EXPLORING THE ALIGNMENT OF ARLINGTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT'S
JUNIOR HIGH AND HIGH SCHOOL ANTI-BULLYING POLICIES WITH STATE AND
DISTRICT POLICY: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK DATA

by

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ABSTRACT

Bullying is a significant issue that results in deterioration of the self-esteem of the victim as well as causing other health and psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, and reduced self-confidence. Research shows that bullying is a common phenomenon in the United States, which involves hurting one's reputation or relationships (Graham, 2016). Cyber-bullying is another common form of bullying to the students who are accessible to the internet and other electronic devices. Cyberbullying has become an even more significant issue due to the unprecedented times we are facing. This study aims to analyze the alignment of bullying polices between the state of Texas, Arlington School district and Arlington junior high school and high schools. The results help shed light on the current policies that have been established and implemented by the state, Arlington district, and Arlington junior high school and high school. While there were some gaps in alignment, overall, most policies were aligned across the three levels.   Based on the findings of this research, implications to social work and social work practice are discussed.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Data received from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (C.D.C.) showed that 15.5% of high school students are cyberbullied, and 20.2% of high school students are bullied on school property (C.D.C., 2017). These statistics are alarming because increasing numbers of researchers have found that bullying can be detrimental to the mental, physical, and academic well-being of a child (Greene, 2006). School shootings, student suicide, and poor educational outcomes have been linked to bullying (Casebeer, 2012). Children who were victims of bullying have been consistently found to be at higher risk for common somatic problems such as colds, poor appetite, abdominal pain, and fatigue. (Wolke & Lereya, 2015).

Bullying not only affects an individual physically but also affects a person mentally. Graham (2016) points out that bullying leads to low self-esteem, feeling depressed, anxiety, and loneliness. Graham was, therefore, saying that victims of bullying tend to isolate themselves. This also includes feelings of sadness to the extent that they would want to commit suicide. Graham also indicates victims of bullying also have low self-confidence, and this gradually begins to affect their academic performance. Jordan and Austin (2011) found that those involved in bullying, both victim and perpetrator, engage in relationships that are more likely to lack emotional support and active bullies are more likely to abuse their partners and to be convicted of crimes.

Research shows that the establishment of a school anti-bullying policy is a pertinent factor in reducing victimization (Lindstrom Johnson et al, 2019) To curb the rapid incidents of bullying, Texas Senator, Menendez Zaffirini proposed Senate Bill 179 known as David's law

which was passed on the 1st of September 2017. This law "requires school districts to include cyberbullying in their district policies on bullying and notify parents if their child has been the victim of bullying or is the alleged aggressor" (Zaffirini, 2017, p. 1). Additionally, David's law allows schools to address off-campus bullying if it "materially affects the school environment and when serious situations arise, such as a student attempting to take their life" (Zaffirini, 2017, p. 1). It also makes it feasible for schools to address bullying on a case by case basis and assess the severity of the incident before deciding whether to place the perpetrator in a "disciplinary alternative education program or to expel students for certain severe bullying behavior such as coercing a child into committing or attempting to commit suicide" (Zaffirini, 2017, p. 1).

Additionally, with the pandemic and with most kids learning from home, cyberbullying is likely to occur and bullying based on race is also likely to occur. A cyberbullying expert from Florida Atlantic University cautions that there will likely be some unintended consequences that merit attention and response from both educators and parents. Among these unintended consequences: a possible increase in cyberbullying among youth (Galoustain, 2020). Additionally, some continue to call COVID-19 a 'foreign virus' or 'Chinese or Asian virus' and this can have a debilitating effect on Asian American children as they may be accused of being carriers because of their race (Galoustain, 2020).

Additionally, when diversity is not understood, valued or respected, this can lead to intergroup tension both in schools and society. Diversity refers to differences in race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, and disability. Therefore, bullying is based on a lack of embracing diversity and this manifests as identity-based bullying and bias, scapegoating, stereotyping, discrimination, microaggressions, implicit bias, the school to prison

pipeline and expressions of hate that can lead to violence and death (Anti-Defamation League, 2015).

It is often not clear how prevalent state and local school district anti-bullying policies are in America's schools. This research focuses on the prevalence of local school district anti-bullying policy in comparison to the state level anti-bullying policy. More specifically, this paper will explore how aligned individual Arlington Independent School District junior high schools and high schools are with the state and Arlington Independent School District anti-bullying policy through their website and online information. To answer this question, an examination of 10 junior high schools and 6 high schools will be conducted. In the next chapter, a review of the related literature is discussed. In Chapter 3, a description of the methodology is presented. In Chapter 4, the results of this research are discussed, and in Chapter 5, a discussion and the limitations of this research and suggestions for further study are highlighted.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bullying is a significant problem in U.S. schools. Most, if not all, state education agencies have an anti-bullying policy on record. However, there are challenges when the policy is not specific enough for districts within the state to follow clearly. Little is known about the degree to which state and district policies match or mirror each other. Nikolauo (2017) found that schools with bullying policies had fewer reported school bullying incidents (up to 8.4%) compared to schools without anti-bullying policies.

Bullying includes verbal, physical, and psychological behaviors that are intended to cause the victim harm or distress and involve a power differential between the bully and the victim (Axford et al., 2015, p. 243). It is defined as any unwanted, repeated aggressive behaviors and verbal abuse that demonstrate an imbalance of power directed towards to other youth, including but not limited to, hitting, kicking, name-calling, and threatening (Vidourek, King & Merianos, 2016, p. 121). Bullying is not just limited to verbal altercations between two or more individuals. According to the National Center Against Bullying (2020), there are numerous forms or types of bullying, but there are four that are prevalent in the United States. These are physical bullying, verbal bullying, social bullying, and cyberbullying.

