Principal Preparedness For Crisis Management In Urban High Schools

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PRINCIPAL PREPAREDNESS FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Educational Leadership
The University of Mississippi

By
NEWMAN C. ROBERTSON

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ABSTRACT

Building level principals are faced with a myriad of responsibilities from teacher observations to meeting with stakeholders to serving as chief academic and administrator in the school. From the student who frequently does not attend class to peer-to-peer fights to the student who brings a weapon to school causing a lockdown, any form of violence (i.e. high, mid-level, low) can be stressful to a principal who has not been properly trained in crisis management and disrupt the learning environment and school safety (Trump 2011; Dupper & Adams, 2002). Thus, the purpose of this qualitative, collective case study is to examine the preparedness of principals who have experienced low to mid-level crisis in urban high schools in a Large Urban School District (LUSD). Using the phases of the Crisis Management Life Cycle (i.e. Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery), the study particularly seeks to understand how principal degree preparation programs and urban high schools prepare principals to address low to mid-level crisis within the last five academic years (i.e. 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016). Through the use of interviews, focus groups, and document analyses, the study findsprincipal preparation programs focus less on crisis management training and more on the principal as the educational leader. Particularly based on the research frameworks of constructivist epistemology and functionalist theory, the study acknowledged principals’ access to crisis management training at the district level, but principals expressed concern about the lack of crisis management training at the school level. Such data analyses allow for insights to be gained about school crisis management and principal preparation programs for today’s principals.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to everyone who helped me and guided me through my times of stress and anxiety. I especially want to thank my wife, Yvette O. Robertson, for your love and support through this process. You are truly an amazing and God-fearing woman, and I love you more than you will ever know. I would also like to thank my daughter, Syddie L. Robertson, for allowing daddy time to do “important work” on days when you wanted to spend time with me.

To my mother, Betty Robertson, you have been with me through the best and worst of times. Through all my academic struggles from high school to college, you never gave up on me. You always prayed for me. You believed in me and always encouraged me to keep pushing forward.

To you, I say, “Betty Robertson’s baby boy got a PhD”. To my sisters Melanie R. Hornsby and Deborah R. Pennier, thank you for raising the bar. Both of you are well respected in your careers, and I aspire to have the same respect in the field of education. To my father, Newman C. Robertson, Sr., you transitioned into heaven August 11, 2000. You taught me everything I needed to be successful in this program. You gave me my work ethic. You taught me to never quit. You taught me to how to be a man. I will continue to make you proud of me.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for giving me the strength to persevere and for without Him this dissertation would not be possible.

I express my deepest appreciation to my advisor, Dr. RoSusan P. Bartee and my committee members, Dr. Denver Fowler, Dr. Susan McClelland, and Dr. Ryan Niemeyer.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge my friend and brother, Dr. Chess Brown. Thank you for keeping me focused and on task until the end. Your words of encouragement time after time provided me with the lift I needed to get over the many hurdles associated with this process.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

On September 7, 2016, the researcher experienced a four-hour lock down while teaching at an inner city secondary school in a Large Urban School District in the southern part of the United States of America. The time was 9:15 a.m., and the researcher’s third period class was getting settled. Instruction was about to begin when one of the assistant principals made the announcement that the school was on lock down until further notice. Although the researcher had experienced lock down drills before, this one was different. This was not a drill. The researcher knew to turn the lights out and move everyone away from doors and windows. There were thirty-five students in the class. This was the researchers first year at the school. There were neither curtains at the windows in the classroom nor at the window on the door. The researcher felt exposed and vulnerable. School had been in session for approximately three weeks. All the mandatory professional development the researcher had attended prior to the start of the school year had not prepared him for this day.

Apparently, an altercation took place in the neighborhood between two young men. One of the young men shot the other and ran to the school. After several attempts to enter the building, he was able to enter through a door opened by one of the students. This young man was either a student or former student as he knew the regular teachers from the new teachers and substitute teachers. He immediately found a class with a substitute teacher. He told her he was a new student and was told to come to her class until the school counselor could get him a schedule. She complied and let him in. He went to the back of the class and had a seat, hoping to wait for the heat to die down so he could make his escape. However, police were on the scene
within minutes. Local law enforcement working with the school resource officers began to do a class by class search in addition to search the entire school. The school had over 1200 students.

While the police were searching for the suspect, the researcher was trying desperately to keep his class calm. By this time, the media had arrived and began broadcasting from the school. Parents began to arrive in an effort to check on and check out their children. No one was let in or out during the search. Cell phones began to go off. Students began to face time other students in other classes. The researcher tried within his power to monitor and control cell phone usage but to no avail. With that many students in class, it was impossible. Taking cell phones was not an option. Thirty minutes passed. One hour passed. Again, another announcement from the assistant principal stating the school was still on lockdown. This time another issue was quickly coming to the forefront, restroom breaks. Furthermore, three students were eight months pregnant. The researcher was concerned that an event like this could trigger any one of them going into labor. Approximately two hours into the lockdown, students began walking out of class to use the restroom. The researcher felt helpless. In the weeks leading up to the first day of school and after, there was no mention of a crisis management plan or crisis management training. Other than the monthly fire drill, no other drill was mentioned or rehearsed. The lockdown ended at approximately 1:30 p.m. Students were sent to lunch and sent home. Many students were checked out by their parents.

The researcher began to reflect on the day’s events. Black curtains were purchased to cover the two windows in the classroom. A cover was made for the window on the door. Lockdown procedures were explained to all classes. Procedures were put in place by the researcher to prevent the same confusion from occurring again. Yet, the issue of restroom breaks became an immediate concern. During a lockdown, no one is allowed to leave the classroom
which creates additional challenges for being able to function while in this state of confinement. The researcher began to scrutinize the lock down procedure from a broader view. How prepared are administrators to handle a mass casualty incident? How did what the researcher previously learned in his principal preparation program prepare him for crisis management? As a practitioner who experienced this lockdown, what can academic degree programs for principal preparation in urban settings gain from this experience?

As a retired service member, the researcher knows all too well the importance of training for the various crises one might experience on the battle field. Merriam-Webster (2017) defines training as a process by which someone is taught the skills needed for an art, profession, or job. Professions like police officers, firefighters, servicemen, and first responders train daily for a host of contingencies that might be encountered while on the job. However, many of these professionals may never experience half of the emergencies for which they are trained to handle. Yet, they are prepared. They prepare for what they will see, might see, or may never see. Likewise, principal preparation programs need to have the same mentality relating to crisis management training. Schools have changed drastically over the years. The threat of a mass casualty incident in schools exists and can happen at a moment’s notice. Consequently, principal training is important. Training comes through practicing safety procedures already in place, making modifications as needed while remaining flexible to account for any unforeseen circumstances which may occur. Trump states:

Although full-scale drills are very educational, they typically are labor and time intensive. Tabletop exercises can provide a less stressful, more time effective method of taking a school’s emergency/crisis planning to the next level. Full and half-day sessions, often done during school professional development days, allow school leaders to avoid having school emergency/crisis plans collect dust on the shelf (Trump, 2011, p. 234).
Tabletop exercises provide a low cost means of providing crisis management training for principals, are scenario based, and can provide the fundamental knowledge needed to manage a crisis. Schools need more relevant safety drills because safety drills need to reflect not only focus on higher forms of violence but also focus on forms of violence that might not entail a mass school shooting. Understanding the development and implementation aspects of crisis management and whether or not principal preparation programs are equipping practitioners to successfully fulfill the purpose is important. This dissertation study, Principal Preparedness for Crisis Management in Urban High Schools, explores the development and implementation of crisis management and the implications of principal preparation programs on equipping practitioners to successfully address low to mid-level forms of violence in urban schools.

**Statement of the Problem**

With the growing threat of school crisis, schools are making great strides in implementing best practices to keep students and staff safe. Are principals prepared to handle casualty incidents that are both wide-spread and not-so-widespread for the school and stakeholders and/or more directed or in directly related to students? Such questions are fundamentally important considering that school shootings and/or related forms of school crises can happen without warning and/or at a moment’s notice. Many believe however, that such crisis cannot happen to their school or within their community (Trump, 2011). Mass shooting incidents, particularly, have been occurring in schools, shopping malls, and other public venues both inside and outside the United States for years (Nedzel, 2012). Consistently, after every mass casualty active shooting incident, various levels of government (i.e. federal, state, local) respond by providing resources to temporarily address the problem. Theses fixes can come in the form of
additional security guards, surveillance cameras, and/or structural upgrades such as fencing around the perimeter or bullet proof glass only in front entry doors (Trump, 2011).

The wide-spread impact of high-level violence in schools, such as the mass shootings at Pearl High School, Columbine High School, and Sandy Hook Elementary School have thrust school shootings into the spotlight exposing a weakness in our society. Dupper and Adams (2002) define high-level violence as murder, rape, possession of weapons, school shootings or any incident which can cause death or serious injury. Yet, what receives less attention are the forms of low and mid-level violence and their not-so-seeming widespread impact as school crises. Low and mid-level forms of violence are defined as such incidents as school fights, use of profanity by students to teachers, any form of gang activity, and weapons such as pocket knives brought to school that occur in urban secondary schools every day (Dupper & Adams, 2002). Low and mid-level forms of violence can generate consequences that possibly could be as devastating to students as higher levels of violence. One difference worth mentioning is that those consequences may not be as visible to the public. Thus, Large Urban School District (LUSD) have implemented a Student Code of Code of Conduct with consequences for low, mid-level, and high level violence that are characteristic of school crises.

LUSD utilizes a Student Code of Conduct to regulate individual behavior within the school context. LUSD Student Code of Conduct categorizes different levels of offenses and the consequences associated with each infraction. According to the LUSD Student Code of Conduct, offenses are grouped into categories according to the seriousness of the offense (Student Code of Conduct, 2016). Although the list is exhaustive, it is not intended to be an inclusive or exclusive list covering all incidents. For those not listed, principals are required to use their professional judgement to assign discipline in accordance with one of the listed
categories comparable to the offense. Below are the categorical groups and corresponding details:

Table 1:

*Offenses and Levels of Violence in a Large Urban Schools District (Student Code of Conduct, 2016)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories by Group</th>
<th>Student Violation</th>
<th>School Penalty</th>
<th>Offense Level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category A</td>
<td>Aggravated assault resulting in serious bodily injury upon a school employee</td>
<td>Expulsion or Suspension for 180 days</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unlawful possession, sale, or use of drugs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unauthorized possession of a firearm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category B</td>
<td>Possession of a lethal weapon such as a knife, Taser, or explosive</td>
<td>Out-of-school suspension</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gang activities</td>
<td>Expulsion (11 – 180 days)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assault upon any school employee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category C</td>
<td>Threatening bodily harm to a school employee</td>
<td>In-school suspension or out-of-school suspension</td>
<td>Mid-level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bomb threats</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One or more students attacking another student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category D</td>
<td>Bullying, physical/verbal intimidation to students</td>
<td>Parent-Principal Conference, before/after school detention</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fighting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As indicated, Table 1 offers important guidelines for managing the LUSD Student Code of Conduct. Category A lists the offenses as outlined by the federal law as zero tolerance offenses and includes aggravated assault resulting in bodily injury upon a school employee. Consequently, Categories A and B are considered high level violence because of the potential for a mass casualty incident and warrant provisions in a school’s crisis management plan. Category C is considered mid-level violence and is typically addressed with consequences including in-school or out-of-school suspension. Categories D and E are considered low level violence and are typically addressed with consequences included in the school discipline plan. As a result, low and mid-level violence in schools have become so commonplace little is done to include these incidents in the crisis management plan. Student-to-student behavior is clearly articulated with a detailed, micro-level plan for ensuring the punishment is appropriate to the offense. However, with regard to school crises, any one of these offenses can potentially lead to a mass casualty, high violence incident requiring a macro-level administrative leadership-focused response. Consequently, principals need to have plans in place to ensure the safety and security of students and staff are maintained at all times.

Irrespective of the level of violence often associated with schools, funding is provided for the hiring of a school resource officer (SRO) or local law enforcement to patrol the schools. Black (2009) describes SROs as trained law enforcement officers assigned to a school to serve as an advisor to the administrative staff on law related matters. The duties and responsibilities of an SRO range from breaking up fights, checking students for weapons, and directing traffic before and after school. SROs also provide security for all after school events such as football and
basketball games, formal dances such as proms, and other special events such as awards ceremonies and graduations.

Bond (2001) posits SROs are security experts who are trained to anticipate and plan to deal with illegal activities in schools. SROs are the liaison between the administrative staff and local law enforcement. SRO’s training include active shooter drills, drugs on school property, and gang related activity to name a few. SROs are experts in juvenile law with arrest authority. Although evidence concerning their effectiveness is mixed, research reveals principals and teachers tend to have a positive attitude toward SROs and believe their presence serves as a deterrent to reduce misconduct and crime at school (Chrusciel, Wolfe, and Hansen, 2014). In addition, the presence of SROs in urban high schools provides the principal with an additional resource to utilize during a crisis. District management plans and crisis management plans account for SROs to maintain school security while directing external resources to aid principals in the event of a crisis.

Chrusciel et al. (2014) states that “despite this line of research, the perspectives of principals and police officials concerning whether SRO presence in all schools is an effective strategy for increasing school safety remains largely unexplored” (p. 27). While it is impossible to stop a determined criminal, the presence of a law enforcement officer in schools can potentially serve as a deterrent for many would be perpetrators (Bond, 2001). SRO’s training in juvenile law and crisis management makes them an invaluable resource to the administrative staff. SROs are an invaluable resource to principals in maintaining school safety per the Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standard Three which states a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective
learning environment (COE, 2016). Also, SROs serve as a liaison between the principal and first responders during a crisis. Most schools in LUSD have SROs. Understanding the components of the LUSD at the micro-level involving individual, student-focused behavior is critical toward gaining insight for how the crisis management plan at the macro-level for institutional, leadership focused responses are implemented.

Notwithstanding, principals are required by law to create and maintain a crisis management plan. The crisis management plan, sometimes referred to as a multi-hazard plan by the LUSD, is designed to provide principals with a tool to be utilized in the event of a natural or manmade disaster. According to Reeves, Kanan, and Plog (2010), the crisis management plan consists of four phases: Mitigation; Preparedness; Response; and Recovery. Figure 1 shows the crisis management plan as a continuum in the following:

Figure 1:
Crisis Management Plan Life Cycle

As indicated in Figure 1, during the mitigation and preparedness stages, the crisis management plan states that principals need to be planning for any type of natural or manmade disaster that
can affect the safety of the school environment (Reeves et al., 2010). Within the response and recovery stages, the crisis management plan states an incident has occurred and the crisis management plan is being utilized in an effort to return the school to some degree of normalcy in a timely manner (Reeves et al., 2010). There are specific actions that need to be taken in each phase allowing the principal to prepare for a host of mass casualty incidents ranging from a tornado to a mass shooting. Following below are the various phases of the crisis management plan according to Reeves et al. (2010).

**Mitigation Phase.** The principal identifies shared commonalities themes regarding major problems in their school setting. In addition, the principal also conducts an annual physical safety assessment to include evaluating buildings and sites to identify safety hazards, survey school premises to identify and address safety issues and areas vulnerable to security breaches, inventory emergency response kits, dialogue with community emergency responders to identify local hazards and identify services needed (Reeves et al., 2010). This phase addresses the relevancy issue of crisis management planning. Principals need to address and be prepared for a potential crisis before it occurs.

**Preparedness Phase.** Once potential crises are identified, the principal prepares the crisis management plan. This is the Preparedness Phase and addresses the rigor aspect of a crisis management plan. The principal determines what crisis plans exist in the district and identifies key elements to be included in the school crisis management plan, identify stakeholders involved in crisis planning, and selects and trains the crisis response team (Reeves et al., 2010). The crisis response team consist of staff members selected by the principal to assist in executing the crisis management plan in the event of a crisis (Reeves et al., 2010). In addition, the principal identifies the school command post, safe assembly areas, emergency evacuation staging areas,
develop classroom emergency go-kits, and identify emergency transportation resources (Reeves et al., 2010). Training and drills are also rehearsed in this phase. The principal identifies the type of drills, schedule dates, and coordinate with local first responders if necessary. An effective crisis management plan addresses all four stages of the Crisis Life Cycle (Reeves et al., 2010).

**Response Phase.** If a school reaches the Response Phase, a crisis has occurred. At this point, the principal is implementing the plan, constantly assessing the magnitude of the crisis and the effectiveness of the plan, making adjustments as needed (Reeves et al., 2010). The principal makes immediate decisions as needed, maintains communication with all relevant staff, communicates accurate and appropriate information, and records and tracks all expenditures (Reeves et al., 2010). Principals need to ensure schools are prepared for a variety of natural and manmade disasters. While all crises are not catastrophic, any crisis can potentially disrupt the school climate for an extended period of time. Having a plan in place to address a variety of incidents can mitigate loss of life while reducing the amount of instructional time lost.

**Recovery Phase.** The Recovery Phase addresses the results aspect of the crisis management plan. In addition to reestablishing a sense of normalcy, the principal needs to assess the effectiveness of the crisis management plan. In addition, the principal contacts community partners for assistance as needed and allocates appropriate time for recovery. The principal also monitors staff emotional health, captures lessons-learned and incorporates them into revisions and training, and maintains contact with the district office to provide resources as needed (Reeves et al., 2010).

The crisis management plan is important considering principal preparation programs may not have adequately prepared principals to address school crises. Also, the ISLLC Standards, which serves as the guiding professional standards, does not address crisis management but
rather focuses on the principal as being the educational leader. Mary Canole and Michelle Young (2013) state in an ISLLC Analysis Report that, “in the mid-1990s, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), a consortium of stakeholder groups in educational leadership, created the ISLLC Standards to take up the challenging task of designing the first set of national standards for educational leaders” (p. 5). The ISLLC Standards place great emphasis on the instructional leadership responsibilities of administrators and provide a common vision for effective educational leadership programs across the country. By 2005, 46 states had adopted or slightly adapted the standards, or had relied upon them to develop their own set of state standards (Canole & Young, 2013). The ISLLC Standards were updated and revised in 2008 to include an explicit description of individual ISLLC standard expectations through dispositions, elements, and indicators to operationalize the policy standards at a more granular level (Canole & Young, 2013). Consequently, colleges and universities across the nation now have a solid foundation to build principal preparation programs to prepare future educational leaders for the rigors of leading schools in the 21st century.

ISLLC Standard Three states that a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment (CCSSO, 2016). Therefore, the principal is responsible for ensuring safety measures are in place to keep students and staff safe before, during, and after a crisis. In an initial review of the principal preparation programs serving feeder institutions into the LUSD, little, if any, emphasis appears to be placed on crisis management. Interestingly enough, the areas of focus in ISLLC Standard Three related to crisis management does not appear to have much attention. Given the initial information provided by the degree preparation programs, none of the programs offered a specific course in
crisis management planning. Consequently, it is not known whether or not crisis management planning is a component of another course, and is perhaps not included in the course description. Although school districts have their own policies and procedures in place for handling various crisis situations, school leaders need to be provided training in crisis management through their respective academic degree preparation programs. Crisis management preparation and planning is an essential part of providing a safe learning environment for students, schools, and the stakeholders they serve.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative, collective case study is to examine the preparedness of principals who have experienced low to mid-level crisis in urban high schools in a Large Urban School District. Using the phases of the Crisis Management Life Cycle (i.e. Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery), the study seeks to understand how principal degree preparation programs and urban high schools prepare principals to address low to mid-level crisis. The study focuses on three principal preparation programs serving as feeder programs into urban high schools in a city in the southern part of the United States that have experienced a low to mid-level crisis within the last five academic years (i.e. 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016). The study addresses how the ISLLC standards, particularly Standard Three, and the focus on crisis management are addressed in the respective academic degree preparation programs. The central phenomenon in this study is the level of preparedness of principals for low to mid-level crises management in urban high schools. Examining the development and the implementation of the crisis management continuum and the role administrators assume is crucial for ensuring the safety and security of students and staff members.
Research Questions

The overarching questions for this qualitative, collective case study research are: How are urban high school principals prepared to handle low to mid-level crises in accordance with the Crisis Management Life Cycle? What can urban school districts do to improve the readiness of principals in similarly situated urban high schools? What can principal preparation programs do to prepare students to handle low to mid-level crises in urban high schools? These questions provide the framework for this research study to understand the implications for the development and implementation of crisis management plans for principals in urban high schools.

