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2018).

When cameras are placed in areas in which an individual does expect privacy, such as in a restroom or a locker room, the courts have determined the Fourth Amendment is violated (Steketee, 2012). The capturing of audio conversations, under certain circumstances, can be misconstrued as possible wiretapping as well as a violation

of Title I of the Federal Electronic Communications Privacy Act of 1986 (Wohlstetter, 2015). Particular caution should be considered and used by school administrators when using surveillance cameras that collect not only video recordings but audio as well (Steketee, 2012).

The use of surveillance recordings in schools captures nothing more than the images of students and staff traveling to and from their destinations (Steketee, 2012). Little reason has been given to have these images preserved by the district administration (Steketee, 2012). However, in some instances when images were retained, the surveillance recordings have not only captured images of fights between individuals (students and faculty alike) but have been used to prove theft and parental harassment toward staff members (Wohlstetter, 2015). The recordings of these instances can be maintained and referenced for the disciplinary action taken with the student or used in the investigation in a court case against a parent (Wohlstetter, 2015).

When the recording is maintained for a disciplinary action taken against a student, the recording will be regarded as an educational recording under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (Steketee, 2012; USDE, 2018). The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act also allows the parents of the student to view the recording of actual events leading up the disciplinary action (Steketee, 2012). Administration is obligated, by law, to protect student and staff confidentiality by not allowing viewing of recordings by third parties (Nance, 2014; USDE, 2018).

The Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits unreasonable searches and seizures by the government; this includes public schools (Nance, 2014). According to Steketee (2012), "Courts have generally held, that what an individual knowingly

exposes in plain view to the public will not trigger Fourth Amendment protection because no search has occurred” (p. 55). An individual who is recorded on video in a public place has no expectation of privacy; therefore, the individual has not been illegally searched by having his or her image recorded (Nance, 2014). Courts also continue to uphold routine searches such as random drug tests of student athletes participating in extracurricular activities due to the low expectation of privacy during extracurricular activities (Steketee, 2012). As long as school administration can establish there is a legitimate reason for conducting the search, it is legal (Steketee, 2012).

**Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.** The FERPA requires all schools that receive federal funds to respect the rights of confidentiality pertaining to student records and other identifiable information the records may contain (Steketee, 2012). Access to records can be obtained by parents and eligible students, according to the FERPA (USDE, 2015). Cameras recording images on school premises can, in certain situations, be considered educational records under the FERPA (Steketee, 2012; USDE, 2018).

**Open-records laws.** States have requirements similar to those of the Federal Freedom of Information Act, which provides individuals with the right to access public records of governmental agencies (Steketee, 2012). State laws may vary, but the definition of a public record includes video images (Blitz, 2013). Recorded images can be disclosed to third parties, including media requesting copies of the images through open-records laws (Blitz, 2013).

**School security officers/school resource officers.** School district administrations nationwide are considering or have implemented expansion of law

enforcement in their schools (Curran, 2018). The implementation of security personnel has been cited as “among the most common physical surveillance measures currently used in schools” (Hanover Research, 2013, p. 8). The duties of the school resource officer range from assisting administrators with potentially dangerous discipline issues to actively patrolling the school building and grounds (Hanover Research, 2013). A school resource officer is the best person to be in the public view at entry ways and reception areas (Thompson, 2018). School resource officers have even been credited with intervening in school shootings (Hanover Research, 2013).

The benefits of using security guards, however, is widely contested in the literature (Rosiak, 2014). While most argue school resource officers operate as a deterrent to school violence, there are those who warn of the detrimental effects a school resource officer may have on particular students (Hanover Research, 2013). The role of a school resource officer differs greatly from that of a traditional law enforcement officer (Curran, 2018).

Schlottman (2015) stated, “when I can build trust as a school resource officer, it makes the school a safer place” (para. 7). According to Rosiak (2014):

...When students have a positive opinion of the SRO, they are more likely to report a crime, and to feel safe in school. Students and staff report feeling safe with SROs in school, and many believe that the SROs have reduced bullying and fighting. SROs improve the perceptions young people and others in the community have of law enforcement officers; and the SRO program helps create and maintain the law enforcement agency’s reputation in the community. (p. 8)

Jennings, Khey, Maskaly, and Donner (2011) associated the presence and quantity of school resource officers with a lower rate of serious school violence.

Lower incidence of crime could be an indicator the presence of school resource officers may, in fact, be a deterrent for all types of school-related crime to some degree (Jennings et al., 2011). Having a school resource officer could be a useful strategy in preventing violence at school (Hanover Research, 2013). Theriot (2016) surveyed approximately 2,000 middle and high school students who attended a school which employed a school resource officer (p. 451). Theriot (2016) noted students who interacted with the school resource officer had a more positive attitude about the officer; however, there was also a decrease in their level of feeling connected, and attachment to school decreased. Theriot and Anfara (2015) argued that although the use of school resource officers in middle schools may pose particular challenges, it may also be creating opportunities to develop a positive relationship between law enforcement and students, enhance the school environment, and reduce incidents of school violence.

School resource officers who are able to establish open communication and promote positive community involvement will be able to foster meaningful relationships with students (Hanover Research, 2013; Schlottman, 2015; Theriot & Anfara, 2015). Schlottman (2015) determined, "How I carry myself can escalate or de-escalate a situation" (para. 6). School resource officers can also offer services to ease the transition to middle school, resulting in a support system that will aid in decreasing violence, and in turn, providing a more secure learning environment which will improve the educational experience for everyone involved (Theriot & Anfara, 2015). Rosiak (2014) found:

The presence of an SRO in a school already places the officer on the scene, should an emergency or other need for a trained first responder arise. This has the added advantage of not requiring an officer from the community-one who does not have the relationships the SRO has developed-to leave that assignment to come to the school. SROs can deter crime or prevent a potentially explosive situation through their presence in a school. (p. 11)

The presence of a school resource officer is not only a benefit to the school but also to the community (Rosiak, 2014).

### **School Safety Law**

School safety is everyone's responsibility (Arkansas Department of Education, 2014). Leaders in states have recognized the importance of school safety and have passed laws requiring districts to create emergency management plans which include procedures for lockdown, fire, tornado, earthquake, and other drills as well as creating a committee that reviews incidents concerning school safety (O'Meara, 2013). Between 2013 and 2015, there were 160 school shootings identified across 38 states with nearly 53% of the identified shootings occurring at K-12 schools (Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, 2015, para. 7). O'Meara (2013) reported:

Over the years, school shootings and incidents of violence have led to a comprehensive and committed approach among school districts, national and state school associations, law enforcement and community partners to prevent incidents of violence in our schools and to properly handle them should they occur. (p. 33)

With the creation of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-76), \$75 million was appropriated for the Comprehensive School Safety Initiative (Bowden, 2018, para. 6).

In implementing this initiative, the National Institute of Justice (2014) “is to collaborate with key partners from multiple, relevant disciplines on developing a strategy and model for comprehensive school safety” (p. 1). Furthermore, the National Institute of Justice (2014) determined the goal of the initiative:

[To] improve the safety of schools nationwide through the development of a solid foundation of knowledge and best practices that can be implemented through individualized school safety personnel, programs, policies, and activities, and result in a sustainable and cost effective school safety program. (p. 3)

The National Institute of Justice (2014) oversees the initiative.

According to the Arkansas Department of Education (2014) and the Safe Schools Initiative Act\_(2013), all public schools must implement emergency plans for terrorist attacks and hold “annual active shooter drills and school safety assessments in collaboration with local law enforcement and emergency management personnel for all schools” (para. 4). The statute also requires:

Schools to have a panic button alert system that is integrated with the Smart 911 system. In September 2015, all public schools received access to a panic button app for use during an emergency. The panic button technology, which is provided by Rave Mobile Safety, allows school faculty and staff to download the app to their smart phones, enabling those on the local school network to quickly notify 911 in the event of an emergency and what type of emergency it is. All



faculty and staff on the local network will receive text message alerts and situational updates. (Safe Schools Initiative Act, 2013, paras. 3-4)

Furthermore, Arkansas public school personnel may install communication equipment that is interoperable with the Arkansas Wireless Information Network system (Safe Schools Initiative Act, 2013). The recommended method for school safety is through comprehensive community partnerships (O'Meara, 2013). According to O'Meara (2013) "this approach recognizes the important connections among school, law enforcement, fire, medical, and other community organizations to share information, resources, and ideas for the development of an effective emergency management system" (p. 35). By involving all stakeholders, school security and safety can be heightened (O'Meara, 2013).

### **Training of Teachers, Staff, and Students**

Analysis of 2014 and 2015 active shooter incidents in the United States revealed an average of 20 incidents each year, which was an increase from 17 incidents in 2013 (Schweit, 2016, p. 2). Although statistics show that most schools will never be the site of an active shooter situation, fear fueled by such incidents affects students and teachers across the country (Gewertz, 2018). Schweit (2016) added, "The 'active' aspect of the definition inherently implies that both law enforcement personnel and citizens have the potential to affect the outcome of the event based upon their responses to the situation" (p. 1). Trump (2017) stated, "The first and best line of defense is a well-trained, highly alert school staff and student body" (para. 7). These incidents support the need for training exercises for school personnel and students (Schweit, 2016).

Training all school personnel from administration, teachers, and support staff to bus drivers and cafeteria workers on school safety procedures that cover school crime

prevention, school violence prevention, crime prevention practice, and emergency planning is best practice (Trump, 2017). O'Meara (2013) concurred, "Preparing for all hazards using a structured, practiced approach to crisis management provides schools with the ability to act reasonably and promptly, whether faced with a severe storm or an armed intruder" (p. 35). Administrators should involve police, firefighters, and first responders in planning and design of a school safety plan, which includes walking the school and grounds to review policies and details in the safety plan (Thompson, 2018).

In Arkansas, "the Safe Schools Committee is charged with developing model policies and procedures that may ensure a safe and productive learning environment for students and school employees for recommendations to school districts" (Arkansas Department of Education, 2014, para. 1). The Safe Schools Initiative Act (2013) stated, "A school district shall provide annual training for all of its employees and students, to the extent practicable, in preventing and responding to acts of violence, terrorism, and natural disaster, including without limitation" (para. 1). Implementation of emergency plans for terrorist attacks under the Safe Schools Initiative Act (2013) requires active shooter drills to be conducted annually including assessments on school safety in cooperation with local law enforcement and emergency management personnel.

Subject to appropriation and funding, the Criminal Justice Institute shall provide education and training for the following:

Personnel designated by a school district or an education service cooperative concerning the active shooter drills required under this section through its Safe Schools Initiative; and Law enforcement officers, emergency management personnel, and other persons who will conduct the school safety assessments and

active shooter drills on a school campus under this section. (Safe Schools Initiative Act, 2013, paras. 6-7)

According to the Safe Schools Initiative Act (2013), training for school staff is to be hosted by an education service cooperative. The employees who receive the training will, in turn, be responsible for training other school staff members and students (Safe Schools Initiative Act, 2013). The training may also include the following:

- (i) Developing prevention strategies and enhancing existing crisis management plans for campus security and safety issues;
  - (ii) Delivering education to students and faculty on public safety and legal topics such as drugs and alcohol abuse, sexual assault, bullying and cyberbullying, gangs, preventing the possession of weapons by minors, and responding to the threat of weapons at school;
  - (iii) Preparing school safety assessments; and
  - (iv) Cooperating effectively with law enforcement officers in the school setting.
- (Safe Schools Initiative Act, 2013, paras. 22-24)

Furthermore, according to the Safe Schools Initiative Act (2013), individual districts are responsible for scheduling annual training and active shooter drills.

Many school leaders began creating emergency/crisis plans after the Columbine attack in April of 1999 (Trump, 2017). According to O'Meara (2013), future attacks could be prevented if those responsible for safety in schools knew the appropriate questions to ask and knew where to uncover information to deter incidents of school violence. Furthermore, adding preventative measures to emergency planning already in

place, including protocols and procedures for responding and managing threats, is necessary (O'Meara, 2013).

Evaluations of school emergency plans nationwide show that while schools have emergency plans, they are not effective unless the plans are communicated and a crisis team is dedicated to carrying them out (Trump, 2017). For schools to have effective plans, districts should be conducting needs assessments to look for vulnerabilities (Gewertz, 2018). Incomplete emergency plans generally lack adequate staff training, contain questionable content, and lack a cohesive partnership in exercising procedures with all community safety partners (Trump, 2017).

According to Trump (2017), "School emergency plans should address preparedness procedures such as lockdowns, evacuations, parent-student reunification procedures, mobilizing school transportation during the school day, emergency communications protocols with parents and the media, and mobilize mental health services" (para. 9). School emergency plans are more effective when practiced in realistic settings (French, 2016). School personnel must work with safety officials to identify staging areas for the press, parents and guardians of students, medical personnel, and others who will respond to the emergency (Trump, 2017).

Lockdown drills should be practiced and implemented in the course of a regular school year, just as other drills are routinely practiced (Trump, 2017). Drills should be practiced at the most inopportune times and not just when it is convenient for staff and teachers (French, 2016). School crisis teams, along with community partners, should review the emergency safety plan and revise or update annually if needed (Trump, 2017).

Acts of violence involving schools have the potential to make school personnel or school board members liable for civil damages for victims (Nance, 2015). This liability arises from several sets of circumstances and often depends on the actions or lack of actions by the school (FindLaw, 2017). School leaders may face not only civil claims under state tort law, such as negligence, but claims asserting a violation of student constitutional rights or civil rights (FindLaw, 2017).

### **Parent Views**

Research has provided some insight into parental involvement with the school in regard to certain circumstances such as socioeconomic status, which highly impacts the ability of parents to interact (Schneider & Coleman, 1993). Within the socio-economic environment, some parents are inadequately involved with the activities and events held in the schools, due to lack of monetary resources or limited educational level (Zhou, 2014). Parents who have obtained a higher level of education have a slight advantage as they have salaried, stable employment with benefits, whereas their counterparts hold hourly jobs and often more than one job (Zhou, 2014).