Physical Bullying

The United States Department of Health and Human Services defines physical bullying as hurting a person's body or possessions (U.S Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). It includes hitting, kicking, tripping, pinching, and pushing or damaging property. For

example, Suzie and Allison are in recess, and Suzie walks over to Allison and hits, kicks, or destroys Allison's bag pack, food, clothing so that Suzie can exert power over Allison.

Verbal Bullying

The National Center Against Bullying defines verbal bullying as saying or writing things that are designed to hurt the feelings of the victim (NCAB, 2020). This can include name-calling, insults, teasing, intimidation, homophobic or racist remarks, or verbal abuse. While verbal bullying can start harmless, it can escalate to levels that start affecting the individual target. For example, John mimics Peter and tells him to go back to where he came from, or John and a group of his friends make fun of Amber because of the color of her skin.

Social Bullying

Social bullying often referred to as "relational or covert bullying, involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships" (Bradshaw et al., 2015, p. 495). Researchers found that this type of bullying is often harder to recognize and can be carried out behind the bullied person's back. It is designed to "harm someone's social reputation or cause humiliation" (Bradshaw et al., 2015). According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, social bullying can include: lying and spreading rumors, negative facial or physical gestures, menacing or contemptuous looks, playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate, mimicking unkindly, encouraging others to socially exclude someone, damaging someone's social reputation or social acceptance (U.S Department of Health and Human Services, 2020).

Cyber-Bullying

The Cyber Bullying Research Center defines cyberbullying as the intentional and repeated harm inflicted using computers, phones, and other electronic devices. Cyberbullying

can be overt or covert. Cyberbullying can happen at any time. It can be in public or in private and sometimes only known to the target and the person bullying (Cyberbullying Research Center, 2020). Cyberbullying can include abusive or hurtful texts, emails or posts, images or videos deliberately excluding others online, and mocking others online or using their log-in (Cyberbullying Research Center, 2020).

However, despite all these varying definitions of bullying, when analyzing what constitutes bullying from the perspective of high school students and teachers, researcher Kathleen Allen (2015) found that in interacting with the students and teachers she evaluated, they did not consider drama and conflict as bullying. They viewed bullying differently. Allen noted that from the standpoint and perspective of those high school students and teachers. At the same time, conflict can be disturbing and frustrating, and these participants did not feel that they were being bullied because of the "sense of equality and absence of the manipulation of power among those involved" (Allen, 2015, p. 176).

Prevalence of Bullying

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, a survey conducted on the number and percentage distribution of students who reported being bullied at school in the United States for the school year of 2014/2015, revealed that among a total of 612,000 students in the 6th-8th grades, 8.42% had been bullied (NCES, 2017). When broken down by the location, the report showed that a total of 18.19% of these students had been bullied in a classroom, while 17.19% of students have been bullied in a hallway or stairwell (NCES, 2017). The data also reports that 11.62% of students have been bullied in a bathroom or locker room, 14.42% at the cafeteria at school, 15.55% outside on school grounds, 12.93% on a school bus, and 7.89% online or by text (NCES, 2017). A meta-analysis of 80 studies analyzing bullying involvement

rates (for both bullying others and being bullied) for 12-18-year-old students reported a mean prevalence rate of 35% for traditional bullying involvement and 15% for cyberbullying involvement (Modecki et al, 2014). Data retrieved from the National Center for Education Statistics shows that for high school students, the prevalence of bullying is visible. Among the 858,600 students in the 9th-12th grade, 8.66% have been bullied (NCES, 2017). These include 25.5% of students that have been bullied in a classroom, 27.19% in a hallway or stairwell, 8.47% in a bathroom or locker room, 22.25% at the cafeteria at school, 17.02% outside on school grounds, 4.90% on a school bus, and 11.11% online or by text (NCES, 2017). Modecki et al (2014) found that the prevalence rates for cyberbullying were lower than for traditional bullying, and cyber and traditional bullying were highly correlated in a review of 80 studies on bullying.

Importance of Bullying Policies

Researchers have found that there are numerous devastating effects of bullying on the victim of bullying and on the aggressor. Hammig (2013) discussed the adverse emotional impact bullying has on the victim, such as feelings of loneliness or not belonging at school, social anxiety, depressive symptoms, and decreased self-esteem and self-worth. Also, researchers such as Jordan and Austin, have discussed the emotional effect that bullying has on the aggressor of bullying, such as being susceptible to violent relationships later in life. Radliff (2012) found that a more substantial proportion of aggressors and victims used cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana. Radcliff stated that being involved in one form of deviant behavior (bullying) increases the likelihood of engaging in another abnormal behavior (substance abuse). Cornell and Limber (2015) found that bullying led to an increase of 5% and 10.8% in the number of dropouts. Peer victimization may be associated with dropout because the experience of being teased and bullied leads to poor academic performance that, in turn, leads students to drop out of school. Still,

victimization also can have broader motivational effects on school engagement. The National Center for Education Statistics revealed that among the 612,000 students in the 6th through 8th grade, in 2015, 8.42% were bullied. Surveys gathered showed that 13.06% experienced a decline in their schoolwork, 12.37% experienced a decrease in the positive relationships with friends and family, 15.66% had negative feelings about themselves, and 10.11% noticed a decline in physical health (NCES, 2019). Additionally, among the 858,600 students in the 9th through 12th grade, 8.66% experienced bullying. Data retrieved showed that 12.85% experienced a decline in schoolwork, 18.56% developed a negative relationship with family and friends, 18.06% developed negative feelings about themselves, and 7.25% experienced a decrease in their physical health (NCES, 2019).

