

1998

## Analysis of violence prevention perceptions among teachers and principals in Iowa public secondary schools

Elizabeth Fischer-Jurgensen  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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ANALYSIS OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION PERCEPTIONS AMONG TEACHERS  
AND PRINCIPALS IN IOWA PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

A Dissertation  
Submitted  
In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

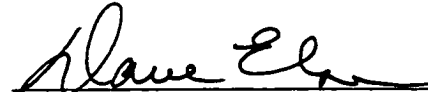
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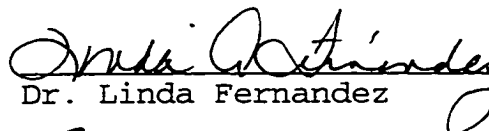
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December 1998

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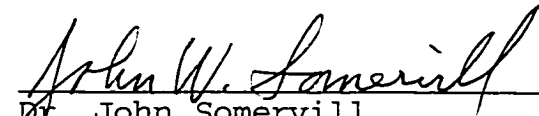
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An Abstract of a Dissertation  
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of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

Approved:

  
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Elizabeth Fischer-Jurgensen  
University of Northern Iowa  
December 1998

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' and principals' perceptions of violence prevention training in Iowa's public secondary schools. The perceived level of danger, the actual amount of violence prevention training, the desired amount of violence prevention training, and the discrepancy between actual and desired amounts of violence prevention training were identified for 11 types of school violence. Additionally, the relationship between the size of community and each discrepancy was examined.

Five research questions were utilized with a quantitative research approach. A survey instrument was mailed to 480 public secondary school teachers and 120 public secondary school principals within Iowa. The sample included 240 rural teachers, 240 urban teachers, 60 rural principals, and 60 urban principals. The final sample included 477 responses which represented a return rate of 80%.

Statistical tests were conducted at the .05 level of significance. Respondent's perceived level of danger, actual amount of training, and desired amount of training were examined using a three point response scale. Means were compared and effect sizes computed. Discriminant analysis measured the extent to which the size of community could be distinguished by discrepancy levels.

Teachers and principals reported a low potential for danger from all categories of school violence. Principal respondents perceived that there is significantly less danger from Verbally Hostile Students than teacher respondents.



The actual amount of violence prevention training for all categories of school violence was perceived to be low. Principals felt that they provided significantly more training than teachers perceived they received. Verbally Hostile Students and Gang Related Activities were the categories which teachers and principals reported the greatest amount of training. Teachers and principals desired similar levels of training. Verbally Hostile Students was the most highly desired violence prevention training topic.

Teachers and principals reported significant dissatisfaction with current levels of training for 8 of the 11 types of training. Teachers desired significantly more training than they had already received for Verbally Hostile Students than principals perceived that they had yet to provide. Responses from rural and urban schools were discriminated by discrepancies between actual and desired levels of training.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
The Research Problem.....	2
Definition of Terms.....	3
Assumptions.....	3
Limitations.....	4
Delimitations.....	4
Conceptual Framework.....	5
Current Perceptions.....	5
Purpose of the Study.....	6
Research Questions.....	7
Sources of Data.....	8
Organization of the Study.....	9
II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY.....	10
How Big is the Problem.....	10
Perceived Safety.....	13
Perceptions of Verbally or Physically Hostile Acts.....	17
Perception of Weapons.....	19
Perception of Fighting.....	20
Perception of Gang Related Activities.....	22
Perception of Hostage Situations and Drive by Shootings.....	23
Iowa Statistics.....	23
The Role of School Leadership.....	24

Chapter	Page
Teacher Preparedness.....	27
Summary.....	30
III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES.....	34
Overview of the Study.....	34
Population and Sample.....	35
Instrumentation.....	36
Data Collection.....	38
Data Analysis.....	39
IV. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION.....	41
Sample.....	41
Results.....	43
Comparison of Respondents' Extent of Perceived Danger.....	43
Respondents' Actual Amount of Training Received or Provided.....	45
Respondents' Desired Amount of Training Received or Provided.....	48
Discrepancy in Training Received or Provided.....	50
Relationship Between Size of Community and Discrepancy Means.....	57
V. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	60
Research Questions.....	61
Summary .....	62
Question 1. To what extent do secondary teachers and principals agree in their perceptions about potential danger from violent acts in their schools?.....	62

Question 2. To what extent do secondary teachers and principals agree in their perception about the actual amount of prevention training received or provided for specific types of student violence?.....	63
Question 3. To what extent do secondary teachers and principals agree in their perception for the desired amount of prevention training received or provided for specific types of student violence?.....	63
Question 4. What is the discrepancy between the actual and desired amounts of prevention training received or provided for specific types of student violence?.....	64
Question 5. What is the relationship between the size of the community and the discrepancy between actual and desired prevention training?.....	64
Discussion.....	65
Conclusions.....	69
Recommendations.....	72
REFERENCES.....	76
APPENDICES.....	82
APPENDIX A: Letters of Transmittal, Surveys, and Postcards.....	82
APPENDIX B: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents .....	91

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Respondents' Perceived Danger of School Violence.....	45
2. Perceived Danger for School Violence.....	46
3. Respondents' Actual Amount of Training Received or Provided.....	47
4. Actual Amount of Training Received or Provided.....	49
5. Respondents' Desired Amount of Training Received or Provided.....	50
6. Desired Amount of Training Received or Provided.....	51
7. Discrepancy in the Amount of Training Received or Provided.....	52
8. Respondents' Mean Discrepancies.....	53
9. Teacher Mean Discrepancies.....	55
10. Principal Mean Discrepancies.....	56
11. Discrepancy of Verbally Hostile Students Category....	57
12. Canonical Discriminant Functions Variables for Rural or Urban Communities and the Discrepancy Between the 11 School Violence Categories.....	59

CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

The incidence of school violence is regularly reported on the news and in the press. In May 1998, the shooting death of two students by another student in Springfield, Oregon, received considerable attention in the news media. This incident and "similar incidents have come to represent in the mind of the public the environment of urban public schools" (The University of the State of New York, 1994, p. 1).

The National Crime Survey of 1987 reported that 184,000 staff, students, and visitors were injured as a result of school crime in one year (Foley, 1990). According to the National Education Association, some 3 million incidents of street crime (assault, rape, robbery, and theft) have been committed inside schools or on school property annually (Hayes, 1993).

For the past 15 years, lack of discipline was ranked as a major concern facing public schools in the Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll (Elam, Rose & Gallup, 1996). In 1994, the number one concern, "lack of discipline," was shared with "fighting, violence, and gangs" as the biggest problems facing public schools (Elam, Rose, & Gallop, 1994). This insecurity about public schools and lack of safety may be the result of 100,000 students carrying guns into classrooms (Hayes, 1993).

Traditionally, schools have been safe from violence, but violence "crosses all class, race, gender, and residence boundaries" (Elliot, 1994, p. 3). Violence in schools is

creating an atmosphere of fear for both teachers and students, and safety is a vital and necessary component in both the school and the classroom setting.

The subject of school violence is not an agreed upon issue between teachers and principals. A higher percentage of teachers than principals say there is a problem with student violence (Ordovensky, 1993). Administrators are aware of violence occurring in neighboring school districts, but many are in denial concerning their own problem or potential problem of violence within their own district (Ordovensky, 1993; Tolley, 1996). There appears to be a discrepancy in the perception of student violence between secondary principals and secondary teachers.

Few districts are training teachers in how to deal with violent student behavior (Boothe, Bradley, Flick, Keough, & Kirk, 1992; Watson, 1995). More must be learned about the extent to which actual training has been offered and the desired amount of training needed to defuse acts of student violence (Hill & Hill, 1994). This study will also provide baseline information about the existence and extent of violence prevention training in Iowa public secondary schools.

#### The Research Problem

The problem of this study was to determine the congruence of teachers' and principals' perceptions relative to violence in Iowa's public secondary schools with regard to: the extent to which danger exists, the actual amount of violence prevention training, the desired amount of violence



prevention training, and the relationship between actual and desired amounts of violence prevention training.

Additionally, the relationship between size of community and discrepancy between actual and desired training was examined.

#### Definition of Terms

Respondents--Any teacher or principal responding to the survey instrument.

Rural School District--Any school district that does not contain a town over 2,500 in population according to the 1990 census.

Secondary Principal--An individual identified as the 7-12, 9-12, or 10-12 principal on the Basic Educational Data Survey (BEDS) by the Iowa Department of Education.