Significance of Research

Research on crisis management and principal preparation programs for action oriented results is limited. Although schools in LUSD are required to have a multi-hazard plan on file, teachers and school staff are often unaware of the contents as well as their roles during a crisis. Gainey (2009) states, “educational leaders must recognize that crisis management was never a passing fad and is essential for guiding schools’ responsibility” (p. 267). Providing a safe and secure learning environment is equally as important as providing an engaging curriculum that meets state testing requirements.

Interestingly enough, there have been a minimum of 142 school shootings since the Sandy Hook School shooting on December 14, 2012 (Washington Times, 2016). Some public schools have armed school personnel as a means of protecting students and staff members from the potential threat of a school shooting. However, many schools have gone with less lethal options such as controlling access to the building during school hours, implementing lockdown procedures should a school shooting occur, and providing a school resource officer (SRO). Sadly, the implications for low to mid-level forms of violence do not receive as much attention
as the high forms of violence shootings like Sandy Hook, Columbine, and Pearl (Dupper and Adams, 2002). Although high levels of violence are rare occurrences in urban secondary schools, the results from just one incident can have a lasting effect on the school environment and the local community.

Trump (2011) continues to advocate for trained armed security guards which can come in the form of either school resource officers or local law enforcement officers assigned to a school working on school campus and school-based policing programs. He posits “school employees who lawfully carry a concealed weapon outside of the school setting as private citizens certainly may do so, but their roles and responsibilities in school settings should be focused on their expertise in education” (p. 50). In some ways, arguments suggest administrators need to focus on leadership and education and leave school security to the experts whose training provides them with the knowledge to support school administrators to create a safe and secure school climate. Notwithstanding, administrators need to be prepared effectively to address the demands of a school crisis. Understanding the implications for crisis management and student conduct and the implications for principal preparation programs are critical toward ensuring the safety of schools and students and stakeholders served.

**Limitations of the Research Study**

Access to information about the principal preparation programs in this study proved to be a challenge. Only two of the three schools posted syllabus online. Program coordinators, which in all three cases were the department chairs, were inaccessible. One expressed no interest in participating via email communication. The other two simply did not respond to the researchers request for an interview. In addition, many of the principals targeted in the study never responded to the researcher’s emails or phone calls. Thus, the viewpoints of the preparedness of
principals for crisis management come from those who have completed the principal preparation programs. Since this is a qualitative study, interviews are an important component to the data collection process.

**Organization of Study**

The dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction to the LUSD crisis management and student conduct plans and different forms of school violence (i.e., low, mid-level, high) while exploring principal preparation programs for action oriented results and the first-hand account of the researcher in a school lock down. Chapter two provides a review of the literature focusing on crisis management planning, principal preparation programs, and school policies and procedures. Chapter three describes the research methods and includes steps taken to design and implement this study. Chapter four reports the findings of the study based upon data through interviews and document analysis. Chapter five contains a summary, conclusions, implications, and recommendations given the insights gained from understanding crisis management in urban high schools. All of these insights are important for exploring the relevancy and rigor of principal preparation programs for action oriented results for those who lead high schools in an urban context.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Literature Review provides an examination of crisis management plans for educational context while exploring principal preparation programs for action oriented results. Thus, the Literature Review focuses on the multidimensional aspect of crisis management, educational policies and procedures directly related to school crises as well as principal degree preparation programs, and school culture and climate (Phaneuf, 2009; Dodson, 2009; Calabrese, 2000; Reeves, Kanan, Plog, 2010; Sullivan, Cleary, Sullivan, 2004; Trump, 2011; Weiler and Cray 2011). Schools today have multi-hazard plans to address the various crises that could potentially hinder the learning environment. Having educational leaders trained in crisis management can make the difference between lives saved and lives lost and necessary to create a safe and secure learning environment.

Critical analyses are also conducted on policy and practice based perspectives on crisis management plans, past and present school shootings, and the school resource officer program (Chrusciel, Wolfe, and Hansen, 2014; Trump, 1998; Newport, 2012). An examination of educational policies and procedures unique to school shootings are also analyzed to highlight current trends in school safety (Sullivan, Cleary, Sullivan, 2004; Phaneuf, 2009). An examination of school climate is analyzed to determine if staff involvement and student engagement can create a positive school climate to dissuade any form of school violence from occurring (Trump, 2011; Cornell and Bradshaw, 2015; Chen, 2008). Thus, principal preparation and crisis management are important toward providing a safe and secure learning environment.
Multi-dimensional Perspectives on Crisis Management

Crisis Management Plans

School safety is equally as important as student achievement. Therefore, school leaders need to have plans in place to mitigate loss of life due to both natural and manmade disasters. Sometimes referred to as multi-hazard plans, Reeves et al. (2010) posit the purpose of a crisis management plan is to create a safety minded culture that embeds the key elements of a crisis. Those are mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery within a school’s education programming to enhance the learning environment. In the mitigation stage, school leaders review previous safety audits, determine common themes regarding major problems in their school, determine who is responsible for overseeing violence prevention strategies, and develop physical safety audits to determine how problems may impact physical vulnerability to certain crisis (Reeves et al., 2010). Jimerson and Furlong (2006) further elaborates on the stages of a crisis management plan by describing the mitigation stage as the stage in which crisis management teams deduce potential hazards to the learning environment.

In the preparedness stage, the planning section of the crisis team plans and implements training drills which includes identifying types of drills to be practiced and schedule drill practice, schedule dates for staff training, and coordinate with local response agencies and involve these agencies in drill practices, if appropriate (Reeves et al., 2010). During the response stage, the crisis plan is utilized to mitigate loss of life and property in an effort to restore the school to some degree of regularity (Jimerson & Furlong, 2006). The recovery stage refers to the longer term actions that repair crisis damage and return the school to pre-crisis operations (Jimerson & Furlong, 2006). School safety is equally as important as student achievement making crisis management plans a crucial part of school operations. Therefore, realistic school
safety drills are important to ensure the safety of students, staff, and visitors. Knowing and understanding the phases of a crisis is important for principals in an effort to return the school climate to some degree of normalcy once the crisis is over.

According to the School Safety Plans Report: A Snapshot of Legislative Action published by the Council of State Governments Justice Center (2014), thirty-three states have enacted laws requiring schools and school districts to have comprehensive crisis management plans. Federal law in some states require fire drills be conducted monthly during the school year, and safety drills will be conducted at least three times during the school year (LexisNexis, 2016). Safety drills include earthquake, tornado, intruder or any other hazard unique to a particular school. The actual number of drills other than fire drills may vary from school to school and are done at the discretion of the principal. On the other hand, the law in Mississippi leaves the number of drills conducted to the discretion of the principals and teachers stating, drills will be conducted until students and staff are accustomed to escape procedures (LexisNexis, 2016). While many schools are ready to handle a potential fire in the facility by evacuating the school, preparedness for other potential dangers is lacking. In a report issued in January of 2016, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) reported an estimated 5,100 structure fires in educational properties, annually, which accounts for one percent of all structure fires (Campbell, 2016). Schools are less likely to experience a fire causing mass casualties although fire drills are conducted monthly. While fire drills are important to the safety of the learning environment, a modification of the frequency is recommended. In addition, the United States has not had a school fire with more than ten deaths since the Our Lady of the Angels school fire in 1958 (Campbell, 2016). Too much emphasis is placed on fire drills when other threats abound. Consequently, hazard assessments are important in determining the frequency, number and type
of drills needed to maintain a safe and secure learning environment. With the proper training in threat and hazard assessments, principals and teachers working together can determine the number and type of safety drills needed to maintain a safe and secure learning environment.

Reeves et al. (2010) suggest that although schools continue to be safe for students and staff, school leaders should work with community members and stakeholders to ensure staff members are trained to handle a variety of contingencies. “Creating and strengthening relationships with community partners such as law enforcement, fire safety, and public health and mental health agencies is best facilitated when all speak the same preparedness language” (Reeves et al., 2010, p.82). Crisis management involves more than a multi-hazard plan created by school leadership. It involves coordination between civilian and government agencies responding to the crisis. Therefore, effective school drills include involvement from representatives of the various agencies including police, fire, and local paramedics. When the various agencies are involved in school drills, potential problems in communication are brought to the forefront. Doing so saves time and possible lives during an actual crisis.

It is also best facilitated when those same relationships are built long before a crisis occurs. In the event of a crisis, school staff members are not only the first responders but the first line of defense (Trump, 2011; Reeves et al., 2010). When a crisis occurs at school, teachers and school leadership are the first on sight and consequently the first to provide assistance. Without the proper training, the potential for severe injury and or loss of life increases greatly depending on the crisis. For example, a natural disaster in which civilian and government resources are extremely busy. Principals may not only be the first responders but the only responders. Consequently, school leaders could realistically be responsible for maintaining and
caring for injured students for hours until help arrives. The importance of crisis management is stated as follows:

Crisis management is not just a one-time response to an unfortunate event. It is a strategic process that must occur far before the first crisis ever takes place in the life of the organization. It is a process that must be planned both before and after the crisis occurs. (Crandall, Parnell, & Spillan, 2014, p.1).

Crisis management is a proactive process requiring training for all stakeholders involved in the planning and implementation process of the school’s crisis management plan. Training can range from tabletop exercises to full scale exercises involving all parties involved in the execution phase of the crisis management plan including local police, fire, and emergency medical services (EMS) who would respond in the event of a mass casualty incident.

Trump (2011) hypothesizes crisis preparedness is continuous and as a result requires practicing key roles as outlined in the crisis management plan. Trump goes on to suggest many school’s crisis management plans are just documents written to satisfy a state or school board requirement but end up in a file cabinet or a bookshelf until a crisis happens. Since school crisis are rare, the effectiveness of these drills in mitigating loss of life remains undocumented. As a result, school safety plans are shelved until a crisis occurs. Staff development is key to crisis management and needs to be diverse enough to ensure readiness for any number of tragic events that may happen. Staff development training also needs to involve local, county, and state responder agencies working together ensuring all roles and responsibilities are clearly defined (Trump, 2011; Reeves, et al., 2010). Crisis management plans needs to be rehearsed and not shelved. Crisis management plans should be living documents, modified as needed to account for changes in personnel. All new staff members should be notified and properly trained on their assigned roles during a crisis incident.
History of School Shootings

Socio-historical views on school shootings. School shootings have existed in American public schools since the early 1900s with the first mass killing at a schoolhouse in Bath, Michigan May, 1927 (Ellsworth, 1927). According to Mary Ellsworth (1927), on May, 18, 1927, Michigan School treasurer Andrew Kehoe, after killing his wife and destroying his house and farm, blew up the Bath Consolidated School by detonating dynamite in the basement of the school, killing 38 people, mostly children. He then blew up his car in front of the school killing himself and four others. This was the deadliest act of mass murder at a school in the United States. Langman (2008) states “although school shootings are statistically rare, the magnitude of events as well as the mystery of what causes them has resulted in widespread speculations about the perpetrators” (p.80). Law enforcement experts have analyzed mass shooting cases over the years in an effort to create a profile of an active shooter. However, no reliable profile exists although there are some similarities among school shooters worth mentioning (Hong, Cho, Meares, Espelage, 2010; Rocque, 2011). Since school shootings are rare as a higher level form of violence, pinpointing a particular type of person or a particular set of circumstances has been a challenge for both school administrators and law enforcement officials. While the majority were white adolescent males in suburban areas, because high level violent school shootings are rare, much of these speculations involving the active shooter profile come from media coverage (Rocque, 2011). Hong et al., (2010) suggest media coverage shaped the fears of American public schools by associating school shootings to terrorism. As a result, schools across the nation increased security measures such as security cameras, name badges, and security guards (Hong et al., 2010). Media coverage also focused on potential causes for school shootings which included social factors such as peer harassment, violent video games, violent movies, mental
illness, lax gun control laws, and bullying (Langman, 2008; Hong et al., 2010; Leary, Kowalski, Smith, Phillips, 2003). In most school shootings, the perpetrator ends up killing himself either by suicide or suicide by cop (the perpetrator intentionally aims his weapon at law enforcement officers forcing them to use deadly force) leading to speculation by the media as to the reasons for his actions. Rocque (2011) adds media coverage of school shootings suggest America’s public schools were suffering an epidemic of school violence and, as a result, schools were no longer safe places for children. Media coverage has caused school leaders to assess and reassess their preparedness for a possible school shooting. Notwithstanding, the recent rash of school shootings in America’s public schools has raised concerns of the safety of the schools and their occupants.

Rocque (2011) goes on to suggest as a result of certain highly publicized school shootings, school leaders have focused on fortifying school safety measures to keep students safe. In particular, the Columbine school shooting has resulted in laws passed by 44 states that require schools to adopt anti-bullying programs and other policies in an effort to prevent another school shooting (Hong et al., 2010). Yet, the effectiveness of these policies remains to be determined. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) 2016 report, thirty-one homicides of school-age youth, ages 5 to 18 years, occurred at school during the 2012-2013 school year. Of all youth homicides, less than 2.6% occur at school, and this percentage has been relatively stable for the past decade (CDC, 2016). In the National Center for Educational Statistics – Indicators of School Crime 2015 Report, school associated violent deaths increased from 2010 – 2013. Since school shootings as a higher level form of violence are unpredictable, principal preparedness is crucial in mitigating loss of life.
**Pearl High School.** On October 1, 1997 at 7:55 a.m., sixteen-year-old Luke Woodham, a sophomore at Pearl High School in Jackson, Mississippi took a hunting rifle to school and shoot nine students, killing two and wounding seven (Dodson, 2009). One of the students killed was his ex-girlfriend, Christina Menfee, a sophomore at Pearl High School (Dodson, 2009). Luke would be apprehended by the assistant principal, Joel Myrick, when he tried to escape through a back exit of the school (Dodson, 2009). Mr. Myrick, an officer in the National Guard unit, retrieved his .45 automatic pistol from his vehicle upon realizing what was going on at the school (Dodson, 2009). He would soon encounter Luke in the driveway of the school’s parking lot where Luke was trying to escape (Dodson, 2009). Luke jumped in his vehicle and speed off but quickly lost control. As the vehicle careened into the soft ground that flanked the road, Mr. Myrick was able to gain the advantage. He stood in front of Luke’s car, pointed his gun at Luke, and commanded him to exit the vehicle. Mr. Myrick would detain Luke until local law enforcement arrived. Luke would be taken into custody at that time (Dodson, 2009). While students at Pearl High School were recovering from this tragic incident, another mass shooting was being planned in Littleton, Colorado.

**Columbine High School.** April 20, 1999 at 11:17 a.m., eighteen-year-old Eric Harris and 17-year-old Dylan Klebold launched what would be considered one of the worst attacks on a school in the United States (Matthews, 2013). Armed with guns, knives, and homemade explosive devices, Klebold and Harris went on a killing spree that would leave at least 13 dead and more than 20 wounded at Columbine High School in Jefferson County, Colorado (Matthews, 2013). The plan, which had been in the works for several months, was to take as many lives as possible. Dressed in black hats and trench coats, Klebold and Harris would enter the west entrance of the school and begin their assault, which ended at 12:08 p.m. with both committing
suicide (Matthews, 2013). Within a few minutes of the first shots fired, the sheriff’s deputy assigned to work at the school was on the scene (Matthews, 2013). The deputy exchanged gunfire with Klebold and Harris who fled into the school. The deputy was soon joined by six other police officers who took positions around the school. At 1:10 p.m., the first SWAT team entered the building to begin evacuating survivors from the school (Matthews, 2013). Poor planning, lack of adequate intelligence, and poor training on the part of the first responders contributed to at least one death (Matthews, 2013). This would be one of the deadliest school shootings in the 20th Century.

**Sandy Hook Elementary School.** On December 14, 2012, after killing his mother who worked at the school, Adam Lanza grabbed a semi-automatic AR-15 assault rifle as well as Glock and Sig Sauer handgun from his mother’s home and proceeded to Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newton, Connecticut (CNN, 2016). At approximately 9:30 a.m., after shooting one of the doors open to the school, Lanza began his killing spree (CNN, 2016). Twenty students ages six and seven in addition to six adults were killed (CNN, 2016). Lanza took his own life upon realizing law enforcement officers were closing in on his position (CNN, 2016). The first officer arrived within two and one half minutes of receiving the 911 call (CNN, 2016). Police secured the building and then proceeded to escort students and faculty out of the building (CNN, 2016). In an effort to highlight the importance of principal preparedness in a crisis situation, school shootings at Pearl High School, Columbine High School, and Sandy Hook Elementary School will be studied to lay a foundation for the type of training needed by principals to alleviate loss of life in any tragic event. All three are high profile school shootings which happened in the United States resulting in changes in the way schools assess safety plans. Although violent deaths at schools account for between 1% and 2% of all homicides among school-age children
(Center for Disease Control, 2016; Duplechain and Morris, 2015), the impact can have a lasting effect on the culture and climate of a school and the local community. With proper training in crisis management incorporated in principal education programs, loss of life can potentially be mitigated.

**Intersection of Pearl, Columbine, and Sandy Hook**

The mass shootings at Pearl High School, Columbine High School, and Sandy Hook Elementary schools were all tragic events that in some way changed the scope of crisis management planning in schools. Schools are now mandated to have crisis management plans on file covering a host of natural and manmade disasters. Yet, school shootings, regardless of how rare, continue to plague school districts around the country. Whether the number killed is one or twenty, school districts have a responsibility to the students, staff, and stakeholders to provide a safe learning environment. In analyzing the shootings at the above schools, several similarities and differences became evident. However, none were significant enough to generalize a cause for school shootings or create a profile for a school shooter.

**Similarities.** In analyzing the school shootings at Pearl High School, Columbine High School, and Sandy Hook Elementary schools, several similarities were noted. All three occurred in the morning (CNN, 2013). All of the victims were either killed or injured indoors (Matthews, 2013; Dodson, 2009). All three shooting incidents received national media coverage (Dodson, 2009; CNN, 2013). All three shooters had some type of connection to the schools in which the shootings were carried out (CNN, 2013; Dodson, 2009; Matthews 2013). All three incidents served as catalyst for changes made in the way school districts view school safety and crisis management. While all three shootings incidents shared some similarities, creating a profile for a school shooter continues to elude law enforcement officials since school shootings are rare.
Differences. An analysis of the differences in the Pearl High School, Columbine High School, and Sandy Hook Elementary shootings continue to point to the fact that there is no real pattern for a school shooting or school shooter. Both Pearl and Columbine were carried out by current students (CNN, 2013). In the case of Sandy Hook, the shooter was not a student but his mother worked at the school (CNN, 2013). The motives for the school shootings in Columbine and Sandy Hook are unknown since the perpetrators committed suicide before police arrived (Matthews, 2013). The Pearl High School shooter was apprehended by the assistant principal and held until law enforcement arrived (Dodson, 2009). He is currently serving three life sentences plus 140 years (Dodson, 2009).

In the case of Columbine and Sandy Hook, multiple weapons were used to carry out the attacks (Matthews, 2013). On the contrary, the Pearl high shooter used only one weapon (Dodson, 2009). While the motives for the Columbine and Sandy Hook shootings remain a mystery, bullying was a factor in the school shootings at Pearl and Columbine. Both Pearl and Sandy Hook were committed by single shooters who killed their mothers prior to the shootings (Dodson, 2009; CNN, 2013). Columbine was committed by two shooters with multiple weapons and homemade explosive devices (CNN, 2013). Although Columbine High School and Sandy Hook Elementary were the worst school shootings in United States history, Pearl High School shooting brought the reality of a school shooting to the southern region. While Columbine caused school districts to reassess school safety measures and include active shooter drills in crisis management plans, Sandy Hook reminded school districts of the devastating impact a single school shooting can have on a school as well as the community.