Gender and Bullying

In 2014, males and females were equally likely to experience physical intimidation (e.g., being hit, slapped, or pushed) at 13 and 12 percent, respectively, as well as Internet or cell phone harassment (5 and 4 percent, respectively), within the past year (Child Trends Databank, 2016). Females were more likely to be the targets of relational aggression (teasing or emotional bullying, 38 versus 33 percent, in the past year). However, in terms of lifetime exposure, females were more likely than males to have experienced all types of bullying (Child Trends Databank, 2016).

Age and Bullying

The risk for bullying peaks at different ages for different types of bullying. In 2014, physical intimidation was most commonly reported by children under ten (10) years: its prevalence was 19 percent among children ages two to five, and 18 percent among children ages

six to nine, compared with 9 percent among children ages 10 to 13, and 5 percent among children ages 14 to 17 (Child Trends Databank, 2016). Relational aggression peaks later, with 23 percent of children ages two to five reporting it in the past year, compared with 33 percent of children ages six to nine, 48 percent of children ages 10 to 13, and 39 percent of youth 14 to 17 (Child Trends Databank, 2016). Internet and cell phone harassment was most common at ages 14-17 (nine percent, compared with less than five percent among younger children).

Bullying Prevention Efforts

Numerous bullying prevention efforts occur in schools throughout the nation. Table 1 outlines the various programs that have been implemented in multiple states in the United States and countries in the world.

Table 1 Bullying Prevention Programs

PROGRAM TYPE	LOCATION	MAIN FOCUS
OLWEUS (BPP)	BERGEN, NORWAY	The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is a comprehensive, evidence-based school-wide program designed for use from elementary to junior high schools. Its goals are to reduce and prevent bullying problems among school children and to improve peer relations at school. Another goal of the program is to improve school climate and safety in participating schools by reducing bullying. Additionally, the goal is for schools to sustain the program after external funding and support ceased independently. The BPP aims to build a prosocial school climate and to reduce passive acceptance of bullying.

PEACE CORNERS	ALAMOSA, COLORADO	The Peace Corners program is a classroom-based method for students to talk through peer conflict in a designated area while the classroom teaching goes on.
STUDENT CURRICULA (K-12)	ALAMOSA, COLORADO	The Student Curricula-K-12 program is designed to establish non-violent, and conflict resolution skills, and is geared toward the developmental stages of each age group. It can be introduced to classroom teachers for weekly use or taught to teachers by the Center of Restorative Program staff or in a field trip or retreat format for older students.
PEACE CIRCLES	ALAMOSA, COLORADO	Peace Circles are a structured way for people to talk from the heart and listen to each other. Circles can help a group get to the root of what is going on, build respect, and resolve conflicts. The use of peacemaking circles is based partly on circle rituals familiar with traditional Native American and African communities. These circles can be organized by a trained parent, staff, or community agency. The victim, offender, and any member of the community that has been affected by the actions of the offender can come together to understand why everyone is there and find ways to heal for everyone involved and prevent future problems.

National Bullying Policy

State and local lawmakers have taken action to prevent bullying and protect children. Each jurisdiction, including all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories (state), address bullying differently. Some have established laws, policies, and regulations. Others have developed model policies schools, and local educational agencies (districts) can use as they build

their local laws, policies, and regulations. Most state laws, policies, and regulations require districts and schools to implement a bullying policy and procedures to investigate and respond to bullying when it occurs.

Data retrieved from the U.S. from the Department of Health and Human Services (2018) showed that some states have policies only, others have laws alone, and some other states have policies and laws. For example, forty-six (46) states out of the fifty-six (56) states have laws and policies, while nine (9) of the states have laws only, and one (1) state has policy only.

From 1999 to 2010, state legislatures nationally enacted more than 120 separate bills that either introduced or amended bullying statutes in their education or criminal codes. Twenty-one new bills were passed in 2010, and eight bills were signed into law through the 30th of April 2011 (Schoot & Weiss, 2016). In the four years, from 2006 to 2010, 35 states also enacted new cyberbullying laws in their education or criminal codes (Schoot & Weiss, 2016).

Bullying Prevention Efforts in Texas

The Texas School Safety Center (2017) developed a bullying checklist for schools to assist in determining if an action or actions constitute bullying (or cyberbullying) under the Texas Education Code. The checklist facilitates a step by step decision process that is mapped to the various components of the law (Texas School Safety Center, 2017). However, the checklist identifies disruptions or interruptions to educational stability as the identifying marker for a victim of bullying. However, research shows that educational disruption is not the only acceptable identifying marker of a victim of bullying. Long-term physical consequences of bullying can be difficult to identify and link with past bullying behavior versus being the result of other causes such as anxiety or other adverse childhood events that can also have physical

effects into adulthood (Rivara & Menestrel, 2016). The Texas School Safety Center has developed a series of hypothetical scenarios as a resource to provide further guidance and act as an example when using the Bullying Checklist for Schools. Each of the scenarios provides a hypothetical scenario and then applies each component of the checklist to the situation, ultimately determining if the action or actions meets the legal definition of bullying according to the Texas Education Code (Texas School Safety Center, 2017).