Secondary School--Any school identified as having 7-12, 9-12, or 10-12 configuration on the BEDS report.

Secondary Teacher--Any certified teacher in a secondary school.

Urban School District--Any school district that does contain a town over 2,500 in population according to the 1990 census.

Violence--"Behaviors by individuals that intentionally threaten, attempt, or inflict physical harm on others" (Reiss & Roth, 1993, p. 2).

Weapons--Any instrument or device used for attack or defense.

#### Assumptions

First, it is assumed that the areas represented in the survey instrument were relevant to violence in Iowa secondary public schools. These areas included legal implications, extortion, gang violence, physical attacks from adults, physical threats from adults, physical attacks from students, physical threats from students, breaking up a fight, taking away a weapon, taking away a gun, defusing aggressive

behavior, and defusing violent behavior (Bachus, 1993). Second, it is assumed that the two groups of respondents, secondary teachers and principals, will respond honestly to the statements in the instrument (Greimann, 1992). Third, it was assumed that the respondents' answers differentiated between actual and desired responses. Fourth, the data could be obtained by the use of a questionnaire and answered accurately. Finally, educators can no longer claim that violence will never happen in their schools. Administrators and teachers should understand the potential for violence within their schools. The interaction of policy, leadership, and practice will help decrease the potential for school violence. The crux of the solution is prevention. By providing staff training in school violence topics, a proactive stance to school violence is superior to a reactive response after an incident occurs.

#### Limitations

For the purpose of this study, the following limitation is identified: Teachers and school officials do not like to disclose negative data concerning violence on school campuses (Kaumo, 1982). The respondents were guaranteed confidentiality with regard to their answers.

#### Delimitations

A delimitation in this study is that the populations examined were limited to the perceptions of randomly selected samples of secondary (7-12) teachers and principals in the State of Iowa. A second delimitation was that this study was limited to Iowa, the results may not be generalizable to

other states. Finally, non-public school teachers and principals were excluded from the study.

#### Conceptual Framework

Nielsen (1996) reports that our perceptions influence how people feel and interpret their external environment. "These feelings constitute our psychological state and are more dependent on our subjective perceptions of the 'things' outside ourselves than the objective reality of what those 'things' actually are" (p. 24). Psychological safety involves more than just securing the physical facilities by installing metal detectors or increasing the number of police officers in schools. The emotional atmosphere of the school environment is a vital component of how students and staff perceive their safety (Nielsen, 1996). Staff and students' perceptions of their environment strongly impacts perceived psychological safety and security. To impact perceived safety for both students and staff, educators must bring their perceptions in line with reality (Pool & Pool, 1996).

#### Current Perceptions

Not long ago, most parents believed that if their children were in school, they would be safe from unpredictable violence. Public schools were viewed as the safety zones within the community (Curcio & First, 1993). This belief has changed due to the fact that schools are becoming an arena of increasingly serious and chaotic violence (Elliot, 1994).

Violence among juveniles has a long documented history from the medieval period to the present day (Empey, 1978).

Although student misbehavior and violence have been documented in public schools, the frequency and extent of violence have increased during the past 30 years (Rubel, 1977). Teachers are afraid to teach in such a work environment and consequently have become stressed (Quarles, 1993). "Therefore, a growing number of school districts across the country are being forced to take action to protect their students and teachers while they are in school" (Iowa School Board Association, 1994, p. 1).

Fueled by increased media attention, Americans are becoming increasingly aware of and concerned about the growing specter of violence in schools. "The media may accurately report increased public awareness and concern about school violence, but it may not accurately reflect what is actually happening on school campuses" (DeMoulin, 1996, p. 6).

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze teachers' and principals' perceptions of violence in Iowa public secondary schools. Specifically, this research identified (a) the extent to which potential danger exists, (b) the actual amount of violence prevention training, (c) the desired amount of violence prevention training, and (d) the discrepancy between actual and desired amounts of violence prevention training. Additionally, the relationship between size of community and the discrepancy between actual and desired amounts of training were examined.

This research provided data on the extent to which teachers and principals perceive violence prevention training existing in Iowa public secondary schools. This research may act as a catalyst for school leadership to examine teacher training in addition to policies and procedures regarding student violence.

Educational organizations which specialize in the preparation, licensing, and training of teachers will better understand the types of supportive programming needed to assist school professionals in this effort. Area Education Agencies (AEAs), the Iowa Department of Education (DOE), and Iowa's colleges and universities are likely resources impacted by this study. School violence training may require shifts in traditional programming and services of these organizations that take years to initiate.

Should school violence be a significant concern of educators, the Iowa Department of Education, in cooperation with law enforcement agencies, may choose to collect and analyze data concerning student violence. This information would further help to understand violence as it exists in Iowa public secondary schools.

#### Research Questions

1. To what extent do secondary teachers and principals agree in their perceptions about potential danger from violent acts in their school?

2. To what extent do secondary teachers and principals agree in their perception about the actual amount of

prevention training received or provided for specific types of student violence?

3. To what extent do secondary teachers and principals agree in their perception for the desired amount of prevention training received or provided for specific types of student violence?

4. What is the discrepancy between the actual and desired amounts of prevention training received or provided for specific types of student violence?

5. What is the relationship between the size of the community and the discrepancy between actual and desired prevention training?

#### Sources of Data

The data in this study were gathered by means of a mailed survey instrument. The survey instrument incorporated a three-item response format in which the respondents were asked to indicate their perceived level of danger from violence, their actual amount of training in school violence, and their desired amount of training in school violence.

The survey instrument was developed for the purposes of this study. The instrument was field tested in two ways. First, a panel of experts in school violence examined the survey and recommended design and item improvements. Second, the instrument was pre-tested and post-tested in an educational administration class on the campus of the University of Northern Iowa.

The target population for the study included all public secondary schools, principals, and teachers in Iowa. The 480 teachers and 120 principals were selected randomly for the study and represented a sample of rural and urban secondary schools across the State of Iowa. The sample was also stratified by size of school. It contained 240 rural teachers, 240 urban teachers, 60 rural principals, and 60 urban principals.

Discriminate analysis was used to determine the extent to which rural and urban respondents could be discriminated based upon the discrepancies between actual and desired amounts of violence prevention training. All computational procedures were conducted using subprograms of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Statistics utilized include descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and correlations. The data were analyzed by first reporting responses as raw frequencies and as descriptive statistics. Statistical tests were conducted at the .05 level of significance.

#### Organization of the Study

Chapter I consists of the research problem and its development. A review of the literature is included in Chapter II. Chapter III presents the methodology used in the study. Chapter IV represents the collection of data and analysis. A summary of the discussion, conclusions, and recommendations for further research are in Chapter V.

## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

No longer are students and teachers safe from unpredictable violence in schools and classrooms. Teaching is a challenging and demanding profession and college preparation has not prepared teachers for what they face in today's classrooms (Stephens, 1997).

Teachers enter the profession prepared to deal with subject matter and child development knowledge, but also need understanding and preparation in violence prevention training. "The preparation of teachers entering the teaching field leaves a great deal to be desired in dealing with today's societal problems of crime and violence" (Decker, 1997, p. 59). "Teacher preparation must include developing skills in crisis intervention, learning strategies for effective conflict mediation and resolution, and methods for maintaining positive yet firm classroom and school discipline" (Stephens, 1997, p. 2). Maintaining safety for all students and staff is necessary for learning to occur, thus violence prevention training needs to be a priority for schools.

#### How Big is the Problem?

How big is the problem of school violence? The news media regularly reports assaults, drive by shootings, fatal stabbings, and vandalism in schools or on school property. With the increased media attention concerning school safety, the 30th Annual Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll of the public's attitudes toward public schools reported that the number one



problem facing schools is fighting, violence and gangs (Rose & Gallup, 1998).

Research on the topic of school safety and violence is uneven. Individuals and organizations conducting research have not agreed on what should be measured or how school safety and violence should be measured. The organization of this researcher's survey was used to present a summary of research on school safety and violence. Various research organizations have conducted surveys on school safety and violence. The following paragraphs describe the major sources of information regarding school safety and violence.

Lou Harris and Associates were contracted in 1993 by Metropolitan Life Insurance Company to survey American teachers. The study was based on a representative sample of 1,000 third to 12th grade teachers, 1180 third to 12th grade students, and 100 police department officials. The representatives of these groups were asked about their "concerns and aspirations as educators" with regard to school safety and violence (Leitman & Binns, 1993, p. ii). This research appeared to be prefaced with the assumption that school violence exists to unacceptable levels. For the remainder of the present study, this survey will be referred to as the Lou Harris Poll.