When socioeconomic status and educational levels of the family are overlooked, more parents become actively involved with their child's education (Mowen, 2015). Parental involvement has a very positive impact on the overall quality of not only the student's education but also in the area of non-academic outcomes (Zhou, 2014). When communities form partnerships with school personnel and the school resource officer is a part of that process, schools are safer for everyone (Rosiak, 2014)

In response to school shootings in U.S. history, parents, school administrators, and legislators have debated whether complete school lockdowns are enough to protect

students (Rochman, 2012). The security protocol for each school is developed and put into place by each district; nothing is set or established by any one governing body (Trump, 2017). School security improves with measures tailored to individual school needs and resources (The Heritage Foundation, 2018). Within the United States, there are more than 13,000 school districts, so one can see that the security policies used will vary widely, even within each state (Rochman, 2012). Yet, when school administrators find a security strategy that appears to be effective, one last hurdle must be overcome—selling it to the parents (Rochman, 2012).

Research was conducted using hierarchical linear modeling to show the relationship of parental involvement in regard to formal and informal security measures (Mowen, 2015). According to Woltman, Feldstain, MacKacy, and Rocchi (2012):

Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) is a complex form of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression that is used to analyze variance in the outcome variables when the predictor variables are at varying hierarchical levels; for example, students in a classroom share variance according to their common teacher and common classroom. (p. 52)

With the presence of security guards, metal detectors, and a required sign-in area, there is a significant decrease in the level of parental involvement (Mowen, 2015). Quinn (2013) shared:

Parents will often call about issues at home, such as divorce and custody battles, when they need a gut check, or someone to explain how something works.

They're part of the school community, and their lives can have an affect on the students, and the school. I'm here for them, too. (para. 11)

While all forms of security measures are considered standard for students, no one has explored the effect of these extra security measures on parents (Kupchik, 2012).

### **Summary**

Due to recent acts of violence against schools, district leaders are taking steps to make sure effective security measures are in place to keep students and school personnel safe (Cornell, 2017). According to Hattersley-Gray (2013), the first line of defense is to make sure there are effective security plan in place. Effective plans mean teachers and students know what to do in certain situations and staff members are trained to respond to threats of intruders or other emergency situations (Trump, 2017). The success of a plan is based both on adaptive and proactive measures (Grimsley, 2015).

Many school leaders have implemented and put into place specific safety measures to ensure the threat of violence is diminished (Timm, 2014). Safety measures such as surveillance cameras, armed security guards, school resource officers, and web-based visitor management systems have been invested in by school districts as a means to prevent school violence (Roberts et al., 2012). Though the effectiveness of these tactics is mixed, the methods are only as good as the management and training of staff to use them to their full capacity (Department of Education of Western Australia, 2017b). Care must be taken to ensure security measures implemented do not violate the rights of individuals involved (Steketee, 2012).

With state and federal laws mandating school leaders take appropriate measures against school violence, it is clear more and more school leaders will be looking to implement effective solutions for preventing school violence (Safe Schools Initiative Act, 2013). Finding a solution that works depends greatly on the demographics and social

make-up of the school environment (Timm, 2014). Parents, community, and school personnel all play an important role in how well-received and carried out a security system and intervention program will be (National Association of School Psychologists, 2013a). If students do not feel safe at school, it is impossible for them to do their best and achieve at their full potential (Lacoe, 2013).

In Chapter Three, the methodology utilized in this research is described. The research questions are reintroduced. A thorough description of the population and sample and the instrumentation is provided. An explanation of the data collection and data analysis is offered. Finally, an accounting of the ethical considerations for participant protection is given.



### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

Chapter Three is comprised of a description of the research methodology and procedures utilized in this study to investigate visitor management systems. The chapter provides an explanation of the problem and purpose, research questions, design, population and sample, methods, instruments, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations.

#### **Problem and Purpose Overview**

Safety is essential to student well-being and learning (Lacoe, 2013). Students who do not feel supported and safe at school, both physically and psychologically, cannot learn to their fullest potential (Lacoe, 2013). Students' ability to learn is supported when steps are taken to ensure they come to school feeling safe, welcomed, and respected (Hattersley-Gray, 2013).

Without establishing and enforcing a security system, schools become vulnerable to various and sometimes severe safety concerns (Dalton-Noblitt, 2012). The most vulnerable part of a school's security system is when visitors enter school grounds during school hours (Hattersley-Gray, 2013). School leaders need to develop and implement effective school safety programs (Trump, 2017).

This research focused on school safety and security by identifying potential areas of risk. The areas of visitor management and intruder prevention were investigated. Additionally, perceptions of parents, administrators, and school resource officers were utilized to address vulnerabilities of school security systems.

**Research questions.** The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the perceptions of public elementary school principals and school resource officers about visitor management systems and school security?
2. What are the perceptions of public elementary school principals and school resource officers about how visitor management systems manage and prepare schools for intruders?
3. What are the perceptions of parents regarding visitor management systems and school security?

### **Research Design**

A qualitative design by nature focuses on “understanding the meaning of experience, [and] the researcher is the primary instrument in data collection and analysis, the process is inductive, and rich description characterizes the end product” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 21). This study involved qualitative methodology to facilitate analysis of the perceptions of school administrators and parents in a focus group setting.

According to Stewart and Shamdasani (2015), “A primary difference between focus group research and other types of research, such as surveys, individual interviews, and laboratory experiments is that data collection occurs in and is facilitated by, a group setting” (p. 17). A focus group approach was selected for this study to allow the researcher “to get at what people really think about an issue or issues in a social context where the participants can hear the views of others and consider their own views accordingly” (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015, p. 455). According to Hennink (2014), “Perhaps the most unique characteristic of focus group research is the interactive discussion through which data are generated, which leads to a different type of data not

accessible through individual interviews” (pp. 2-3). The focus group interview questions were designed to encourage open dialogue among the participants.

For this study, qualitative methodology was selected to organize the data gathered from focus groups and individual interviews. Creswell (2014) stated, “Purposeful sampling, collection of open-ended data, analysis of text or pictures, representation of information in figures or tables, and personal interpretation of the findings” are all found in qualitative research (p. xxiv). Parent interviews were conducted in a focus group setting with multiple participants contributing their perceptions to the group. Elementary principal and school resource officer interviews were conducted either in person or via telephone.

### **Population and Sample**

The population for this study included the four member schools of an educational resource cooperative in northwest Arkansas. The sample size consisted of four elementary principals, four school resource officers, and 20 parents. Five parents were selected by each participating principal.

A purposive sample was used to select elementary principals who had school resource officers in their buildings. Fraenkel et al. (2015) elaborated, “[in a purposive sample], “researchers do not simply study whoever is available but use their judgment to select a sample that they believe, based on prior information, will provide the data they need” (p. 101). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) concurred, “The composition of a focus group depends on the topic to be discussed. As with individual interviewing, purposeful sampling should be used to include people who know the most about the topic” (p. 114). Fraenkel et al. (2015) cautioned, “The major disadvantage of purposive sampling is that

the researcher's judgment may be in error-he or she may not be correct in estimating the representativeness of a sample or their expertise regarding the information needed" (p. 101). Then the principals were asked to select a purposive sample for the focus group based on their judgment (Fraenkel et al., 2015), and to select parents representative of their school's student population.

### **Instrumentation**

The focus group interview questions were researcher-created and developed with the intent to draw out both consensus and contrasting points of view among participants. The open-ended questions were aligned to the research questions and the review of literature. Questions one through three pertained to the perceptions of visitor management systems, both past and present (AlphaCard, 2014; Bertalanffy, 2015; Espelage, 2014; Grimsley, 2015; Hattersley-Gray, 2013; Monat & Gannon, 2015; SchoolGate Guardian, 2017).

Questions four through six were developed to obtain perceptions on security measures found in schools (Hanover Research, 2013; Jennings et al., 2011; Lobbyguard, 2013; Morones, 2013; Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2013; SchoolGate Guardian, 2017; Steketee, 2012; Wohlstetter, 2015). The final five questions were posed to gather perceptions regarding whose responsibility school safety is, how school personnel can better train those individuals, and whether visitor management systems support feelings of safety (French, 2016; O'Meara, 2013; Rochman, 2012; Safe Schools Initiative Act, 2013; Trump, 2017). The principals and school resource officers were asked the same set of interview questions as the parent focus groups.

According to Noble and Smith (2015), “It is imperative that all qualitative researchers incorporate strategies to enhance the credibility of a study during research design and implementation” (p. 3). Fraenkel et al. (2015) suggested the format of the instrument (directions, print, and language) corresponds back to the validity. Furthermore, Fraenkel et al. (2015) stated a critique or review of the instrument assists the researcher in determining its effectiveness. Pandey and Patnaik (2014) determined, “The quality of research is generally assessed using the tests of construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability” (p. 40). To assure validity, a triangulation of data collected from the focus groups and individual interviews, the review of literature, and the theoretical framework was used, along with member checking after focus groups and individual interviews were completed. Member checking is the process of sending transcripts back to interview participants for review (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Interview questions were field tested by two parents, one principal, and one school resource officer who did not participate in the study to assess the reliability of the content of each question by ensuring questions were stated clearly to avoid misinterpretation. Those field-testing the interview questions used the Validation Rubric for Expert Panel developed by Simon and White (2017). The Validation Rubric for Expert Panel is a rubric used by individuals during a field test to determine the validity of survey and interview instruments (Simon & White, 2017). The individuals selected to field test the instruments for this study utilized the Validation Rubric for Expert Panel by completing the Likert-type scale for each of the ten categories on the rubric. After the field test, revisions were made to the questions if necessary to ensure dependability of the instrument.

## **Data Collection**

Once permission was granted from the four school district superintendents for the research to be conducted in their districts (see Appendix A) and approval was received from the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (see Appendix B), contact was made via email (see Appendix C) with the elementary principals. Each principal was asked to select five parents to participate in the focus group who were representative of the building demographics. The principals were also asked to distribute copies of the research information sheet (see Appendices D & E) and a copy of the interview questions (see Appendices F & G) to the school resource officer and the focus group participants.

The focus groups were scheduled with the assistance of the building principals. Participants were welcomed, followed by an explanation of the purpose of the study and the rules of the process. The research information sheet was reviewed, and participants were assured of their anonymity and right to withdraw at any time. Each focus group member was assigned a number at that time. All focus group discussions were completed in person. Building principal and school resource officer interviews were conducted either in person or by phone and were scheduled at the convenience of the participants.

The focus group members were asked to identify themselves with the number assigned them before answering each question. All interviews were audio-recorded. Following the conclusion of each focus group and individual interview, the recordings were transcribed and copies were sent to the participants for their approval. Focus group transcripts were sent to the building principal who distributed and collected the transcripts to the parents. Participants were directed that at this time, they could clarify or delete all or part of their responses.

Electronic data were stored on a password-protected computer. Validity was insured through the use of member checking, or allowing participants to review and verify transcripts. Upon completion of the research, both electronic and paper data will be retained for three years and then destroyed.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the constant comparative method is “comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences” (p. 32). The constant comparative method was used during the data analysis phase of the research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated:

Because the basic strategy of the constant comparative method is compatible with the inductive, concept-building orientation of all qualitative research, the constant comparative method of data analysis has been adopted by many researchers who are not seeking to build substantive theory or grounded theory. (p. 228)

Both the focus group interview questions and the elementary principal and school resource officer interview questions were open-ended and designed to gather information to answer the research questions. The data from each interview question were compared among all participants.

Once the participants reviewed the transcripts for accuracy, the data were analyzed to identify any patterns that might exist. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated, “Open coding is what one does at the beginning of data analysis... It is tagging any unit of data that might be relevant to the study” (p. 229). Open coding was first used to identify data relevant to the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A

table with prevalent themes was created based on the focus group transcripts, and frequently used words were charted under each theme.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated, “Axial coding is the process of relating categories and properties to each other, refining the category scheme” (p. 229). Axial coding was utilized to make connections among the different themes and properties uncovered (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Selective coding was used to develop “a core category, propositions, or hypotheses” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 229) and to determine any major themes or categories that were relevant (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Major themes were identified and then selectively coded in each transcript. Comparisons were made both among the individuals in each focus group and then also among the different focus groups. The main focus of the data analysis was to answer the research questions developed for this study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All participants were provided with a copy of the research information sheet which detailed the purpose of the research, outlined any possible risks, and informed the participants of their right to opt out of the research at any time without negative consequences. Once focus groups were completed, audio recordings and other documents from the focus group interviews were secured in a locked office, and digital information was password-protected on a personal computer. Three years after the conclusion of the research project, the documents and data gathered will be destroyed.

Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of participants. Due to the small size of the sample, participants were advised there might be a possibility their comments would be recognized even with safeguards in place. Once transcriptions were completed,



but prior to finalization, participants were presented with a copy for review. At this time, member-checking-the process of participants being given the opportunity to ask questions, make revisions, or opt out of the research entirely-was utilized (Creswell, 2014).

### **Summary**

The methodology used in this qualitative study was outlined in Chapter Three. The chapter consisted of a synopsis of the problem and purpose followed by the research questions developed for the study. Next, the research design was described. An explanation of the population and sampling methods and descriptions of the instrument utilized within the study were provided. Chapter Three concluded with details about the collection of data, along with the techniques used for data analysis and a reflection on related ethical considerations.

In Chapter Four, qualitative data gathered regarding visitor management systems and school safety are presented and analyzed. This includes responses to interview questions from the parent focus groups and the elementary principal and school resource officer interviews.

## Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of school security in relation to visitor management and intruder prevention and to identify potential areas of risk and improvement of physical and psychological safety measures. Qualitative methodology was applied to this study to analyze the perceptions of school administrators, school resource officers, and parents in a focus group setting. The data were collected through four focus group discussions and through personal interviews with four elementary principals and three school resource officers. The focus groups were designed to encourage open dialogue among the parents about effective visitor management and school security issues. The interview questions were provided in advance all four of the school districts.