As of April 2011, Texas was rated as the only state without any formal requirement for districts to create bullying or harassment policies. Until recently, Texas state law only required districts to develop general codes of conduct governing student behavior in schools, which listed bullying as one of several prohibited behaviors (United States Department of Education, 2011). In response to numerous incidents and headlines involving bullying, the requirement was changed in June 2011 when the governor of Texas signed new legislation requiring districts to create and adopt formal bullying policies for Texas public schools. The legislation focused on providing a more comprehensive definition of bullying, including cyberbullying, and developing new policies pertaining to training, reporting, and following through on allegations of bullying (Childress, 2011). State laws also vary in how they instruct school districts to integrate new bullying provisions into existing school-based policy documents (United States Department of Education, 2011).

Bullying Policies in Texas

As of 2018, Texas was one of the states that had laws but no policies surrounding bullying. Texas Legislature states that "bullying means engaging in written or verbal expression or physical conduct that a school district board of trustees or the board's designee determines will

have the effect of physically harming a student, damaging a student's property, or placing a

student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or of damage to the student's property;

or is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive enough that the action or threat creates an

intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for a student" (U.S Department of

Education, 2011, p. 179).

During the 85th Texas Legislature, SB 179, also known as David's Law, was passed and

signed into law effective the 1st of September 2017. The newly enacted law relates to

harassment, bullying, and cyberbullying of a public-school student, a charter school student, or a

minor and encouraging certain mental health programs for public school students, increasing a

criminal penalty, and providing a civil remedy (Texas School Safety Center, 2020). Texas anti-

bullying laws encourage districts to establish a district-wide policy to assist in the prevention and

mediation of bullying incidents between students that interfere with a student's educational

opportunities and substantially disrupt the orderly operation of a classroom, school, or school-

sponsored or school-related activity. Texas anti-bullying laws require school districts to include

anti-bullying prevention in the district's health education curriculum (Texas School Safety

Center, 2020). Antibullying policies can have considerable effect by potentially preventing

bullying behaviors before they occur and by reducing the prevalence of bullying (Hatzenbuehler,

et al, 2015).

There is anecdotal evidence that school districts in Texas have restorative justice

initiatives that include anti-bullying measures. For example, Dallas ISD has a restorative circle

program that involve the offender, victim, internal students and/or staff. They also have a

restorative conference program that involves the offender, victim, and support team (i.e. parents,

guardians, social workers/ case managers, where applicable.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Summary

This study will employ qualitative and quantitative content analysis to develop themes for both the state level and school district level definitions of bullying. This study will carry out a content analysis of the Facebook and official school website pages of 6 Arlington Independent School District High Schools and 10 Junior High Schools. Data from May 2019 to May 2020 will be analyzed. All public Junior High Schools and High Schools will be selected. College preparatory High Schools will not be included in this analysis.

3.2 Qualitative Content Analysis Research

Qualitative and quantitative content analysis was chosen as the methodological approach. Qualitative content analysis is defined as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Additionally, Bajar (2017) defines qualitative or relational content analysis as the "concentration on the frequency of attribution of themes (p. 6). Qualitative content analysis does "more than counting the frequency of words; instead, it pays attention to unique themes that illustrate the range of the meanings of the phenomenon" (Zhang & Wildmuth, 2009, p. 319). Therefore, qualitative content analysis seeks to look at how and why a phenomenon exists.

3.2.1 Process of Qualitative Content Analysis

This study utilized the eight steps of data analysis, as outlined by Zhang and Wildmuth (2009). They are:

- ➢ Prepare the data: Data for this study will be collected from Arlington Independent School District webpage, 13 AISD High Schools webpages and Facebook pages, 10 AISD Junior High Schools webpages, and Facebook pages.

- ➢ Define the unit of analysis: The unit of analysis is the school website or Facebook page

- ➢ Develop categories and a coding scheme:

- ➢ Testing your coding scheme on a sample of the text:

- ➢ Code all the text with an additional coder:

- ➢ Assess your coding consistency:

- ➢ Draw conclusions from the coded data:

- ➢ Report your methods and findings:

3.3 Quantitative Content Analysis

Bajar (2017) defines quantitative content analysis or conceptual analysis as "analysis that is purely focused on counting the frequency of exact and accurate words, sentences, or statements in the documents being studied" (p. 6). Therefore, for this study, quantitative data analysis included analyzing how many times all types of bullying and other words or concept that is classified as bullying is mentioned on the Facebook sites and school webpages of a total of 23 Arlington I.S.D. high schools and junior high schools. Word counts for bullying were conducted using Excel.

3.4. State Definitions

- ➢ What are the common terms found in the state definitions of the terms "bullying" and "bullying policies" from the Texas Education agency website?

➢ What themes emerge from the state definitions of the term "bullying" and "bullying policies"?

3.4.2 District Definition

➢ What are the most common terms found in the district definitions of the term "bullying"?

➢ What themes emerge from the district definition of the term "bullying"?

3.4.3 Comparison between State and District Definitions

➢ How do the word occurrences compare between state and district definitions of the term "bullying"?

➢ How do the emergent themes compare between state and district definitions?

3.5 Data Collection

Data were gathered from Arlington High Schools and Junior High School Facebook pages, Arlington I.S.D. website, and Arlington high school and junior high school webpages. The data were collected by selecting the data range May 2018-May 2020 to explore the possible effects if any, COVID-19 has had on bullying policies on school Facebook pages and searching the key term bullying. To examine the state-level bullying policy, websites such as the Texas Education Agency was also searched for the key term bullying.