Low and Mid-Level Violence. Dupper and Adams (2002) defines low-level violence “as such acts as bullying, peer sexual harassment, victimization based on known or presumed gay or
lesbian sexual orientation, and the psychological maltreatment of students by teachers” (p. 351). Dupper and Adams (2002) go on to say low level forms of violence occur with greater frequency and have a profound effect on school safety. LUSD defines acts of low-level violence as inciting a fight, fighting, vulgar language toward another student or staff member, physical threats, or bullying (LUSD Handbook, 2016). In addition, LUSD categorizes mid-level violence as gang activities, destruction of property, threatening bodily harm to school personnel, or making bomb threats (LUSD Handbook, 2016). These offenses can easily escalate to high level violence. Low level and mid-level violence may not warrant the media attention of a high level violence incident but can affect the safety and security of a school’s culture unless systems are put in place to effectively handle these incidents.

School Resource Officer (SRO) Program

What is a SRO? While there is no one standard definition, both the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) and The Center for the Prevention of School Violence (CSPV) provide definitions worth stating (Canady, James, and Nease, 2012; CPSV, 2016). The NASRO defines a SRO as a law enforcement officer employed by the local police department or agency and assigned to work in one or more schools. The duties and responsibilities of the SRO vary from school to school and from state to state. However, the overall intent of the SRO programs is to provide a safe learning environment in schools, provide valuable resources to school staff members, foster positive relationships with youth, develop strategies to resolve problems affecting youth, and protect all students from internal and external threats (Candy et al., 2012). On the other hand, The CPSV defines a SRO as a certified law enforcement officer who is permanently assigned to provide coverage to a school or a set of schools. The SRO is
trained to perform three roles: law enforcement officer; law-related counselor; and law-related
education teacher. Black (2009) states:

The SRO serves as a visible law enforcement presence on campus to deter, prevent, and respond to crime. The SRO helps assess school safety needs and serves as the school’s vital link to other emergency personnel during critical incidents. The SRO serves as an informal advisor and conflict mediator for students and staff. The SRO helps resolve issues before they develop into more serious problems. As a classroom instructor, the SRO teaches law related and safety-related topics (p.30).

A brief look at the history of the SRO program will offer insight into the intent of the program and its evolution over the years.

In 1951, the first school to have a police officer assigned to it was in Liverpool, England, and the goal was to foster a positive relationship between the police and the students (Bond, 2001). However, in the United States, the first city to have a police officer assigned to a school is generally recognized as Flint, Michigan (Black, 2009). The SRO program did not begin to progress until the 1990s in response to school shootings (Trump, 1998). By this time, many school boards across the nation became concerned about safety and security, and saw the SRO program as a viable option to protect students and staff from potential threats both inside and outside the school. As a result, many school districts signed agreements with police departments for school policing (Black, 2009).

In theory, SROs are supposed to serve as counselor/mentor, teacher, and law enforcement within a school. More emphasis, however, is placed in the area of law enforcement. SROs are expected to break up fights, check for weapons, handle unruly students, and provide overall security for the school. Little emphasis is placed on counselor, mentor and teacher aspects of their duties. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of the SRO program as it relates to preventing a school shooting or other violent attacks that may happen at the school. Chrusciel et al. (2014) suggest comparing levels of violence within schools that have SROs to those that do
not and assess perceptions of those individuals with whom SROs interact on a regular basis as a method to determine the efficacy of a SRO program. Although the evidence concerning the effectiveness of the SRO is mixed, research reveals that principals and teachers tend to have positive attitudes toward SROs and believe that their presence deters student misconduct and reduces school crime (Chrusciel et al., 2014). The SRO program is just one of a several safety measures put in place to deter mass school shootings. In addition to SROs, many schools have implemented such safety measures as metal detectors, surveillance cameras, school uniforms, etc. Therefore, the schools with SROs cannot attribute the fact that their school has not experienced a school shooting solely to the SRO program when other safety measures exist to keep students and staff safe.

Newport (2012) conducted a survey a week after the Sandy Hook shooting to determine if increasing police presence in schools, increasing government spending on mental health screening, decreasing the depiction of gun violence on TV, banning the sale of assault rifles, and arming at least one staff member for the school’s protection where effective measures to prevent school shootings. Over one-half of Americans believe increasing police presence at schools would be very effective in preventing school shootings and another 34 percent believe it would be somewhat effective—only 12 percent of Americans reported that an increased police presence at schools would not be effective in preventing school shootings. The perspectives of principals and police officials concerning whether SRO presence in all schools is an effective strategy for increasing school safety remains unexplored.

Currently, although there is some literature regarding the perceptions of principals, there is no existing research that explores law enforcement perceptions of SROs (Chrusciel et al., 2014). In some school districts, the SRO is a law enforcement officer assigned to a school. In
other school districts, the SRO works for the school district but goes through the same training as local law enforcement. Consequently, the SRO program is separate which does not make the SRO a police officer and limits their authority outside of the school district. However, SROs provide principals with a law enforcement presence on school property providing peace of mind to students, staff, parents, stakeholders, and the local community (Chrusciel et al., 2014). The perception is SROs are police officers of the school and have the same training as local law enforcement. Like police officers, SROs are trained to handle a variety of incidents from a school shooting to providing basic first aid which makes them an invaluable asset to school administrators, students, staff, and the local community.

Educational Policies and Procedures on School Shootings

Policy Trends

Zero Tolerance. “Zero tolerance first received national attention as the title of a program developed in 1986 by Peter Nunwz, the U.S. attorney in San Diego, impounding seagoing vessels carrying any amount of drugs” (Skiba and Knesting, 2001, p.18). In 1989, school districts in California, New York, and Kentucky applied the term to school discipline policies, requiring mandatory suspension and expulsion for drugs, fighting, and gang activity (Skiba and Knesting, 2001). By 1993, school districts across the country had adopted some form of zero tolerance policies and expanded the infractions to include smoking and school disruption (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). However, it was not until the Gun Free Schools Act passed by Congress in 1994 that zero tolerance policies became mandatory for all schools receiving federal funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and required schools to expel for a period of one year any student found with a weapon on school grounds (Jimerson and Furlong,
2006; Fox and Burstein, 2010). In 1997, an amendment to the zero tolerance policy allowed schools to expel students for illegal drugs and drug paraphernalia. Local school districts, under the guise of the state legislature, expanded the Gun Free Schools Act to include other forms of misconduct such as fighting, threats, and swearing (Phaneuf, 2009). Consequently, the intent of zero tolerance policies was to make the consequences so severe for bringing a weapon to school, having drugs on campus, engaging in gang activity, fighting, etc. that the punishment alone would serve as a deterrent resulting in a safer school environment.

Fox and Burnstein (2010) suggest zero tolerance has failed stating that no evidence exists to the contrary. Zero tolerance policies have been applied unevenly based on school and student characteristics resulting in higher dropout rates while having zero impact on all school safety (Fox & Burnstein, 2010). Reeves et al. (2010) agrees stating zero tolerance policies have created unfair practices. These policies have led to a disproportionate number of males and minority students being referred for disciplinary actions. Bloomenthal (2011) posits, “there is no evidence suggesting young people became any more or less violent during the period when zero tolerance policies first became prevalent than they had been in the preceding years” (p.307). Similarly, the American Psychological Association’s Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) concluded that based on a review of research pertaining to the effects of zero tolerance policies, the evidence contradicts the intent resulting in a higher suspension and expulsion rate for minority students and students in low socioeconomic status. Thus, school leaders are using the zero tolerance policies to suspend or expel unruly students versus students who may possess a genuine threat to the safety of the school. Zero tolerance policies are designed to deter potential mass shootings by suspending or expelling students with motivate and means to carry out a school shooting.
DeMitchell and Hambacker (2016) state that after nearly two decades of zero tolerance policies, little evidence exists demonstrating the effectiveness relative to making classrooms, schools, and students safer. DeMithcell and Hambacker (2016) go on to state “teachers are at the frontline of the school-wide discipline policy including zero tolerance policies” (p.11). Teachers and principals need to receive the proper training to effectively utilize zero tolerance policies to ensure students are being treated fairly and equitably. Trump (2011) states “proper training of school administrators on school board policies, disciplinary procedures, and overall school safety issues can reduce the risks of questionable actions by school administrators” (p.107). Since every school district is different, principal preparation programs need to provide a basic foundation on disciplinary procedures and school safety measures but leave school board policy training to the respective school districts as each school district is different.

**Bullying.** Fox and Burnstein (2010) states that the first attempt to measure school bullying was done in by Dan Olweus in the early 1970s. Following a series of suicides by adolescent boys in Norway, Mr. Olweus was commissioned by the Norwegian Ministry of Education to conduct a survey on bullying and victimization. The results were astonishing. Mr.Olweus discovered that one in seven students were involved in bullying behavior, either as a victim, perpetrator, or both (Fox & Burnstein, 2010). In 1998, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development sponsored a nationally representative survey on bullying of 15,686 students in grades 6 through 10. The survey found that 30 percent of those surveyed were involved in frequent to moderate bullying in some form (Fox & Burnstein, 2010). The data also showed that an estimated 3.2 million students nationwide were victims of bullying (Fox & Burstein, 2010). However, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics Indicators of School Crime and Safety Report 2015, the percentage of public schools that reported student
bullying occurred at least once a week decreased from 29 percent in 1999–2000 to 16 percent in 2013–14.

Bullying has been one of the causes used to explain rampage shootings at schools but no clear data exist to support this fact. Leary, Kowalski, Smith, and Phillips (2003) posits some of the more recent school shootings were precipitated by bullying but the research to support this is sparse at best. However, a case study was conducted of 15 school shootings between 1995 and 2001. In 12 of the 15 cases, bullying was found to be the root cause for the school shooting (Leary et al., 2003). Leary et al. (2003) goes on to suggest that in the case of Columbine shootings, media reports widely acknowledged that the shooter had been bullied by other students. This raises an important question of whether or not bullying is a main contributor in past school shootings. More research needs to be done to validate this fact. Since bullying has been determined to be the cause in a number of high profile school shootings, anti-bullying policies and laws have been implemented in school districts across the country. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Policies and Laws on Bullying (2016), all 50 states have enacted some form of law or policy to prevent bullying. Yet, without proper training of teachers and administrators, many of these laws will go unenforced. Since teachers are responsible for enforcing the school discipline policy, proper training is paramount to not only ending bullying in schools but possible preventing another school shooting as a result.

Brock, Lazarus, and Jimerson (2002) theorizes students need to know when they report a bullying incident, something will be done. Thus, proper staff training is crucial. Staff members need to be trained to know the differences between normal peer conflict and bully-victim problems and how to intervene (Brock et al., 2002). Brock et al. (2002) goes on to state:

Staff training should include understanding the characteristics of bullies and victims, effective strategies and disciplinary approaches to use with bullies, effective strategies to
support victims, reinforcing caring student behavior within the classroom and school, and developing and maintain the caring community (p. 176).

In addition, administrators need to have a variety of strategies when dealing with bullies and their victims as each situation may be different and require a different set of skills. While it may be difficult, if not impossible, to put an end to bullying, administrators can create a school culture in which bullying is discouraged thus creating a safer learning environment.

**Gun Control.** The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states that “a well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed” (U.S. Const. amend. II). This is the foundation upon which many gun laws today are built. However, since the recent increase in school shootings, state and federal government agencies have re-examined gun laws in an effort to create or modify laws as needed to prevent guns from getting in the hands of a potential school shooter. Schildkraut and Hernandez (2014) posits states have the power to regulate gun control under the guise of the Second Amendment. Thus, the Second Amendment provides guidelines for all states to use in the manner most beneficial to their respective state governments.

Since the Columbine school shooting, the federal government has introduced the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act of 1994 (the Brady Bill) and the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (the Federal Assault Weapons Ban or AWB). The Brady Bill imposed a five day waiting period and background check on any unlicensed individual seeking to purchase a firearm from a licensed gun manufacturer, dealer, or importer (Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2014). However, this change was only temporary as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) established the National Instant Criminal Background Check System allowing background checks to be done instantly either over the phone or electronically and applied to all firearms (Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2014). As a result of this change, gun
enthusiast can purchase and receive their firearm the same day versus waiting five days as outlined by the Brady Bill. The Federal Assault Weapons Ban declared it unlawful for a person to manufacture, transfer, or possess a semiautomatic assault weapon as well as prohibited large capacity ammunition feeding devices or magazines holding more than 10 rounds (Sckildkraut & Hernandez, 2014). In addition, the AWB contained a list of 19 specific firearms banned from production.

Procedural Trends

School Safety Drills. School safety drills are an important part of any school’s safety plan. These drills prepare students by teaching them what to do in the event of a natural or manmade disaster such as a fire, tornado, earthquake, or intruder in the building. Safety plans vary from state to state and are based on real or perceived dangers in the local area as well as the region. In some states, federal law requires fire drills must be conducted monthly during the school year with an additional fire drill conducted the first fifteen days (LexisNexis, 2016). In other states such as Mississippi, monthly drills are not mandatory. Instead, the number of drills are left to the discretion of school leadership. Mississippi Code Annotated 37-11-5 states it shall be the duty of the principals and teachers in all public school buildings to instruct the pupils in the methods of fire drills and to practice fire drills until students are familiar with the methods of escape (LexisNexis, 2016). Such fire drills shall be conducted often enough to keep such pupils well drilled (LexisNexis, 2016). Grech (1999) states “crisis drilling has become a part of the new landscape of school safety following the Columbine High School shooting” (p.1). School safety is paramount. Keeping students and staff safe is equally as important as insuring academic success. Crisis drills have become an integral part of the school culture allowing
school leaders a tool to prepare students and staff for a plethora of natural and manmade disaster that could potentially disrupt the learning environment.

Zhe and Nickerson (2007) suggests school drills have been around for nearly a century, but schools have had to modify the number and type of drills based on current threats to the safety of the school environment. Schools practice five main drill procedures; evacuation, reverse evacuation, lockdown, shelter-in-place, and duck-cover-hold. These basic drills are used to practice drills specific to individual crisis scenarios, such as nuclear disaster, sever weather, natural disaster, bomb threat, or intruder (Zhe & Nickerson, 2007). However, the effectiveness of these drills remain undocumented as data and research are scarce. One issue that arises is the level and extent of student involvement. While advocates say drills teach students and staff how to respond to a threat, opponents propose safety drills cause unnecessary fear and concern (Grech, 1999). Grech (1999) proposes some schools are implementing safety drills involving staff and police and conducted when students are not in school. These safety drills provide realistic training through scenarios based on past school shootings. Since school shootings are rare, little data is available to determine the success of these drills.

**Technological Intervention.** Since the Columbine High School shooting, school districts have turned to such technological interventions as the use of metal detectors, surveillance cameras, and electronic door locks that can only be opened with a special identification badge issued to faculty and staff. Yet, there have been approximately 270 school shootings since Columbine (ABC News, 2016). Consequently, the efficiency of these interventions remains questionable since school shootings are rare. Skiba and Peterson (2000) states:

> In the aftermath of the Columbine High School tragedy, there have been increased calls for widespread application of school security technology. Yet it is important to note that,
aside from district testimonials, there are few empirical evaluations of the efficacy of such approaches. (p.337)

In reviewing nine studies on the use of metal detectors on perceived school safety, Gonzales and Jetelina (2016) found the evidence to be insufficient for conclusions of effectiveness to be drawn. Likewise, the evidence to support the use of surveillance cameras and access control on perceived school safety provided little conclusive evidence. In a study done on the impact of metal detectors in schools, Hankin, Hertz, and Simon (2011) found the evidence supporting the use of metal detectors inconclusive. Many schools have multiple security measures in place. Although metal detectors serve as a deterrent in preventing a school shooting, it is difficult to predict how many school shootings are averted as a result of schools using metal detectors.

According to the Center for Disease Control Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) conducted in 2015, 4.1% of students nationwide had carried a weapon (e.g., gun, knife, or club) on school property at least one day in a 30-day period before the survey. During 1993 – 2015, a significant linear decrease occurred in the prevalence of having carried a weapon on school property (11.8% - 4.1%). Across 33 states, the prevalence of having carried a weapon on school property ranged from 2.0% to 10.7% (median: 5.2%). Across 17 large urban school districts, the prevalence ranged from 2.4% to 9.8% (median: 3.3%). Nationwide, 6.0% of students had been threatened or injured with a weapon (e.g., a gun, knife, or club) on school property one or more times during the 12 months before the survey. During 1993–2015, a significant linear decrease occurred overall in the prevalence of having been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property (7.3%–6.0%). Across 30 states, the prevalence of having been threatened or injured with a weapon ranged from 4.1% to 10.6% (median: 6.6%). Across 18 large urban school districts, the prevalence ranged from 4.3% to 13.9% (median: 6.8%). Nationwide, 5.6% of students had not gone to school on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey because
they felt they would be unsafe at school or on their way to or from school (i.e., did not go to school because of safety concerns). During 1993–2015, a significant linear increase occurred overall in the prevalence of having not gone to school because of safety concerns (4.4%–5.6%).

Although data from the YRBS show a decline in the number of students bringing weapons on school property has declined nationwide, the report also shows an increase in the number of students missing a day or more of school due to safety concerns. Since school shootings are rare, data to determine the effectiveness of metal detectors, surveillance cameras, controlled access entry, and other safety measures are scarce. Yet, more studies have been done on the use of metal detectors in schools than any other safety measure. Gonzalez and Jetelina (2016) state results from various studies continue to show insufficient evidence in support of the use of metal detectors or any other technological devices as a feasible deterrent for school shootings. The lack of a clear conclusion from the literature review raises the question about what security measures should be put in place to deter a possible school shooting or any other violent incident that may occur on school property.

**Threat Assessment.** Cornell, Sheras, Gregory, and Fam (2009) addresses the use of threat assessments as a tool for evaluating potential threats so the appropriate action can be taken. Cornell et al. (2009) write:

> Threat assessments are widely used by the Secret Service to deal with persons who threaten to attack public officials, and has evolved into a standard law enforcement approach to analyze a variety of dangerous situations, such as threats of workplace violence. (p.120)

Threat assessment is a process of evaluating a threat, and the circumstances surrounding the threat, to uncover any facts or evidence that indicate the threat is likely to be carried out (Cornell et al., 2009). Threat assessment is concerned with determining whether a student has the intent and means to carry out the threat and includes efforts to prevent the threat from being carried out
Although threat assessments have been widely recommended by the FBI and Secret Service as a violence prevention approach for schools, there are few empirical studies of its use and effectiveness in preventing school violence such as a mass shooting. Surface (2011) posits a threat assessment consists of two separate and interrelated approaches: threat inquiry and threat investigation. Surface describes a threat inquiry as:

Carried out by a school-based team that makes an initial determination of the risks. The school-based team should include an administrator, a school counselor, a teacher or a coach, and a school resource officer. If the inquiry indicates a moderate or high risk of targeted violence, the inquiry is expanded to a threat investigation.

A threat investigation goes beyond the inquiry team to include outside agencies such as law enforcement and mental health professionals. Threat investigations follow the same path as an inquiry but it considers whether state law has been violated, the availability of weapons in the home, and any other issues to which an internal team would not have access (Surface, 2011, p. 153). Not all threats are equal, but all must be taken seriously. Consequently, school leaders and staff members on the threat assessment team must be prepared to respond appropriately and expeditiously to any and every type of real and perceived threats.

When analyzing threats, the threat assessment team should examine details about the following: the identity of the victim or victims; the reason for making the threat; the means, weapon, and method by which it is to be carried out; the date, time, and place where the threatened act will occur; and concrete information about plans or preparations that have already been made (Surface, 2011). Although research regarding the efficiency of threat assessments are infrequent, Cornell et al. (2009) offers the Virginia model of threat assessment as an approach to violence prevention that emphasizes early attention to problems such as bullying, teasing, and other forms of student conflict before they escalate into violent behavior. Thus, school staff members are “encouraged to adopt a flexible, problem-solving approach, as distinguished from a
more punitive, zero-tolerance approach to student misbehavior” (Cornell et al., 2009, p. 120). Adopting a flexible approach to problem solving requires training. Principal preparedness programs need to provide realistic training on research based methods to effectively manage student misbehavior.