An additional source of research data was the Gordon S. Black Corporation survey of 1998. The Gordon S. Black Corporation has a research division dedicated to the continuous improvement of schools nationwide. The survey system is called the CSMpact<sup>SM</sup> for Schools and collected

staff, students, parents, and community data from more than 100 school districts nationwide which included 200,000 public school students and teachers. For purposes of clarity, it will be referred to as Gordon S. Black survey for the remainder of this study.

Research data from Phi Delta Kappa were also used. On a yearly basis, Phi Delta Kappa sponsors the Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward The Public Schools (Rose & Gallup, 1998). Phi Delta Kappa is a professional fraternity in education. The Gallup Organization is nationally known for survey research. Together, Phi Delta Kappa and the Gallup Organization report their findings about various issues regarding public education. This survey will be referred to as the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll.

Gordon Bachus, a Professor of Education Administration at Central Missouri State University in Warrensburg, Missouri, surveyed 123 K-12 teachers about school violence in Missouri's rural schools. The focus of his research was on preparation of both teachers and administrators in dealing with school safety and violence issues.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) was established by the Office of the President and the United States Congress through the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Act of 1974. The OJJDP sponsors research, programs, and training in addressing national issues of juvenile delinquency and improving juvenile justice. The statistics used in the most recent study will be referred to as Synder and represent the OJJDP.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics collected data from a national sample of more than 10,000 students from January through June 1989. The sample comprised of students who attended public or private school. For the remainder of the present study, this data will be referred to as the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority surveyed 2,700 secondary students and 1,300 public high school teachers in 1990. The survey focused on crime and violence in Illinois schools and communities. Data from this survey will be referred to as the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

Research data from Paul Kingery were also used. In 1990, Paul Kingery, with Texas A & M University, surveyed 1,004 8th and 10th grade students from 23 small communities in Texas. This research will be referred to as Kingery.

#### Perceived Safety

The perception of safety by students in their public schools is important for several reasons. Schools are expected by parents and society to be safe environments for students to learn, play, and mature. Contemporary research on the human mind has documented the negative impact that unsafe environments have upon the process of learning (Caine & Caine, 1991) and the desire for students to want to come to school. Likewise, when parents feel that school may have become an unsafe environment, their support may wane. Parent and community support is key for the ability of public

education to further enhance safety in the school environment (DeMoulin, 1996).

Contrary to the current societal perception regarding increased violence in schools, some indicators support that the decade of the 1990s began with an increased sense of school safety by students. " . . . between 1980 and 1990, there was a 12.2% decrease in the number of students who reported feeling unsafe at school and an 8.1% decrease in the proportion of tenth graders nationwide who reported that they felt unsafe at school" (DeMoulin, 1996, p. 6). The juvenile arrest rate is the lowest since the beginning of the decade for 1996 (Snyder, 1997).

Currently, however, students' perceptions about feeling safe in school appear to be declining. The 1993 Lou Harris Poll, reported that only 44% of the secondary students felt very safe and 50% felt somewhat safe in or around their school premises. This means that a large proportion of students (94%) felt very safe to somewhat safe in their school districts in 1993. In the 1997 Gordon S. Black national survey, approximately 1 in 10 students did not feel safe while in school (Black, 1998). As a result of concern about school safety, some students have been reported to have changed schools to feel more safe. In the 1993 unscientific survey by USA Weekend that reported 37% of students in grades 6 through 12 feeling unsafe in school, 50% of the respondents reported that they knew someone who had changed schools for safety reasons (Ansley, 1993).

The perceptions that parents hold about safety in schools has also been reported. In the 1998 Gordon S. Black national survey, 12% of parents did not feel that schools provided a safe learning environment (Black, 1998). In the 1998 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll, a question was directed to parents about their perception of safety at school. Thirty-six percent of parents feared for their students' safety while at school (Rose & Gallup, 1998). This was reported to be an increase from 25% in a previous survey. Parent concern about the well-being of their children at school remains an issue. "Today, they (parents) fear that their children will be severely injured or not come home at all due to increased school violence, especially the increase of weapons at school" (DeMoulin, 1996, p. 20).

The positive perceptions teachers hold about school safety remains relatively high. Gordon Bachus (1993), who surveyed teachers from rural Missouri, investigated their perceptions of violence in their schools. Eighty-one percent of the secondary teachers reported that violence existed to a very small degree in their schools. In the same study, 65% of K-12 teachers believed there was a potential for violence and 50% of secondary teachers believed there was a potential for violence.

According to the 1998 Gordon S. Black survey, only 4% of the teachers surveyed felt unsafe while in school (Black, 1998). The 1993 Lou Harris Poll reported that 75% of secondary teachers felt very safe when they were in or around school. In the same study, 64% of urban teachers felt very

safe while only 45% of suburban or rural teachers felt very safe. The study reported that 2% of urban teachers did not feel very safe while a greater proportion, 6%, of suburban or rural teachers did not feel very safe. The size of the community appeared to influence how safe teachers felt in their school.

The perceptions held by administrators regarding school violence are varied. Many administrators believe school violence has not increased in their school district, but has increased in neighboring districts. M. Tolley (1996) believed that "school administrators are going through a period of denial, refusing to admit the presence of violence in their schools" (p. 281). In the Executive Educator poll, 69% of middle school principals and 61% of high school principals reported that school violence in neighboring school districts had increased in the past five years. Although, middle school principals (60%) and high school principals (69%) indicated that school violence had not increased in their own schools. Sixty-four percent of urban administrators and 54% of suburban administrators reported significant rises in school violence. Forty-three percent of small town school executives also reported a rise in school violence from the previous five years. In the same study, 66% of administrators predict that school violence will increase in the next couple of years (Boothe et al., 1992).

Whether school safety and violence are increasing or decreasing, the public's perception as molded by extensive media coverage has influenced students', parents', teachers',

and principals' perceptions regarding school safety. The media's coverage has tended to highlight school safety issues and the public is worried about the personal safety of students and staff while attending school. Since the recent fatal shootings on school grounds across the nation, some observers contend that the danger from school violence may be exaggerated to the public by the news media (Donohue, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 1998).

Students and teachers may feel victimized when confronted with verbal or physical hostile acts. Little research has been gathered on verbally and physically hostile acts in school. In 1992, the Executive Educator nationally surveyed 1,216 superintendents, principals, and central office administrators regarding their perceptions of school violence in their own and neighboring school districts.

#### Perceptions of Verbally or Physically Hostile Acts

Incidents of school violence have been characterized as lesser or more severe (Leitman & Binns, 1993) in nature. Lesser types of school violence include pushing, shoving, grabbing, slapping, verbal insults, and stealing. According to the 1993 Lou Harris Poll, 43% of secondary students indicated that verbal insults were a major problem and 33% felt that pushing, shoving, grabbing, or slapping were also a problem in their school (Leitman & Binns, 1993).

Violence begets violence. Students sometimes elevate the present level of danger in order to feel more safe from lower forms of violence. In Kingery's 1990 survey, more than 20% of students felt that threatening the use of a weapon

would help to prevent fights with other students. The existence of lower forms of violence encourages more frequent and more dangerous forms of violence in schools. In the same study, 34% of students reported having been threatened with bodily harm and 15% of students claimed that they had something taken from them by force or threat of bodily harm (Kingery, 1990).

The perceptions that teachers hold about verbally and physically hostile acts by students have also been reported. The 1993 Lou Harris Poll reported that 30% of secondary teachers felt verbal insults from students were a major problem in their school. In the same study, 36% of urban teachers felt verbal insults were a major problem while only 22% of suburban or rural teachers felt it to be a problem (Leitman & Binns, 1993). The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority reported that one in 11 teachers had been threatened by a student during the 1989 school year. Fifty-two percent of the teachers reported that a student had directed an obscenity at them and one-third reported that a student had made an obscene gesture at them (Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, 1991). The Bureau of Justice Statistics showed that 16.0% of the respondents reported that a student had attacked or threatened a school teacher (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1991).

Information regarding the perceptions of school administrators on verbally and physically hostile acts by students has rarely been reported. The 1992 study by the



Executive Educator reported that 63% of K-12 administrators perceived an increase in students' verbal abuse. Of the middle school principals surveyed, 66% indicated an increase in student verbal abuse. According to the survey, 43% of principals reported an increase in verbal abuse during the past five years (Boothe et al., 1992).