Principal D did not want to participate in the interview process, but he did submit his responses via email, and those responses were included with the other qualitative data. School Resource Officer C was involved in a legal matter and opted out of participating in the interview process. Each focus group consisted of four to six parents selected by the elementary principals of the participating districts (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Focus Group Participants by District*

Participating Districts	Number of Focus Group Participants
School A	6
School B	5
School C	5
School D	4

## **Focus Group Interviews**

The focus group interviews included 11 questions created to better understand the perceptions of parents. Although not all participants provided insight and responses to every question, each participant provided valuable information and insight to the study. To protect the identities of the participants, each parent was assigned a number. For example, the first parent from District A was referred to as A1, the second as A2, the first parent from District B was referred to as B1, the second as B2, and so on. This documented pattern continued throughout all focus groups for all participants interviewed.

The groups were interviewed and their responses were recorded on a digital recorder by the interviewer. Once the interviews and focus groups were completed, the recordings were transcribed. Transcripts for focus group members were then given to the building principals who distributed the transcriptions to the appropriate parents to review for accuracy. The participants were able to add, delete, or revise their responses or to withdraw from the study altogether. The principal then collected the transcripts and returned them to the researcher. Open coding was then used as a way of grouping chunks of data by labeling words, phrases, and common ideas found in the transcripts repetitively by making notes, underlining specific words, and circling thoughts common to all the transcriptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Interview question one.** What do you believe are the benefits of a visitor management system, and what do you think would be some of the benefits of having a visitor management system in your building?

Each of the focus groups agreed there were many benefits of having a visitor management system. Participant A2 stated, “Keep the kids safe,” and A5 added, “It keeps other people that have no business being on campus out of the building away from the children.” Participant B4 stated, “That we know who’s coming in and out.” According to B3, “So that we have safety for our children and building.” Specifically, B5 included, “I like that you can scan your driver’s license. You can automatically pull up if they have a questionable background. So, I think that would be something you could keep track of and warn you a little bit.”

Participant C3 specified, “Knowing who comes in and out... and if they have a record. Because I think that’s very important to know who’s coming in and who’s coming out.” According to C3:

I’m from here, so I know a lot about the people that are in this community. But there’s other teachers that aren’t from here, other administrators that aren’t from around this community, didn’t grow up here. So they may not be aware of previous issues with that particular person or a record that that particular person may have. I think visitor management is beneficial for that reason.

Parent C1 included:

I think it would be more efficient, too, because we just use pen and paper. You know I know that it gets confusing, because there’s a lot of people in and out of here every morning, and I could just see where it would just be more efficient.

During the one focus group session, parents at School D had similar responses.

Participant D3 stated, “I feel that not just anyone can come into the school. We know who’s in the school.” Parent D4 added:

I like how it tracks, too. I think it helps... I like how you can keep a running record of visitors and keep track of who was there, when they were there, and why they were there.

Focus group participants D1 and D2 agreed with the other members of their group.

**Interview question two.** What do you see as some of the problems of having a secure visitor management system?

Participant A4 shared the following:

I don't have any problems with that, but I can see people saying like, "Oh, this is my privacy or issues with their identity." As far as the pen and paper, the only problem I see with that is people can write something different down. There's no actual accountability of who that person is. So as far as an actual sliding the card, I feel like it just gives you more access to security and making sure the kids are safe. You know, anybody can write down whatever they want, because they don't check. So for me, you know, I can walk in and granted, yes, smaller schools like ours, a lot of times they know who you are, but I think there's more error that can happen using a pen and paper versus a slide of a card, and I feel like if you had to slide a card, if they have the right system in place, they can tell, are these parents going through a divorce? Is this parent even allowed to be picking up this child? So, I feel like there's more control in a situation like that. So especially if it's connected to your driver's license.

Participant B6 stated, "I don't have any problem with having a security system."

Similarly, B2 shared, "I agree. I agree with her that there's not a problem with that. I mean to me it would make it more safe for everyone." Parent B5 shared, "I think the

only drawback would be management being able to get everybody scanned in the mornings or in the evenings, because we have so many parents that pick up our children.”

Participant C6 noted a potential problem:

I’m currently working in the morning on helping visitors enter the building. And some visitors don’t bring ID, so, even if we went to a computer-based system we’ve got a lot of parents who say they don’t have an ID. So, I see that as being a potential problem for us.

According to C3:

But another problem with that is they don’t require you to sign out. So, although they know you’ve entered the building, they actually don’t know when you left. So, if something were to happen, they would know they there were 20 parents that entered the building, but they may not know how many parents have exited. And I think that’s a problem, too.

Participants D1 and D4 had some of the same concerns. According to D1:

You’re not necessarily keeping track of when they’re entering and when they’re leaving, because not all parents come back and check back through like they should even when they’re told. So, the problem is they check in, but they’re not always checking out.

Participant D4 was the only participant who mentioned a concern about campus accessibility once visitors had checked in. Specifically, D4 asserted, “I think the tracking system, I think some parents are confused. They think it gives them free rein to go wherever they want on campus once they’ve checked in.” Another concern mentioned only by participant D1 was an infringement of visitor’s rights. Parent D1 shared, “Not all

parents view it favorably, because they feel that it infringes on their constitutional right.” This point was discussed in the review of literature as well (Nance, 2014; Steketee, 2012)

**Interview question three.** What suggestions do you have for improvement?

Focus group member A1 noted:

One of my comments is on improvement. When you let parents in every single day to go have lunch with your child, or you go interrupt the classroom where your child is, I think that’s taking away from their learning time, but also it takes away time from the ladies who work in the office who are working there every single day.

Participant A5 shared, “I love to go in to school and eat with my kids, but you also have access to every other child in there.” There were also concerns mentioned about parent pick-up by A3, who stated, “...For me, some of the concerns is, they don’t ask or have you identify that you’re actually an appropriate person to pick up the child.” Parent A4 suggested a possible solution, “That might be a good time to use that badge printed out or something.” Participant A2 suggested a car sticker system that had to be scanned before parents could pick up their children.

Participant B4 shared that as someone who subs in the building a lot, she would like to see an electronic, scanning-type of visitor management system in her school. In her words, “It would make it easier for volunteers. Because of the background check, scanning the license already.” According to B3:

I think something like this would definitely help your substitutes in the office. ID the person with the photo already in the system after they present their license once. Then they don’t have to have the driver’s license to scan them out.

In agreement, B2 mentioned witnessing upset parents without appropriate identification.

Participant C2 was concerned that parents do not properly display school identification given to them, causing unnecessary issues for school personnel. She suggested, “Then make the tag conspicuous on your body, and don’t hide it, so, that when somebody who cares about your child is trying to keep them safe and is questioning you, you don’t have to be a total snob.” Participant C3 summed up parent concerns:

My concern is that I worry about if people check in and don’t just say they have.

I want somebody in the office to know that my child is not to go with them. We need when they check in on the system some sort of capability of saying when a person checks in, okay, these are the people that are allowed to get these kids.

Participant C3 added, “If it’s an electronic system, I scanned their ID. OK, this person can pick up these five people, because that’s who their parents have put on the pick-up list.”

Participant C2 offered the possibility of the school issuing identification cards for parents.

During the one focus group session, D1 suggested:

Honestly, I don’t think there’s going to be a perfect situation. I do like this system. I just think it’s not foolproof, and as much as they’re trying to do the best, they’re going to miss. They’re going to have parents and situations coming in, and that’s not a fault of the system itself.

Participants D3 and D4 agreed, and D4 added:

I think that maybe more education with parents and families to realize the importance of this. I think if they can educate us somehow a little bit better about



the benefits of the system, how it works to protect our kids, it's not a tracking system per se to keep someone out unless they need to.

**Interview question four.** Share with me your thoughts on the following:

Using a pen and paper system or an electronic system for the registry of visitors.

Focus group member A3 responded:

I think there's more accountability in an ability to actually monitor who's coming in. If there's any way you can know the police are looking for this person, or you can have that information to know, OK, this is a person that's flagged. This is a person that's not safe to let in the building. I just feel like it gives you access to a better way of keeping our kids safe.

Participant B2 stated, "With paper and pen, they can write anybody's name down. I mean, they could write John Doe. You know what I mean, they could write whatever. With the driver's license, they actually have to prove who they are."

Participant D1 responded:

I definitely think it needs to be electronic versus pen and paper just for the ease of making sure information is accurate, and they're keeping up with tracking it better. I just think pen and paper is just not feasible anymore. It's not efficient.

According to D3, "I have to go out, and say, there's always technology failure. Always."

Parent D2 agreed, "If the power is out, we have to go back to paper." Focus group

participant D4 acknowledged:

Maybe you could have a back-up plan, and just say, in the case our power is out, we're going to use the paper and pencil check-in but go with the electronic system as the main check-in for the building.

*Locked doors and controlled entrances.* Focus group participant A1 responded: If you walk around this building, you will not see any window that opens. They may look like they do, but they do not. Every single door is locked. The only way you get in is if you're a teacher, you're the resource officer, or the superintendent. That's the only way you get in those doors. The doors don't stay open. They're always locked. The only time that they do come open is when the children go out for recess, and they're escorted out, and in the morning time, whenever the Dean of Students is here in the mornings, and he has the door open. He's making sure those kids are walking in safely in the morning. That's one thing I love about this elementary building, is you could not get in here unless you are being monitored through the main doors right there and you get checked in first.

Parent A5 pointed out an improvement with controlled entrances:

One thing they did differently this year than we've done in the past is not letting all the parents in to wait for car rider children. In the past, you could come in and stand and mingle. You got tired of waiting, and you'd wind up inching your way down the hall. I did. I know that this year, no one, even the people waiting for early checkout that have to get out early, nobody comes in the building. It's all controlled down there by somebody with a clipboard, and that was an improvement.

Participant B1 responded:

I think in this building at least, it's successful, because you have to come to the direct attention of whoever is in the office, because all the doors are locked. Once

the front office closes the doors to them, they are locked. So, for our building, it's successful. Once we get the system on the high school building, I think it will be more successful. Yes, across the board.

According to B5, "I think it's basically in today's time you hear about these things all the time, so you have to have something like that in place. You have no other option at this point." Parent C1 responded:

I worked at a school where you couldn't get in there. The secretary had a camera, and she didn't let you in unless you showed her your ID. It was great, because no one was getting in there. But sometimes you kind of need to get in there in a hurry, and you can't get in. So, it had its positives and negatives.

Participant C3 added:

Yes, I want all of the doors locked, and I want to know my child will be protected while they are in the school district or in school. But at the same time, with outside recess, you just worry about them being in a situation where they can't get to where they need to get in. And, because of all the doors around campus being locked, and you can never prepare them for whatever situation it is. My child may need to run to the high school to get away from whatever is going on, and if those doors are locked, they can't get in to safety. So, you know I worry about that. If my child is in the hallway, maybe she's coming back from that nurse, and we have a lockdown situation, and teachers are instructed to lock their doors. Well, my child is not the enemy, and she can't get back in her classroom, because we're all on lockdown. You know, I worry about things like that in situations like

that with being shot. But at the same time, it's kind of a double-edged sword.

You want to protect them while they're here.

According to D1:

Every door should be locked no matter what. I feel like that is the number one plan of defense. You have outside doors locked, inside doors locked. I mean, I just feel like that's our best method of protection for all. Even if the principal has to come pound on a door, absolutely.

Focus group member D2 shared thoughts on the inconvenience of locked doors:

It may be an inconvenience, because sometimes we get down the sidewalk and don't have the keys to get in. But, that's a small inconvenience compared to when someone is able to walk in, and they were intending to do harm.

*Surveillance cameras.* Participant A1 responded, "I think it's great. Yes. I think it's an excellent thing." Parent B5 commented on using video as evidence, "I think it's good, because you're going to see a lot of things in the media. Teachers maybe hitting students or something, but if you have a camera, you could catch that. It just gives you like pure evidence." Participant C4 noted the importance of monitoring the cameras:

I also think that because we do have surveillance cameras, someone may need to be looking at them regularly. You know, you never know what you'll see, and if no one's watching them. Maybe full-time surveillance on them just to see if someone's walking down the hall that shouldn't be there. So, I think maybe continued surveillance by someone to keep an eye on what's actually happening.

Participant C2 shared a concern, "I know that we have cameras here, and I know this as a parent, my kid is on camera. I just want to know, how accessible is the footage?"

Focus group member C5 felt cameras were needed for safety but also for accountability:

I feel like I'm fine with surveillance cameras. I am, because in our messed-up world, I feel like that is one of the things that we have to do to keep the kids safe and also to keep them honest. Kids will do something, and you're like OK, so, if we look back at the cameras then that's, well, that's what we're going to see. And you know, sometimes, they're like yes, and sometimes they kind of backpedal a bit, you know. And so, I do feel like that's OK. I would want my child, if he does something wrong, to know that kind of accountability with the video camera. I think that's good to have them there to keep them safe.

Participant D2 understood cameras were necessary. Parent D1 agreed and added:

I agree they are necessary, and I think they need to utilize them, and they do utilize them a lot to find specific instances of situations where they've not been told the truth and were able to make an accurate diagnosis of the situation. I also am concerned that at some point the wrong person might get a hold of some information, or if a court case came about, and what parents viewed as happening in the situation might not actually be what is actually happening. So, I think there's a possibility for opening up yourself to a lawsuit with inaccurate interpretation.

Participant D4 advised:

A situation that may have started somewhere outside of that view of the camera could unfold inside the view of the camera and be very different, because you

don't have all the pieces to discern what actually happened, so you can't really rely on surveillance.

***Privacy rights.*** Participants A2 and A4 had similar opinions that the school is their students' authority when at school. According to A4:

We support the school. If that's what the rule is, then we support it. They will be punished. That's part of what you sign at the beginning of the year that says you give the school that right, so I don't know what privacy you would have to have as a fourth grader and as a student.