In an examination of the Virginia threat assessment model involving 209 serious threat cases in a city in the southern part of the United States, Strong and Cornell (2008), as cited in Cornell et al. (2009), noted:

- 60 (29%) threats to hit or beat up someone,
- 48 (23%) threats to cut or stab,
- 32 (15%) threats to shoot,
- 30 (14%) threats to kill,
- 14 (7%) sexual threats, and
- 25 (12%) other threats (such as to blow up or burn down the school). This study found that all of the student threats were resolved without any detected act of violence. Almost all students were able to return to their school or an alternative school placement, with only five students receiving long-term suspensions without school services. Plans to assist each student included modifications to special education plans, the provision of academic and behavioral support services, and referrals to community-based mental health services. However, after the threat assessment, the number of disciplinary office referrals for these students declined by approximately 55% through the remainder of the school year. (p. 44)

Yet, a threat assessment model is ineffective without having properly trained staff to examine each threat. Harris and Lurigio (2012) agree stating “regardless of the model employed, the establishment of effective systems of threat assessment and management requires a considerable investment in training, personnel, data systems, and intelligence gathering” (p. 66). Threat assessment takes time. Effective threat assessments require personnel who are not only trained but possess the resources to investigate all potential threats hindering the safety of the school. In addition, threat assessments can highlight areas for improvement in a school’s multi-hazard safety plan.

**Personnel Operations and Training**

**Arming School Staff.** Conti (2015) posits arming school staff is seen as a viable option to enhance school security. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL),
33 states introduced more than 80 bills related to arming teachers and school staff in 2013 in the wake of the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting. As of November 2013, seven states (Alabama, Arkansas, Kansas, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Texas) have passed laws allowing teachers to carry weapons on school property (NCSL, 2016). In Tennessee, House Bill 006 allows school district faculty and school staff members to carry a firearm within the district if the individual is authorized to possess and carry a firearm in accordance with Tennessee law, has the written authorization of the director of schools, has completed a 40-hour course in basic school policing training that is approved by the school district, and uses only frangible bullets. This statute also clarifies civil damages policies relating to a faculty or school staff member that carries a firearm on school property (NCSL, 2016). However, for many states enacting laws allowing school personnel to carry concealed weapons on school property, the type and amount of training required varies from state to state.

While some states only require the minimum needed to attain a concealed carry license, others require staff members to undergo a series of mental and physical test followed by intensive weapons training, a course on juvenile law and the use of deadly force, and threat assessment training sponsored by local law enforcement (Conti, 2015). However, DeMitchell (2013) argues “bringing more guns into school and placing them in the hands of individuals who may be poorly trained, and have competing responsibilities such as teaching, is an easy public solution but a poor substitute for the heavy lifting necessary to truly make our schools safe havens for students” (p.297). Thus, the question of how much training is needed to stop a crazed gunman on school property still remains for those school districts electing to arm school staff. Since school shootings are rare, there is a lack of data to support the effectiveness of any amount of training required by some school districts.
However, proponents suggest arming staff members puts more guns on school property. Consequently, if not secured properly, these weapons potentially can fall into the wrong hands causing a school shooting incident. Nedzel (2014) states the Gun Free School Zone Act (GFSZA) of 1990 prohibits someone from knowingly possessing a firearm near or in a school. However, the GFSZA contains a provision allowing any individual with a concealed carry permit to carry a firearm in a school zone. In Tennessee, the state law has been amended to allow any person with a valid handgun permit recognized in Tennessee to transport and store a firearm or firearm ammunition in the permit holder’s privately owned vehicle while on or utilizing any public or private parking area on school property (Tennessee Code Annotated 39-17-1309).

Nedzel (2014) further states, “if a person is legally armed and fires in self-defense or defense of others against an armed shooter, while a prosecutor might decline to try him, his action would still be a violation of law” (p. 430). The amount of training required for the average citizen to carry a concealed weapon is far less than a trained law enforcement official. Consequently, a person with a concealed carry permit trying to stop a school shooter will only put more lives at risk of being killed or seriously injured.

In addition to legal concerns, Trump (2011) raises a number of issues concerning arming school staff members. Issues such as training, types of firearms allowed, types of ammunition allowed, and insurance against civil and legal liability are just a few of the many concerns needing to be addressed. Also, Conti (2015) points out school districts arming school staff have encountered insurance carriers which have either threatened to raise premiums or decline to provide liability coverage. Despite the pros and cons for arming school staff members, principal preparedness is essential. Whether armed with a handgun or armed with the knowledge to
handle the potential mass casualties resulting from a school shooting, school staff need to have the proper training to mitigate loss of life.

**CPR/First Aid Training.** Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) is defined as the manual application of chest compressions and ventilations to patients in cardiac arrest, done in an effort to maintain viability until advanced help arrives (Online Medical Dictionary, 2016). Cardiac arrest is defined as an electrical malfunction in the heart that causes an irregular heartbeat and disrupts the flow of blood to the brain, lungs, and other organs (CPR Fast Facts, 2016). Each year more than 350,000 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests occur in the United States (CPR Fast Facts, 2016). When a person has cardiac arrest, survival depends on immediately getting CPR from someone nearby. Consequently, almost 90 percent of people who suffer out-of-hospital cardiac arrests die (CPR Fast Facts, 2016). CPR, especially if performed in the first few minutes of cardiac arrest, can double or triple a person’s chances of survival (CPR Fast Facts, 2016). Thus, teachers and administrators trained in CPR and basic first aid is key in promoting a safe learning environment. Urso and Rozalski (2014) posits public school settings are filled with students with special health care needs (SCHN) as well as an increase in emergency situations leading to sudden cardiac arrest (SCA). SCA is “caused by abnormal heart rhythm which may result in the heart no longer pumping blood to the body” (Urso and Rozalski, 2014, p.40). In a 16-year study, Lotfi, White, Rea, Cobb, Copass, Yin, Becker, and Eisenberg (2007) classified by setting all incidents of SCA in King County and the city of Seattle in Washington state. During that time period, 3,773 cardiac arrests occurred in public locations and 97 (2.6% of all public cardiac arrests) took place in schools. Of those 97, twelve were among students, 33 among faculty and staff, and 45 among adults not employed in the school (Lotfi et al., 2007).
Upon examining the identified cause of cardiac arrest in eight students aged 3 to 18 years, Lotfi et al. (2007) found that four had a prior history of developmental disability or clinical cardiopulmonary disease and that the greatest population of pediatric cardiac arrests occurred in the school setting versus in hospitals or at home. Thus, immediate bystander CPR and early defibrillation are needed to treat SCAs that occur in public locations (Lotfi et al., 2007). In addition to SCA and SCHN, students and staff are injured daily requiring some form of first aid ranging from a simply band aid to CPR. While some schools have full time nurses, others schools rely on staff members trained in CPR and basic first aid. Still, in the event of a mass shooting, the number of students injured could exceed the amount of school staff trained.

Gomes and Smith (2007) suggest although CPR and first aid training is important, equally as important is the ability for administrators and teachers especially to not only monitor students with chronic health issues but possess the necessary training to assist in the event the student’s condition worsens during class. In a survey of 60 new teachers in a medium-sized school district in California, 71 percent of beginning teachers had students with chronic health conditions in their classrooms, with asthma being the top condition identified (Gomes and Smith, 2007). In addition, 20 percent of teachers said they had experienced a medical emergency in the classroom, but only 35 percent felt prepared to monitor students with the potential for health emergencies (Gomes & Smith, 2007). With the rising number of students with chronic health conditions, administrators are very likely to face health crises at their schools. How teachers, staff, and the administrator respond has far-reaching implications for the entire school community (Gomes & Smith, 2007). Therefore, principals need to be trained in basic first aid including CPR. Principals are first responders in the school. In a health crisis situation, seconds count. Educational leadership degree programs need to train principals to be able to spot the
warning signs of the various childhood ailments including heart attacks, seizures, and other chronic health concerns. In addition, principals need to possess the training needed to perform the necessary first aid until paramedics arrive on the scene.

Cason and Stiller (2010) conducted a study comparing online first aid courses to instructor led courses as teachers and school administrators lack the eight or more hours needed to complete a traditional CPR/First Aid course. Online CPR education incorporates many of the principles used in video self-instruction (VSI) and offers such other benefits as flexibility and consistency (Cason & Stiller, 2010). Its increased accessibility can also overcome many of the logistical challenges of classroom-based training as it can be adapted to almost any setting and can reach more remote populations (Cason & Stiller, 2010). Online CPR education may also overcome such other impediments as anxiety or other aversive psychological responses associated with learning within classroom settings (Cason & Stiller, 2010). In a study evaluating the effectiveness of an online first aid course by comparing it with the traditional instructor-led course, Cason and Stiller (2010) notes the completion of effective online course increases course accessibility and mitigates the major deterrent to widespread layperson training. The study compared a group of 25 laypersons self-selecting the traditional course and 46 self-selecting the online course (Cason & Stiller, 2010). Instructors assessed all participants as passing all skills tests. None passed using the objective data but online course participants outperformed traditional course participants. As a result, Cason and Stiller (2010) concluded the online course is effective, and its accessibility permits broader dissemination and use. Principal preparedness in CPR and first aid is an essential element to any school’s crisis management plan. Consequently, more emphasis needs to be placed on crisis management in principal preparation degree programs.
Educational Degree Preparation Programs and Crisis Management

**Principal Preparation Programs.** The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards were developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers in collaboration with the National Policy Board on Educational Administration (NPBEA). These six standards have been developed to help strengthen preparation programs in school leadership (CCSSO, 2016).

1. Standard One states a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community (CCSSO, 2016). The educational leader sets the vision per the school district and fosters buy in from internal and external stakeholders. The educational leader is knowledgeable of the resources available to help with implementation of the vision in addition to the mission and goals of the school.

2. Standard Two states a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth (CCSSO, 2016). The administrator is knowledgeable of the vast and varied professional development for staff members to hone their craft. The administrator stays abreast of the latest trends in education. The administrator has the insight to understand and know the needs of students and staff and provide the resources necessary to maximize student achievement.

3. Standard Three states a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations,
and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment (CCSSO, 2016). With the recent spotlight on school violence, specifically school shootings, administrators need to ensure safety is a priority. Utilizing resources provided by the school district is important in maintaining a safe learning environment. In addition, administrators need to have a crisis management plan that is practical, rehearsed frequently, and adjusted as needed to reflect the changes in school culture and school personnel. Having a properly trained staff is also paramount in developing a safe school climate.

4. Standard Four states a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources (CCSSO, 2016). The educational leader keeps both internal and external stakeholders informed of changes in the educational environment as well as policies and procedures affecting the learning environment. The educational leader has an open door policy. The educational leader realizes the school is a resource to the community and integrates services with school programs to strengthen community relations.

5. Standard Five states an educational leader promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner (CCSSO, 2016). The educational leader knows his actions are constantly being scrutinized. Therefore, every decision made regarding school operations need to be done for the good of the school community as a whole.
6. Standard Six states a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context. The administrator needs to be aware of all policies affecting the educational environment from local to national policies. The educational leader has the knowledge to understand how policy trends affect the learning environment and has the skillset to make adjustments as needed to ensure student achievement remains a top priority.

The ISLLC standards are designed to provide a foundation for educational leadership programs to train future educational leaders. While the standards covered are not all inclusive, provisions in each standard provide educational leaders with the list of priorities needed to successfully run a school. However, more emphasis needs to be placed on ISLLC Standard Three as principals today are having to deal with a myriad of crises of which they are not prepared to handle.

School Culture and School Shootings

School Climate. The National School Climate Council (NSCC, 2012) (as cited in Wang, Berry, and Swearer, 2013) refers to school climate as “the quality and character of school life and is based on patterns of students, parents, and school personnel’s experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures” (p. 297). Espelage, Low, and Jimerson (2014) suggest “a positive school climate can minimize problematic behaviors by promoting safe environments and supportive/positive relationships for youth” (p. 233). While some elements of a positive school culture are consistent, others may be modified depending on the school. Wang, Berry, and Swearer (2013) state “it is critical that educators understand what constitutes a positive school
climate, use reliable measures to evaluate school climates, and use effective prevention and intervention programs to improve the climates in schools” (p. 300). Trump (2011) suggests “respect, sensitivity to diversity, appropriate language and behavior, peaceable conflict resolution, a sense of belonging, and related characteristics of a positive and supportive learning environment play significant roles in reducing safety risks” (p.181). Having a positive school culture with a family like atmosphere provides students and staff with a sense of belonging. Thus, principals need to implement policies and procedures to create a safe school culture where all students are welcomed, regardless of race or religious beliefs.

Trump (2011) goes on to say schools should address climate along with security and emergency preparedness, not one or the other. Too often school climate needs are pitted against and often compete with security needs, instead of focusing on both. Trump (2011) states “schools can be warm, welcoming, and trusting environments and still have balanced security measures and comprehensive emergency preparedness guidelines” (p.182). A school does not have to look like a prison to be secure. School leaders can make subtle changes in the school environment to improve school security while maintaining a climate conducive to academic achievement while fostering the growth and development of the whole child. Having detailed plans in place to address a host of manmade and natural disasters and a well trained staff is paramount to maintaining a safe school climate.

**School Layout.** Although school shootings are rare, one death from a school shooting can have a ripple effect on school safety measures. All stakeholders from school superintendents to building level administrators to members in the community have been forced to reassess current best practices in an effort to keep students and staff safe from potential threats both inside and outside the school. As a result, entry and exit points in schools have been reinforced.
Surveillance cameras have been strategically placed throughout schools. The security of the buildings has become a predominant safety topic in school communication following the school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School (O’Meara, 2014). School and university leaders across the country are seeking the guidance of legal counsel, architects, engineers, and security professionals to assess the security of school and campus buildings and recommend design changes for the protection of students, staff, and visitors from armed intruders and incidents of violence (O’Meara, 2014). Many building level administrators have implemented a lock door protocol which requires all teachers to close and lock doors when students are in class. This is just one of the many nuances being executed in an effort to keep students and staff safe.

Bulletproof glass, lighting, and reconfiguring traffic patterns are just a few of the many safety topics being discussed among school design teams (O’Meara, 2014). In addition, surveillance cameras and identification card entry locks are among the technological advances being utilized in today’s schools. Consequently, new schools are being developed around guidance issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) All Hazards Approach, incorporating the most current design and construction elements for tornados, hurricanes, earthquakes, fire, intruders, and site dangers (O’Meara, 2014). O’Meara states “schools will also be designed according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Buildings and Infrastructure Protection Series to Design Safe School Projects, January 2012” (p. 12).

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security Buildings and Infrastructure Protection Series to Design Safe School Projects is a part of the new Building and Infrastructure Protection Series (BIPS) published by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) Infrastructure Protection and Disaster Management Division.
(IDD), serves to advance high performance and integrated design for buildings and infrastructure. This manual was prepared as a component of the S&T program for infrastructure protection and disaster management; the overall goal of this program is to enhance the physical resistance of the Nation's buildings and infrastructure to manmade and natural hazards to meet specific performance requirements at the highest possible level (Chipley, Lyon, Smilowitz, Williams, Arnold, Blewett, Hazen, and Krimgold, 2012).

This is the Second Edition of a publication developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as part of the Risk Management Series known as: FEMA 428, "Primer to Design Safe School Projects in Case of Terrorist Attacks." Chipley et al. (2012) states:

The primer revises and expands the original 2003 edition with updated risk assessment techniques, protective measures, emerging technologies, and discussion of the threat of school shootings. The purpose of this primer is to provide the design community and school administrators with the basic principles and techniques to make a school safe from terrorist attacks and school shootings as well as ensure it is functional and aesthetically pleasing, and meets the needs of the students, staff, administration, and general public. Protecting a school building and grounds from physical attack is a significant challenge because the design, construction, renovation, operation, and maintenance of a facility must consider numerous building users, infrastructure systems, and building design codes (p. ii).

After the Columbine school shooting as well as other tragedies in schools, building engineers began to reassess the physical structure of schools in an effort to create a design that would offer the greatest amount of protection against natural and manmade disasters. With the help of the Federal Government and engineers from the private sector, FEMA 428 was written as not only a guide to build schools to withstand a terrorist attack but an all hazards guide. Some of the features include surveillance cameras, bulletproof glass, and fewer entry/exit points.

When evaluating the safety and security of a school building, design professionals are now being asked to utilize a federally recommended design process known as the Crime
Prevention Through Environmental Design to mitigate risk (CPTED) (O’Meara, 2014). CPTED theories contend that law enforcement officers, architects, city planners, landscape and interior designers, and resident volunteers can create a climate of safety in a community right from the start. CPTED’s goal is to prevent crime by designing a physical environment that positively influences human behavior. This theory is based on four principles: natural access control, natural surveillance, territoriality, and maintenance. National Crime Prevention Council’s (NCPC) course helps participants put the theories behind CPTED into action in their communities by designing a hands-on, interactive, two- or three-day basic or advanced training specifically tailored to their community’s needs (O’Meara, 2014). Principals can learn about strategies to make the physical environment aesthetically pleasing while maintaining safety and security.

In addition to the CPTED, O’Meara states “the Department of Homeland Security recommends school building designers conduct a FEMA 452 risk assessment to help identify the most cost beneficial (in terms of effectiveness) protective measures for a school building’s safety needs (p. 12). The objective of the FEMA 452 is to serve as a How-To Guide to outline methods for identifying the critical assets and functions within buildings, determining the threats to those assets, and assessing the vulnerabilities associated with those threats. Based on those considerations, the methods presented in this How-To Guide provide a means to assess the risk to the assets and to make risk-based decisions on how to mitigate those risks. This document presents five steps and multiple tasks within each step that will lead school designers through a process for conducting a risk assessment and selecting mitigation options.
Summary of the Literature Review

When it comes to crisis management, school districts have become reactive compared to being proactive. Since a major crisis can happen at a moment’s notice, staff development is paramount to mitigate loss of life. Crisis management plans need to be rehearsed with and without students as safety drills need to be part of the culture of the school. Safety drills need to incorporate the outside agencies that will be responding. Hence, principal preparation programs need to reflect a synthesis of district policies with scenario based training to prepare principals for a school crisis.
Chapter Three, Research Methods, discusses the specific steps unique to the implementation of the given study, *Principal Preparedness for Crisis Management in Urban High Schools*. Vital information involving the research framework and methodological design, research procedures, and data analysis are provided. When conducting a study, the researcher needs permission from multiple sources. Hence, efforts are described about how the researcher seeks the appropriate permission from the dissertation committee, the Institutional Review Board, and the targeted participants in this study. Chapter Three offers insightful views about how the study is to be carried out to appropriately ensure the necessary procedures for a successful implementation.

**Research Frameworks and Methodological Design**

**Research Frameworks**

**Epistemological Framework.** Micro-level theory is the study of small scale structures and processes in society. Thus, Micro-level theory says explanations of social life and social structures are to be found at the individual level or in social interaction *(Ballatine & Spade, 2015)*. Principals learn how to deal with a crisis through assimilation of prior knowledge or adaptation of what is going on around them. With no formal training in crisis management in principal preparation programs, educational leaders develop their knowledge of how to handle a school crisis through experience, professional contacts, and case studies. Thus, when considering
these perspectives, one prominent theory in sociology and education is the constructivist theory. The constructivist theory offers important viewpoints given the purview of this study and the focus on principal preparedness for school crises.

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) define constructivism as “the epistemological doctrine that social reality is constructed, that it is constructed differently by different individuals, and that these constructions are transmitted to members of a society by various social agencies and process” (p. 23). Principals construct their knowledge of crisis management through personal experience or the experience of their peers. Shared experiences can come in the form of a case study at a district level principal’s meeting, through casual conversation, or through a purposeful phone call from a colleague seeking advice on a crisis situation. Principal preparation programs are designed to provide principals with a foundation for decision making. While it is impossible to prepare a principal for every possible crisis, an examination of how principals are prepared to meet crisis is fundamentally appropriate. Gall et al. (2007) further states that researchers who subscribe to constructivist epistemology believe that the study of individual interpretations of social reality must occur at the local, immediate level. Consequently, principals learn how to handle crisis from what they experience themselves, what they see their colleagues’ experience, or what they acquire through the analysis of case studies on various crisis in urban high school settings. While some principals may experience a school shooting or high level form of violence, others may only experience a school fight or a mid-to-low level form of violence. Since major crises are rare, principals construct their knowledge of mitigating various crises through case studies, district policies, and professional contacts.