Also, an advanced search using the sites mentioned above was edited to eliminate multiple results. Furthermore, because this study is explicitly dealing with the term "bullying," other phrases that include "cyber-bullying," "verbal bullying," etc. were included in the search process.

Data Analysis

Table 2 provides the different codes and the explanation of the codes that were used in the analysis of data. To complete the quantitative and qualitative analysis, the first step was to outline all the sources that were used, that is Texas Education Agency (state), Arlington I.S.D. (District), Arlington I.S.D. Schools (Website and Facebook pages).

Then, an outline of all the codes including types of bullying, sentiment (non-proactive/proactive), COVID-19, standard policy, unique, demographics (race, gender, disability), and type of school (high school or junior high school), was created and documented in Excel. The next step was to assign a value to each code. For types of bullying, physical bullying was given a value of zero (0); cyberbullying was given a value of one (1), and where there are mentions of multiple types of bullying such as verbal and social bullying, a value of two (2) was given. For high schools, a value of one (1) was given, and for junior high schools, a value of zero (0) was given.

If there were any mentions of bullying as it relates to the recent pandemic, a value of one (1) was given, and if not, a value of zero (0) was given. Additionally, if the policies, information on the website, and Facebook pages were worded in a way that promotes proactiveness rather than reactiveness, then a value of one (1) was given, and if not, a value of zero (0) was given.

At each level, the number of times a code was mentioned was tallied. For example, the number of times physical bullying was mentioned at the state level, Arlington I.S.D. level, and Arlington I.S.D. schools' level, respectively, were counted. The same process was applied to other codes such as verbal bullying, gender, disability, race, COVID-19, across the respective levels.

For the qualitative portion of the study, the data were copied into Excel and color-coded across all levels using the apriori coding scheme from the quantitative analysis. The sources included bullying information from the state website and Facebook page, Arlington I.S.D. website and Facebook page, and Arlington I.S.D. schools' website and Facebook pages were copied into Excel. At each level, the different types of bullying were color-coded. Physical bullying was color-coded red; cyberbullying was color-coded orange, and if there are multiple types of bullying such as verbal and social bullying mentioned, it was color-coded blue. Then, the demographic focused bullying policies were color-coded. Gender was color-coded pink, race was color-coded dark red, and disability was color-coded yellow. In other words, if the policies mentioned the prohibition of bullying or disciplinary actions for bullying based on gender, it was color-coded pink, based on race, it was color-coded dark red, and based on disability, it was color-coded yellow.

Non-proactive policies were color-coded purple, and proactive policies were color-coded brown. Polices at the state, district, and Arlington I.S.D. schools level that were standard or routine were color-coded green and unique policies, that is, measures, or activities, or additional policies that have been established and are in effect in addition to the standard policy, were color-coded purple.

Table 2. Codes and Explanation of Codes

Codes	Explanation
Physical Bullying	These codes included mentions of physically harming a student, damaging a student's property, physical safety, hazing, assault, demands for money, physical conduct, taunting, theft of valued possession, and physical violence.
Verbal Bullying	These codes included mentions of negative verbal expression, intimidating, threatening, harassment, rumor spreading, teasing, name-calling, and gossip.

Cyberbullying	These codes included mentions of abuse by an electronic communication device, including the use of cellular or other types of telephone, computer, camera, electronic mail, messaging, social media, and internet website.
Multiple Bullying	These codes included mentions of physical, verbal, cyber, social, and other forms of bullying, harassment, and discrimination.
Gender-Based	These codes included mentions of bullying, harassment, or discrimination based on the sex or gender of the victim.
Race-Based	These codes included mentions of bullying, harassment, or discrimination based on the race, color, or national origin of the victim.
Disability Based	These codes included mentions of bullying, harassment, or discrimination based on the disability of the victim.
Non-Proactive	These codes included mentions of **standard** policies **without** any additional measures or activities.
Proactive	These codes included mentions of measures, activities, or policies that have been established to **actively prevent** bullying
Standard Policy	These codes included mentions of policies that have been established by the Texas Education Agency and the School District. Such policies include Texas anti-bullying policies and Arlington Independent School District student code of conduct anti-bullying policies.
Unique	These codes included mentions of additional policies, measures, or activities that have been established and are in effect in addition to the standard policy.
COVID-19	These codes included mentions of changes or updates in policy due to the recent pandemic.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Using quantitative and qualitative content analysis, data were analyzed at the State, Arlington Independent School District, and school level. The quantitative results are displayed below in Table 3.

Tally of the Codes.

For the state level, data obtained from Texas Education Agency (T.E.A.) anti-bullying policies showed that at the state level, physical bullying was mentioned four (4) times, verbal bullying was mentioned four (4) times, and cyber-bullying was mentioned seven (7) times. It was also noted that the state-level policies mention multiple types of bullying, such as social, physical, verbal, and cyberbullying, nine (9) times. The state-level policies, however, did not address bullying based on gender or race. Bullying based on disability, was mentioned once in the state level policies. Seven (7) of state-level policies were non-proactive; that is, they included **standard** policies **without** any additional measures or activities while two (2) were proactive, meaning they included mentions of actions, activities, and policies that have been established to **actively prevent** bullying. Seven (7) of the state-level policies were standard policies. None of the state-level policies reflects changes or updates to the policies due to the recent pandemic. Additionally, none of the state-level policies were unique, that is, included mentions of additional measures, or activities that have been established and are in effect in addition to the standard policy.