Participant A2 stated, "If my child was involved there, he needs to be disciplined. He needs to know you don't do that at school." Parent B3 also voiced concerns about privacy rights for certain kids:

I know we do have a large foster system in this area. And so, I think that would be more of a child privacy thing. I mean, I don't think anybody should be private when they're coming to pick up or drop a child. Maybe just the kids concerned in that type of situation are my thoughts.

Parent C2 stated in regard to privacy rights:

I think that it would be worthwhile having the surveillance cameras. I'm glad that they're in place, and I'm glad that we have them, especially on the playground. But I kind of feel like as a school, it should be posted as the parents come in the door, that hey, you're on camera. Just know we're watching, and we know it's here, because it's not posted anywhere that I know of.

At this point, C4 reassured C2, "There is something posted there. It used to be on the outside of doors." Participant C3 confirmed:

It's free public education, I'm sorry, it comes at a price. If you want a free and public education, I think that's the price as a citizen you have to pay to keep your child safe. So, I feel like if you're getting free education, you're on surveillance cameras. That's my opinion on that, because I send my child to a free school. If you don't like it, there's some local private schools you can take them to and pay the price.

Parents in focus Group D shared similar thoughts, and D2 stated, "The cameras, they're not behind closed doors. They're not in classrooms. They are out in public where everyone is." Parent D4 agreed, "We do have signs posted all over the campus saying surveillance cameras are used-audio and video. So pretty much when you roam the campus, you will see those signs."

**Interview question five.** What are the benefits of a school resource officer?

Participant A1 stated, "Not only does your child feel safe when they walk through those doors for being locked down, but they have it in the back in their head. OK, if something were to happen, I know that officer." In addition, A1 went on to say, "I know that our officer right now, he loves the kids. He'll do anything for them. I think it's amazing. I think every single school needs to have one. Every school needs to have them." Parent A3 agreed:

I'd say, too, it also builds a safe zone for the children that they might not see on TV or things like that on the news. It gives them a sense of stability with the cops and gives them that relationship as they grow older that they see that there are good cops, that they see that there are people that are here to protect them and keep them safe, and I strongly encourage it.

Participant A4 added, “I wish we had another one, one for elementary and one for middle school, high school. I like that he is a lot of times present during car rider line walking around. You know, there’s more safety there.”

After a comment by B1, B4 agreed, “I also think he’s good, because our children are seeing, especially nowadays with their being so much negative light on police officers, our kids are seeing him as a friend.” Participant B1 added, “I kind of think it also helps to let our kids know that the police aren’t there to ruin our lives. They’re there to help us. And, I think that’s really important, especially now.” Parent B4 went further to say students see the school resource officer as a safe person even if they might think, “I like this teacher, but I don’t know if she really will help me. I can go to him.”

Participant B5 asserted, “If you have something bad, you have someone there that can help with the situation real quickly. I almost think we need more [SROs], especially when we have campuses at different locations. I think we need more.” According to B2:

I mean, there honestly needs to be one in each building. I mean, you know, K-2, and one for over there, and 3-5, and then in each building, because I mean, what if something came up in that building and he needed to be in both. I mean, there honestly needs to be one in each location.

Focus group participant C2 stated:

I think just having the officers on campus and possibly even in high school, the high school students seeing them on campus through all of their school career.

Well, if they have a problem, they know they can go to them.

Participant C1 believed a resource officer would prevent someone from coming in with a weapon or with the intention to hurt somebody but shared the concern:



I just think they need to be visible all the time every day. I need to see them as a parent. And that's hard to do with this campus. It's so large! We have two SROs district-wide, and I have not seen them in a long time.

Participant D1 acknowledged:

I think they are visible for any type of situation. If someone might be intending to do harm, I think they are there as a deterrent, and I think not just for students but also for parents or anyone else who might become upset. I think just knowing that we have a school resource officer on campus probably deters a lot of situations that could be potentially dangerous.

**Interview question six.** What are your main safety concerns here at school?

Participant A1 stated a concern:

Not saying that this would happen, but my concern is what if there happened to be an active shooter and/or an intruder and there was something else going on another campus, and the SRO was busy. He's over there on that side of the campus, and he can't get to this side. That's one concern that I see. One is just not going to do it. If something is going on over there and there's a buddy system going on, OK. Well, that one's got that one distracted over here, so the other can get to the main reason or target. My main concern over here is not having enough SRO power to spread around.

Parent D1 added:

My main concern is that we only have one resource officer and that he is not a full time resource officer, and there is no way that he can be responsible for all of the

staff and students and visitors on campus. If a situation arose, he just physically cannot handle all of that responsibility by himself. I would like to see more.

Several members of the focus groups mentioned recess and the playground as their main safety concerns. According to B1:

As far as this building goes, I think my only area is this playground at the end of the building. I kind of feel like if somebody was going around the back of the building, somebody could see them and catch them maybe. I think the playgrounds, they could be safer. I have seen personally the other day I was actually coming to sub for somebody mid-day, and I walked up, and there was a parent sitting there watching the playground.

Both C1 and C2 stated concerns for teachers having to not only supervise students at recess but also keep an eye out for registered sex offenders who live in the area. Parent C2 stated, "Recess... I checked the website, and the sex offenders are in the area. I know how close they live." Participant C1 was concerned with how recess supervisors would be able to identify a parent as a registered sex offender and added, "It's like every recess there's a parent that will drive slow or walk by and stop and give their kids a drink or something to eat." Participant C2 added, the concerns from the focus group, "For my child, I'm not as worried about when he's in the classroom or at lunch. But I am worried that he's at recess, because it's a big open field." Participant C3 expressed her concerns about recess:

Not all of our playgrounds are completely fenced all the way around. So, that's concerning because I worry about my own child. You've got a hundred kids out

there. How can you watch a hundred kids every minute of every moment? And, kids walking off, that's a danger.

Participant C3 was also concerned about the activity center (AC),

I worry about down at the AC at lunch time. That's a lot of kids in a little spot, and there's nowhere for them to go if there was an emergency. So, it's a catastrophe waiting to happen. I really feel like there needs to be some sort of presence at that outer door while the kids are at lunch, because that's 200 kids that are vulnerable to anything. And, it's an outside glass door that opens right to the AC, I mean, so they are very vulnerable, and there's a lot of kids. And so, if something happened, it would be a mass casualty situation. We have kids in the AC the major part of the day. Yeah. So, it would be really beneficial to have some security.

Parent C6 shared concern about the entrances to the buildings where the offices are:

That's a big concern of mine, because we've got one person sitting out there. If she's on the phone, then she's not able to see, and somebody can come in and then get in the doors. A big concern of mine is any of the doors, because they are all glass, and there are a lot of outer doors like this.

Participant D4 also explained, "Our playground area is very open. I know we do have the fence now, but still, it's accessible to many streets, which we cannot help that. I understand that, but that's a concern." Many schools have large open campuses, and D4 mentioned, "Open campus, the distance that the children have to travel to specials classes back and forth is a concern, because if something happens and you're headed to music, that's a long ways to go with a bunch of kindergartners."

**Interview question seven.** Do you believe your children are safe while at school? Why or why not?

Focus Group C was the only focus group who did not feel their children were safe at school. Participant C1 stated her fear:

I went to school here my whole life, like this is the best place ever. I feel safe here as a grownup, [and] I felt safe here as a child. This was my favorite place. But right now, as a parent knowing that what's going on in today's world, it scares me because there's a glass door five feet from my child's room. Someone could hop a fence or cut a fence, break down the door, whatever, and go into that classroom. So, it scares me. It's a great school. It's just scary sometimes to think about it.

**Interview question eight.** Who's responsible for school safety?

Participant A2 replied, "Everyone"! According to A4, "Parents, administration, teachers. I mean, when you're on campus, you're the one. It starts at home, too."

Focus group member B4 responded:

This is the only time that I really think that the saying "it takes a community" applies. When I'm at home, it's me raising my children, but when they're in the school, it takes the principal and the teachers and secretary and all the volunteers to help be mindful and watchful. If it feels like something is not right, to speak up and say something.

Participant C6 responded:

I think we all are. I think every staff member is responsible if they see somebody walking down the hall, like C2 said, that doesn't belong. They stop, and they

question, “Can we help you? Do you have a visitor’s badge? If not, come to the office.” I think all of us have a part to play, not just the resource officers or the administration.

Parent C3 stated, “I think as a whole, our whole community is responsible for the safety of the children here. If there’s somebody in a community that sees something that’s not right, you need to report that.” In continuation, C3 shared, “It needs to be a community-wide effort and not just being solely on the school or solely on the resource officers.”

Focus group member D1 expressed:

Parent one, two, three, four, and five hundred and seventy-nine, the rest of us. Every day, every staff member, every single person on campus no matter what their role, should be aware of everything and aware of their surroundings and even if it seems minute to them. Communication should be open among everyone.

**Interview question nine.** What type of training should be offered for parents, students, and school personnel to further school safety?

Participant A3 responded:

I think there should be an awareness for parents to understand the school’s not against parents being with their kids. They’re not against family being able to come and get their kids; their concern is the safety of our children.

According to A3:

This can be done by providing training for parents. If they are here and something was to happen, how do we as parents in here not get scared or freaked out? What are some of the protocols that we should know as we’re in the building

so that we can help out other parents, help teachers out. We need to know those protocols, too, if we're in the building.

Parent A5 added:

I don't know if it's a fine line between scaring children too badly or not, but you know, we do fire drills, tornado drills, and these kids are so inundated with social media. They know what's going on out there... I'm old enough to remember way back in the 1960s when we had like nuclear attack drills and things like that, and we got under the desks. You know, you learn to go with whatever's happening in the times, and it probably wouldn't be a bad idea to help them understand how you block the door, how you get away from the window. And yeah, it would probably scare them. But those stinking tornado and fire whistles are loud enough to scare the little guys.

Focus group member A2 expressed:

I like the idea of intruder drills. Um, it's kinda hard with the special needs kids. To reiterate that, my son's special needs, because my son kinda like freezes when that stuff happens, and it's kinda hard to teach those kids, but it needs to be like reiterated over and over and over like once a month or something, like a drill once a month, so they'll know what to do.

Participant A3 felt the parents needed to be more involved and shared, "I think that if they think that they're going to be doing a drill the next day, that they allow the parents to know, so we can prep our children." Parent A3 continued, "This is, I think, the parents' duty to explain and prepare their children for that and be able to really answer questions, because it's hard for teachers to have the time to answer all those questions and their

concerns.” Focus group member B4 stated, “I’d love CPR training for the volunteers. I mean, I’m sure that most of the teachers have, I don’t know, but I know there are a lot of allergies in this school, so allergy training and just being aware, more awareness.”

According to C6, “I think for parents we need to have some sort of parent meeting, and I encourage parents to attend and explain to them that this is for the safety of their child.” Parent C6 further added, “I think a lot of them think that you’re getting in their personal business or whatever and they’re just looking at it from that standpoint, not that you were trying to protect their baby.” Participant C3 agreed and added:

They also need to train parents on concerning behavior... I really don’t feel like some parents have any idea about concerning behavior. I don’t think that they know where to get help. Yes, the counselor is their first go-to. But I think some people are very private, and they are afraid of being judged or getting help.

Parent C3 also acknowledged:

If your child is exhibiting these types of behaviors, this is something you need to be concerned about. These are the steps that you can take to try to get help. You know whether that is seeking out the counselor as your first act or even give them some sort of, you know, other types of ways to get help, because I feel like a lot of parents are afraid of being judged.

Participant C5 conveyed, “I feel like maybe this is cynical of me, but I feel like we could offer all the training we could for every parent, every teacher, every student, every whatever, and it could still happen.” She continued, “I just keep thinking of the Sandy Hook thing... and I feel like that was the best system. It shouldn’t have happened.”

Participant C5 mentioned the sense of entitlement and lack of respect for schools:

I feel like in today's society respect is so little, people just lack respect... There isn't much trust, there isn't. So, I'm saying that because I feel like the community and the school aren't one anymore, anywhere, because it's almost against the school. They can say, yeah, we need everybody coming in and everybody helping. And a lot of us would, but there are those who complain and say, "You don't have the right to do anything, and that's my child..." It's that sense of entitlement.

Focus group member D4 stated, "The active shooter training that they're having tomorrow is a wonderful first step." According to D1:

I also think in addition to active shooter training and disaster training, I think that all personnel should be trained on ways to deescalate situations and also ways to handle special needs students, behavioral needs students, and also parents who are noncompliant. I just think they are lacking in our resources on how to defuse a situation before it escalates.

Participant D3 expressed, "To train our students, they definitely need more drills. They need lockdown drills. They need to be training our students within the classroom, and they need to be trained at the same time at school."

**Interview question 10.** What are some key factors that contribute to students, parents, and staff feeling safe at school?

Focus group member A4 expressed:

My husband is actually a teacher at a different school district, and I've seen the different things each room is equipped with in case they do have an active shooter or something like that. I think as many tools as you can get a teacher that can stay



in there and still keep the kids safe. Like they have an extra fire extinguisher or something that, you know, like iron or metal that goes in between the doors, you know, like anything you can equip them with, you know, will help. So resources and communication between the school and the parents, you know, anything. I felt like our school is very good about that as far as emails, texts from the teachers that remind us.

Both A4 and A5 were concerned about the lack of communication or the protocol for getting their children after an event occurred. Specifically, A4 stated:

As far as like if something were to happen, yeah. Where do I go to get my kids? So, there's some questions on that. What would you call that, a safe zone? There needs to be follow up in case of a tornado. If you evacuated to where your main housing is, do you know where you're supposed to pick up your kids? Quite frankly the same thing. You know, you have an active shooter. All those kids in Florida had parents. Did parents know what to do? I know at different times they evacuate to churches. I don't know that I've seen anything, and maybe I didn't read my handbook good enough, where it says children will be sent to "fill in the blank," whatever place they are supposed to evacuate to.