Gall et al. (2007) describes epistemology as “the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge and the process by which knowledge is acquired and validated” (p. 15).
With the lack of crisis management training in principal preparation programs, principals need to rely on each other’s experiences to provide a framework for resolving crisis in their respective school settings. An effective crisis management plan addresses the four components of the life cycle of a crisis which are mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery (Reeves et al., 2010). Emel Ulanir (2012) agrees, describing constructivism as “an epistemology, a learning or meaning making theory that offers an explanation of the nature of knowledge and how human beings learn” (p. 195). While there are several theories concerning how human beings acquire knowledge, constructivism is a theory which takes into account the experiences of the individual. Ulanir (2012) goes on to say that constructivism focus is shifted from “knowledge as a product to knowing as a process” (p. 196). Therefore, during a crisis, principals need to rely on sound decision making skills as well as prior knowledge acquired through professional development, case studies, and personnel experience to mitigate loss of life during a mass casualty incident. Creswell (2003) states “the goal of research, then, is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied. The questions become broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, a meaning typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons” (p. 8). Thus, the researcher seeks understanding about the relevancy and rigor of principal preparation programs. Such knowledge and perspectives are gained through the use of open-ended questions to ascertain insight into crisis management plans for urban high schools in a city in the southern part of the United States.

**Theoretical Framework.** Macro-level theory focuses more on social structure, social processes and problems, and their interrelationships. This approach tends to minimize people's ability to act and overcome the limits of social structures. Macro-level theories can take one of three perspectives which include: interpretive, conflict, and functionalist perspective (Ballatine &
Functionalist perspective states rules and status exist in society to provide social control or social order. Social order is necessary for survival (Ballatine & Spade, 2015). Crisis management plans are designed as a tool to maintain order while outlining plans to keep the school safe in the event of a crisis. As part of sociology and education, the functionalist theory particularly offers useful viewpoints when considering how the development and implementation of school crisis management plans influence the preparedness of principals to address crisis.

DeMarrais and LeCompte (1999) posit “functionalism is a macro-level theory which has been the prevailing theoretical framework in the social sciences throughout the twentieth century and argues that society operates as does the human body” (p. 5). One of the most important functions is the transmission of rules, customs, and appropriate behavior for operating in society (DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1999). DeMarrais and LeCompte (1999) go on to say that “important variant of functionalism is structural functionalism which assumes that human systems have an underlying but observable coherence based upon formal rules, signs, and arrangements” (p. 6). Structural functionalism is the belief that the structure in a social system must maintain a balance with each other in order for societal health to be sustained (DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1999). Therefore, conflict is an idiosyncrasy which the healthy system avoids and seeks to resolve as quickly as possible (DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1999). Crisis, like conflict, can destroy a safe school culture. Consequently, measures need to be put in place by the principal to ensure the safety and security of the school environment. These measures come in the form of metal detectors, SROs, crisis management plans, etc. all of which are designed to protect the infrastructure of the school while keeping students and staff safe from internal and external threats.
When Epistemology Meets Theory

Figure 2 below outlines the key concepts between functionalist theory and the epistemology of constructivism as it relates to this study. Figure 2 provides the following:

Figure 2:
A Venn Diagram of Macro-Level and Micro-Level Systems

Within Figure 2, it is important to know that functionalist theory addresses the actions of society as a whole. Hence, the crisis management plan is a tool designed to establish order after a crisis has occurred. For the purposes of this study, the society is made up of the students and staff at the urban high schools in the LUSD which strives for order through systems put in place by the LUSD and the principals of the schools examined. On the contrary, constructivism addresses how the individual learns and processes knowledge. Consequently, students and staff make a conscious choice to obey or disobey the systems in place based on their individual observation, knowledge, or experience. Those students who choose to follow these systems adapt their
thinking and actions allowing order to exist. However, those students who choose not to follow the established systems end up committing a low to mid-level offense.

**Methodological Design**

**Qualitative Research.** This study uses a qualitative research methodological design to collect and analyze data regarding the insights of the participants. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand a phenomenon from the participants’ perspective. Creswell (2012) describes qualitative research as “exploring a problem and developing an understanding of a central phenomenon” (p. 16). Patton (2002) further states that phenomenology focuses on “exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as a shared meaning” (p.104). The phenomenon being analyzed is how principals are prepared to handle crisis management within urban high schools in a city in the southern part of the United States. The research questions for this study, *Principal Preparedness for Crisis Management in Urban High Schools*, are as follows: How are urban high school principals prepared to handle low to mid-level crises in three urban high schools? What can an urban district do to improve the level of crisis management readiness of principals in these and other similarly situated urban high schools? What can principal preparation programs do to prepare students to handle low to mid-level crises in urban high schools? These questions provide the framework for this research study to understand the implications for the development and implementation of crisis management plans for principals in urban high schools.

Qualitative research is more than interviewing people and writing descriptive narratives. It is the systematic approach of choosing participants and sites in an effort to further understand a central phenomenon, not quantifiable using quantitative research methods. Qualitative research
allows the researcher to engage in the study while recording and collecting information. Patton (2002) states, “the quality of qualitative research data depends to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher” (p. 5). In qualitative research, personal biases are addressed and incorporated into the study. While interviews and observations are an important part of the data collection process, data analyses are key to understanding the research study. Coding and themes aid in examining and making meaning of the data, but the use of validation approaches ensures the credibility to the research study is important.

Hence, given the framework of the research questions, the researcher will examine the crisis management plans of three urban high schools in a city in the southern part of the United States that experienced low to mid-level school crises within the last five academic years (i.e., 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016). The researcher will carefully examine each of the cases strategies and how they utilized purported phases of the crisis plan (i.e., Mitigation, Prevention, Response, and Recovery). The researcher compares cases from the three different schools noting similarities and differences in the actual crisis, strategies used to resolve the crisis, and preparation prior to the crisis. The researcher also integrates the use of video and other document artifacts to understand what occurred and transpired in these multiple cases. The researcher considers the implications of principal preparation programs and how they prepare aspiring principals for school crises.

**Collective Case Studies.** Stake (1995) as cited in Patton (2002) describes a case study as a study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances. Creswell (2012) further states case study researchers focus on a program, event, or activity involving individuals rather than a group. The case study researcher seeks to gain knowledge and experience through constructivism. Principals learn to manage day
to day operations through principal preparation programs, peer mentorship, and personal experience. Creswell (2012) defines collective case studies as, “multiple case studies which are described and compared to provide insight into an issue” (p. 465). By studying multiple case studies, the researcher gains insight into various strategies utilized in a crisis in an urban high school setting. However, for the purposes of this study, to understand the use of collective case studies, it is important also to understand the fundamental meaning of case studies.

Narrative. Patton (2002) states the central idea of a narrative analysis is, “that stories and narratives offer especially translucent windows into cultural and social meanings” (p. 116). Narratives are personal accounts of an event. Consequently, the person writing the narrative can provide as much or as little detail desired. Narratives of personal experiences pertaining to a crisis provide principals with a foundation for understanding crisis management from the perspective of a peer with experience. Gall et al. (2007) describes a narrative analysis as “an organized representation and explanation of human experience” (p. 491). Narrative can be written or oral, and allows the reader or listener to assimilate knowledge through the experiences of the writer or speaker. Through the use of narratives, the principals in this study share personal experiences with a low-to-mid-level school crisis. Principals also share in narratives about how their respective principal preparation programs prepared them to handle school crises.

Researcher as an Instrument.

Role of the researcher. In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument. According to Patton (2002), “the credibility of qualitative methods, therefore, hinges to a great extent on the skill, competency, and rigor of the person doing the fieldwork – as well as things going on in a person’s life that might prove a distraction” (p. 14). Because the researcher is the instrument of data collection and the data is mediated through a human instrument, it is
imperative the researcher reveal pertinent information about self. Creswell (2014) states, “since qualitative research is interpretative research, the inquirer is typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants” (p. 187). Creswell (2014) further posits that since the researcher is heavily involved in the data collection process personal biases, issues, and ethical concerns must be addressed. To reduce biases, the researcher will maintain a personal journal explaining personal reactions and reflections.

**Background of the researcher.** Patton (2002) posits the researcher is an essential part of the qualitative research process. Thus, he suggests researchers disclose background, biases, and experiences when conducting a qualitative study.

I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. My mother is a retired educator who taught English and Language for over thirty years. I have two older sisters who are nurses. I grew up in a two parent household. My father was a truck driver who had a high school education. My father was also my role model. He taught me the importance of taking care of the people you love. He also taught me to improvise in situations when you don’t have exactly what you need.

This skill would carry me throughout the journey of my life. I have a high school diploma from a very prestigious African-American high school in New Orleans. I have also earned an Associate’s Degree from the Community College of the Air Force, a Bachelor’s Degree from Southern University, a Master’s Degree from Xavier University, and an Educational Specialist Degree from the University of Mississippi. All of these degrees were not acquired without hard work and great sacrifice. I have been a high school mathematics for over twenty-three-years teaching at over six schools in two states.

I have also served in the United States Air Force Reserve. After twenty-seven years of service, I retired. During my time in uniform, I have held many jobs including, Munitions
Maintenance Supervisor, Group Career Advisor, and Public Affairs Officer. The United States Military is a quick reaction force. The training involves everything a soldier might encounter on the battlefield. In addition, the training also focused on providing a knowledge base to improvise and adapt to any situation not encountered in training. The military mindset is simple, “Train for the worst, pray for the best”. This mindset has carried me through my military and teaching career.

I entered the doctoral program while completing an active duty tour teaching Reserve Officer Training Corp (ROTC) cadets how to be Air Force officers. During this time, I pondered several topics to explore for my dissertation. I completed my tour of duty and went back in the classroom. During my first assignment, the middle school where I was assigned had a gas leak at the school one morning before the start of the day. Students were quickly escorted to the alternate location until the fire department gave the all clear. Although students were allowed back in the building, the gas fumes lingered. Students began to get sick. The school nurse quickly became overwhelmed. During my second assignment, approximately one year and a half later, the school had a fire drill. Students exited the building to a fenced in yard. The problem was the students were not far enough away from the building to be safe in the event of a real fire. Also, the gate had a pad lock and no one had the key. This was a disaster waiting to happen.

Yet, it was not until my current teaching assignment that my topic would materialize. My school was placed on lockdown for over four hours. It was during this time I realized how unprepared I was. I also speculated if my colleagues felt the same. Paranoia set in as each day after I wondered if another four-hour lockdown was on the horizon. I began to reflect on my training as a teacher. In all my education classed, I had not been prepared for the challenges that
would arise from holding over thirty high school kids in a classroom for over four hours. I thought about worst case scenarios. I began to reflect on all the training I received in the military, recalling information I thought may be helpful during this time of uncertainty. I soon realized I was an anomaly. I had a skillset many of my colleagues did not have. My topic began to take shape. On any given day and at any given time, a crisis could happen at a school causing mass casualties. While teachers and principals are the first responders in a crisis, the leadership of principals serve as the difference maker to mitigate loss of life until emergency services arrive.

**Research Procedures in the Study**

Creswell (2012) posits five steps as comprising the process of collecting qualitative data. These steps include identifying participants and sites, gaining access, determining the types of data to collect, developing data collection forms, and administering the process in an ethical manner. The following are more specific about these processes and how they are linked to implementation of this study. Additionally, principals are selected to understand the central phenomenon of the implications of principal preparation for crisis management in urban high schools. Sites are determined based on the occurrence of a crisis (low-level or mid-level) within the last five academic years (i.e. 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016).

**Research Participants.**

*Principals.* Three principals from urban high schools are selected to participate in an hour long interview for this study as all three principals have experienced a low to mid-level crisis within the academic year of 2016-2017 ranging from an extended school lockdown, gang related violence on campus, and the physical assault of a teacher by a student. All three
principals received their leadership education within the last nine years from one of the three universities situated within the urban setting of a city in the southern part of the United States. This nine-year period is important since principal preparation programs were using the ISLLC standards 2008. Since the University A, University B, and University C are three universities in the southern part of the United States area with principal preparation programs and serve as a primary feeder of principals to the LUSD, the researcher identified three principals from three urban schools who completed their educational leadership degree from each of these programs. Snowball sampling, too, is utilized to recruit principals participating in this study.

**LUSD Department of School Services.** The Department of School Services (DSS) provides a safe and respectful environment for students, staff and families of LUSD. DSS addresses school violence and other areas such as the suspension rate, arrest and transport rate, overage for grade students and internal gang involved youth (LUSD, 2017). DSS also trains school resource officers in addressing and recognizing problem areas that contribute to student violence. Additionally, DSS also has an Emergency Management Division that serves as an integral role in helping to promote safety (LUSD, 2017). DSS also works to train, collaborate, and plan with internal departments and external agencies to ensure essential preparation and the safety of students and staff (LUSD, 2017). DSS also teaches standard procedures for emergency situations, which provide the school district with a foundation for planning and a frame for action should an emergency situation arise. Multi-Hazard Emergency Management Planning is presented in the four phases of emergency management: Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery (LUSD, 2017). DSS monitors all levels of violence at all schools and provides resources accordingly. The Chief Administrator of DSS is to be interviewed (Appendix B).
Research Sites.

Urban High Schools. For this study, the researcher explores the experiences of principals from three high schools in an urban setting. All three schools have experienced a low to mid-level or high level crisis within the last five academic years (i.e. 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016).

School A is located in a city in the southern part of the United States. With over 1,200 students, School A continues to promote a school culture rooted in developing the whole student while providing a safe and secure learning environment. Approximately eighty-seven percent of the students are African American, twelve percent Hispanic, and one percent Caucasian. School A has been a level 5 school for four consecutive years and a reward school for two consecutive years. School A is also the researcher’s current teaching assignment. Last year, School A went on lockdown for several hours after a student let the suspect police were chasing into the building.

School B is located in a Large Urban County. It has over 1,800 students enrolled with a population of ninety percent African American, eight percent Hispanic, and one percent Caucasian. School B is one of the newer schools in the Large Urban School District. School B strives to provide a safe and secure learning environment for students and staff. On October 4, 2013, School B cancelled its’ homecoming football game after a series of fights broke out at the school. Several students were arrested. According to local news reports, deputies believe the fights stemmed from an off campus shooting that happened the night before.

School C is located in the southeastern part of the city in the southern part of the United States. It has over 1,300 enrolled with a population of eighty-seven percent African American, eleven percent Hispanic, and one percent Caucasian. School C, like A and B, strives to create a
safe environment for students and staff. On May 24, 2016, a teacher at School C was attacked by a student. Authorities believe the attack was planned and that some classmates knew about it and were trying to record it. According to local news reports, the 16-year-old suspect was charged with assault and expelled from the school.

Principal Preparation Programs. For this study, the researcher explores the experiences of program coordinators of principal preparation programs in three higher education institutions. Below is descriptive information about each program. Each of these institutions is a feeder institution for preparing principals for SCSD.

University A is a public institution of higher education and has over forty degree programs that prepare students for varied career paths and are offered through the three departments within the College of Education. The Department of Leadership at University A offers degrees in two areas: K-12 School Leadership (LDPS) and Higher Ed/Adult Education (HIAD) (University A, 2017). Areas of focus include: Community Education, Elementary and Secondary Education, Central Office Administration, School based Administration, Higher Education, Adult Education, Federal and State Departments of Education and other leadership roles (University A, 2017).

University B is a private, Christian, four-year, coeducational, liberal arts-based university offering bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees (University B, 2017). Founded in 1823, University B is the oldest institution affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention (University B, 2017). Located in the southern part of the United States, University B has a proven track record for producing high quality educational leaders. University B’s School of Education is committed to preparing competent educators who reflect Christ as they serve and lead in their schools and communities (University B, 2017). University B offers both an Educational
Specialist Degree and a Doctor of Education Degree in educational leadership (University B, 2017).

University C traces its origin to the 1869 charter of a private high school and college in the south as well. University C offers both an Educational Specialist and a Doctor of Education degree in educational leadership. University C’s Doctor of Education degree program in Instructional Leadership will prepare instructional leaders who will not only lead in management and teaching; but most importantly will prepare individuals who will become visionary instructional leaders capable of effecting profound change that produces improved student achievement in a supportive environment (University C, 2017). This program is created specifically for practicing teachers, educational leaders, and district and site administrators in public and nonpublic schools and school systems. The degree program fosters the development of leadership skills associated with visionary leadership and change management coupled with traditional instructional tasks such as goal setting, resource allocation, curriculum management, and analysis of instructional content and design (University C, 2017).

**Gaining Access.** Principals for this study are purposefully selected and the snowball sampler is used to recruit participants. Patton (2002) states snowballing is a technique used to recruit future participants from current participants through networking and professional contacts. Participants in this research study are selected from the professional contacts of the principal of one of the participating schools. This principal is a graduate of one of the feeder institutions of higher education and the school has already experienced two major crises this year. The researcher reached out to the principal for assistance in providing principals for the interviews for this study. In return, the principal emailed the researcher the names of four principals who indicated they would participate in the interview. The researcher locates the
remaining participants using the Large Urban School District’s Directory. Those schools that fit the criteria of having a crisis within the last five academic years (i.e. 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016) and having a principal who graduated with a degree in educational leadership are the ones considered for participation in this study.

After locating potential participants, the researcher made contact via phone, email, and personal visits. Once the participants agree to join the study, a copy of the consent form to review and sign is provided. The researcher provides a brief overview of the study. The researcher provides a range of dates and times for the interview in order to allow for flexibility. Refreshments were provided to all participants.

**Data Collection Measures.** Document, video, and interviews are used to collect data for this qualitative research collective case study. Crisis management plans from three urban high schools are analyzed to gain a better understanding of school safety protocol. Course syllabi and program sheets from the universities in this study will be analyzed. Interviews are provided to determine principals’ perspective on preparation programs. The LUSD-DSS was interviewed to determine principal preparedness for crisis management.

**Document Analysis.** The study incorporates the use of the district and school level crisis management plans as well as course syllabi and program sheets from the colleges and universities proving principals to the LUSD. According to Gale (1997) as stated in Patton (2002), qualitative researchers are “uniquely positioned to study documents by analyzing the practical social contexts of everyday life within which they are constructed and used” (p. 498). Qualitative researchers are not only concerned with the data contained in the document analyzing but the context in which the document is used. Thus, the researcher is able to ascertain the relevancy of a document in the decision making process. Creswell (2012) states documents
“consist of public and private records that qualitative researchers obtain about a site or participants in a study, and they can include newspapers, minutes of meetings, personal journals, and letters” (p. 223). Documents are a good source of data which can provide themes for the initial stages of a qualitative research study. Creswell (2002) further states documents are a good source for a qualitative study because they have been written by the participants and are ready for analysis. Document analysis provides a transcribed document ready for coding potentially saving the researcher valuable time.

All schools are required to have a crisis management plan on file that address a host of emergencies a school may face. These plans are unique to their respective school locations and student population. The researcher analyzes crisis management plans from the selected urban high schools. All crisis management plans need to address a host of natural and manmade disasters that can potentially arise anytime threatening the safety of any school climate. Crisis management plans provide school leaders with a tool to address a variety of potential mass casualty incidents that could have a devastating effect on the safety of the school setting. The document analysis particularly focuses on the intersections between the ISLLC Knowledge, Disposition, and Performance components and the key components of crisis management addressed in the school crisis plan.

In addition, the researcher analyzed the course syllabi from the colleges and universities in the study. The course syllabi provided a detailed examination of each course required to either an educational specialist degree or a doctor of philosophy degree in educational leadership. The course syllabi also outlined any crisis management content studied in any course offered in the respective program. Only two of the three schools mentioned posted syllabi
online. The syllabi will be used in conjunction with interviews to determine the depth of crisis management training in principal preparation programs.

**Videos.** The researcher broadly analyzes video news reports of various crises from the participating secondary urban high schools in LUSD. Patton (2002) posits visual technology can add an important dimension to fieldwork if the observer knows how to integrate and analyze visualize data within a larger fieldwork content. More specifically, the researcher searches for news stories from the selected urban high schools in LUSD. Both types of video are used as a basis for formulating general interview questions on crisis management planning. Data from the schools are also used to understand the implementation of crisis management in urban high schools.