#### Perception of Weapons

Throughout the nation, students using weapons in schools is a rare occurrence (Arnette & Walsleben, 1998). Though the use of weapons by students in school is infrequent, it is the deadliness of such acts when they occur and the devastating fear that is generated that impacts the perceptions of society beyond the isolated incidents. Students, parents, teachers and administrators are left with the fear of it occurring in their own school.

Students have been surveyed about the prevalence and use of weapons in their schools. According to the National Education Association, an estimated 100,000 students carry guns to class (Hayes, 1993). Of the 2,508 sixth through 12th grade students surveyed nation-wide in 96 public and private schools, 4% reported that they had carried a handgun into their school (LH Research, 1993). According to the same study, 11% of the students reported that they have been shot at by someone with a gun. In the survey by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, one-third of the students reported bringing a weapon to school for self-protection at some time during their high school career (1991).

Teachers' perceptions of the use of weapons vary according to the source of data. The 1993 Lou Harris poll reported that 46% of the K-12 teachers felt that students using knives or firing guns was a major problem in their school and 10% felt that it was a minor problem. Very few secondary teachers, only 3%, felt that using a knife or firing a gun was a major problem in their school. In the same study, 4% of urban teachers felt using knives or guns was a major problem while only 2% of suburban or rural teachers felt it was a problem.

Administrators tend to believe that unsafe situations, with regard to students' use of weapons, tend to occur in someone else's school and not their own. In The Executive Educator's survey in 1993, 54% of the middle school principals reported that gun-related incidents have not occurred in their schools, and 60% of all K-12 respondents indicated that no guns have been involved in school crime and violence. In the same study, 38% of urban school executives reported more gun-related incidents than five years ago. Almost 39% of the administrators indicate that gun-related incidents do not occur in their schools (Boothe et al., 1992). Though most administrators do not necessarily see a weapon related violence problem in their schools, it should be noted that from 1992-1994, 76 out of 105 students lost their lives due to firearms at school (Kachur et al., 1996).

Perception of Fighting

Resolving disagreements by fighting seems to be the way some students manage conflict within schools. A national

survey consisting of a representative sample of 1,234 public elementary, middle, and secondary schools reported that there were 190,000 physical attacks and student fights in 1996-97 (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Many students perceive fighting as a problem in their school. The Lou Harris Poll reported that 28% of secondary students felt that kicking, biting, or hitting someone with a fist was a major problem in their school (Leitman & Binns, 1993).

Teacher's perceptions about student fighting varied when the size of community was considered as a variable. The 1993 Lou Harris Poll reported that 13% of the secondary teachers felt that kicking, biting, or hitting someone with a fist was a major problem in their school. In the same study, 20% of urban teachers felt that kicking, biting, or hitting someone with a fist was a major problem while only 10% of suburban or rural teachers felt this type of violence to be a problem (Leitman & Binns, 1993).

School administrators note fighting as a problem form of violence in their schools. In the Executive Educator survey, fighting was reported to be on the rise at all grade levels according to school administrators (Boothe et al., 1993). In the same study, 49% of middle school principals and 48% of the high school principals indicated an increase in fighting between girls. According to the survey, 29% of middle school principals and 16% of high school principals reported an increase in males choosing to solve arguments by fighting.

### Perception of Gang Related Activities

Gangs and youth violence are synonymous. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, "there are as many as 23,000 youth gangs in the United States" (Arnette & Walsleben, 1998, p. 5). A significant factor contributing to school violence incidents is the presence of gangs in schools and the community at large (Arnette & Walsleben, 1998). As with other forms of social decay, the negative influence of gangs upon youth directly impacts student behavior at school.

Perceptions of gang violence and intimidation regarding students are evident in research. The Bureau of Justice Statistics in 1991 reported that 15% of the students were in school gangs (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1991). The 1993 Lou Harris Poll indicated that 34% of secondary students believed that gang membership was a major factor contributing to school violence (Leitman & Binns, 1993). The fear and intimidation associated with gangs cause concerns for disruptions at school. The Bureau of Justice Statistics also reported that 19% of the respondents indicated that gang fights happened only once or twice a year while another 12% of students said that gang fights happened at least once a week.

Teachers are also aware of the influence of gangs upon violence at school. The 1993 Lou Harris Poll indicated that 38% of secondary teachers report gang membership being a major factor contributing to school violence (Leitman & Binns, 1993). In the same study, 48% of urban teachers felt the gang membership was a major factor while only 29% of

suburban or rural teachers felt it was a contributing factor toward incidents of school violence.

Administrators also appeared to be knowledgeable about the negative influence of gangs upon safety in their schools. The Executive Educator's national survey asked 6,200 school administrators about gang related violence in their schools. Fifty-seven percent of respondents reported that gang-related incidents did not happen in their school districts. Forty-three percent of urban administrators reported that gang-related incidents had increased in their schools during the previous five years to 1992 (Boothe et al., 1992).

#### Perception of Hostage Situations and Drive by Shootings

Hostage situations and drive by shootings are among the most dangerous forms of school violence. In a report compiled from 2,500 school violence news stories, 242 individuals were held hostage by gunpoint (Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, 1990). In the same report, the incidents of drive by shootings or hostage situations have occurred in schools in at least 35 states and the District of Columbia.

#### Iowa Statistics

The Federal Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 required school districts receiving federal money to expel students for a 12 month period who bring firearms to school. During the 1995-96 school year, administrators reported that out of 36 expulsions, 21 of those incidents were gun related (Siebert, 1996). Most of the incidents involving guns were for a student's self protection or showing off the unloaded weapon. In either case, the Iowa Department of Education director,

Ted Stilwell stated that "twenty-one incidents of handguns is a problem . . . Whether it's getting better or worse, we don't know" (Siebert, 1996, p. 1A). The zero tolerance approach to firearms may be helping to reduce anxiety for students, parents, and the local communities, but the worrying continues to exist.

Although Iowa schools may be seeing increasing incidents of violence, statistics by the Iowa Department of Education are not being recorded and maintained at the present time (Stilwell, personal communication, February 7, 1996). Ted Stilwell, Director of the Iowa Department of Education, did not see the need for school districts to track school related violence incidents.

#### The Role of School Leadership

Principals are responsible for what happens within their building (Sergiovanni, 1987) and for planning to anticipate social trends that impact the school setting (DeMoulin, 1996). "Learning cannot take place in an environment of fear, disruption, or chaos" (Knezevich, 1984, p. 337). The security of students, staff, and facility is a well established role of the principal (Knezevich, 1984).

Ignoring the potential for violence ignores reality. Schools are not well insulated from violence. "Any strong force operating in the society will inevitably have an influence upon the educational process" (Kimbrough & Nunnery, 1983, p. 431). Violence in society will be reflected in the behavior of students in schools. "Students bring their values, needs and attitudes with them every day, and much of

what they bring has been learned outside the school environment" (Nielsen, 1996, p. 30). The necessity of protecting the physical safety of children does not "absolve educational administrators of responsibility for acting to reduce acts of violence in schools before the more encompassing social solutions are activated" (Kimbrough & Nunnery, 1983, p. 441). Principals must be proactive in this effort rather than wait for society to successfully reduce violence outside of the school setting.

Strong leadership promotes prevention through preparation. The place to begin preparing schools to deter violence is the creation of good violence prevention policy and/or a mission statement (Decker, 1997). Several authors suggest explicit policies to deter school violence (Curcio & First, 1993; DeMoulin, 1996; Grady, 1996). Policies and mission statements guide and enable school faculty to act in order to maintain a safe learning environment as well as "send the message to students, staff, and community that the district believes school safety is a top priority so that consistent prevention and response measures are available on demand" (Decker, 1997, p. 5).

Principals' authority and leadership in the school setting can also set the tone for reducing violence in their schools. "Foremost among those who can make a positive difference in creating and maintaining safe schools, according to much of the professional literature, are school principals" (Pool & Pool, 1996, p. 185). The National Safe Schools study agreed: "a strong, clear, consistent school

governance, particularly by the principal, can help in reducing school crime and misbehavior" (Tolley, 1996, pp. 306-307). Strong governance includes setting high behavioral expectations of all students (Monhardt, Tillotson, & Veronesi, 1995), maintaining good communication with the student body and especially students who are most likely to use violence (DeMoulin, 1996, pp. 17-18), providing sufficient supervision in areas of the school where the potential is greatest for violence, and promoting an intolerance for student behaviors that deviate beyond acceptability including vandalism and the use of inappropriate language.