Focus member B1 expressed, "I think because they know that all the staff truly cares about them. And, they would do anything to keep them safe. As a mom, I believe that with every ounce of my being." Parent B4 added:

I think the way, at least the school utilizes its volunteers, it's not come in, do this job, and get out, or they're trying to keep volunteers out. They want parents to come in and be active and help out. They make you feel that you belong here.

Personally, I volunteer to do popcorn, and I help in the library, help my students' teachers with party days when it's a big party like Christmas. I feel welcomed and wanted and not like a burden.

Participant C2 stated, "I think parents would better understand the safety of their kid if procedures were explained and they understood the vibe behind things." Parent C2 added, "I think oftentimes they miss the fact of how many children we're trying to protect and that changes the game a little bit." Finally, C4 conveyed, "I think that if it were explained better and they felt it may be their business if we give them information, they'd be a little more understanding." Focus group member C5 expressed:

I feel like it is such a fine line between safety and welcoming. I talked to the school resource officer. This was over a year ago, and he said do you want a school, or do you want a prison, because you can't have both.

Participant C1 and C4 agreed, they both want parents to feel welcome at school, like they belong. According to C4, "I think the parents need to be invested."

Focus group member C3 added, "We need a lot of transparency. We need clear and concise procedures even if we sent out reminders. I think we probably could do a better job of sending reminders to remind parents about those safety procedures."

According to D1:

Communication, and I know there is kind of a fine line as to you not wanting to cause a panic or a riot with parents. But, I do think there is a proper time and place to share that information with parents. We know with social media and we've seen it with all the schools in the area lately. Parents have felt that the schools were hiding information from them about potentially dangerous

situations. I think it goes back to the staff and as long as they are open with students and with parents and as long as they are making students feel comfortable discussing those situations.

Participant D4 added, “I think running the drills and the practice with the kids, so they’re not unaware or not knowing what the next steps are going to be, and that yes, this is just a drill, but this is what we will be doing if we need to.”

**Interview question 11.** Are there any other thoughts you would like to share on Visitor Management Systems or school safety?

Focus group members A4 and A5 expressed concern about the lack of supervision in the mornings when parents are dropping off their children. According to A5:

I know that at the beginning of the year, we had people in the car rider line in the morning that stood out there and helped the kids get out of the cars, and they don’t do that any longer, and I think that it would be, could be, an important safety thing even as far as looking at that child that day and going, we’d better watch this child. If they came out of the car just ballistic and mad at Mom, this might be a red flag that somebody needs to get a hold of that child. So, I think that would be a safety concern.

Participant A4 added:

They are there, but they are not always on time. I mean, I’ve been here, dropped off early, and um, they haven’t been out there. Drop off starts at like 7:45, 7:30, but I know they don’t come out until later. So, somebody could look into that... But just having someone out there opening the car door might be a good idea.

Focus group member A1 voiced an additional concern about the morning car rider line:

One thing I can see for concern as a parent, if they have little ones in car seats, try to have the student who's in elementary or middle school or high school, whoever's having to get out of the car, have them on the inside of the street next to the sidewalk where they can get out, go straight to the sidewalk, instead of having to walk around the car.

Parent A1 continued, "Anybody who's dropping off their kids, they need to keep an eye out." Her concern came from witnessing a student almost get hit by another car while exiting the car. She added, "I do think that the kids who are in elementary or middle school or high school, if they're being dropped off, be on the inside, don't be trying to walk around vehicles."

Focus group member B3 responded:

I think one of the big things here is having the same person in the office, having the same people doing the evening car rider, because the teachers that are out there know the parents, and they know who's supposed to be picking up children. So just having that same face daily is a big deal. And, that makes me feel even more secure. You know that somebody is not going to take my tag and take my child, and they're going to know."

Participant B3 added, "Maybe they make sure that even substitutes go through background check information and make sure that everyone who comes in this building who is going to work with a students is upstanding." Parent B5 concluded with a concern about family events at school, "My only question was like when we have these big school events like family events and things, how do we know every family member that's on

campus, like, who they are bringing?" He further questioned, "How do you check on every single person?"

Focus group member C2 expressed, "If we could teach teachers assessment skills instead of panic mode maybe that would be a great good sort of training."

According to D1, "I would love to see us go to a badge system for the doors... Not only would that protect them, but also you're able to track better who's in what building and what's going on." Participant D4 agreed, "I agree with that... And, that would allow someone at a central location to be able to identify where students are at. It would just be a better tracking system all the way around." Parent D5 mentioned concerns about logistics of making sure all staff know how to assist all students in all locations:

Every teacher needs to be prepared for it if there is a need, a special needs student in their classroom. If they're in a wheelchair or they are a little bit slower getting places, how they're going to help and have the other kids get there with you assisting that student even though they may have an aide... And, every teacher needs to know what to do if that student happens to be outside their room walking down the hall and we have something where they need to take them and how to get them into their classroom without getting them too scared. And, with that, evacuation drills maybe even off the playground. So, you think about that when you've got a group of three different classes, you know, four or five or whatever on the playground. How are you going to get that many students off safely off the playground? Into which room will they go? How are you going to facilitate that from every situation?

Parent D4 stated, “It’s really unfortunate that we’re in a world that we have to think about this, but I’m thankful that we’re in a district that is proactive enough that we’re taking these steps.”

### **Principal Interviews**

The principal interviews were conducted separate from the other interviews. Each principal was asked 11 questions that corresponded to those asked of the focus groups.

**Interview question one.** What are the benefits of a school visitor management system?

Principal A liked the system even though it was not yet 100% functional. He responded, “I like what we can do with the electronic system. We can put that information in, and it should send an immediate notice to our resource officer and to me and our secretaries.” He continued:

The electronic system is good, because sometimes it’s hard to stay on top of who’s coming in and out all the time. I’m excited about just that aspect of it, because we do have a lot of custody issues and a lot of just people that, you know, don’t need to be here, aren’t supposed to be here. And, it’s hard to feel like you’re staying on top of that. I think this system will help us with that.

Principal B remarked, “I think it would be a great benefit for continuity in our office. Right now we do not have a management system that is electronic, and we are investigating that currently.” Principal C expressed, “Well, it’s reliable. And it’s a fast procedure. You know who’s in the building if there is an occurrence of something that takes place. I mean, it’s a fast way to get a count.” Principal C concluded, “Knowing who’s been in, who’s been out, and who’s still in the building. That’s what I would think

the benefits would be.” Principal D asserted the visitor management systems allowed schools to “control who is on campus and to provide a background check on people who want access to the school building and students.” All the principals felt a visitor management system provided extra security and added safety measures which increase the ability to prevent violence.

**Interview question two.** What do you think are some of the problems of having a visitor management system?

Principal A responded, “When it doesn’t work, well, I just have parents sign in on a piece of paper. So, we go back to that paper and sign them in.” Both Principals B and D had concerns about technology. Principal B mentioned having a quality back-up plan, and his concern was “web-based programs where the internet service is down, things of that nature. So having a quality backup plan in those instances would be my concern.” Principal C felt each school would have their own concerns or problems, but her main concern was accuracy of information. She specified, “Some of our parents may not actually have a driver’s license. Some of them might have a work ID. How much of that information is really correct on their ID?” She went on to state, “When it comes to safety measures, I mean, you want something implemented, but I’m finding parents won’t comply.” Principal C conveyed her frustration with some preschool parents not complying with school procedures and shared, “Some of our preschool parents will not comply with our new rule leaving some type of ID, keys, or some personal item so that they come back out the building, because we have so many entryways.” She went on to say those parents sometime leave the building from whatever door is most convenient and take the school badge with them, causing the school to change the color of the badges

so people do not use old badges. Principal C stated, “It just breaks down our system. But I’m having a hard time getting them to comply. So we’ve started this car rider procedure, and now they’re not wanting to comply on that, either.”

**Interview question three.** What suggestions do you have for improvement?

School A was still trying to learn the system. Principal A expressed, “I think when we get the system going, we’ll learn more about what it can do.” He confessed, “I guess I haven’t used it enough to know what would be a drawback of it, because it’s been sitting out there for two months.” He added, “The girls in the office have started messing with the electronic system a little bit trying to make it work and going over to middle school, because middle school got the system to work.” He did believe that once the system was fully functioning it would be beneficial; however, he was concerned about the amount of people that either do not carry their driver’s licenses or simply do not have one.

Principal B shared her concerns about car riders and ensuring the people in the cars had not stolen a car tag from someone, putting a child at risk. She specified, “I think one thing that we’ve investigated is making sure that we have a system in the car rider line... that it truly is the person with that tag that is there to pick up.” School B is investigating some sort of a visual identification process to accurately identify those individuals approved for student pick-up.

Principal C mentioned the desire to have a location at the front of the building for parents to wait for teachers to bring the students to them. According to Principal C, “Now I’m having to provide someone to escort them back and forth. And, I don’t have enough staff members to do that. And, really our job is to educate.” Principal D



responded that companies should “interface the security system with the school information system for complete access of student files.” He also had the same concerns as the other principals in regard to the openness of School D and students being exposed to danger while walking between buildings.

**Interview question four.** Share with me your thoughts on the following: using pen and paper system or an electronic system for signing in.

Building A just installed an electronic system, whereas Buildings B and C both still use pencil and paper. Both Principals A and D mentioned there was no accountability to ensure the person was actually writing their own name on the paper. Principal A acknowledged, “The paper and pen is what we always used to use. But anybody can write something down. We don’t check it every time after they sign it.” He continued, “The electronic system I think will be so much better. It’s going to notify us. We’re not going to have to worry about going over and checking it constantly to see where they go or how long they’ve been.” Principal A concluded, “The system prints out a badge that says, ‘Hey, this is who I am,’ and it even tells where they are supposed to be going.”

Principal B responded:

We use paper and pen. It’s working very effectively for us as a cross verification. Visitors come through the office. When someone does sign in, and we notice that they’re not the person on the pickup or emergency list, we do ask for identification. So, we’re still visually looking at identification or cross-referencing those signatures, and we can trace back if we have issues. So, we do at least have some trace or trail to follow if we have any issues.

Principal C expressed, "It would just be really quick if we had a badge or an ID that we could scan real quickly and have information there, in and out quick. We use paper pen." She added, "I have a parent that refuses to sign and show ID. Like if I'm standing there beside the paper and tell her you have to fill that out, she won't. She just gets belligerent."

*Locked doors and controlled entrances.* Principal A stated, "I think they're good. I also know that if someone really wants in here, they're going to get in here." He added, "As long as we have windows and doors, they're going to get in, but at least we know that if someone uses a gun to get in, we're going to know they're here because of the noise." He acknowledged:

I definitely think that the locked buildings make people feel better, and we know who's coming and going where... With the locked door, the intercom/buzz in and the electronic sign-in system, we know when someone is coming in, and we stress to our kids and teachers, don't open the doors and let people in.

Principal B responded, "Well, I think we're blessed here. We have controlled entrances here on the front, and this is the only doors that are open during the daytime." She admitted there were still some transitions between portable buildings that required students to be supervised during transition time and "also just making sure that teachers coming in and out of the other doors are making sure that they're locked."

Principal C stated, "We have nine different entrances in the building. Just mechanisms are failing us, like we had new doors installed in on our K-1 hallway. The doors don't shut right." She continued:

We do ask the children to come get us if someone's knocking on the door. We try to train them, even if it's the superintendent, if the principal is standing there knocking, don't let us in. We have keys; there's no reason for us knocking. If you see an adult knocking on the door, you go get your teacher or whoever you're with; get their attention and let them go get the door. But in my building, we've done pretty good. We'll test them every once in a while, you know when the SRO is around campus, to see if they'll fall for it. And, they don't. We try to tell our parents, you know, don't knock on the doors and to go through the main entrance.

Principal D responded locked doors are "the best way to keep a building safe." However, he also recognized a concern: "What about kids getting locked out of the building or room during an emergency?"

*Surveillance cameras.* All four principals expressed their appreciation for having cameras; however, Principals A and C felt their systems could be updated and better serve the needs of their buildings. Principal A shared, "I think they're good. I mean, I wish I had more. So, yeah. I pull up video every so often for discipline. We've had some things that have happened, and we go back and look at it." Principal C responded:

I'm actually able to monitor all cameras in our district, so that's nice, too, because if there was actually a situation that was happening at school and if you know like a school shooting happened there, I could actually come over to the cameras and see what's going on and share that.

Both principals understood the expectations and limitations of video surveillance.

Principal B acknowledged, "There have been some times where I realize I need more

camera access or different video of things, but sometimes, yeah, we've used them for things, and I can pull video up on my phone when I'm not here, so they're nice."

Principal C also shared, "You're probably aware our cameras don't move. They're not 360 cameras... We don't have audio yet with it. You know, I don't know many schools that have audio with surveillance camera, but that could be additional help."

Principal B shared, "Our camera system is phenomenal. We have a new camera system. The board was good enough to invest that money." She added that it was a quality digital system that allowed her to monitor every area of the school. She admitted, "But, there again, having the time to do so. But, that has been a tremendous help, and parents and students are very aware of that camera system."

***Privacy rights.*** Principal A expected the district may have some privacy concerns with the new electronic visitor management system and specified, "We just started the electronic system. Yesterday was the first day, so I'm sure we probably will have some of those issues with people not wanting to provide their identification." He added, "But, I guess if they want to come into the school, that's the way they get in. I mean, if they want access, they will have to comply." He further stated:

If people don't want to run their ID or I know that they don't have one, and I said well, we're going to have to let them type in their name or whatever. But they will have to show you some form of identification so that you know that they're typing in the right name... I mean, I've been here my whole life. I went to school here, and I've taught here for 29 years. There are a lot of people I don't know, because we keep getting new people, but most people I know. We stay on top of sheriff's office jail log.