**Interviews.** Patton (2002) posits qualitative research grows out of collecting data from in-depth interviews, direct observations, and written documents. Thus, for the purpose of this study, the researcher conducts interviews and document analyses to collect the necessary data to understand the phenomenon. Interviews provide the researcher with an in-depth analysis of a central phenomenon from the perspective of the participant or the person being interviewed (Appendices A and B). Hence, three principals are interviewed from urban high schools in LUSD to assess their perspective on their level of preparedness for crisis management. As previously indicated, the selected principals completed their preparation programs within the last 9 years, attended on of the feeder institutions with principal programs, and have experienced a crisis within the last five academic years (i.e. 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016). LUSD-DSS lead administrator is interviewed to gain insight into LUSD principal preparation training. All interviews are scheduled no longer than 60 minutes.
Data Collection and Emerging Issues

The researcher collected and analyzed data from crisis management plans and news stories and YouTube videos regarding crisis at the urban high schools selected (LUSD, 2014; Local News Station, 2016; School 2 Fight, 2015; School 5 Fight, 2016; School 4 Fight, 2016; School 3 Fight, 2016; School 1 Fight, 2017). The researcher interviewed the Director of Student Services from a LUSD. The DSS provides policies and systems which are utilized by principals to handle low to mid-level violence incidents at their respective schools. In addition, the researcher interviewed five principals from urban high schools in the LUSD who have experienced low to mid-level violence incidents at their schools.

Data collection occurred during the latter part of Spring 2017. Emails were sent to perspective participants requesting a time and date to conduct an interview which lasted approximately 60 minutes. In many cases, emails were followed up by phone calls to the school sites of the principals identified in this study. For the purposes of anonymity, again the principals participating in the study are referred to as Principal one, Principal two, Principal three, Principal four, and Principal five. The Chief of Student Services is referred to as the DSS. The researcher was unable to interview the program coordinators, which in all three cases were the Department Chairs, of the three targeted universities mentioned in the study. Several emails and phone calls were made in an attempt to conduct the interviews needed for this study. University C’s program coordinator replied to the email stating no interest in participating in the study. The researcher never had the chance to speak directly with the program coordinators from University A and B. In both instances, the researcher was told by the secretary of the department that crisis management was imbedded in many of the courses. No other information was provided.
News stories and You Tube videos were used to identify those schools which experienced low to mid-level violence incidents within the past five years (Local News Station, 2016; School 2 Fight, 2015; School 5 Fight, 2016; School 4 Fight, 2016; School 3 Fight, 2016; School 1 Fight, 2017). There are currently 45 high schools in LUSD. The researcher identified 11 of those schools for this study. Overall, six interviews were conducted and transcribed including five principals along with the DSS. Crisis management plans also were analyzed; however, the researcher was allowed to see only one part in a very detailed plan outlining the policies and procedures for every possible crisis a school may face (LUSD, 2014). These plans are individualized for each school and are written in conjunction with guidelines provided by the LUSD Emergency Management Team (EMT). The researcher was only allowed to review the part of the crisis management plan as other parts were considered confidential according to the LSUD-DSS. This part contained 11 sections which contained such information as the names and contact information of the crisis management team, building and community hazards, school demographics, assembly areas for evacuation, staging areas, student accounting and release information, and drill schedule.

According to the DSS, the other sections of the crisis management plan (LUSD, 2014), which provide detailed procedures for each crisis, cannot be discussed per the LUSD Legal Department. The logic behind this reasoning rest in the fact that many of the low to mid-level violence incidents are caused by perpetrators within the school. Consequently, the concern is that those individuals, knowing how LUSD will respond to various crises, will plan accordingly resulting in a greater number of casualties.
Research Protocols.

*Interview Questions.* Using the constructivist epistemology and theoretical framework of functionalist theory, interview questions were created for principals and LUSD-DSS. The interview questions for principals are found in Appendix A. The interview questions for the LUSD-DSS lead administrator can be found in Appendix B.

The protocols that are used for this study are interviews developed for the purpose of document analysis (Appendix A and Appendix B). The purpose of the interview questions is to gather data from principals on their perspectives on crisis management planning and principal preparation in urban school settings. Data are used to establish codes and themes for the data analysis process and provide a basis for coding for interviews. During the interviews, participants are asked approximately six open ended questions regarding crisis management preparation, focusing on relevancy, rigor, and results. Data acquired from the principal interviews are used to determine the relevancy, rigor, and results of the respective principal preparation programs and are examined to assess the needs of principals concerning crisis management. All of the data are used to inform the development of the write-up.

**Ethical Consideration and Informed Consent**

The researcher sought approval from the dissertation committee to conduct the research on the proposed topic. Once approval is obtained, the researcher submitted the document to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Mississippi. All participants are asked to sign a consent form, which includes the purpose, process, researcher’s contact information, and the participants’ privacy policy prior to scheduling an interview. Alpha and numerical combination codes will be used to safeguard the confidentiality of all participants. The researcher is the only one with access to the codes identifying the participants. The data
collected from the study is kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home office. All recorded interviews are transcribed by the researcher. Once the study is complete, all audio and video files are destroyed by the researcher. The above mentioned steps are utilized before, during, and after the study to insure participant confidentiality. All participants have the option to review their transcripts to ensure accuracy. A pseudonym is used to describe each of the participating urban high schools and the principal preparation programs.

Data Analysis in the Research Study

Patton (2002) describes triangulation as “using several kinds of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches” (p. 247). This study uses interviews and document and video analyses to ascertain important insights about the implications of principal preparation for crisis management to ensure student safety. Data acquired from principals are used to assess the rigor and relevancy of the school district crisis management plans. Results of principal preparation are based upon the ISLLC Standard Three.

Step I: Prepare and Organize Data. Creswell (2012) states the first step in the process of analyzing and interpreting qualitative data is to prepare and organize the data. In this phase, the researcher collects and analyzes data from crisis management plans and news stories regarding crisis at the urban high schools selected. The researcher collects and transcribes data from interviews from principal participants and the LUSD-DSS. Creswell (2012) also states qualitative researchers analyze data by reading it several times to develop a deeper understanding about the information supplied by the participants. Once all data is transcribed, the researcher reads the data several times in an effort to develop a deeper understanding and look for themes. Creswell (2012) posits the qualitative researcher interprets the research by “making a personal
assessment as to a description that fits the situation or themes that capture the major categories of information” (p. 238). The researcher then analyzes by hand all data collected using color coding to mark parts of the text with a common theme. Creswell (2012) states qualitative computer software programs are designed to store and organize data, enables labeling and coding of data, and facilitates searching through data and locating specific text or words. In order to best address the research questions, the analysis is conducted over all the cases.

**Step II: Coding Data.** After reading the data several times to develop a general sense of the information, the researcher engaged in the coding process. Creswell (2012) states the object of the coding process is “to make sense out of the text data, divide it into text or image segments, label the segments with codes, examine codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapse these codes into broad themes” (p. 243). The researcher begins the coding process by analyzing the crisis management plans. From these plans, the researcher creates themes that will be used to guide the open ended questions for the interviews. All interviews are recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Transcriptions are coded using the same codes established from the document analysis. The researcher identifies one principal interview, and begin the coding process by making a list of key words repeated or highlighted throughout the transcript. The researcher then narrows this list to five to seven themes or descriptions.

**Step III: Build Description and Themes.** The researcher uses coding to build description and themes. Creswell (2012) states “describing themes from data consists of answering the major research questions and forming an in-depth understanding of the central phenomenon through description and thematic development” (p. 247). The researcher develops themes based on the classification of ordinary, unexpected, hard-to-classify, and major and minor themes. Creswell (2012) describes themes as “similar codes aggregated together to form a
major idea in the database” (p. 248). These themes and descriptions serve as the basis for coding all other data collected and are selected as the data are analyzed.

**Step IV: Report Findings.** The researcher represents and reports the qualitative findings of this study by creating a comparison table, developing a hierarchical tree diagram, or drawing a map. Once the data has been collected and analyzed, the researcher gains a better understanding of the best way to represent the information. The data are then reported using a narrative discussion. Creswell (2012) describes a narrative discussion as “a written passage in a qualitative study in which the author summarizes, in detail, the findings from the data analysis” (p. 254). The researcher includes in the report dialogue and/or quotations that provides support for key themes discovered in analyzing crisis management plans and principal preparation programs. In addition, the researcher reports multiple and competing perspectives as emerging in the document and video analysis and interviews.

**Step V: Interpreting Findings.** The researcher interprets findings, making an interpretation of the meaning of the results by reflecting personally on the impact of these findings and on the literature that might inform the findings. Creswell (2012) states interpretation in qualitative research means “the researcher steps back and forms some larger meaning about the phenomenon based on personal views, comparisons with past studies, or both” (p. 257). The researcher reviews the major findings and how the research questions were answered. Personal reflections and views are analyzed in conjunction with the literature. Limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed in this phase.

**Step VI: Validate Findings.** The researcher validates the accuracy of findings. Creswell (2012) describes validating findings as the researcher “determining the accuracy or credibility of the findings through strategies such as member checking or triangulation” (p. 259). The
researcher uses triangulation by comparing data from document and video analysis and interviews. Creswell (2012) defines triangulation as “the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research” (p. 259). The researcher carefully examines all data from multiple sources to ensure findings are accurate and credible.

**Summary of the Research Methods**

Chapter Three outlines and describes the proposed research methods to conduct this qualitative research study by providing the research design, theoretical framework, methodological approach, research procedures, data collection, and data analysis. The notes and transcripts from the principals’ interviews and the LUSD-DSS interview, and review of documents, videos, and multiple case studies will provide data for the analysis for an examination of crisis management planning in urban schools while exploring the relevancy and rigor of principal preparation programs for action oriented results.
CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSES

Chapter four discusses the research findings and analysis on this qualitative, collective case study regarding the preparedness of principals who have experienced low to mid-level crisis in urban high schools in the Large Urban School District. Using the phases of the Crisis Management Life Cycle (i.e., Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery), the study particularly seeks to understand how principal degree preparation programs and urban high schools prepare principals to address low to mid-level crisis. Dupper and Adams (2002) defines low-level violence “as such acts as bullying, peer sexual harassment, victimization based on known or presumed gay or lesbian sexual orientation, and the psychological maltreatment of students by teachers” (p. 351). Dupper and Adams go on to say low level forms of violence occur with greater frequency and have a profound effect on school safety. Thus, Chapter four provides insights about the data collection process and the emerging issues, thematic perspectives on crisis management and the diversified efforts used to advance quality control, and a summation of the critical viewpoints.

Thematic Perspectives on Crisis Management

In this study, the thematic perspective on crisis management resulting from the interviews conducted can be put into four main categories: training; school climate; personnel matters; and policies and procedures. Each principal was asked the following questions:
1. What systems for crisis management have you put in place at your school to ensure a safe and secure learning environment for students and staff?

2. Describe the type and frequency of professional development you received in crisis management from LUSD.

3. Based upon what you have learned from LUSD, how has that improved your approach to managing school crisis?

4. What training in crisis management have you received during and after your principal preparation program?

5. In the Crisis Management Life Cycle, the Mitigation Phase is defined as the part of the crisis management plan where major problems in the school setting are identified. What training have you received in this phase?

6. The Preparedness Phase is the part of the plan where principal plan for those major problems identified in the Mitigation Phase. What training have you received in this phase?

7. In the response phase, a crisis has occurred. What types of crises have you been trained to handle?

8. In the Recovery Phase, the principal works with both internal and external resources to reestablish a sense of normalcy in the school after a crisis has occurred as well as assess the effectiveness of the crisis management plan. What training have you received in this phase?

9. Knowing what you know now as one who has experienced a crisis, what can principal preparation programs do differently in their course curriculum?
10. Please let me know about any information you feel is relevant that was not covered in this interview.

The above questions provided the researcher with insight regarding crisis management training from principal preparation programs and LUSD as it relates to the four phases of the Crisis Management Life Cycle.

Table 2 shows the emerging themes based on principal responses to the questions asked during the interview. My observation of the chart is that Principals one, two, and four all referenced training, personnel concerns, and policies and procedures as key elements in their crisis management preparation. Principal five, on the other hand, focused on training and policies and procedures outlined by the district. Principals two and four were the only two interviewed who touched on all four themes. More specifically, embedded within Table 2 are synthesized perspectives about principals’ responses concerning crisis management:

1) All principals interviewed cited a lack of training in crisis management

2) All principals interviewed stated the importance of following the policies and procedures as outlined in the AOSSPPM for handling the variety of school crisis encountered

3) Some principals interviewed suggest school climate is directly related to the number of low to mid-level violence incidents in a school

4) Still, some principals interviewed talked about not only hiring the right people but placing the right people in the right places to mitigate crisis incidents

Hence, all five principals expressed a need for more training in the phases of the Crisis Management Life Cycle as well as a better understanding of applying the policies and procedures in the AOSSPPM relating to low-level violence incidents.
Table 2 provides a visual representation of the common themes and principal responses.

Table 2 states the following:

Table 2

*Interview Data Matrix*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>School Climate</th>
<th>Personnel Matters</th>
<th>Policies and Procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal one</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal two</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal three</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal four</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal five</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5 out of 5</strong></td>
<td><strong>3 out of 5</strong></td>
<td><strong>3 out of 5</strong></td>
<td><strong>5 out of 5</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>60%</strong></td>
<td><strong>60%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Training Quality

All of the interviewees felt more training would be beneficial to better equip principals to handle low to mid-level violence incidents. The type of training provided by the LUSD focuses on natural disaster such as earthquakes, tornadoes, or flooding in addition to manmade disasters such as school fires, intruders in the building, or active shooter drills. Training on such low-level violence incidents as how to break up fights are non-existent. Low to mid-level violence incidents occur daily in urban high schools regardless of the policies and procedures implemented by the school and the district. While the AOSSPPM outlines response procedures, nothing in the guide clearly states how to physically and safely intervene.

In addition, the frequency of the formal crisis management training is limited. Principals are trained in crisis management during Summer Principal’s Academy, which is designated for principal, assistant principals, members of the instructional leadership team (ILT). The Principal’s Academy is really not focused on crisis management but on instructional practices being implemented for the upcoming school year. Additionally, principals receive district office notifications, are given a Multi-Hazard Emergency Management Procedures and Protocol Booklet for each classroom, and are provided technical assistance as needed from the emergency management staff. Technical assistance can range from offering help with the online submission of the monthly fire drill form to providing training for teachers on the use of metal detectors. As a result, crisis management is a function of the operations division at LUSD. All issues concerning crisis management must be forwarded to the Director of Operations and his staff.

Type of Training. All principals receive their initial training in crisis management during the Emergency Management Preparedness Course conducted by LUSD Emergency Management staff (Principal three, personal communication, June 1, 2017). This training is a
five day eight hours per day intensive course which takes participants through different types of crisis ranging from fires, active shooters, and natural disasters (Principal three, personal communication, June 1, 2017). Principals are provided updates to policies and procedures through email notifications and through Summer Principal’s Academy, but no other hands on crisis management training exist after the Emergency Management Preparedness Course. In addition, the training also exposes participants to the Incident Command System (ICS), a nationally recognized system utilized by LUSD to handle all major crisis. Reeves at al. (2010) states the ICS “helps to outline roles and responsibilities of the district and school crisis teams, and facilitates communication with the community responders” (p.103). After their initial training, all principals are required to attend Summer Principals Institute held June of every year for refresher training in crisis management.

Summer Principals Institute is a week-long training and covers all aspects of school operations providing principals with updates on instructional strategies, changes in state law as it relates to operations, and updates to the crisis management manual, Academic Operations School Support Protocol and Procedures Manual (AOSSPPM). All principals receive an updated version of the AOSSPPM at the beginning of each school year. The AOSSPPM covers topics such as school safety, general administrative protocol, financial compliance, and attendance and discipline procedures. The DSS provides updates during Summer Principals Institute on upcoming changes for the new school year. This briefing is approximately 50 minutes, and covers important deadlines such as when the first fire drill has to be conducted. In the LUSD studied, state law requires a fire drill be conducted within the first fifteen days of the first day of school and every 30 days thereafter (LexisNexis, 2016). The DSS and his staff provide the
resources and the technical support needed to ensure all principals conduct all required safety drills per state guidelines.

No training, however, is offered to aid principals in handling fights in their school. Although the district has a student code of conduct which governs student behavior, there are minimal ways to stop fights from completely happening. Consequently, the principal’s role is to intervene physically and render the proper consequences for the parties involved. “There is no training to teach you how to safely or effectively break up a fight. But the expectation is, as a male teacher, you are expected to intervene in some way” (Principal one, personal communication, June 6, 2017). This was a common response among all principals interviewed for this study. The assumption here is the very presence of male teachers and administrators in the hallways and in the building is deterrent enough to prevent most fights from occurring. In addition, all principals expressed a need for some form of training for personal safety reasons and to avoid any potential liability issues that may arise from physically handling a student.

Several principals interviewed have been injured as a result of breaking up fights. These injuries range from a broken foot to getting punched in the face during the melee. As a result of a lack of training, some principals have taken a different stance when it comes to their expectations for themselves and their staff as it relates to breaking up fights. Principal two stated:

Teachers are expected to de-escalate a situation. The teacher is responsible for ensuring administration is notified of that particular incident, but they are not encouraged to physically intervene because they may get hurt. We have male teachers on every hall that will step in. That is how it works here. That determines the culture of our school. (Principal two, personal communication, May 18, 2017)

Yet, training in how to de-escalate is situation is not provided by the district. If a principal gets injured intervening in a fight, the LUSD will take care of medical expenses in addition to providing the administrator with time off for recovery. According to one of the interviewed
principals, “I broke my foot breaking up a fight my first year as an assistant principal, and the
district took care of my injuries and provided a substitute until I was able to return to work”
(Principal two, personal communication, May 18, 2017). Fights at schools are a common
occurrence regardless of the systems put in place. While some systems may reduce the number
of fights in a school, the reality is some students will fight irrespective of the policies and
procedures by the school or the district. With the proper training in fight intervention, injuries
can potentially be avoided saving the district in compensation to principals and other employees.

**Frequency of Training.** Principals receive very little hands on training in crisis
management. After the initial emergency management training, no other hands on training is
provided by LUSD. Brief updates are provided through briefings at the Summer Principals
Academy, LUSD office notifications, and an updated AOSSPPM provided to principals at the
beginning of each school year. In addition, each principal is expected to provide a Multi-Hazard
School Plan and Recovery Guide to the LUSD Emergency Management staff at the beginning
which identifies members of the school’s crisis management team. Per the National Incident
Management System (NIMS), each school is responsible for having a crisis management team
responsible for filing key roles during a crisis situation. Also, principals are responsible for
making sure those staff members identified on the crisis management team receive the proper
training for their respective roles.

Reeves et al. (2010) defines NIMS as “a comprehensive national approach to incident
management in an all hazards context and provides a consistent framework for all aspects of
emergency management that enables public and private entities to work together effectively and
efficiently in preparation for, prevention of, response to, and recovery from a crisis incident” (p.
101). LUSD requires all schools to have an incident command team which follows the Incident
Command System outlined in NIMS. All principals interviewed stated more training in the four phases of the Crisis Management Life Cycle would be beneficial in understanding how to effectively manage a crisis. Some principals like Principal four have sought crisis management training outside of what is offered by LUSD. Principal four states:

I have been through the Sheriff’s Department Crisis Management Training, Police Active Shooter Training, and FBI Active Shooter Training. I actually got to see their strategies and techniques when they come in and why they do what they do. It made a lot of sense as to why we do what we do in various crisis situations (personal communication, May 30, 2017).

While LUSD offers crisis management training through Safe Schools Training Website, this training is not mandatory. Principals are highly encouraged to use the AOSSPPM for all crisis incidents.

In addition to being a step by step guide, the AOSSPPM provides phone number of district personnel that need to be notified. “I have not received a whole lot of training because this is a district level function” (Principal five, personal communication, June 1, 2017).

Consequently, the emergency management staff is responsible for the Mitigation and Preparation Phases of the Crisis Management Life Cycle. The principal is responsible for the knowing the procedures involved in the Response Phase. The principal in conjunction with the emergency management staff work together during the Recovery Phase to ensure students are provided the resources needed to re-establish the learning environment after a crisis. Therefore, an in-depth knowledge of the phases of the Crisis Management Life Cycle is a district level function requiring little to no training for the principals. Literature correlating frequency of training crisis management training to number of crisis at a school is limited.