School culture can either enable or deter the use of violence within the school. The impact principals have upon this culture is well documented throughout school leadership literature (Peterson & Deal, 1998). A strong school culture that does not concede to the use of violence helps to limit the opportunities for students to use violent acts (Grady, 1996).

The development of policy and a school culture that do not tolerate violence are good places to start, but "any personnel responsible for assisting in the practice and usage of such policies must be trained to carry them out without question should the need occur" (Murdick & Gartin, 1993, p. 279). Administrators should take responsibility for addressing potential violence by providing training to faculty on policy implementation that reduces violence (Messing, 1993). Educators who are typically not familiar



with the demands of violent situations, must know what to do (Burns, 1990; Harrington-Lueker, 1991; Murdick & Gartin, 1993; Watson, 1995). Principals need to focus organizational resources and provide training so that violence does not disrupt learning or threaten physical safety within the educational environment (Decker, 1997).

Anticipating types of violence that faculty may encounter reveals types of strategies that require planning and training (DeMoulin, 1996, pp. 17-18). "While generalized national data are available (though frequently misleading), states and local communities usually do not have localized information about school crime in their area on which to base decisions about policies and resource allocation" (DeMoulin, 1996, p. 7). Local law enforcement officials can help in this effort by sharing regional trends and other pertinent information relating to the reduction of violence.

#### Teacher Preparedness

Administrators and teachers should understand the realities for the potential of violence within their schools. Reality demands that every educator be adequately prepared "to respond appropriately if faced with a violent or potentially violent occurrence" or face litigation for failing to be prepared (Bachus, 1993, p. 27). Educating faculty and staff about appropriate actions when dealing with violence is logical and practical (Bachus, 1993; Furlong, Morrison, & Dear, 1994).

Strategies and training programs which reduce the potential for violence or minimize the potential damage of a

violent incident need to be addressed (Decker, 1997; Hill & Hill, 1994; Quarles, 1993). Teachers and administrators require special violence prevention skills to cope with potentially explosive situations and violent students, yet training in these skills has been neglected (Quarles, 1993) and only deal with crisis situations (Furlong et al., 1994).

Boothe et al. (1992), found that a majority of administrators, 58%, are not training teachers to deal with violent situations. "Although most teachers and other school personnel may not be well equipped to control violent behavior, they are educationally prepared to implement developmental and proactive programming that will reduce the atmosphere that encourages violence" (Nielsen, 1996, p. 29).

In order for training and inservice programs to be effective, faculty and staff must perceive the need for training (Wanat, 1996). When teachers and administrators receive intensive training, they are legally and psychologically prepared to deal with violent incidents and more knowledgeable about legal responsibilities (Bachus, 1994).

Robert Watson took the position in his article entitled "A Guide to Violence Prevention," that "when school personnel feel helpless and are unable to overcome their feeling of vulnerability, taking action to make themselves less vulnerable can improve both real and perceived safety" (1995, p. 58). "Equally important is preparing classroom teachers to respond appropriately if faced with a violent or potentially violent occurrence" (Bachus, 1993, p. 27). "All

faculty and staff should receive general safety training when they join the school. Each year thereafter, they should receive specific training in safety procedures, including supervision necessary for a safe environment" (Watson, 1995, p. 59).

Recently credentialed California teachers, administrators, board members, and trainers were asked about their preparedness to respond to violence. The following results were identified from the survey:

More than 50% of the teachers indicated that they felt unprepared to address school violence. Although a sizable proportion of teachers, and to a lesser extent administrators, feel that they are not prepared to address violence on their campuses, it also appears that when it comes to learning how to deal with school violence, teachers often are on their own. (Furlong et al., 1994, p. 12)

Gordon Bachus surveyed 123 K-12 educators from rural Missouri to investigate their perceptions of violence in their schools. Teachers were asked to indicate how capable they were of dealing with specific violence topics. The following information resulted:

Ninety-seven percent of all teachers were "moderately" to "very" capable of breaking up fights between students.

Eighty-eight percent of all teachers were uncertain about what to do if a student displays a weapon; 12 percent "definitely" knew what to do.

Eighteen percent of all teachers had no idea what to do if a student becomes violent in class; 56 percent "probably" knew what to do; 26 percent "definitely" knew what to do. (Bachus, 1993, p. 28)

Inservice activities seem to be in preparation for crisis situations and planning. "The entire school community must be prepared to respond to school crises (Poland, in press); however, it may be unreasonable to expect all educators to know how to respond to, or to feel responsible to prevent, unpredictable random acts of violence" (Furlong et al., 1994, p. 12). Workshops regarding violence prevention methods are being offered in professional development settings (Bachus, 1994).

#### Summary

Given escalating incidents of nationally publicized school violence, maintaining school safety has become a national issue. Statistics about school violence can create a confusing picture. No one national data source or survey that provides the complete picture of any trend for school violence as it exists in secondary public schools. Unfortunately, no national data regarding rates of victimization (Arnette & Walsleben, 1998) or Iowa data (Siebert, 1996) are being maintained regarding the number of incidents of school violence each year. In addition, some educators believe the problem is increasing across the country while others believe the incidents, while more serious in nature, have not increased in number (Sabo, 1993). Furlong et al. (1994) recommends caution when examining school violence statistics because the data are not sufficiently precise to accurately derive conclusions.

A survey conducted by the National School Board Association found that "thirty-five percent of respondents

from 2000 school districts believe that violence has increased significantly" (IASB School Public Relations Service, 1994, p. 1). Educators believe that school violence has increased during the past 20 years (DeMoulin, 1996). The National School Board Association survey also found that "more than four out of five school districts from urban, suburban, and rural areas believe that the problem of school violence is worse than it was five years ago" (IASB School Public Relations Service, 1994, p. 1).

Despite the perception of increased violence, often problems of school violence are perceived to be in another school district (Boothe et al., 1992). Educators are hesitant to acknowledge the extent of the problem within their own district (Curcio & First, 1993; O'Donoghue, 1995; Ordovensky, 1993; Quarles, 1993; Tolley, 1996) so that the public does not waver in its support of schools (Hill & Hill, 1994; Kennedy, 1991; Martin, 1990). In the survey conducted by The Executive Educator and Xavier University, school leaders across the nation described the amount of violence occurring in their school districts versus neighboring school districts. This study found the following discrepancies with regard to school violence incidents:

Urban schools have no exclusive claim on school violence. Significant percentages of both suburban (54 percent) and urban (64 percent) school executives report a rising number of violent acts. Surprisingly, school executives in small towns (43 percent) also report an increase compared to five years ago, although administrators of rural districts report either no change or declining levels of violent acts. (Boothe et al., 1993, p. 17)

Sixty-nine percent of both elementary and middle school principals and 61 percent of high school principals say school violence in neighboring districts has increased over the past five years—a much higher percentage than those who say violence has increased in their own school districts. (Boothe et al., 1993, p. 17)

Acts of violence are not restricted to urban schools (Bachus, 1993; Hill & Hill, 1994; O'Donoghue, 1995; Quarles, 1993). Youth violence "crosses all class, race, gender, and residence boundaries" (Elliot, 1994, p. 3). Kingery (1996) reported that even though violence is more frequent in urban areas, rural youth are just as likely to commit violent acts. "The primary reason that rural schools have lower violent crime rates may have more to do with their smaller size on the average than with their rural location. Researchers have not directly compared small urban schools with small rural schools" (Kingery, pp. 58-59).

Bachus (1994) reported that because of the infrequent number of violent incidents in rural schools, administrators may be failing to address the potential for violence. "This infrequency is a positive and negative reality--positive in the sense that acts of violence are not a daily occurrence or expectation, and negative in the sense that board members and administrators may be reluctant to tackle the issue" (p. 19).

Administrators have provided little training for teachers to prepare themselves or their students in the area of school violence. Bachus (1994) warns administrators that school violence has "reached the level of 'foreseeability', meaning that the potential danger exists" (p. 18).

Foreseeability implies responsibility. Failure to predict school violence or be prepared for violence may result in legal entanglements or a "fatal error" by school administrators (Decker, 1997).

CHAPTER III  
METHODS AND PROCEDURES  
Overview of the Study

It was the purpose of this study to determine the congruence of teachers' and principals' perceptions relative to violence in Iowa's public secondary schools when applied to 11 categories of school violence. The differences between principals' and teachers' perceptions of the 11 categories of school violence, included in the school violence survey, were analyzed. Specifically, this research established (a) the extent to which danger exists, (b) the degree of actual amount of violence prevention training, (c) the degree of desired amount of violence prevention training, and (d) the relationship between actual and desired amounts of violence prevention training. Additionally, the relationship between size of community and discrepancy between actual and desired training was examined.