Principal B responded, “I think that if you go to public school that you are subject to giving up certain rights in lieu of safety.” Principal C shared her experience with parents and surveillance cameras:

I have never had a parent question me about our surveillance cameras. You know, sometimes, I’ve used it for discipline, and you know, to see what actually happened. I’ve had parents that want to view it, and I will not allow that because of confidentiality of other students.

Principal D admitted:

I think that if students come to school in a public school and they are made aware that video cameras are in use, that the child is subject to the use of video to help in determining whether or not the child was involved in anything that may be perceived as a violation of school policy or the law. I don’t believe that any video should be posted on social media or made available to the public without consent.

**Interview question five.** What are the benefits of the school resource officer?

All four principals were very appreciative and complimentary of their SROs.

Principal A replied, “Ours is wonderful! I have got to be careful when I say I’m concerned about something and what do I need to do. You know, I mean, he’s like ready to take care of stuff.” He continued:

Our SRO is very helpful. Say like, if we have any parents that were kind of mad because we’re sending their kid home with lice for the fifth time and you know he’s out here, it just makes you feel a lot more comfortable. Today’s world is just kind of sad that it’s resorted to that.

Principal B responded, “We’ve been blessed especially with our SRO. He’s here at lunch every day, and the kids love him, and he gets it. So we’re building that rapport with our local police, and he’s wonderful.” She added:

The other part is he’s helping me with morning traffic. I couldn’t do without him in the morning and in the afternoon, just his presence both at the high school campus and this campus trying to get parents to obey the traffic laws, watching for school bus safety as well. So, there’s many aspects of what he does there that are tremendous benefits to the high school. Helping with the drug dogs and with investigations and with those very delicate situation with students.

Principal C felt the presence of an school resource officer was a deterrent to inappropriate behavior. She shared, “We like our resource officers. Our lead SRO has been here for 20 years. I feel comfortable when a situation happens.” She continued, “My building resource officer has been here, I would say at least the last three years. You know, he’s bilingual, and with our demographics, that is nice.” She further added:

He is one that helps with traffic. He is a trained police officer. He is a city police officer. He works for the PD, and so he’s half-time just like our other SRO. They’re both paid half city, half school funds, so... sometimes he might have a nighttime duty, so you’ll see him in town. You’ll see him at community events. So, I think that’s good for our community; we’re small enough that that makes a big difference.

Principal D answered:

A trained SRO is a huge benefit. Not only is he there to help in any type of incident but he brings a safeness and security just with his presence. Our SRO is

a sheriff's officer but is contracted by our school, so not only can he write tickets for traffic violations around school, he can also go out into the county where our students are and help with welfare checks or actually go pick up students who are truant or that may be having issues with violence or abuse.

**Interview question six.** What are your main safety concerns?

The main concern of Principal A was "that if they want in here, they're going to get in, and what would we do once that really happens?" He went on to mention that there were a couple of employees with reserve training that let him know when they are armed. He also mentioned the front office had a can of mace if needed, but his main concern was "that we can practice all day long but if something really happens... are we really going to be prepared if something like that happens?" He continued:

I don't have a gun on me. I don't want a gun. I think that's what scares me more, thinking that teachers could have guns in their classroom for protection more than I'm worried about someone coming in because of accidental things.

Principal B expressed worry about the playground and when students are at physical education class in another building. Another huge concern continued to be logistics of K-2 transportation: "...a child getting on the wrong bus or getting off at the wrong stop is what always keeps me awake at night." Principal C shared, "Our building is located in the center with all the streets... We have streets that run on all three sides of our building." She also mentioned all the outside entrances and ensuring doors remained locked. Principal D's main concern was "teachers carrying guns."

**Interview question seven.** Do you believe that your students are safe here while they are at school?

Principal A responded, “Yes, I think we are. The teachers, we talk about it. We have a plan; we cover our windows and hide. And, as far as like people having to sign in, they can’t just come in and grab them.” He continued, “We have our fence along the playground and policies for parents; they aren’t allowed on the playground.” He further discussed how they ensure safety for the car rider line, “We make sure we’re all out there, we know who’s picking them up, and so we are as safe as we can be and are there if something happened.” Principal B expressed, “I do, and I think it’s because we do a very good job of keeping classrooms locked, the other entrances locked, and just having the one main entrance where you have to be buzzed in.” Principal C responded:

In any situation you need to be aware of your surroundings; you need to be watching people. And, I think communicating that with staff members. I don’t think you’re ever going to get everyone to feel 100 percent that this situation is safe. But they face the same things when they go to Wal-Mart, when they go to the doctor’s office, church. So, I do feel like this school is a safe place.

Principal D asserted, “The staff and I go above and beyond to make sure we know the students and question safety issues and work together to make sure student needs are being met.”

**Interview question eight.** Who is responsible for school safety?

All four principals felt school safety was everyone’s responsibility. Principal A responded further by stating:

As far as making sure that people know the routines and procedures, that would be me, for my building. The superintendent would want to make sure that our teachers feel comfortable and know what they’re supposed to do and that our kids



know what they're supposed to do districtwide. I mean, that's ultimately my responsibility, but then it's everyone's to enforce it day in and day out.

**Interview question nine.** What training should be offered for parents, students, and school personnel to further school safety?

All four principals responded that continuing drills for each threat was essential. Principal A also thought communication was very important, especially with parents:

And, for parents, I think just making them aware of what you do. Like I send them letters, and I tell them our car rider line is for the safety of their kids. You know, I think just keeping them aware of and just letting them know that everything we do is not to be mean, but it's what we feel like we need to do for the safety.

Principal B considered the importance of staff communication, "For our teachers, just having that conversation after those drills about questions and concerns." She added, "There's a thousand scenarios, but at least having that conversation about using common sense and you being the person in charge that has to step up and take responsibility."

Principal B also mentioned the importance of keeping parents aware of the different protocols in place to keep students safe.

Principal C was concerned about doing too many active shooter drills with the younger children and stated, "You know, I don't want to scare them. But, I think we need to provide some training. I mean, like we do fire drills and we do the active shooter drill." She continued, "I don't want to do too many of those, because those are situations you don't know how to prepare them, but just giving them a heads up, you know." She also thought it was a good idea to bring in guest speakers for teachers, perhaps someone

who had been in a similar situation. Principal C concluded, “I would say trauma care would be a important piece.” Principal D also answered, “Communication drills with radios, social media, and school messenger, so parents know where to find information during an emergency.”

**Interview question 10.** What are some key factors that contribute to students, parents, and staff feeling safe at school?

The principals all mentioned the importance of communication. Principal A replied, “I try to, you know, to tell parents. They want to know and get so concerned.” He also mentioned the practicing of safety drills and stated:

All the safety procedures we have in place. Having that SRO visible and on campus each day. Just keeping them aware of and just letting them know that everything we do is not to be mean, but it’s what we feel like we need to do for the safety.

Principal B mentioned the importance of reassuring the students. She concluded, “You should be able to feel safe regardless of where you are at our campus.” Principal C reiterated, “Just communicating. With parents I think is key, and staff, too. But depending on the grade level, communication and transparency is required. Principal D realized all schools are different and suggested:

I feel like a school should do some surveys or have a group really evaluate what is best to implement for a particular school... We have even had a school lockdown because an estranged dad was mad... So, each campus needs to decide what types of security work best for them and how to implement security tools and procedures based on specific needs.

**Interview question 11.** Do you have any other thoughts that you would like to share about your visitor management system or school safety?

Principal A noted some concerns about inaccuracy of information from the new visitor management system:

I hear there was somebody that had a substitute in high school. When he put his driver's license in, and it flagged it to the secretary there and said he was a sex offender. And so, of course, it sent a thing to our resource officer and the principal immediately, too, and the visitor just had the same name as the offender. He wasn't a sex offender, but it showed us that.

Principal B mentioned her search for a quality system for car riders and drop off, "I feel like that's where we're missing the boat. That's a very hectic 20 to 30 minutes with a tremendous amount of traffic." She continued:

One of our issues is we don't have one way in and one way out... so managing that flow of traffic and parents, and we're not only talking about safety from predators, but I'm also talking about just the fact that we're addressing speed, we're addressing cell phone use in car rider lines. So there's a tremendous number of safety issues. And, even though I have adequate staff, I would love to have more people and more eyes on what's going on in those situations. So, that's a concern as always.

Principal C acknowledged, "I wish I could tear my building down and build it the way I want it." She admitted that although that might solve current parental issues, it would just create others. She stated:

We want parents here in the school and what we've put in place now makes them feel like they're not welcome, or at least the parent that I'm having trouble with. Now, I don't want him to feel like this is a bad place. But, when it comes to providing safety for my kids, they make other parents feel safe for their children. I'm sorry for how that one feels.

She concluded, "We're just trying to improve each day. Making this a safe place to learn and survive the next situation that arises."

### **School Resource Officer Interviews**

The school resource officers were interviewed separately from all other participants in the study. The school resource officers were asked 11 questions that corresponded to the other participant questions. The school resource officer from school C declined to participate in the interview.

**Interview question one.** What do you believe are the benefits of a visitor management system and what do you think would be some of the benefits of having a visitor management system in your building?

All of the school resource officers were adamant about the fact they put student safety first. Officer A responded, "I believe the biggest benefit is to keep out people who don't need to be here, but if a parent has a protection order against them or something like that." He continued, "If they check-in, it can automatically throw a red flag up for me to be contacted to come solve the problem." He acknowledged, "Our greatest fear is these child custody issues and keeping a parent who is not supposed to have a child from coming and getting the child." Officer B replied, "My whole reason for being here is safety and security of the children; the better the visitor management, the safer the kids. I

really don't have much more to say about it than that." Finally, SRO D stated, "Visitor management systems have several benefits, including the ability to run an instant sex offender check on all visitors. Also, a record of all visitors is kept allowing for review at a later time if needed."

**Interview question two.** What do you see as some of the problems of having a secure visitor management system?

Both SRO A and SRO B mentioned the issue when the system did not work properly, whether it was a technology glitch or a problem with the software. Officer A added, "I am here five days a week, [and] probably two days where they're working on it. So that's the biggest problem I see, but when it works, it's great." Officer B offered, "Web-based programs where the internet services is down, things of that nature, so having a quality backup plan in those instances would be my concern."

School Resource Officer D admitted visitor management systems make parents nervous because of the personal information the school can access. He added, "There is also the added time needed to utilize the system and the work required by the person responsible for administering the system." He determined one of the important aspects of the system is the "electronic checks still require a person to verify the accuracy of the information and that it applies to the person requesting entry."

**Interview question three.** What suggestions do you have for improvement?

School Resource Officer A responded:

It would be nice if they could somehow link their school systems to the State Crime Information Center systems to where when a driver's license is scanned or

something, if this person's a sex offender, it will automatically pop up and we could know why this guy's got a criminal history for that matter.

Officer B acknowledged having a visitor management system with ID cards and pass cards would be beneficial. Currently, that was something they did not have. Officer D replied, "Educating parents and other visitors on the need for the visitor checks" was his suggestion for improvement.

**Interview question four.** Share with me your thoughts on the following: using a pen and paper system or an electronic system for the registry of visitors.

School Resource Officer A expressed:

I don't like the pen and paper system, because unless someone is sitting there to identify them by their photo ID, you can come in and write any name you want to on it and stick it to your shirt and go down the hallway. At least with the electronic system you know they have their photo taken, [and] if we need to go back and look at that to make sure that they're who they say they are, we can do that.

Officer B responded, "I think that eyeball-to-eyeball approach with a real person looking at a real supposed parent or guardian. I don't think you can really get away from it. No matter what else you have in place." Officer D asserted, "An electronic system has less errors and requires less overhead and space to keep visitor records allowing for a quicker review of when and who has visited the school." He did acknowledge that a back-up pen and paper system should be in place in case the other system is not working.

***Locked doors and controlled entrances.*** All three school resource officers were adamant that all doors, especially exterior doors, need to be locked and some sort of

controlled entrance needs to be in place at the main entrance. Officer D's response summed up all three statements on the importance of locked doors and controlled entrances, "Locked doors and controlled access should be a requirement for all school entrances."

***Surveillance cameras.*** All three school resource officers were overwhelmingly in favor of video surveillance cameras, and all three used the cameras frequently. Officer A stated, "I really like surveillance cameras." He went on to discuss actual events that occurred both in the building and on the grounds, and the cameras allowed him to identify the perpetrators. He added he had been able to identify "kids snatching stuff out of other people's lockers." Officer B admitted, "I use it quite a bit, and I uncover minor crimes, even felonies sometimes, and I think we need to cover the whole campus if you can afford it." According to SRO D:

Cameras are a deterrent to many individuals wishing to do wrong. They can also be used by security and law enforcement personnel to assess the location of the intruder in real time. The saved video footage can also be used by the court system after an incident to verify the actions of all involved.

***Privacy rights.*** Regarding privacy rights, SRO A stated, "I believe if they come here and they don't want a scan their driver's license to enter our school, then they probably don't need to be here if they have an issue with that." He continued, "That information is not used against them for anything other than for identification purposes. We're not going to release that information." He added, "As far as videotaping, I mean, if we're using it for security purposes like we do, then I don't think they should have a problem with it. It's closed circuit. It's not being aired." Officer A expressed the video

could be used in a court of law, “The only place that video will ever be shown is in court. And, that’s only if one of the lawyers or the prosecutor or the judge wants to view that. It’s not publicly distributed.”

School Resource Officer B responded, “I think the same parents that think their children ought to have a telephone all the time would be the ones that complain about the so-called privacy rights.” He added, “I don’t think there is a right to privacy except in the restrooms in this building and in the nurse’s station.” Officer D replied, “If signs are posted that surveillance measures are in place, then anyone who wants to enter accepts that they are being monitored. Also the use of cameras is listed in the student/parent acknowledgement of school policies.”