At the District level, analysis of the district's website and Facebook pages revealed that physical bullying was mentioned two (2) times in the district's policy, verbal bullying was

mentioned once, and cyber-bullying was mentioned three (3) times. Additionally, multiple types of bullying, such as verbal, social, cyber, and physical bullying, are mentioned four (4) times in Arlington Independent School District anti-bullying policy. The district-level policy addressed bullying based on gender, race, or disability. However, the district's policy is non-proactive; that is, it includes mentions of standard policies without any additional measures or activities for prevention. Additionally, Arlington I.S.D. had a standard bullying policy. Data gathered from Arlington I.S.D. district page also reflects changes or updates due to the recent pandemic.

At Arlington I.S.D. school level, physical and verbal bullying were mentioned once, respectively, while cyber-bullying was mentioned two (2) times, respectively. Arlington I.S.D. schools on their websites and Facebook pages mention multiple types of bullying three (3) times. Only two (2) Arlington I.S.D. schools address bullying based on gender and race but not disability. Twelve (12) of Arlington I.S.D. schools were non-proactive in addressing bullying, that is, including mentions of **standard** policies **without** any additional measures or activities. At the same time, four (4) were proactive, including mentions of measures, activities, and policies that have been established to **actively prevent** bullying. All 16 Arlington I.S.D. high schools and junior high schools in this analysis had a standard district policy.

Out of the 16 Arlington I.S.D. Schools that have a standard policy, five (5) of those schools have a unique policy, including mentions of additional measures or activities that have been established and are in effect in addition to the standard policy. None of the sixteen (16) schools that were analyzed reflects changes or updates to the policies due to the recent pandemic.

Alignment of Codes across all levels.

Regarding the types of bullying, across the state, district, and school-level, the data reveal that the state has more mentions of the different types of bullying than the District and Arlington

I.S.D. schools. However, Arlington I.S.D. has more updates/changes in policy based on the recent pandemic than the state and Arlington I.S.D. schools. As regards policy, across the state, district, and school level, Arlington I.S.D. schools each had one standard policy, whereas the state had multiple policies. Move. As regards to bullying based on gender, race, and disability, Arlington's district addressed bullying based on these categories in its policy more than the state and Arlington I.S.D schools.

Table 3. Quantitative Results

Codes	State Level	District Level	School Level
Physical Bullying	4	2	1
Verbal Bullying	4	1	1
Cyberbullying	7	3	2
Multiple Bullying	9	4	3
Gender Based	0	1	1
Race Based	0	1	1
Disability Based	1	1	0
Non-Proactive	7	0	12
Proactive	2	1	4
Standard Policy	7	1	16
Unique	0	0	5
COVID-19	0	1	0

Additionally, while Arlington I.S.D. schools had more non-proactive polices, standard polices

without any additional measures or activities than the state and district, they also had more proactive policies, that is, measure or activities that have been established to actively prevent bullying, in comparison to the state and district.

Although all 16 Arlington schools that were analyzed had a policy, they all had one standard policy from the District. In order words, there were not 16 different policies, but one standard policy as provided by Arlington district multiplied by 16 Arlington ISD schools.

Qualitative Results

The apriori coding scheme based on the codes from the quantitative data analysis was used to code the data for the qualitative analysis. The codes were collapsed into the following four themes: types of bullying, lack of unique and proactive policies, limited emergency response, and demographic focus.

Types of Bullying

Across all levels, that is, state, district, and school, the data revealed that physical bullying was mostly described as "physically harming a student, damaging a student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or of damage to the student's property" (Arlington Independent School District, 2017 p. 1).

Cyberbullying was mostly described as "bullying that is done through the use of any electronic communication device, including through the use of a cellular or other type of telephone, a computer, a camera, electronic mail, instant messaging, text messaging, a social media application, an Internet website, or any other Internet-based communication tool" (Texas Education Agency, 2017 p. 61).

Verbal bullying was largely described as "harmful, threatening, or violent behavior, including behavior, such as verbal threats." It was also mostly described as "taunting, as distinct from teasing, meant to hurt or belittle, and establish an imbalance of power. Name-calling, crude jokes and calling attention to physical or social shortcomings" (Texas Education Agency, 2017 p. 73). Based on these data it appears that there was significant alignment between the state, district, and schools on types of bullying because the description of bullying was consistent across all levels.

Lack of unique and proactive policy

Across all levels, the data were coded according to the uniqueness or the standard nature of the policy and the proactiveness or non-proactiveness of the policy. In other words, this theme describes whether across the state, district, and school-level, there were standard policies and whether the wording of the policy promotes preventing bullying **before** it occurs or reacting to bullying **after** it has occurred. The results retrieved from this coding theme showed that across all levels, most of the policies were unique but non-proactive.

For example, at the state level, the state-level policy not only mentions that "the board shall adopt a policy, including any necessary procedures, concerning bullying that prohibits the bullying of a student," (Texas Education Agency, 2017 p. 61) it goes further to mentions that "a district may establish a district-wide policy to assist in the prevention and mediation of bullying incidents between students that: interfere with a student's educational opportunities or substantially disrupt the orderly operation of a classroom or school, or school-sponsored or school-related activity" (Texas Education Agency, 2017, p. 61) while Arlington I.S.D. mentions that "the District prohibits bullying, including cyberbullying, as defined by state law and that retaliation against anyone involved in the complaint process is a violation of District policy and

is prohibited" (Arlington Independent School District, 2017, p. 1). Arlington I.S.D. makes no mention of procedures that have been implemented or will be implemented to prevent and mediate bullying incidents like the state mentioned. Additionally, while the state includes proactive measures in its policy, it is not an all-inclusive measure because it only addresses bullying that affects academic performance.