Eleven categories of school violence were selected from the literature base and placed on the survey for teachers and principals to individually evaluate. They were asked to indicate their perceived level of danger, actual amount of violence prevention training, and desired amount of violence prevention training. A three-point scale was used to measure the range of responses from Very Little or None to A Great Deal.

A cover letter described the confidential nature of the research and was mailed along with the survey instrument and postcard. Examples of each are found in Appendix A. The



survey was returned anonymously to the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Postsecondary Education at the University of Northern Iowa, and a postcard was sent directly to the researcher's home address. The second mailing was generated by identifying respondents who did not return the postcard.

#### Population and Sample

The population included all public secondary schools, teachers, and principals in Iowa. Teacher and principal populations were generated by the Iowa Department of Education for the 1996-97 school year.

#### Sample

The Iowa Department of Education Bureau of Statistics utilized a commonly used randomization method to determine the participants of this study. The names of all Iowa secondary teachers and principals (7-12) were sorted according to their community population. From the population, 240 secondary rural teachers and 240 secondary urban teachers were randomly identified by the Iowa Department of Education. This generated a total of 480 teachers for the sample. Additionally, 60 secondary rural principals and 60 urban principals were randomly identified by the Iowa Department of Education. A total of 480 secondary teachers and 120 principals comprised the sample.

The survey was initially mailed in February 1997. The first mailing produced approximately 388 responses and yielded a 64.7% return of the total sample. The second

mailing in late February raised the total to 477 responses. The final return rate was 80%.

### Instrumentation

The survey instrument was developed for the purposes of this study. The instrument (see Appendix A) consists of two sections. Questions in Section I established the perceived level of danger from violent acts, actual amounts of training, and desired amounts of training. Questions in Section II covered demographic characteristics of secondary teachers and principals.

Section I established the perceived level of danger from violent acts, the actual amount of training received or provided, and the desired amounts of violence prevention training received or provided. Teachers and principals were asked to indicate their perceptions regarding 11 categories of school violence. The format for responding to questions ranged from (1) A Great Deal, (2) Some, (3) Very Little, or None.

The instrument was made up of a total of 39 items and was designed to be completed in less than 20 minutes. Eleven specific skill/behavior categories were selected because they were representative of the kinds of school violence commonly found in the school violence literature. These categories of school violence included:

1. Verbally Hostile Students
2. Physically Hostile Students
3. Student Fights
4. Students with Weapons

5. Students with Guns
6. Verbally Hostile Adults
7. Physically Hostile Adults
8. Gang Related Activities
9. Hostage Situations
10. Drive by Shootings
11. Bomb Threats

The second section of the survey measured demographic components. Respondents' demographic data include frequencies and responses for the categories of teacher/principal, type of school district (urban/rural), gender, age, educational attainment, years of teaching experience in present position, total years of teaching experience, and total years of administrative experience for principals. Table 13 of Appendix B is illustrative of the data.

Validity was established by a panel of three school violence experts. Feedback from these experts led to improvements in the survey instrument. The panel of experts consisted of: Dr. Clem Bartollas, Professor of Criminology, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa; Dr. Robert Decker, Professor of Educational Leadership, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa; and Dr. Cathann Kress, violence prevention specialist, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. Additions and revisions were made in several school violence categories from the panelists' suggestions.

A field test of the survey instrument was conducted to establish an acceptable measure of reliability. The instrument was pretested and post-tested in an educational leadership class on the campus of the University of Northern Iowa. The field test led to improvements in clarity and format. Two survey questions were changed due to ambiguous answers given by the respondents' pretest answers.

#### Data Collection

During February 1997, the sample population of teachers and principals was sent a packet containing a brief letter of introduction and explanation (Appendix A); the survey instrument (Appendix A); and a NO POSTAGE NECESSARY return envelope (Appendix A). The letter briefly explained the purpose of the study, the format of the survey instrument, and the time required to complete the survey.

The survey instrument was printed on different colors of paper to represent rural teachers, urban teachers, rural principals, and urban principals. Anonymity was preserved by the use of a separate postcard enclosed with the survey instrument. The NO POSTAGE NECESSARY format was used and included the return mailing address. The respondent's name and address showed plainly.

The respondent returned both the anonymous survey instrument and postcard when the survey was completed. Upon receipt, the survey was recorded anonymously according to rural teacher, urban teacher, rural principal, and urban principal categories, and the postcard was marked as having been received. After a period of two weeks from the initial

mailing, a follow-up letter (Appendix A) was mailed to remind and encourage respondents to return the postcard at their earliest convenience and to return the survey by a specific date.

#### Data Analysis

The design of the study included an examination of the extent of perceived danger and both actual and desired levels of violence prevention training. A discrepancy was determined by subtracting the desired mean score from the actual mean score. Demographic variables surveyed helped to determine the overall characteristics of the respondents. Respondents' demographics were reported by category.

Respondents to the survey instrument described their perceived level of danger on a three point scale ranging from (1) Very Little or No danger perceived, (2) Some, and (3) A Great Deal of danger perceived for each of the 11 school violence categories. Respondents reported the actual amount of training that had been delivered and their desired amount of training that might have been delivered for each of the 11 school violence areas using the three point scale.

The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. Statistical tests were conducted at the .05 level of significance. Frequencies, means, and standard deviations were computed and analyzed from the data related to Research Questions One through Three.

Data related to Research Question Four compared discrepancies between the actual and desired means by

determining the effect size for each decisional area. The actual and desired mean responses were compared using t-tests for each of the 11 categories of school violence.

Research Question Five utilized discriminate analysis to determine if school size was significant in relation to the discrepancies for each of the 11 school violence areas. A significance factor of .05 was used. The relationship between school size and the 11 school violence areas was described in terms of correlations.

To determine which, if any, of the identified school violence categories held statistically significant differences between the discrepancies of actual and desired violence prevention training, means were compared using t-tests and one-way ANOVAs. When determined, significant differences were analyzed to identify patterns of actual, desired, and discrepancy responses.

CHAPTER IV  
RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

It was the purpose of this study to examine the actual and desired levels of violence prevention training that existed in Iowa's public secondary schools. Specifically, this research established (a) the extent to which danger existed, (b) actual amounts of violence prevention training, (c) desired amounts of violence prevention training, and (d) the discrepancy between actual and desired amounts of violence prevention training received or provided. Additionally, the relationship between size of school and the discrepancy between actual and desired training was examined. Eleven categories of school violence were selected for this study.

The first section of this chapter includes a demographic description of the respondents. In the second section, a review of the results for each research question is presented. The results of the study are summarized in the final section of Chapter IV.

Sample

The sample, consisting of teachers and principals, is presented in Appendix B. Teachers comprised 79.2% (378) of the responses and principals 20.8% (99) of the 477 responses to the survey. The majority of respondents were male 61.0% (291), females comprised 38.4% (183) of the sample and .6% (3) of the data were missing. Responses from rural survey participants were compared to responses from urban survey participants to analyze whether a relationship existed

between school size and the discrepancy between actual and desired amount of violence prevention training. Rural schools comprised 51.6% (246) of the total sample and urban schools comprised 48.4% (231) of the total sample.

The most common age group responding to the survey represented ages 40-49 and comprised of 37.5% (179) of the sample. The second largest age category was 50-59 which comprised 30% (143) of the sample. The third largest age category was 30-39 which comprised 18.7% (89) of the sample. The age category of 20-29 year olds represented 10.7% (51) of the sample. Only 2.5% (12) of the respondents indicated they were in the 60 or above age category.

A total of 219 responses, representing 45.9% of the total sample, came from the BA category for educational attainment. Forty-two percent of the respondents indicated they had earned a master's degree. Over 11% of the respondents indicated that they had achieved a Specialist or Doctorate.

Respondents' years of teaching experience in their present position was also examined. A total of 155 respondents indicated that they had been in their position less than five years. This group represented 32.7% of the sample. The second largest category was in the 20-25 present position range which comprised of 24.9% (118) of the sample. Approximately thirty-nine percent of the respondents had 6 to 19 years of experience in their present position. Only 3.2% (15) of the respondents designated they had 26 or more years of teaching experience in their present position.