**Interview question five.** What are the benefits of a school resource officer?

The school resource officers mentioned several benefits including traffic enforcement, child custody issues, theft, safety, and security. Officer B also mentioned the importance of being around the students and building relationships of trust:

One benefit that holds true is the amount of hours that I spend actually inside the building and walking around and trying to make myself known to the children so that they trust me [and] are not afraid of me.

Officer B also mentioned, “NASRO [The National Association of School Resource Officers] teaches us that we have a threefold reason for being here for education, and to bridge the gap between what we really are and what people think we are, and to be a counselor in some regards.” Officer D conveyed, “Resource officers are certified law enforcement officers and are able to diffuse many situations before they become violent.” He added:



If the situation warrants legal action, the officer is already on site and can respond much quicker than calling 911 and waiting for another officer to be dispatched to the school. And lastly, if required, the resource officer is armed and equipped to deal with an active killer situation.

**Interview question six.** What are your main safety concerns?

Both SROs A and D had concerns about armed intruders. Officer A responded, “My main concern is an active shooter. Of course there’s been a lot of that going on here lately so it’s on more people’s mind. But that’s what I worry about more than anything else.” On the other hand, SRO D acknowledged:

Having an armed resource officer on campus has more benefits than concerns, but there are still concerns that anyone with a weapon on a school campus could lose control of that weapon, and it could then be used by the person trying to cause harm.

Both SRO A and SRO B mentioned their concerns about the amount of exterior doors to their buildings. Officer B concluded with one of his greatest concerns, “I’ve already pointed out the simplicity of someone coming down here and either grabbing a child or presenting themselves as the legal guardian. That worries me all the time.” He continued, “We are near to a hotel that caters to the lower elements of our city. We’re near local stores that sell alcohol. Drugs are prevalent in the community. And, I could go on.” Officer B acknowledged, “We have registered sexual offenders, probably all over, dotted all over the community, and some that are too close to the schools, and we just don’t know about it.”

**Interview question seven.** Do you believe that students are safe at school?

All three school resource officers asserted the students were safe at school. Officer B responded, "I believe the children are as safe as we can make them with the resources that we have and buildings that we have." Officer A replied, "We've got a good group of teachers and a good group of administrators here. Pretty well everybody keeps their eyes open for anything weird; it gets reported to me." According to SRO D, "Being prepared for these types of situations is the best way to prevent them from happening."

**Interview question eight.** Who is responsible for school safety?

Both SRO A and SRO D felt everyone was responsible for school safety. Officer D responded, "Everyone is responsible for school safety, from security and law enforcement, teachers and administrators, students and parents, to the local community." More specifically, SRO B stated, "At the very top, I would believe it is the superintendent. Maybe the school board thinks they are."

**Interview question nine.** What kind of training should be offered for parents, students, and school personnel to further school safety?

All three school resource officers acknowledged the importance of training and communicating with emergency service personnel, parents, staff, and students. Officer D summed up the opinions of the three officers in his response:

There are different levels of training for everyone involved in school safety.

Parents need to be aware of what threats exist to their students. Students need to recognize danger signs in their classmates [behaviors] and in others [behaviors] around the school. They [parents and students] need to know what to do with the information they have. School personnel need to know school policy, local law,

and how to identify a dangerous situation and then how to minimize the dangers associated with them.

**Interview question 10.** What are some key factors that contribute to students, parents, and staff feeling safe at school?

Each school resource officer responded differently to this question. Officer A stated, “I think the biggest key factor is knowing that we have plans in place to take care of each emergency. And knowing we have full-time officers on campus.” According to SRO B, “I can tell you that just being here in the mornings and directing traffic, keep making sure that kids, all of those kids are safe.” Officer D mentioned, “If the students believe that faculty and staff care about them and will do whatever is necessary to take care of them, then I believe the students will feel safe at school.” He added, “Teachers need to understand what measures are in place and what the plan is if something does happen.”

**Interview question 11.** Are there any other thoughts you would like to share about visitor management systems or school safety?

School Resource Officers B and C both responded to this question. Officer B acknowledged:

I don't think it's practical, but it would be nice to have two SROs, one on this campus and one for that campus. I don't believe it will ever happen, because it's too costly. I think about this daily, will I be on the right campus at the right time for an incident? Of course, resources are limited.

Officer D admitted, “Visitor management systems, trained and armed resource officers, entry control devices, and any other security measures will help keep our schools safe,

but there is no way to prepare for and defeat all dangers.” He continued, “Chances are, most of us will never see an active killer situation at our school, but we need to be prepared for everything we can.” In conclusion, SRO D stated, “I think most schools are working in the right direction to keep students safe in an ever-changing and increasingly dangerous world.”

### **Emerging Themes**

The responses from the interview questions were analyzed and four themes emerged. Theme one revolved around monitoring access into and out of the physical school building. Visitors entering and exiting the school building has been identified as the weakest point of security in a school facility (Hattersley-Gray, 2013; Lacey, 2014). The purpose of visitor management systems is to monitor and screen visitors to provide safety and accountability for districts (Gewertz, 2018; Hattersley-Gray, 2013; Taylor, 2018).

Theme two included the issue of school-controlled entrances into the building itself. School personnel who maintain security doors and control traffic through one main entrance that is continually monitored deters intruders from entering and provides a safe and secure learning environment for students (Griffin, 2016; Schneider & Coleman, 1993). Theme three was centered on the importance of employing trained school resource officers who could, in turn, create a more positive presence in the school building. Students who have a positive relationship with their school resource officer feel safe in school (Schlottman, 2015). Students and staff report feeling safe with school resource officers in school (Rosiak, 2014). Finally, theme four addressed the training of school personnel in the areas of school safety and communication. Students and staff

who are alert and well-trained are the best line of defense in a school intruder or shooter situation (Trump, 2017).

### **Summary**

A qualitative methodology was utilized to categorize data gathered from focus groups and individual interviews. Four focus group interviews with parents, four interviews with building principals, and three interviews with school resource officers were detailed in Chapter Four. Four themes emerged as a result of an analyses of the data. The four themes were monitored access to school, controlled entrances, trained positive presence of school resource officers, and training and communication of administrators, school resource officers, staff, students, parents, and community members.

The research questions are restated and the findings are presented in Chapter Five. The conclusions drawn from the research data and related literature are discussed. Finally, implications for practice regarding school safety and visitor management systems are presented. Recommendations for future research are outlined.

## Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

This qualitative study allowed for examination of the perceptions of elementary parents, principals, and school resource officers regarding visitor management systems and school safety. Three research questions were developed to guide the study. The participants of this study included parents who participated in focus group discussions and elementary building principals and school resource officers who participated in interviews.

Presented in Chapter Five are the findings, conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research. Responses from the focus group discussions and personal interviews were transcribed and then analyzed to determine participants' perceptions. A summary of the data was then applied to the corresponding research questions. Supporting research from the review of literature in Chapter Two was also included allowing for comparisons related to previous research.

### Findings

The interview questions were designed to elicit honest responses and to gather data to answer the research questions. The responses have been summarized and applied to the corresponding research questions.

**Research question one.** What are the perceptions of public elementary school principals and school resource officers about visitor management systems and school security?

All principals and school resource officers agreed there needs to be some sort of visitor management system in place at schools. There were some differing opinions of what type of system works best. Principals and school resource officers with an

electronic visitor management system appreciated the efficiency of checking in visitors, providing background checks, and keeping track of visitors who were in the building. Most agreed a pen and paper system was a last resort as the process is time-consuming, not always monitored, and likely inaccurate. One principal mentioned a concern with electronic visitor management systems since the system is only functioning when internet is available. Also, the electronic systems could misidentify someone with the same name as red flagged when the actual individual signing in was not that person. A concern was voiced about visitor management systems such as locked exterior doors and controlled entrances because students and staff could get locked outside during a dangerous situation and not have access to shelter.

Principals and school resource officers all agreed their buildings were as safe as they can be. Although principals expressed that it was first and foremost their responsibility to keep the building safe, all principals and school resource officers asserted everyone has a responsibility in keeping the building safe. The school resource officers' main safety concern when it came to their responsibility was an active shooter situation.

Both principals and school resource officers predicted training and drills would help to make the building safer. All principals mentioned the importance of practicing drills, but Principal C had concerns about doing intense drills with younger students. All principals agreed that good communication with staff and parents is needed to keep the building safe. Most principals and school resource officers did not agree arming teachers would enhance the safety of the school.

**Research question two.** What are the perceptions of public elementary school principals and school resource officers about how visitor management systems manage and prepare schools for intruders?

As mentioned in question one, all principals and school resource officers felt visitor management systems are necessary and provide a degree of security where possible intruders are concerned. To what degree depends on the type of system. Principals and school resource officers felt the ideal system would include an electronic system that could connect to the state and federal database to provide criminal background checks on all visitors.

The ideal system also would be able to connect to the school information system to bring up student data such as who has permission to pick up the student or any pertinent court documents restricting certain people from picking up or having contact with students. An ideal system would also scan visitors' identification in and out, print photo badges, and keep track of visitors throughout the building with efficiency and ease, notifying the appropriate personnel of anything out of the ordinary. Principals and school resource officers described a system specifically designed to keep people such as sex offenders, sexual predators, disgruntled parents, parents with custody issues or no contact orders, and those persons whose sole purpose is to do harm out of the building.

Concerns with such a system included cost of implementation. Principals and school resource officers with electronic systems in place expressed a concern with criminal database scans that identify sex offenders and then flag innocent people with similar names. Another concern is what happens when the internet or database



connection is lost due to technical difficulties and malfunctions. A procedure or a backup system would then need to be put into place to manage visitors.

**Research question three.** What are the perceptions of parents regarding visitor management systems and school security?

Two parents brought up privacy issues in regard to visitor management systems. Parents D1 and A4 felt providing a driver's license and running it through an electronic database was a violation of a person's privacy rights. All parents asserted some sort of visitor management system needs to be in place. Parent A3 expressed there is more accountability when schools monitor who is coming in and out of the building. All parents were concerned about only using a pen and paper check-in system to manage visitors, as visitors could sign in and write any name on the paper.

Parent A5 specifically mentioned controlled entrances and what happened in the school building prior to having any type of monitored entrance, stating she remembered parents coming in and inching down the hallway at pick up time without anyone knowing. All parents agreed schools should have locked doors and controlled entrances as security measures. Parent C3 was concerned about a lockdown situation and a child being locked out of the building or locked out of a room and left in the hallway vulnerable. The same parent also had concerns about multiple entrances to the building and possible access points for intruders.

All parents were in favor of having security cameras on campus. Parent A4 stated, "We support the school, so we support the procedures and policies of the school." Parents agreed if their child was doing something wrong and caught on camera, he or she

should be punished. All parent groups said their school used security cameras and posted that cameras were in use.

School resource officers were seen as a positive presence on school campuses according to all parents. Parents proclaimed school resource officers are key in keeping safety and security in school and giving students a positive sense of security while at school. Parents expressed school resource officers need to be visible and interact with students and parents. All parents emphasized there need to be more school resource officers hired to be more effective. Parents A1 and D1 shared a concern that if there happened to be an active shooter while something else was going on at another campus, the school resource officer could not get to where the emergency was in time. All parents would like to see more school resource officers on campus.

The playground was a concern for all parent focus groups. Parents shared concerns about playgrounds being too open and vulnerable to predators. Several parents were concerned about how teachers and staff on recess duty were supposed to not only supervise students but also identify possible predators and safety risks. Parent C2 expressed the worry for student safety is not so much for when students are in the classroom or at lunch, but more when students were on the playground because the playground is open and not fenced.

All parent focus groups agreed students were safe on campus except Focus Group C. Although parent C1 had gone to school in District C and felt safe, she did not feel her children were safe due to the lack of security measures. She was concerned with the possibility that someone could breach the outer fence and gain access to the building through a glass door located near her daughter's classroom. All groups believed it is

everyone's responsibility to make sure school is safe. Everyone plays a part in school safety, and parents asserted communication and training are a part of that. Parents felt communication and training for parents regarding school safety and security procedures needed to improve and teachers, students, and parents needed to practice drills to prepare for different safety scenarios. Focus Group A explained communication on lockdown and follow-up procedures needed to improve. Focus Group C parents expressed they would feel better if procedures were communicated and understood better.

### **Conclusions**

Responses of participants from this study and the research questions were analyzed to form the following conclusions. After completing the open coding on the transcripts, the data were then subject to sorting via axial coding to determine commonalities. The initial themes that emerged included restricted access, accountability, controlled entrances, trained positive presence, safety procedures, responsibility, feeling safe, and training.

**Theme one: Monitored access to school.** Monitored access to the school building was the main theme of all the focus groups and interviews with principals and school resource officers for establishing school safety and preventing intruders. Customizable software-based systems provide schools with needed visitor management resources such as custody information and background checks against the child sex offender registry (AlphaCard, 2014; Lacey, 2014; Raptor Technologies, 2017b; Taylor, 2018; Thompson, 2018).

During the interviews, visitor management systems were discussed in detail from simple paper and pencil monitoring to electronic systems that connect with school

information systems. Both participants and researchers agreed visitor management systems are a way of tracking who comes in and out of the building to keep children safe. According to relevant literature, electronic visitor management systems are more efficient than pen and paper sign-in systems (AlphaCard, 2014; Hanover Research, 2013; Lacey, 2014; Raptor Technologies, 2017b; Taylor, 2018; Thompson, 2018). Pen and paper sign-in systems leave room error and cannot be managed well, especially when there is more than one visitor at a time (AlphaCard, 2014; Hanover Research, 2013; Lacey, 2014; Raptor Technologies, 2017b; Taylor, 2018; Thompson, 2018). With the electronic system, schools can be connected to a database or school information system that allows the school to scan a driver's license or ID card and bring up pertinent information about that individual and the student involved (Lacey, 2014; SchoolGate Guardian, 2017; Taylor, 2018; Tech&Learning, 2017).