Across all levels, regarding being proactive, the district's policy was more proactive by preemptively listing corrective actions if a bullying incident occurs. The policy had a more thorough corrective action than at the state level or Arlington I.S.D. school level. The state policy states that "if the results of an investigation indicate that bullying occurred, the District shall promptly respond by taking appropriate disciplinary action in accordance with the District's Student Code of Conduct and may take action reasonably calculated to address the conduct." (Arlington Independent School District, 2017, p. 2) For Arlington I.S.D., this would include

> "a training program for the individuals involved in the complaint, a comprehensive education program for the school community, follow-up inquiries to determine whether any new incidents or any instances of retaliation have occurred, involving parents and students in efforts to identify problems and improve the school climate, increasing staff monitoring of areas where bullying has occurred, and reaffirming the District's policy against bullying." (Arlington Independent School District, 2017, p. 3)

Based on the findings in this theme, there was no alignment across the three levels.

Limited Emergency Response

Another theme that emerged from the coding process was limited emergency response within bullying policies. Under this theme, a search was carried out across all levels with the specification "COVID-19" to identify any changes or updates to policy or any information that had been posted on either the District, state, or Arlington I.S.D. schools website, or Facebook pages respectively as it relates to bullying and the recent pandemic. However, the only information that was posted concerning the recent event was

> "online safety has always been important for students. In fact, all students in grades K-12 in Arlington I.S.D. receive dedicated yearly instruction on digital citizenship through their campus library programs. Still, now that schools are closed, and students have to do almost all of their work online, online safety is even more essential. Make the internet safe for everyone by treating others online with respect and kindness. Do not ever post things that would hurt another's feelings. Reject bullying and instead use the internet to encourage others. Treat others as you want to be treated. And if someone is unkind to you, bullies you, or sends you to mean or threatening messages online, talk to your parent, teacher, or a trusted adult right away" (Arlington Independent School District, 2020 p. 2).

It is pertinent to note that only the district addresses bullying as it relates to COVID-19, as shown above. While the state website has mentions of COVID-19, it only deals with changes to the mode of teaching due to COVID-19, and it makes no mention of updates in bullying policy due to COVID-19. However, Arlington I.S.D. schools' websites and Facebook pages do not address bullying concerning COVID-19. Based on the findings in this theme, there was no alignment across the three levels.

Demographic Focus

Under this theme, policies across all levels were explicitly analyzed to identify if these policies addressed bullying based on race, gender, and disability. However, the most common demographic category that is addressed is disability. All the policies stated that "the board of trustees of each school district shall adopt a policy, including any necessary procedures, concerning bullying that requires that discipline for bullying of a student with disabilities comply with applicable requirements under federal law, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. Section 1400 et seq.)" (Texas Education Agency, 2017 p. 62).

However, at the District level, the policy states that "The principal or designee shall determine whether the allegations in the report, if proven, would constitute prohibited conduct as defined by policy F.F.H., including dating violence and harassment or discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, gender, national origin, or disability" (Arlington Independent School District, 2017, p. 2)

While Arlington I.S.D. and the state addressed bullying based on disability, race, gender, and so forth, it is not extensive. There are no comprehensive preventive measures or specific consequences for bullying based on these demographics that are clearly stated in any of these policies. Across all levels, policies do not reflect a vast amount of information on bullying based on race, gender, or disability.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study revealed several patterns in bullying policy when comparing school, district, and state level policies. At the state, school, and district levels, there are some similarities and differences that are noted. For example, across all levels, the results of this study showed a similarity in the wording of policies that outlined consequences of bullying. Also, across all levels, the description of terms such as cyberbullying, physical bullying, and verbal bullying aligns. A difference can be seen in reference to COVID-19, however. Across all levels, there is a difference in changes or updates to policy based on COVID-19. For example, at the District level, Arlington District reminded parents and students to practice online safety while learning from home, while the state or individual schools did not.

Studies show that bullying results in mental and physical well-being and affects the academic well-being of a student. From childhood, victims of bullying suffer from physical problems, including poor appetite, abdominal pain, fatigue, or cold (Barrett, 2017). It may also affect the personality of the student. Such students may feel depressed, anxious, or with reduced self-esteem. Studies show that by establishing anti-bullying policies, the chances of bullying are immensely lowered (Hall & Hawes, 2019).

As mentioned in other literature regarding the different types of bullying (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2020; Epstein & Kazmierczak, 2006) that students face, the results of this study also demonstrate that the policies at Texas state, Arlington ISD, Arlington ISD school level reflect these same kinds of bullying, which include physical, verbal, and cyberbullying. Cyberbullying has become an increasingly common and serious issue in

recent years largely due to the easy access, and in some cases the anonymity, of digital devices. As children and teens spend more time online during the COVID-19 pandemic to complete virtual schoolwork and keep in touch with friends, cyberbullying may increase as well (Children's Hospital of Orange County, 2020). This study, however, identified that across all levels, policies did not reflect any changes due to COVID-19, with the exception of a single mention of the change to online learning that reminded students to practice online safety in general but not specific to bullying.