In the total years of teaching experience category, a total of 239 respondents, 50.1%, indicated 20 or more years of teaching experience. Almost 50% of the respondents indicated that they had 5 to 19 years of teaching experience.

Principals were surveyed, in addition to their total years of teaching experience, as to their total years of administrative experience. The most frequent category representing total years of administrative experience among the principals was the 6 to 10 year category representing 25.3% of the principals who responded to the survey. The second most common experience category was five years or less of administrative experience. This represented 24.2% of the sample. Approximately 17% of the principals surveyed had 11 to 15 years of administrative experience. Over 33% of the principal respondents indicated that they had 16 or more years of administrative experience.

### Results

#### Comparison of Respondents' Extent of Perceived Danger

Research question one asked respondents to indicate their perceptions of potential danger from each of the 11 categories of school violence. The research question asked "To what extent do secondary teachers and principals agree in their perceptions about potential danger from violent acts in their school?" Respondents were given three options: Very Little or None, Some, or A Great Deal.

The potential for danger from each of the 11 categories of school violence was perceived to be low among the respondents of this survey. The responses ranged from Very

Little (1.23) to Some (1.90) on a scale of 1 to 3. The perceived mean responses for principal respondents was 1.89 and the perceived mean response for teacher respondents was 1.90. The categories with a low potential for danger included: Bomb Threats, Students with Weapons, Physically Hostile Adults, Students with Guns, Hostage Situations, and Drive by Shootings. The categories of Verbally Hostile Students, Physically Hostile students, Student Fights, and Gang Related Activities were the categories in which respondents felt the greatest potential for danger to exist.

Teacher and principal respondents perceived danger among the school violence categories in very similar ways. One category, Verbally Hostile Students, was perceived by respondents as having the greatest amount of potential violence among the 11 categories. Respondents reported the least potential violence in two categories, Hostage Situations (1.23) and Drive by Shootings (1.23). A ranking of the 11 school violence categories is presented in Table 1.

Teacher and principal mean responses significantly differed in one of the perceived danger categories, Verbally Hostile Students. Principal respondents perceived that there was less danger in this area than teacher respondents. The difference between means for Verbally Hostile Students was significantly different ( $t(476) = 7.08, p < .01$ ). A ranking by mean scores of the potential danger for school violence categories is presented in Table 2.

Table 1

Respondents' Perceived Danger of School Violence (N = 477)

School Violence Categories	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Verbally Hostile Students	1.90	.62
Student Fights	1.72	.63
Gang Related Activities	1.55	.69
Physically Hostile Students	1.53	.64
Verbally Hostile Adults	1.53	.66
Students with Weapons	1.34	.61
Bomb Threats	1.30	.61
Physically Hostile Adults	1.29	.64
Students with Guns	1.25	.59
Drive by Shootings	1.23	.61
Hostage Situation	1.23	.62

Respondents' Actual Amount of Training Received or Provided

Research Question Two asked respondents to indicate their perceptions about the actual amount of training received or provided in 11 categories of school violence. The question was: "To what extent do secondary teachers and principals agree in their perception about the actual amount of prevention training received or provided for specific types of student violence?"

The actual amount of violence prevention training for each of the 11 categories of school violence was perceived to be low among survey respondents. Respondents perceived they had received or been provided with Very Little to No training. In no category did the respondents report they had received or provided even Some violence prevention training.

Mean responses ranged from 1.23 to 1.66 on a scale of 1 to 3 as seen in Table 3.

Table 2

Perceived Danger for School Violence (N = 477)

School Violence Categories	Teacher <u>M</u> ( <u>SD</u> )	Principal <u>M</u> ( <u>SD</u> )	<u>p</u>
Verbally Hostile Students	1.90 (.65)	1.89 (.51)	.01
Student Fights	1.72 (.63)	1.70 (.63)	n.s.
Gang Related Activities	1.56 (.69)	1.54 (.72)	n.s.
Physically Hostile Students	1.53 (.63)	1.53 (.71)	n.s.
Verbally Hostile Adults	1.50 (.66)	1.66 (.66)	n.s.
Students with Weapons	1.34 (.60)	1.32 (.67)	n.s.
Bomb Threats	1.30 (.60)	1.29 (.63)	n.s.
Physically Hostile Adults	1.29 (.63)	1.31 (.67)	n.s.
Students with Guns	1.24 (.57)	1.28 (.66)	n.s.
Drive by Shootings	1.22 (.60)	1.24 (.63)	n.s.
Hostage Situations	1.24 (.62)	1.22 (.62)	n.s.

Note. n.s. = not significant at  $p = .05$  level.

Table 3

Respondents' Actual Amount of Training Received or Provided  
(N = 477)

School Violence Categories	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Verbally Hostile Students	1.66	.64
Gang Related Activities	1.60	.68
Physically Hostile Students	1.58	.65
Student Fights	1.57	.63
Verbally Hostile Adults	1.47	.65
Bomb Threats	1.40	.63
Students with Weapons	1.40	.63
Students with Guns	1.39	.64
Physically Hostile Adults	1.39	.65
Hostage Situation	1.28	.62
Drive by Shootings	1.23	.59

Different perceptions of actual amount of violence prevention training received or provided were evident between principal and teacher respondents in all of the 11 categories of student violence. Principals' mean responses were all higher than teachers' mean responses. Significant differences were detected in nine of the 11 categories. These categories were Verbally Hostile Students, Physically Hostile Students, Student Fights, Students with Weapons, Students with Guns, Physically Hostile Adults, Hostage Situations, Drive by Shootings, and Bomb Threats.

Verbally Hostile Students and Gang Related Activities were the categories in which teacher and principal respondents reported the greatest amount of training received

or provided. The mean response rates were 1.66 and 1.60, respectively. The least amount of training received or provided was in the categories of Drive by Shootings and Hostage Situations with mean responses of 1.23 and 1.28, respectively. A summary of the data for Research Question Two is reported in Table 4.

#### Respondents' Desired Amount of Training Received or Provided

Research Question Three describes the amount of training desired by respondents in each of the 11 categories of school violence. The question was: "To what extent do secondary teachers and principals agree in their perception about their desired amounts of prevention training received or provided for specific types of student violence?"

Respondents desired similar amounts of training for the 11 categories of school violence. Mean responses ranged from Very Little (1.64) to Some (2.10). Verbally Hostile Students was the most highly desired violence prevention training topic. Respondents reported the least amount of desire for violence prevention training in Drive by Shootings. No statistically significant differences were found between the teacher means and principal means in any of the 11 school violence categories. See Table 5.

Verbally Hostile Students, Physically Hostile Students, Gang Related Activities, Student Fights, and Students with Weapons comprise the top five of the 11 total responses. Bomb Threats, Hostage Situations, and Drive by Shootings, attracted a lower level of desire for more training. Physically Hostile Adults, Bomb Threats, Hostage Situations,

and Drive by Shootings appeared in the Very little or None category.

Table 4

Actual Amount of Training Received or Provided (N = 477)

School Violence Categories	Teacher M(SD)	Principal M(SD)	p
Students with Weapons	1.33 (.60)	1.63 (.66)	.01
Students with Guns	1.32 (.61)	1.62 (.68)	.01
Physically Hostile Students	1.51 (.64)	1.85 (.65)	.02
Student Fights	1.50 (.62)	1.84 (.60)	.01
Physically Hostile Adults	1.34 (.63)	1.55 (.68)	.02
Verbally Hostile Adults	1.40 (.62)	1.72 (.69)	n.s.
Drive by Shootings	1.20 (.57)	1.35 (.63)	.01
Hostage Situations	1.24 (.57)	1.43 (.70)	.01
Verbally Hostile Students	1.58 (.64)	1.97 (.55)	.01
Bomb Threats	1.32 (.60)	1.67 (.67)	.01
Gang Related Activities	1.53 (.64)	1.90 (.75)	n.s.

Note. n.s. = not significant at  $p = .05$  level.

Table 5

Respondents' Desired Amount of Training Received or Provided  
(N = 477)

School Violence Categories	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Verbally Hostile Students	2.10	.65
Physically Hostile Students	2.09	.63
Student Fights	2.03	.63
Gang Related Activities	2.03	.68
Students with Weapons	2.00	.64
Students with Guns	1.97	.67
Verbally Hostile Adults	1.93	.64
Physically Hostile Adults	1.84	.65
Bomb Threats	1.78	.67
Hostage Situation	1.71	.68
Drive by Shootings	1.64	.68

Although teacher and principal respondents desired similar levels of training, teacher mean responses were generally lower, but not significantly lower than principal responses. A variation in the trend was for teacher desired mean responses to be higher than principal desired mean responses in the categories of Drive by Shootings and Hostage Situations. A summary of the data for Research Question Three is reported in Table 6.