**Theme two: Controlled entrances.** Controlling entrance to district buildings was the second prevalent theme regarding school safety discovered during data analysis. A monitored sign in and out, or check in and out to gain access to building is the ideal means to control access to the building according to parents, principals, and school resource officers. The purpose of controlling and monitoring access to the building is to prevent a crime from happening. Controlling and monitoring entrances and access to buildings can deter and or detect a crime before it occurs (Gewertz, 2018; Hevia; 2018; Lacey, 2014; Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2013; Taylor, 2018; Thompson, 2018). Keeping all exterior doors locked and only allowing entrance to the building through one monitored and controlled entrance can prevent unauthorized entrance and access to the

building and holds visitors accountable, while keeping track of who is in the building (Griffin, 2016; Hevia, 2018; Schneider & Coleman, 1993).

**Theme three: Trained positive presence.** The third theme centered around the importance of school resource officers and the important role they play in keeping schools safe. Having school resource officers on campus was seen as a positive addition to the districts' security measures. School resource officers who are visible and build good relationships with students are a key component of school safety (Jennings et al., 2011; Rosiak, 2014; Schlottman, 2015; Theriot, 2016). In this study, the need for more than one resource officer was echoed. The concern was that if there is only one resource officer and something happens on one part of the campus, the resource officer would not be available to handle an emergency on the other side of the campus.

**Theme four: Training and communication.** The fourth and final theme revolved around preparation for emergency lockdown situations. Conducting drills and making sure staff and students know how to react to lockdown situations is the best line of defense if a school encounters an active shooter situation (Schweit, 2016; Trump, 2017). Focus group members mentioned the need for better communication as far as what a parent needs to do after a lockdown situation occurs. When planning and implementing a safety plan into effect, everyone in the community should have a part to play, from school administration, teachers, students, and parents to firefighters, police, and first responders (O'Meara, 2013; Taylor, 2018; Thompson, 2018; Trump, 2017).

### **Implications for Practice**

The first implication for practice is the utilization of an electronic visitor management system. According to Taylor (2018), as technological advancements

continue to improve school security, schools are able to provide a safer learning environment. Both participants and the review of literature support the utilization of an electronic visitor management system (AlphaCard, 2014; Hanover Research, 2013; Hevia, 2018; Lacey, 2014; Raptor Technologies, 2017b; Taylor, 2018; Thompson, 2018). It is essential districts have procedures in place and trained personnel available to screen visitors upon entry (Schaeffer, 2016). Although these systems are expensive, schools can use newly allotted Title IV funds or write grants to enhance school safety measures when local funds are not available.

The second implication for practice is the utilization of school resource officers. All participants agreed school resource officers are indispensable when it comes to school security and safety. Curran (2018) ascertained school districts across the nation are adding or expanding the presence of law enforcement in their schools. School resource officers not only patrol buildings but also assist in discipline cases that might become dangerous (Schlottman, 2015; Thompson, 2018). School Resource Officer B added that his role as an school resource officer has enabled him to build positive relationships with both students and parents.

Parent focus group members agreed and appreciated not only the positive relationship with law enforcement but also the commented on the safety and security an school resource officer brings to the building. The expense of adding a school resource officer or officers is costly; however, there are grants available and many county sheriff's departments or local police departments partner with school districts to provide an off-duty officer to serve as a building school resource officer.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

During this study, three primary recommendations for future research have evolved. The first recommendation is to research student perceptions of visitor management systems. This is important because ultimately it is the students these protocols are designed to protect. It would be interesting to view how important students feel these measures are to school security. This study could be conducted either through focus groups, personal interviews, or quantitatively.

As this study revealed several areas of focus for school safety and implementation of visitor management systems, the second recommendation is to conduct a qualitative study to interview school secretaries who monitor and use the electronic visitor management systems on a daily basis. The importance of the perceptions of individuals who utilize these systems regularly would provide insight into system capabilities, ease of use, problems that may arise, and how to manage problems with electronic systems when they occur. This research would be ideal for those districts considering implementation of an electronic visitor management system.

As school security audits become more popular in helping schools determine areas of weakness in their security procedures, the third recommendation for further research would be a qualitative study to identify perceptions of principals and school resource officers about why it is important to have school security audits and to pinpoint where a school might be vulnerable. Hevia (2018) suggested security audits such as the School Access-Control Vulnerability Index “measures the efficacy of how well the total group of security systems and structures work together in blocking access to the school, by an unwanted intruder” (p. 15). A study of this nature would be significant, because it

would allow administrators and school resource officers on the frontline to provide perceptions of security measures that are beneficial and those that are not.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of parents, principals, and resource officers on the topic of school safety and the measures taken to ensure a safe environment. Through the qualitative nature of this study, and a variety of perspectives, a few common themes emerged. Despite the fact participants differed on the process of securing a building, all individuals agreed on the importance of creating a safe and secure campus. One piece of common ground was that the pen and paper approach should be considered as a last resort. An additional commonality came about as all groups agreed school personnel should keep all exterior doors locked and have one main entrance monitored at all times. Another commonality was that both the principal and school resource officer share an equal amount of responsibility for the safety of their respective areas.

In an effort to achieve a more safe and secure campus, both the principals and school resource officers felt conducting training with their staff would increase the safety of their campuses. There were some variations as to the intensity of the drills based on the age of the students, but the overall consensus was that training held value. Parents also felt the presence of a trained individual such as an school resource officer was valuable, as the presence of a school resource officer gave both parents and students a sense of safety while on school grounds.

One area of the elementary campus parents felt was a potential problem is the playground. This perception came from the way in which recess and other activities



conducted outside are monitored by school staff. The parent group expressed concern based on the number of students a single staff member is required to monitor while watching for any potential threat. The other point of concern came from the vulnerability of the typical playground. The parent group felt the standard method of securing a playground was not adequate for ensuring safety.

Focusing attention to campus security and allocating appropriate funding toward accomplishing this goal is key to addressing this issue (Curran, 2018). Establishing a practice and procedure accompanied by trained personnel will increase the safety of a school campus and thus increase the sense of security for its students (Trump, 2017). This must be top priority for all public schools in today's society.

## Appendix A

### Permission Letter

<Date>

Dear (Superintendent Name):

I am writing to request permission to conduct research in the (School District). I am currently pursuing my doctorate through Lindenwood University and am in the process of writing my dissertation. The study is entitled, *Perceptions of Visitor Management Systems Regarding School Safety*.

I am asking permission to interview the elementary school principal and the school resource officer and to hold a parent focus group of elementary parents selected by the elementary principal in the district.

If you agree, please sign below, scan this page, and email it back to me, Janalee Olhausen-Kaylor, at [REDACTED]. Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have regarding this study.

Sincerely,

Janalee Olhausen-Kaylor

Doctoral Student at Lindenwood University

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_

Print name and title here

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

**Appendix B****IRB Approval Letter**

DATE: January 8, 2018

TO: Janalee Olhausen-Kaylor  
FROM: Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board

STUDY TITLE: [1166050-1] Perceptions of Visitor Management Systems  
Regarding School safety

IRB REFERENCE #:  
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS  
DECISION DATE: January 8, 2018

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 1

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will put a copy of this correspondence on file in our office.

If you have any questions, please send them to [IRB@lindenwood.edu](mailto:IRB@lindenwood.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board's records.

## Appendix C

### Informational Email

Good afternoon,

I hope you are enjoying a great start to the new year. First, I want to thank you for agreeing to help me in my doctoral study. I wanted to provide some background for you so that you are aware of the focus of the study and what I am actually needing from you, your resource officer, and your parent focus group.

I am excited about working with you, your resource officer, and your selected parent focus group for this research study. The parent focus group will be made up of five parents selected by you who will be interviewed in a discussion forum about visitor management in regard to school security, perceptions about these systems, and perceptions on training and responsibility where school safety and security are concerned. Once you have selected a parent group, please select a place and time that would be convenient for all to meet. I will bring research information sheets and a guide for procedures, as well as a tape recorder to record the session. There are a total of 11 questions on the discussion agenda. These will be the same 11 questions I ask in the interviews with the principal and the resource officer. The principal and school resource officer interviews will be arranged at a time other than the focus group time.

This research will focus on school safety in terms of potential areas of risk and implementation of physical and psychological safety measures. The areas of visitor management and intruder prevention will be investigated. Additionally, perceptions of parents, administrators, and school resource officers will be utilized to address vulnerabilities of school security systems.

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. What are the perceptions of public elementary school principals and school resource officers about visitor management systems and school security?
2. What are the perceptions of public elementary school principals and school resource officers about how visitor management systems manage and prepare schools for intruders?
3. What are the perceptions of parents regarding visitor management systems and school security?

I would like to complete my principal interviews and resource officer interviews by phone between February 1st-16th and set meetings with your chosen parent focus group the last two weeks of February between February 15th-28th. Please email or call with dates and times that would be convenient to you and your parent groups. If you have any questions or need to contact me, I can be reached by phone or by email at (417) 699-4861 or [okj@alpenaleopards.org](mailto:okj@alpenaleopards.org).

Thank you so much for working with me on this research project.

Janalee Olhausen-Kaylor

## Appendix D

# LINDENWOOD

## Research Information Sheet for Principal and School Resource Officer

You are being asked to participate in a research study. We are conducting this study to gather perceptions of visitor management systems in regard to school safety. During this study, you will be interviewed by the principal investigator. It will take about 30 minutes to complete this interview.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time.


There are no risks from participating in this project. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study.

We are collecting data that could identify you, such as names and email addresses. Every effort will be made to keep your information secure and confidential. Only members of the research team will be able to see your data.

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. We do not intend to include information that could identify you in any publication or presentation. Any information we will be stored by the researcher in a secure location. The only people who will be able to see your data include members of the research team, qualified staff of Lindenwood University, and representatives of state or federal agencies.

### **Who can I contact with questions?**

If you have concerns or complaints about this project, please use the following contact information:

Janalee Olhausen-Kaylor at 

Dr. Fransen at sfransen@lindenwood.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or concerns about the project and wish to talk to someone outside the research team, you can contact Michael Leary (Director - Institutional Review Board) at 636-949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu.

## Appendix E

# LINDENWOOD

### Research Information Sheet for Focus Group Participants

You are being asked to participate in a research study. We are conducting this study to gather perceptions of visitor management systems in regard to school safety. During this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group interview with four other parents from your school district. It will take about one hour to complete this interview.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw at any time.

There are no risks from participating in this project. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study.

We are collecting data that could identify you, such as names and email addresses. Every effort will be made to keep your information secure and confidential. Only members of the research team will be able to see your data.

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. We do not intend to include information that could identify you in any publication or presentation. Any information we collect will be stored by the researcher in a secure location. The only people who will be able to see your data include members of the research team, qualified staff of Lindenwood University, and representatives of state or federal agencies.

#### **Who can I contact with questions?**

If you have concerns or complaints about this project, please use the following contact information:

Janalee Olhausen-Kaylor at [REDACTED]

Dr. Fransen at sfransen@lindenwood.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or concerns about the project and wish to talk to someone outside the research team, you can contact Michael Leary (Director - Institutional Review Board) at 636-949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu.

## Appendix F

### Focus Group Interview Questions

\* Define visitor management system to parent group

1. What do you believe are the benefits of a visitor management system, and what do you think would be some of the benefits of having a visitor management system in your building?
2. What are the problems?
3. What suggestions do you have for improvement?
4. Share with me your thoughts on the following:
  - a. using a pen/paper system or electronic system for the registry of visitors
  - b. locked doors and controlled entrances
  - c. surveillance cameras
  - d. privacy rights
5. What are the benefits of a school resource officer?
6. What are your concerns?
7. Do you believe your children are safe while at school? Why or why not?
8. Who is responsible for school safety?
9. What training should be offered for parents, students, and school personnel to further school safety?
10. What are some key factors that contribute to students, parents, and staff feeling safe at school?
11. Are there other thoughts you would like to share about the visitor management system and/or school safety?



## Appendix G

### Principal/School Resource Officer Interview Questions

- \* Define visitor management system to principals and school resource officers.
1. What do you believe are the benefits of a visitor management system, and what do you think would be some of the benefits of having a visitor management system in your building?
  2. What are the problems?
  3. What suggestions do you have for improvement?
  4. Share with me your thoughts on the following:
    - a. using a pen/paper system or electronic system for the registry of visitors
    - b. locked doors and controlled entrances
    - c. surveillance cameras
    - d. privacy rights
  5. What are the benefits of a school resource officer?
  6. What are your concerns?
  7. Do you believe the students are safe while at school? Why or why not?
  8. Who is responsible for school safety?
  9. What training should be offered for parents, students, and school personnel to further school safety?
  10. What are some key factors that contribute to students, parents, and staff feeling safe at school?
  11. Are there other thoughts you would like to share about the visitor management system and/or school safety?

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### **Vita**

Janalee Olhausen-Kaylor completed her undergraduate studies at California State University at Fullerton in 1993 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Child Development. She furthered her education by earning a Master of Arts in Teaching from the University of Arkansas at Montecello in 2005. She also obtained a Master of Arts in Educational Administration in 2009, followed by a Specialist Degree in 2011, both from Lindenwood University.

Janalee began her teaching career in public education as a preschool director for a school-based program in California in 1993. She also worked for Stowell Learning Center, an educational center that provided tutoring and remedial services. Following her seven-year career in preschool and remedial educational services, Janalee moved to Arkansas and accepted a position with Eureka Springs Elementary as a kindergarten teacher in 2003. In 2006, she was offered a first-grade teaching position with Branson School District in Missouri, where she was asked to step into an administrative liaison position while working on her advanced degree. Janalee served the Branson School District for nine years until she was offered an elementary and middle school principal position at Alpena School District in Arkansas. Janalee is endearingly referred to as Mrs. OK by her staff and students and has worked hard to create an environment where individual educational needs are valued in a positive and nurturing building climate.

Janalee is an active member of the Arkansas Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the Arkansas Association for Educational Administrators, and the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.