Studies have shown that children with specific identities also face targeted bullying, for example, those with disabilities are generally at greater risk of bullying victimization than children without disabilities (Bear et al, 2015). Also, studies have shown that males and females were equally likely to experience physical intimidation as well as internet or cell phone harassment and in terms of lifetime exposure, females were more likely than males to have experienced all types of bullying (Child Trends Databank, 2016). The results of the current study demonstrate that the policies at Texas state, Arlington district, Arlington school level share the sentiments of previous studies by addressing bullying based on gender, and disability. However, the results of this study reveal that the policies at Texas state, Arlington ISD, Arlington ISD school level share a similar lack of concrete measures and information to address bullying based on race. COVID-19 and the racial justice movement may also impact bullying, and cyber-bullying efforts as well as how people are victimized. Therefore, it is crucial that policies reflect these changes as they occur in our society. Lack of adequate information could prove problematic considering the national movement for racial justice happening in the country and the fact that students are active participants. It is challenging to interpret the percentages of children and youth who are bullied across different racial and ethnic groups, due to the limited

information currently available on racial and ethnic differences in definitions of bullying and on whether and how bullying may vary according to the racial/ethnic diversity and density of schools and communities (Rivara & Menestrel, 2016).

Studies show that school-based anti-bullying programs are often effective and can lead to a decrease in bullying and victimization (Hall & Hawes, 2019). The most important program elements that were associated with a decrease in both bullying and victimization were parent training/meetings, disciplinary methods, the duration of the program for children and teachers and the intensity of the program for children and teachers (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009). Additionally, the implementation and alignment of anti-bullying policies is crucial in addressing bullying (Hall & Hawes, 2019). This study identified that while bullying policies were mostly aligned across all levels, the policies themselves were non-proactive and standard with no additional measures for bullying prevention. Parent trainings/meetings is an example of activities or measures that can be included in a policy that makes it a unique policy. Disciplinary methods is an example of measures that can be included in a policy that makes it a standard policy.

Limitations

While this study had several strengths it also had limitations to be addressed in future studies. For example, this study examined one school district in Texas, so it is not representative of the state, so it may not reflect the true extent to which there is complete alignment between the state, district, and school bullying policies. Future studies should also include more school districts to address this limited representativeness. Additionally, data sources could be expanded to include other social media pages or printed material related to bullying for a more expansive study. Similarly, the data sources were often hard to access for the current study. Information was not readily accessible, and this required spending more time gathering information. Thus,

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given the time constraints for the thesis a lengthier, more in depth analysis may reveal more sources. Lastly, for the purposes of the thesis the author was the sole coder, but in a traditional research study there should be multiple coders of the data.

Implications for Social Work

It is pertinent to note that bully perpetrators are often bully-victims. Graham (2016) found that one of the most identifiable characteristics of bully-victims is that they have emotion regulation and attention problems, which tend to alienate peers. Therefore, with multiple behavioral and social risks, bully-victims are more troubled and vulnerable than either bullies or victims (Graham, 2016). Wong (2013) found that causes of acts of bullying can be divided into emotional and instrumental. Wong further stated that "emotional causes imply that aggressive acts or pranks are a means for entertainment, or that bullies aim to vent their dislike of victimized high-risk students through acts of aggression" (Wong et al, 2013). Additionally, "instrumental causes include those in which the bully attacks recalcitrant victims to obtain possessions, power, or status" (Wong et al, 2013). Anti-bullying policies, therefore, need to be restorative as a means of prevention, recognizing that bullying behavior often stems from one's own history of victimizationBased on the findings from this study, social workers can play an essential role in intervening to reduce the increasing number and forms of bullying in schools. This can be done by helping students develop resilience that may decrease the odds of being a victim of bullying and may stop bullying behaviors (Slovak & Singer, 2011). This is because the 2017 CDC report outlines the severe impacts of bullying, including increased anxiety disorders, self-victimization, increasing rates of suicide cases by students. Several other stress-related symptoms that require immediate attention (Coyle, 2008) Therefore, school social workers can use their skills to educate students that are involved in the behavior through the establishment of a safe

environment as well as providing training to bystanders and other supporters on the regulation of behaviors.

Social work instructors, social workers in schools, and those in mental health practice can use the information in this study to advocate for more targeted policies that are worded in ways that encourages the enforcement of measures that **prevent** bullying and not just **react** to bullying. This study focused on junior high schools and high schools and this puts social workers in schools and in mental health practice at the helm of the issue. Policies cannot be changed without action. This study has highlighted the nuances in alignment of bullying policy between the state, district, and school levels. It is vital that social workers, especially those in schools and in the mental health practice advocate and lead the charge in ensuring that bullying policies reflects a change away from vague, non-proactive policies to unique and proactive policies. They should also try to work with their school on being involved in making or changing policy for the betterment of their school and work with their legislatures for changes to state laws on bullying.

However, it is pertinent to note that social workers cannot competently advocate for change without the help of social work researchers. Social work researchers must be involved in researching measures that can be included and implemented in the making of anti-bullying laws. Also, social work researchers should be included in policy making at the district level. Social work researchers bring a different perspective that is based on ethics that law and policy makers may not have. Social work researchers have a different code of ethics which they follow. Adherence to the code ethics ensures that will uphold social justice, dignity, worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity and competence (Minnesota Department of Education & Minnesota School of Social Workers Association, 2007) with potential victims of bullying.

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