While training is important for crisis management, all principals interviewed agreed the policies and procedures put in place by the district’s emergency management staff addressed the plethora of crisis a school may face in the course of a school year. LUSD utilizes the Incident Command System (ICS) which requires all schools have an Incident Command Team designated by the principal. In addition, district protocols are contained in the AOSSPPM, a comprehensive guide which contains crisis response procedures with a description of the incident followed by the response procedures to successfully resolve the crisis.

Incident Command System (ICS). The ICS is a policy component of NIMS and outlines roles and responsibilities of the district and school crisis teams, and facilitates communication with the community responders (Reeves et al., 2010). All schools are required to have a Crisis Management Team composed of administration and faculty. The principal serves as the Incident Commander with duties including a safety official, public information official, intelligence, operations, logistics, and administration and finance. Each school has a staff member from the emergency management team assigned to insure schools are in compliance with all safety regulations mandated by the state. The DSS states:

The Emergency Management Team has an ongoing responsibility of providing technical assistance all year long to each school. Understanding that even with our best laid plans, there could still be some ambiguity and sometimes personnel changes. We have administrative rights to access each schools Multi-Hazard Plan, their activity, and their recordings. We look for things that need to be improved. Principals are responsible for identifying the Crisis Management Team and making sure members are trained with assistance from LUSD Safety and Security (personal communication, May 15, 2017).

The emergency management staff reviews all multi-hazard plans as well as identify potential hazards in and around the school or community hazards which can affect school operations. All procedures in the multi-hazard plan created by the principals for their school demographics are
verified for accuracy by the emergency management staff. All procedures are contained in the AOSSPPM. Although the AOSSPPM is very thorough and covers many of the crisis a school will face, it is impossible to cover every single crisis. Therefore, the DSS recommends principals contacting the director of operations for incidents not covered in the operations manual.

**District Protocols.** As a procedure, the LUSD Director of Operations along with the DSS and other agencies work together to ensure the AOSSPPM is updated and in compliance with all federal laws relating to education.

The SCS Crisis Management System is derived from state law and those particular procedures are connected to policy. It is very important administrators are abreast of those policies and procedures and to ensure that information is communicated to the staff (Principal two, personal communication, May 18, 2017). Principals should be versed in the policies and procedures surrounding crisis management. In addition, teachers are provided a modified version of the AOSSPPM which has been consolidated into a checklist format. “We provide each school, each classroom, with a protocol and procedures manual that reiterates the universal procedures that should be used for the various types of emergencies” (DSS, personal communication, May 15, 2017). Crisis management is everyone’s responsibility. Yet, principals are ultimately held responsible for all personnel and the facilities at their respective schools. Having a comprehensive knowledge in crisis management can aid principals in the mitigation of loss of life and property in the event of a crisis incident.

A review of the literature concerning policy trends highlights the zero tolerance policy. According to Jimerson and Furlong (2006), the Gun Free Zones Act of passed in 1994 made zero tolerance policies mandatory for all schools receiving federal funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and required schools to expel students for a period of one year found
with a weapon on school grounds. In 1997, an amendment to the policy allowed students to be expelled for illegal drugs and drug paraphernalia (Phaneuf, 2009). Yet, research suggests zero tolerance has had an adverse on school safety, creating higher dropout rates as a result of being applied unevenly to minority students (Fox & Burnstein, 2010). As a result, LUSD has modified the zero tolerance policy in an effort to apply this policy equally among minority students while still maintaining the integrity of what the zero tolerance policy was designed to do, and that is make all schools safe.

**School Climate**

Phaneuf (2009) refers to school climate as “the unwritten beliefs, values, and attitudes of the school, and the interaction between students, teachers, and administrators as well as organizational characteristics of the school” (p. 47). As a practice, more than half of the principals interviewed (60%) mentioned the need to better for establishing a positive school climate as a means of mitigating low to mid-level crisis incidents. A positive school culture is key in a safe school environment and promotes social acceptance among students thus potentially mitigating the low to mid-level violence incidents. Espelage, Low, and Jimerson (2014) suggest “a positive school climate can minimize problematic behaviors by promoting safe environments and supportive/positive relationships for youth” (p. 233). In addition, effective communication between principals and faculty concerning crisis management protocols can pay huge dividends in the event of a crisis. Thus, principals should communicate regularly with faculty and staff concerning the procedures contained in the AOSSPPM.

**School Culture.** The culture of a school is established based on policies and procedures put in place by the principal. In LUSD, principals use as a practice, the AOSSPPM as a foundation implementing rules and regulations which promote a safe school environment.
Systems in place at a school determines the culture of the school and the culture of the building by establishing expected behavior from students and staff. Consequently, the right systems in place can create a safe school environment. LUSD has been very good about providing resources to aid principals creating a culture which promotes academic achievement (Principal two, personal communication, May 18, 2017).

Creating a safe school culture requires consistent and fair application of the rules and regulations set forth by LUSD. School culture is established and maintained by both students and staff using the policies and procedures provided by the LUSD.

The protocol and procedures manual is designed to assist principals in re-establishing a positive school culture once a crisis has occurred. One of the respondents asserts the following:

You know your school culture is positive when the students feel comfortable enough to approach you and tell you things happening at the school. We have some good kids here who want to come to a safe place to learn, get a good education, and have fun (Principal four, personal communication, May 30, 2017).

Building a positive school culture requires time, patience, and a willingness to communicate with students, staff and the community. In some cases, low to mid-level violence incidents are results of what transpired between students in their community. Thus, establishing a line of communication with the community can go a long way in maintaining a school culture which promotes safety and academic achievement.

**Communication.** Open and honest communication is imperative to establishing a positive school climate. As a practice, principals need to communicate policies and procedures early and often to instill in faculty and staff the importance of school safety.

Those crisis management systems are communicated at the beginning of the year. Your crisis management is part of your in-service training for teachers in the building. It is important that principals go through the crisis management plan to let the staff know what particular situations occur and what systems are in place to address each scenario (Principal two, personal communication, May 18, 2017).

Principals, through consistent communication of the crisis management plan, can create a culture of school safety among staff members which in-turn translates to the students.
Although all principals in this study agreed on the importance of crisis management and the importance of having systems in place address incidents that may arise, some principals have gone above and beyond by doing more than what is required by the LUSD. “We go over the crisis management plan in-depth. All of my teachers are CPR certified. We have monthly drills in addition to what is required by LUSD and the state of the federal law. We do all these things to communicate to our faculty and staff the importance of being prepared for a crisis” (Principal four, personal communication, May 30, 2017). The Multi-Hazard Plan created by principals establishes the minimum number and type of drills required to satisfy requirements set by the federal guidelines. Some principals with schools in high crime areas have chosen to do more lockdown and active shooter drills in an effort build a safe school environment.

**Personnel Matters and Crisis Management**

More than half of the interviewees (60%) agreed that having the right people with the right skillset in the right job is paramount to any crisis management team or school safety plan. A low to mid-level violence incident can temporarily disrupt a positive school environment. The school resource officer (SRO) provides principals with not only a law enforcement presence but serve as a liaison between school administration and first responders in the event of a crisis. In addition, developing the right mindset to effectively manage a crisis is crucial. Therefore, subject matter experts (SMEs) provide a wealth a knowledge to principals in helping them establish the right frame of mind when dealing with a crisis situation. SME can be principals who have experienced a crisis or law enforcement or first responders who have responded to a school crisis. Allowing these individuals to share their experiences can go a long way in mentally preparing principals for the mental stress associated with any school crisis.
**School Resource Officer.** The SRO is a law enforcement officer assigned to work at a school. The SRO may be a member of the local law enforcement agency or may be employed by the school district. In LUSD, SROs are employed by the school district but receive training from the local law enforcement agency. SROs train with law enforcement for a variety of crisis which may occur at a school. While the duties of the SRO may vary from state to state and from school to school, the overall intent of the SRO program is to provide a safe learning environment in schools, provide valuable resources to school staff members, foster positive relationships with youth, develop strategies to resolve problems affecting youth, and protect all students and staff from internal and external threats (Candy et al., 2012). Yet, in many urban high schools in LUSD, the SRO is being underutilized with more emphasis placed on the law enforcement aspect of their job.

SROs are the go to persons when it comes to handling physical altercations between students since they are trained that area. Principal one states:

As a principal, you have got to know how to work with your SROs. I have seen schools where SROs and administrators don’t work well together. I have seen schools where SROs have too much patrol left in them and they have a hard time converting into an SRO. There is a trick to being a good SRO. The good ones are worth their weight in gold. The kids feel comfortable telling them that there are drugs in the school. (personal communication, June 6, 2017)

SROs provide an important element to any crisis management plan and crisis management team. Additionally, a good SRO is proactive. By building trusting relationships with the students, SROs can de-escalate low to mid-level violence incidents before these incidents reach the school campus.

**Subject Matter Experts.** Along with the need for better training, communication, and policy and procedures, more than half of the principals interviewed (80%) stated talking with someone, such as another principal, who has experienced a crisis or someone who works in crisis
management, such as local law enforcement, fire department, or local EMTs would provide a deeper understanding to why the policies and procedures are written as such. Principal four states the following, “I was able to talk to the men and women who had been through things. I was able to ask questions and get answers that I just could not get from a textbook or a manual” (personal communication, May 30, 2017). Crisis management planning is more than just training. It is about developing the mental capacity to efficiently manage the rigors of a crisis along with the mental stress associated any crisis.

I would recommend current and future principals have access to emergency management personnel. Someone whom they can have only and honest dialect about the importance of a crisis management plan and the consequences for not having a plan or following a plan already in place (Principal three, personal communication, June 1, 2017).

LUSD needs to allow principals in the district who have experienced a crisis time to share their experiences at the monthly principals meeting or during Summer Principals Institute. Since school crisis are rare, some principals spend less time on crisis preparation and more time on implementing policies and procedures to improve test scores.

Although academic achievement is important, creating a safe school environment is equally as important. Principal two (personal communication, May 18, 2017) recommends aspiring leaders intern with sitting principals to get a real world and authentic experience on the policies and procedures in place for crisis management. LUSD has instituted a program which allows aspiring principals to intern at an assigned school for one year. These interns get a first-hand look at the day to day responsibilities involved in being a principal and the balance that must be established between maintaining a safe environment while growing the capacity for academic achievement.

However, all SMEs will agree that keeping a cool head in the midst of a crisis is key to successfully managing any crisis. “When a crisis occurs, whether it is low or mid-level,
administrators must remain calm and even toned. People will remember your demeanor before they remember your words and that is why it is important to keep your emotions in check” (Principal three, personal communication, June 1, 2017). Students and staff look to administration for guidance in the midst of a crisis. Therefore, principals should remain even tempered while following the procedures outlined in the AOSSPPM for the given crisis.

Principal four states:

In my first year as a principal, the basketball coach died in my arms four days into the school year. The other coaches on site were all CPR certified but froze which is not unusual the first time you have to use it. I had to remain calm. I had to keep my emotions in check. As a result, I require all my teachers to be CPR certified (personal communication, May 30, 2017).

A crisis, whether low, mid-level, or high violence can occur at any given moment without warning. Having the right people in the right place with the right training can make the difference in how the severity of the crisis. A low-level violence incident can quickly escalate to a high volume incident unless policies and procedures are not only put in place but practiced until these procedures become second nature. During any crisis, time is crucial.

**Principal Preparation Programs**

The researcher analyzed the syllabi from three feeder colleges and universities which provide principals to the LUSD in the study. Only two of the three school posted syllabus of courses required to attain either an educational specialist degree or doctor of philosophy degree in educational leadership. None of the courses examined contained content on crisis management. None of the syllabi posted reflect the extent to which crisis management is covered in the programs of the colleges and universities in the study. Below are the excerpts
from the course catalogs of the universities in this study. The course catalog of University A states the following:

Educational Law - federal and state statutes and local regulations applicable to education; legal requirements and their implications for educational operation; legal research methods and case law (University A Course Catalog, 2016 – 2017)

University A Course Catalog provides an in-depth study on federal and state statues regarding educational law. However, there is no mention of crisis management training or school safety.

The course catalog of University B also states the following:

Legal Issues in School Governance - areas of the law as it impacts school administrators are studied, including, but not limited to, sources of the law and the courts, the law and students and educational personnel, desegregation and its effects, school finance issues and school district liability, federal law and regulations involving special education (University B Course Catalog, 2016-2017).

University B Course Catalog provides a study of a variety of legal issues a principal may encounter such as school finances, special education, and a host of other potential liability issues that may arise. Yet, no mention is made of school safety or crisis management. The course catalog of University C further states the following:

Education Law - a study of laws and court decisions having direct implications for the teacher and/or administrator in the professional setting. The teacher/administrator as an employee, classroom management, safety/security issues, negligence and torts, students’ rights, instruction, and administration/supervision are among topics to be covered (University C Course Catalog, 2016 –2017)

University C Course Catalog covers a variety of legal cases and their impact on today’s public school system. In addition, University C is the only university in the study which provides principals with a foundation for addressing safety and security issues in a school setting.

When asked what training in crisis management principals received in their principal preparation programs, responses ranged from zero to very little. Principal one states, “I did not receive any training in crisis management, and I earned my educational specialist and doctor of
philosophy from the same university” (Principal one, personal communication, June 6, 2017). Based on a review of the syllabus, the researcher deduced the emphasis of the colleges and universities in the study focused on preparing principals to be curriculum experts and less on providing the principal with the tools needed to handle low to mid-level violence incidents that often occur regularly in urban school settings. Table 3 shows how principals in the study responded when asked the extent of crisis management training received in their respective principal preparation program.

Table 3

**Principal Preparedness from Colleges and Universities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A</th>
<th>Category 1</th>
<th>Category 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal 5</td>
<td>No Formal Training</td>
<td>Limited Training</td>
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<td>School B</td>
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Although three of the five principals in the study received limited training in crisis management, one principal did not receive any formal training. Principal three did not attend any of the colleges in the study. However, Principal two states, “Crisis management was embedded in the educational law class. Scenarios were discussed and recent school crisis were analyzed from a legal prospective” (Principal two, personal communication, May 18, 2017). This explains why the researcher had difficulty finding specific information related to crisis management in the curriculum. While the colleges and universities mentioned in the study may teach crisis management in some form, it is not clear to what degree based on the information the researcher was able to obtain. “Crisis management was covered in my Liability Issues Class in which we
discussed different real world scenarios relating to crisis management” (Principal four, personal communication, May 30, 2017). Although two of the three schools had some form of crisis management training, no formal course exist at any of the schools to prepare principals for the vast and varied low to mid-level crisis incidents urban high school principals frequently face. While the researcher does not advocate for a full course in crisis management, colleges and universities can better prepare principals for the rigors of school leadership by providing relevant and realistic training in how to manage low to mid-level violence incidents.

Summary of Research Findings

Chapter four has presented findings from the interviews of the Director of Student Services, principals from urban high schools in LUSD, and the program directors from the three feeder universities who provide school leaders to LUSD. Findings have been organized by themes which are as follows: training quality, policies and procedures, school climate, and personnel matters. The principals interviewed in this study expressed a concern for the lack of crisis management training received especially relating too low to mid-level violence incidents which occur more frequently in schools than high-level violence incidents. While the district has done an exceptional job of creating policies and procedures to guide principals through any crisis, principals need to realize the AOSSPPM is not all encompassing. For those incidents not covered in the AOSSPPM, principals need to exercise sound judgement. School climate is equally as important in maintaining a safe and secure learning environment for all students and staff. A positive school climate can lessen the number of low to mid-level violence incidents urban high schools address on a daily basis. In addition, the policies and procedures set forth by LUSD are designed to aid principals in developing a school culture which fosters safety and
academic achievement. However, policies and procedures alone cannot completely eliminate low to mid-level violence incidents without having the right staff to consistently enforce those rules and regulations. Personnel, with a safety mindset, are an integral part of any school safety plan. Staff members trained in CPR, first aid, and de-escalation strategies provide principals with a resource in the event of a crisis situation. Therefore, principals need to ensure staff members are versed in the policies and procedures stated in the AOSSPPM as well as trained in the areas of the crisis management plan in which they are responsible.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter five offers a summary of the research, conclusions, implications and recommendations of this qualitative, collective case study about the preparedness of principals who have experienced low to mid-level crisis in urban high schools in the Large Urban School District. Chapter five provides specific responses to the research questions guiding this study:

1) How are urban high school principals prepared to handle low to mid-level crises in accordance with the Crisis Management Life Cycle?

2) What can urban school districts and principal degree preparation programs do to improve the readiness of principals?

3) What can principal preparation programs do to prepare students to handle low to mid-level crises in urban high schools?

Based on the research, principals in the Large Urban School District follow the AOSSPPM. The AOSSPPM covers a broad range of crisis incidents principals may face through the school year and is a step by step guide outlining what to do and who to call for assistance. Consequently, principals are not trained in the phases is the crisis management life cycle since crisis management is a function of the operations division of LUSD. In the summary of the research, the researcher summarizes the findings based on the data collected from the interviews. In the conclusion, the researcher links the findings to the existing research and shows how the research advances the body of knowledge in the crisis management field. In the recommendations and implications, the researcher makes suggestions for further research in how school districts and
principal preparation programs can better prepare school leaders to handle crisis incidents and the importance of training and following protocols established by their respective school district.

**Summary of the Research Study**

A summary of the thematic perspectives as a result of this qualitative research study are: (a) the need for more training in the different phases of the Crisis Management Life Cycle and better training for the Crisis Management Team; (b) a better understanding of the policies and procedures associated with the broad spectrum of low to mid-level violence incidents that can occur; (c) the importance of a positive school culture and its effects on crisis management; and (d) having the right personnel in key position in the Crisis Management Plan. Based on the data, the researcher noted that all of the participants noted training in how to safely intervene in an altercation between two students, be it verbal or physical, needs to be provided by the district. This training can potentially reduce the number of principals and staff injured every year as a result of breaking up fights. In addition, a deeper understanding of policies and procedures set forth in the AOSSPPM would be beneficial to principals as well as faculty and staff. The principals and assistant principals are the only personnel with access to this guide. However, faculty and staff need to be knowledgeable of the policies and procedures outlined in the AOSSPPM to better understand LUSD protocols for addressing certain crisis incidents. Better training of principals and a thorough comprehension of the AOSSPPM provide the foundation for a positive school climate.

Low to mid-level violence is going to happen in any school, regardless of whether it is an urban high school or a suburban high school. Consequently, principals need to have systems in place, not only those outlined in the AOSSPPM, that address those challenges unique to their school. Each school is different, and the principal is ultimately responsible for understanding the
pulse of their school and putting systems in place accordingly. The researcher also noted only two principals in this study mentioned utilizing school resource officers in assisting with low to mid-level violence incidents. Additionally, according to the DSS, SROs are an integral part of any crisis management plan. Principals need to recognize SROs are more than just a police presence on campus. SROs need to provide trusted council to the principals in all related to crisis management and law related issues and assist principals in building a positive school climate. While it is impossible to eliminate low to mid-level violence incidents in schools, principals can use the AOSSPPM along with other de-escalation techniques to limit the potential number of incidents.

Thus, with regards to the first research question, how are urban high school principals prepared to handle low to mid-level crisis in accordance with the Crisis Management Life Cycle, the response is multi-dimensional. Principals receive initial crisis management training during a three to five day eight hour per day course. This course analyzes real world scenarios from LUSD as well as nationally to prepare new principals for potential crisis at their respective schools. In addition, principals receive refresher training at Summer Principals Institute. Summer Principals Institute is a week long course for all principals in LUSD and provides updates on all aspects of school operations. The crisis management refresher is a 50-minute lecture covering mandated safety drills and updates to the Academic Operations School Support Policies and Protocols Manual. The operations manual is a guide outlining protocols for school operations and as well as provides a step by step guide for addressing a variety of crisis ranging from mid to high-level incidents occurring at a school. Principals receive an updated copy of this manual as part of their crisis management preparation.
Regarding the second research question, what can urban school districts and principal degree preparation programs do to improve the readiness of principals, the response requires a multi-dimensional approach. All principals interviewed express a lack of training in the phases of the Crisis Management Life Cycle from LUSD and their respective principal preparation programs. Yet, a few of the principals’ state they did receive limited crisis management training as part of their law class. Although the phases of the Crisis Management Life Cycle are not covered, real world scenarios based on recent school crisis from around the county are studied in various classes at the three schools mentioned in the study. Since the program coordinators could not be interviewed, no other information on principal preparation programs is available.

Principal degree preparation programs need to ensure that areas of school crisis management are covered within their courses. As the review of the course catalogs for University A, University B, and University C show issues of school safety only appeared in one of the three course catalogs (i.e. University C) while the other university course catalogs did not include any mention of school safety within the course catalogs’ descriptions. Principal degree preparation programs also need to work with the urban school district to provide realistic training in the form of internships with sitting principals, real world scenarios based on incidents from the school district, and provide training in the phases of the Crisis Management Life Cycle which consist of the mitigation phase, preparation phase, response phase, and the recovery phase. In the mitigation phase, principals look for potential hazards to the learning environment. In the preparation phase, principals establish policies and protocols to address those hazards identified in the mitigation phase. In the response phase, a crisis has occurred. The crisis management plan is used to address the crisis. In the recovery phase, procedures are put in place to return the learning environment to some degree of normalcy. In addition, the procedures utilized to handle
the crisis are analyzed for the purpose of process improvement. An analysis of the syllabus of the colleges and universities in the study suggest little to no emphasis is placed on crisis management in principal preparation programs. Principals trained in the phases of the Crisis Management Life Cycle would have the knowledge base needed to make sound decisions for those incidents not covered in the protocols manual. Overall, the AOSSPPM is a thorough guide focusing on mid to high-level violence incidents. Principals need training on how to safely intervene and address low-level violence incidents.

Additionally, as it pertains to the intersection of the epistemological framework of constructivism and the theoretical framework of structural functionalism, the responses of the principals offer interesting perspectives. As indicated previously, constructivism is shifted from “knowledge as a product to knowledge as a process” (Ultanir, 2012, p.196). Thus, at the micro-level or at the school level, principals have access to the availability of crisis management processes. The theoretical framework of structural functionalism suggests that the structure in a social system must maintain a balance with each other in order for societal health to be sustained (DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1999). Hence, principals need to engage in ongoing professional development to ensure their preparedness in executing crisis management plans. Table 3 shows the intersection between the theoretical and epistemological intersections with principal responses and thematic perspectives.
Table 4

Theoretical and Epistemicological Intersections with Principal Responses and Thematic Perspectives

<table>
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<th>Constructivism – (Micro-availability of knowledge at school level)</th>
<th>Structural Functionalism – (Macro-continued professional development at the district level)</th>
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Table 4 shows the intersection between the theoretical framework and the thematic perspectives as outlined in the study. All principals agreed that information on training, policies and procedures, school climate, and personnel matters is readily available at the school level in the form of operations manuals and experienced personnel onsite. In addition, all principals agreed professional development on how to establish and maintain a positive school climate is nonexistent. Only one principal suggested the professional development offered by the district on crisis management is sufficient for principals to handle low to mid-level violence incidents in
urban schools. Yet, all principals in the study agreed the district provided professional development training on policies and procedures and personnel matters. The LUSD in the study provides and trains principals on the operations manual used to address low to mid-level violence incidents.

Additionally, the LUSD provides subject matter experts on matters related to any potential school crisis that may occur. Based on the responses, all principals interviewed agreed the LUSD provided the resources, such as the AOSSPPM, which covers potential crisis a school may face. “Everyone in the district is responsible for reading the operations manual provided to them by the district because the policies and procedures are there” (Principal two, personal communication, May 18, 2017). The AOSSPPM is updated at the beginning of each school year. The updates are shared with principals during Summer Principal’s Institute. Any changes made during the year are sent via email to principals. Principal five was the only principal to mention the online professional development training in crisis management. “Professional development is ongoing and done a couple of times a year plus you have to do the online training which is approximately twelve modules” (Principal five, personal communication, June 1, 2017).

Consequently, the researcher wonders why the other four principals interviewed did not mention this training. Principal four states:

I have been through the Emergency Management training back when LUSD would send principals. LUSD stop sending us for some reason. The training was as realistic as it gets. We put out fires, learned how to perform basic first aid, became CPR certified, and learned search and rescue techniques. (Principal four, personal communication, May 30, 2017)

While many of the participants agreed that more professional development is needed in the areas of training and building a positive school climate, all participants maintained the district provided the information needed to successfully navigate through any crisis incident.
Conclusions on the Research Study

The following is a discussion of the major findings and conclusions drawn from the research. The conclusions are based upon the perspectives of the interviews and how they align with or do not align with the current research.

Training Quality

Overwhelmingly, the principals interviewed stated a need for additional training in the phases of the Crisis Management Life Cycle. Since school crisis are rare, no data exist on the correlation between crisis management training and the number of incidents at a school. However, principals are ultimately responsible for the safety and security of all students, staff, and visitors at their schools. Based on the interviews conducted, many expressed a lack of training in the Mitigation and Preparedness Phases of the Crisis Management Life Cycle stating the district has plans in place covering the major crisis that could possible affect the day to day operations of a school. Moreover, several expressed concern regarding training in how to address low to mid-level violence incidents such as breaking up fights, cursing out a teacher, and gang activity on campus to name a few. However, according to the Director of Student Services, crisis management training is coordinated through his office. Each of the members of his staff is responsible for a certain number of schools. They are responsible for providing the principals with a crisis management manual which is updated every school year and reflect any changes or trends in school safety. Per the DSS, principals can contact the Academic Operations and School Support Office for additional training request. Although high-level violence incidents are rare, schools experience low to mid-level crisis incidents daily.
Policies and Procedures

All principals interviewed agreed LUSD did an excellent job of having policies and procedures in place to mitigate loss of life and property in the event of a crisis incident. Interestingly enough, not one principal in this study mentioned or referenced the zero tolerance policies. DeMitchell and Hambacker (2016) suggest that after two decades of zero tolerance policies, little evidence exists on whether these policies have made schools safer. LUSD has adopted such policies for high-violence incidents as outlined in the AOSSPPM and the Student Code of Conduct. Hence, any student caught violating a rule considered a Category A offense, such as aggravated assault or unauthorized possession of a firearm or drugs will be expelled for 180 days as outlined by the zero tolerance policies.

Many of the principals interviewed agreed the crisis management manual is thorough and provides a comprehensive step by step guide of how to handle any crisis that may arise in a school. The DSS along with his staff reviews each school’s Multi-Hazard Plan bi-annually for compliance as well as provide updates based on the latest national trends in school safety. Each school’s Multi-Hazard Plan must be updated at the beginning of each school year to reflect student and staff changes and dates and times when safety drills will be conducted. Federal law states fire drills must be conducted every thirty days with the first drill conducted within the first fifteen days of the school year. The Multi-Hazard Plan is a living document and should be updated throughout the school year to reflect student and staff changes. Also, safety procedures contained in the plan should be reviewed regularly to ensure faculty and staff are versed in their responsibilities should a crisis occur. LUSD along with the DSS does an excellent job of monitoring compliance by schools as all safety drills are a state mandated requirement with strict penalties for non-compliance.
School Climate

A positive school climate can potentially reduce the number of low to mid-level violence incidents. Trump (2011) suggests school should address climate along with security and emergency preparedness and not sacrifice one for the other. Therefore, the principal should put systems in place to create a safe environment as well as promote academic achievement. The principal should then communicate this vision to the students and staff. In addition, some of the principals interviewed expressed a need for greater communication between the administrative staff and the teachers regarding crisis management policies and protocols. Although the principals are given a crisis management guide, teachers are only given a checklist which some principals believe leaves out pertinent information teachers may need to know in the event of a crisis. Trump (2011) further states that schools “can be warm, welcoming, and trusting environments and still have balanced security measures and comprehensive emergency preparedness guidelines” (p.182). While the AOSPPM provides a step by step guide to keep students safe and staff, some principals argue that if teachers had access to the same guides principals have, then they would have a better understanding of the why behind the actions taken by the principal during a crisis. Crisis management policies and procedures are reviewed during in-service week during the first week of school. The depth of the information provided to teachers during this time is at the discretion of the principal.

Personnel Matters

Principals one, two, and four expressed a desire to talk with other principals who have experienced a crisis. These principals can be from another district or from another state. Also, principals expressed interest in speaking with first responders such as local law enforcement, fire department personnel, and emergency medical technicians who have experienced a crisis.
Although the principals interviewed agreed the policies and procedures provided LUSD thorough, principals also agreed speaking with someone who has experienced a school crisis would be invaluable aiding them in preparing for a potential crisis. In addition, having open and honest dialogue with first responders would provide principals with insight into strategies by first responders used to aid students and staff in the event of a school crisis.

Many of the principals interviewed stated the importance of having the right people in the right job per the crisis management plan. However, only two principals interviewed stated the importance of having an SRO on campus. All urban high schools are assigned at least two SROs. Chrusciel et al. (2014) suggest the evidence concerning the effectiveness of the SRO is mixed, but the research reveals that principals and teachers tend to have positive attitudes toward SROs and believe that their presence deters student misconduct and reduces crime. However, no data exist to support this theory. Furthermore, per LUSD, SROs are an important part of every school’s crisis management plan and serve as a liaison between principals and first responders.

In addition, each school is required to have a crisis management team consisting of the administrative team and staff. Each job requires a specific skill, be it administrative or communication. Whether it is communicating with parents, the media, students, or other staff, the ability to remain calm is one theme mentioned throughout each interview. Also, principals also agreed strategically placing male teachers throughout the school aids in mitigating low to mid-level violence incidents. More research is needed to support this fact. Table 5 shows the collective alignment between the thematic perspectives and the phases of the Crisis Management Life Cycle as it relates to responses by the participants in this study.
Table 5

*Thematic Perspectives and The Phases of Crisis Management Life Cycle*

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<th>Mitigation</th>
<th>Preparation</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Recovery</th>
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Based on the responses from the participants, principals receive training in the response and recovery phases of the Crisis Management Life Cycle. This training consists of simply executing the protocols outlined in the AOSSPPM for the response phase. In the recovery phase, principals work with the DSS, the Director of Operation, and external stakeholders to return
schools to sense of normalcy once a major crisis has occurred. For low to mid-level violence incidents, principals work with DSS as well as internal resources to help the school return to its pre-crisis state. The DSS and his staff, on the other hand, are trained in all aspects of the Crisis Management Life Cycle. The DSS is responsible for identifying hazards at each school and then preparing a plan to address those hazards which are the mitigation and preparation phases respectively. These plans are then vetted through the Director of Operations for approval before they are sent to the principals for implementation.

**Recommendations of the Research Study**

The researcher offers recommendations to the district based on the findings, analysis, and conclusions of this study. The recommendations are related to each of the themes that have surfaced during this study.

**Training Quality and the Need for More Differentiated Approaches**

The researcher recommends providing training to principals on how to safely and effectively break up fights between males and females as techniques used for the former may have to be modified for the later. Also, the researcher recommends in addition to CPR training principals are certified in basic first aid. Such approach is different from the current trends in the LUSD because they only require CPR certification for members of the crisis management team (LUSD, 2014). While some schools have full time nurses assigned, others may have part time nurses. Since low to mid-level violence incidents are unpredictable, principals trained in basic first aid can provide assistance if needed and as needed until the nurse or EMTs arrive. This training is available through the Safe Schools Training Website utilized by the district to meet other training requirements. However, the researcher would recommend adding a practicum
component to the online course. This would provide the hands on training needed to effectively apply the techniques learned in the online course. In addition, the researcher recommends members of the Crisis Management Team should receive training in whatever job they are assigned.

**Policies and Procedures and the Need for Expanded Staff Access**

The researcher recommends all staff members have access to the crisis management manual provided to principals by LUSD and not just the checklist provided to teachers which is a modified version of the crisis management manual. Such approach is different from the current practices of LUSD given the fact that in the event of a crisis, the principal is the incident commander and must have protocol procedures readily available to address crisis incidents. Staff members need to have expanded access to the crisis management plan to efficiently carry out their individual responsibilities. In addition, principals need to allocate time during weekly staff meeting to review crisis management policies and procedures. Low to mid-level crisis can happen at any time and without warning. Therefore, staff members familiar with the policies and procedures will be better able to react without hesitation to crisis incidents.

**Personnel Matters and the Need for Subject Matter Experts**

The researcher recommends LUSD allow principals in the district who have been through a crisis time during the monthly principals meeting to share their experiences focusing on lessons learned. In addition, school leaders from other districts, states and countries if possible should be allowed either in person or via technology to share experiences as well. The researcher also recommends allowing principals to witness and possible participate in law enforcement training relating to school crisis. Such approach serves to advance the practices of LUSD toward providing a deeper understanding into the why procedures are to be followed the way they are
written. Additionally, EMTs would provide insight into the importance of first aid training as a means of mitigating loss of life during a crisis. In addition, the researcher recommends carefully vetting staff members for the Crisis Management Team. The researcher also recommends principals ensure these individuals receive the proper training needed to effectively carry out the responsibilities assigned during a crisis. The researcher recommends selecting people who can remain calm under the stressors associated with an actually crisis. The right people in the right job can make the difference between effectively managing a crisis and all out chaos.

**Recommendations and Implications for Further Research**

In order to ensure principals are prepared to properly handle low to mid-level violence incidents in urban high schools in a city in the southern part of the United States, the researcher offers the following recommendations: (1). Integrate the viewpoints from the program coordinators or department chairs from the respective universities; (2). Investigate how other school districts of the same size are preparing principals in urban high schools to handle low to mid-level violence incidents in their schools; and (3). Examine the quality of crisis management training received by candidates in the principal internship program. These recommendations provide important perspectives on how to advance the research on school crisis management.

While LUSD provides a wealth of resources to address mid to high-level violence incidents in urban high schools, the implications of this study suggest that since no formal training is provided for low-violence incidents leaving principals to exercise sound judgment for incidents not covered in the AOSSPPM. There remains a need to provide specialized efforts toward addressing the various forms of violence the researcher has witnessed faculty and staff injured trying to intervene in such low-level violence incidents as altercations between students.
A final implication of the research study is that proper training and establishing a protocol for intervening can mitigate potential injury to all parties. Principals need to think and prepare for worst case scenario incidents in order to create a safe and secure learning environment.

**Researcher’s Reflections**

It is hard to reflect on something when all the information has not been collected through no fault of the researcher. Feedback from the program coordinators at the three universities mentioned would have provided insight into the amount of crisis management preparation prospective principals receive. However, many of the principals interviewed stated that no formal crisis management training was offered in their respective graduate studies. Some principals interviewed stated that crisis management was part of one of their graduate courses. As an educator with over 24 years of experience, the researcher has witnessed the lack of emphasis placed on crisis management. Since the probability of a major crisis happening at a school is rare, principals are spending more time focusing on improving test scores. Although the researcher believes improved test scores are important, school safety is equally as important. Students can’t perform unless they feel safe. The crisis management plan addresses those potential issues that can damage or destroy a learning environment.

In addition, the researcher has learned the Crisis Management Life Cycle is continuous and can be applied to all crisis. Having an effective crisis management plan is useless unless the staff is properly trained. Training should be realistic with emphasis on procedures and mental stressors associated with any crisis. Real world training would provide principals with insight into how they would handle an actual crisis and involve creating a scenario with all the chaos an actual crisis would contain. While some opponents believe real world training is unnecessary
since school crisis are rare, the researcher proposes school crisis happen every day. Since crisis strike without warning, principals should prepare every day for the worst case scenario. Preparation would take the form of mentally rehearsing procedures for an active shooter drill, an intruder in the building, a lockdown, and a physical altercation. Theses drills represent the most common crisis schools face that can disrupt the learning environment.

Finally, the researcher suggests all principals become certified in CPR and basic first aid. Many urban high schools only have access to school nurses a couple of days per week leaving schools and students vulnerable. Principals and assistant principals trained in basic first aid would serve as an alternate when the school nurse is not available. The Office of Preparedness offers a free two full day course called Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) designed to address many of the low violence issues a principal may face daily. CERT students learn life-saving skills; gain a new confidence that they will know what do before, during and after a disaster. CERT training is presented through lectures, videos, and hands-on exercises to teach students what to do before, during, and after a disaster. Modules include: fire suppression (extinguishing a small fire with an ABC fire extinguisher), disaster psychology, medical triage and first aid, hazardous materials, disaster preparation, terrorism, and light search and rescue. CERT training provides principals with the realistic hands on training needed to address crisis ranging from low to mid-level to even high-level incidents. Although the focus of this research study is low to mid-level violence incidents, the recommendations made by the researcher will prepare principals for any crisis whether natural or manmade.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


LIST OF APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS
Appendix A

Interview Questions for Principals

(Prompts will be given describing low and mid-level crisis)

1. What systems for crisis management have you put in place at your school to ensure a safe and secure learning environment for students and staff?

2. Describe the type and frequency of professional development you received in crisis management from LUSD.

3. Based upon what you have learned from LUSD, how has that improved your approach to managing school crisis?

4. What training in crisis management have you received during and after your principal preparation program?

5. In the Crisis Management Life Cycle, the Mitigation Phase is defined as the part of the crisis management plan where major problems in the school setting are identified. What training have you received in this phase?

6. The Preparedness Phase is the part of the plan where principal plan for those major problems identified in the Mitigation Phase. What training have you received in this phase?

7. In the response phase, a crisis has occurred. What types of crises have you been trained to handle?

8. In the Recovery Phase, the principal works with both internal and external resources to reestablish a sense of normalcy in the school after a crisis has occurred as well as assess the effectiveness of the crisis management plan. What training have you received in this phase?
9. Knowing what you know now as one who has experienced a crisis, what can principal preparation programs do differently in their course curriculum?

10. Please let me know about any information you feel is relevant that was not covered in this interview.
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE CHIEF OF STUDENT SERVICES
Appendix B

Interview Questions for the Chief of Student Services

(Prompts will be given describing low and mid-level crisis)

1. What is the philosophy, mission, and vision of DSS?

2. What crisis management training does your department provide to principals in urban high schools?

3. Describe any differences in your preparation and implementation for the range of school crises you might encounter.

4. What systems for crisis management are in place at the district to ensure a safe and secure learning environment for students and staff?

5. In the Crisis Management Life Cycle, the Mitigation Phase is defined as the part of the crisis management plan where major problems in the school setting are identified. What training does LUSD provide to the principals for this phase?

6. The Preparedness Phase is the part of the plan where principal plan for those major problems identified in the Mitigation Phase. What training does LUSD provide to the principals for this phase?

7. In the response phase, a crisis has occurred. What types of crises LUSD prepare principals to handle?

8. In the Recovery Phase, the principal works with both internal and external resources to reestablish a sense of normalcy in the school after a crisis has occurred as well as assess the effectiveness of the crisis management plan. What training does LUSD provide to the principals for this phase?
9. Describe any differences in preparation and implementation for the range of school crises in LUSD.

10. Based upon what LUSD has learned from previous crisis, how has that improved LUSD delivery and implementation of crisis management training?

11. How is LUSD partnering with principal preparation programs to ensure the successful preparation of emerging principals?

12. Based upon LUSD’s understanding of the current principal preparation programs, what can be done differently to ensure principals are prepared appropriately to meet school crises.

13. Please let me know about any information you feel is relevant that was not covered in this interview.
VITA

I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. My mother is a retired educator who taught English and Language for over thirty years. I have two older sisters who are nurses. I grew up in a two parent household. My father was a truck driver who had a high school education. I have a high school diploma from a very prestigious African-American high school in New Orleans. I have also earned an Associate’s Degree from the Community College of the Air Force, a Bachelor’s Degree from Southern University, a Master’s Degree from Xavier University, and an Educational Specialist Degree from the University of Mississippi. I have been a high school mathematics for over twenty-three-years teaching at over six schools in two states. I have also served in the United States Air Force Reserve. After twenty-seven years of service, I retired. During my time in uniform, I have held many jobs including, Munitions Maintenance Supervisor, Group Career Advisor, and Public Affairs Officer. I entered the doctoral program while completing an active duty tour teaching Reserve Officer Training Corp (ROTC) cadets how to be Air Force officers. I completed my tour of duty and went back in the classroom. I am currently an assistant principal at an urban high school in a city in the southern part of the United States.