Discrepancy in Training Received or Provided

Research Question Four asked about the discrepancy between the actual and desired amounts of training received or provided. The question asked: "What is the discrepancy between the actual and desired amounts of prevention training received or provided for specific types of student violence?"



Table 6

Desired Amount of Training Received or Provided (N = 477)

School Violence Categories	Teacher M(SD)	Principal M(SD)	p
Students with Weapons	1.98 (.65)	2.08 (.58)	n.s.
Students with Guns	1.95 (.68)	2.05 (.60)	n.s.
Physically Hostile Students	2.07 (.64)	2.18 (.60)	n.s.
Student Fights	2.01 (.65)	2.10 (.58)	n.s.
Physically Hostile Adults	1.83 (.65)	1.90 (.65)	n.s.
Verbally Hostile Adults	1.89 (.64)	2.07 (.63)	n.s.
Drive By Shootings	1.65 (.69)	1.60 (.67)	n.s.
Hostage Situations	1.72 (.69)	1.68 (.67)	n.s.
Verbally Hostile Students	2.07 (.66)	2.21 (.61)	n.s.
Bomb Threats	1.76 (.67)	1.89 (.65)	n.s.
Gang Related Activities	2.02 (.68)	2.07 (.67)	n.s.

Note. n.s. = not significant at  $p = .05$  level.

A discrepancy level for both teacher respondents and principal respondents was determined by subtracting each

desired mean response from the actual mean response among the 11 categories of school violence. The results of this formula yielded negative discrepancies for each of the categories of school violence as seen in Table 7. Negative discrepancies indicate that respondents desired that there should be more training than already existed in their schools.

Table 7

Discrepancy in the Amount of Training Received or Provided  
(N = 477)

School Violence Categories	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Students with Weapons	-.60	.84
Students with Guns	-.59	.88
Physically Hostile Students	-.52	.88
Student Fights	-.46	.84
Physically Hostile Adults	-.46	.81
Verbally Hostile Adults	-.46	.81
Verbally Hostile Students	-.44	.87
Gang Related Activities	-.43	.85
Hostage Situation	-.43	.74
Drive by Shootings	-.41	.73
Bomb Threats	-.38	.74

To understand the significance of discrepancies, effect size (Coehn, 1977) was computed and reported for respondents in Table 8. The effect size was determined by subtracting actual means from desired means for each of the 11 categories of school violence. School violence categories with a large effect size were defined to be greater than .8. A medium

effect size was defined between .5 to .8. A small effect size was defined between .2 and .5.

Table 8

Respondents' Mean Discrepancies (N = 477)

School Violence Categories	Actual M(SD)	Desired M(SD)	Discrepancy M(SD)	Effect Size
Students with Weapons	1.40 (.63)	2.00 (.64)	-.60 (.84)	n.s.
Students with Guns	1.39 (.64)	1.97 (.67)	-.59 (.88)	n.s.
Physically Hostile Students	1.58 (.65)	2.09 (.63)	-.52 (.88)	.80
Student Fights	1.57 (.63)	2.03 (.63)	-.46 (.84)	.73
Physically Hostile Adults	1.39 (.65)	1.84 (.65)	-.46 (.81)	.71
Verbally Hostile Adults	1.47 (.65)	1.93 (.64)	-.46 (.81)	n.s.
Drive by Shootings	1.23 (.59)	1.64 (.68)	-.41 (.73)	.69
Hostage Situations	1.28 (.62)	1.71 (.68)	-.43 (.74)	.69
Verbally Hostile Students	1.66 (.64)	2.10 (.65)	-.44 (.87)	.69
Bomb Threats	1.40 (.63)	1.78 (.67)	-.38 (.74)	.60
Gang Related Activities	1.60 (.68)	2.03 (.68)	-.43 (.85)	.63

Note. n.s. = not significant at  $p = .05$  level.

School violence categories with a large effect size were defined to be greater than 8. Physically Hostile Students, Student Fights, and Hostage Situations were violence categories with a large effect size from teacher respondents. This difference between actual and desired responses was such that teacher respondents strongly desired more training in these areas.

School violence categories with a medium effect size were defined to be .5 to .8. Drive by Shootings, Physically Hostile Adults, Verbally Hostile Students, Gang Related Activities, and Bomb Threats were violence categories with a medium effect size from teacher respondents. The differences between the actual and desired mean responses varied enough to be considered serious. A summary of the data for Research Question Four is reported in Table 9.

No large effect sizes were indicated for principal respondents. Two school violence categories, Physically Hostile Adults and Physically Hostile Students, received a medium effect size from principal respondents. The remaining school violence areas fell into the small effect size category between .2 and .5. They were Verbally Hostile Students, Student Fights, Drive by Shootings, Hostage Situations, Bomb Threats, and Gang Related Activities. A summary of the data for Research Question Four is reported in Table 10.

Teacher respondents' discrepancies and principal respondents' discrepancies were compared using  $t$ -tests for each of the 11 types of student violence. One school

Table 9

Teacher Mean Discrepancies (N = 377)

School Violence Categories	Actual <u>M</u> ( <u>SD</u> )	Desired <u>M</u> ( <u>SD</u> )	Discrepancy <u>M</u> ( <u>SD</u> )	Effect Size
Students with Weapons	1.33 (.60)	1.98 (.65)	-.65 (.87)	n.s.
Students with Guns	1.32 (.61)	1.95 (.68)	-.63 (.89)	n.s.
Physically Hostile Students	1.51 (.64)	2.07 (.64)	-.56 (.90)	.88
Student Fights	1.50 (.62)	2.01 (.65)	-.51 (.87)	.82
Hostage Situations	1.24 (.59)	1.72 (.69)	-.48 (.76)	.81
Drive by Shootings	1.20 (.57)	1.65 (.69)	-.45 (.76)	.79
Verbally Hostile Adults	1.40 (.62)	1.89 (.64)	-.49 (.82)	n.s.
Physically Hostile Adults	1.34 (.63)	1.83 (.65)	-.49 (.84)	.78
Verbally Hostile Students	1.58 (.64)	2.07 (.66)	-.49 (.90)	.77
Gang Related Activities	1.53 (.64)	2.02 (.68)	-.49 (.86)	.77
Bomb Threats	1.32 (.60)	1.76 (.67)	-.43 (.78)	.73

Note. n.s. = not significant at  $p = .05$  level.

Table 10

Principal Mean Discrepancies (N = 96)

School Violence Categories	Actual M(SD)	Desired M(SD)	Discrepancy M(SD)	Effect Size
Students with Weapons	1.63 (.66)	2.08 (.58)	-.44 (.72)	n.s.
Students with Guns	1.62 (.68)	2.05 (.60)	-.42 (.81)	n.s.
Physically Hostile Adults	1.55 (.68)	1.90 (.65)	-.34 (.69)	.51
Physically Hostile Students	1.85 (.65)	2.18 (.60)	-.34 (.79)	.51
Verbally Hostile Adults	1.72 (.69)	2.07 (.63)	-.35 (.79)	n.s.
Verbally Hostile Students	1.97 (.55)	2.21 (.61)	-.24 (.73)	.44
Student Fights	1.84 (.60)	2.10 (.58)	-.27 (.68)	.43
Drive by Shootings	1.35 (.63)	1.61 (.67)	-.26 (.58)	.41
Hostage Situations	1.43 (.70)	1.68 (.67)	-.24 (.66)	.36
Bomb Threats	1.67 (.67)	1.89 (.65)	-.22 (.57)	.33
Gang Related Activities	1.90 (.75)	2.07 (.67)	-.17 (.76)	.23

Note. n.s. = not significant at  $p = .05$  level.

violence training discrepancy, Verbally Hostile Students, produced a significant difference between the groups. See Table 11.

Table 11

Discrepancy of Verbally Hostile Students Category (N = 477)

Group	Number of Cases	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>p</u>
Teacher	378	-.49	.896	11.41	.001
Principal	98	-.24	.733		

Relationship Between Size of Community and Discrepancy Means

Research Question Five describes the relationship between size of community and the discrepancy means. Specifically, the question was: "What is the relationship between the size of the community and the discrepancy between actual and desired prevention training?"

Discriminant analysis was used to indicate relationships, if any, that existed between the size of the community (rural or urban) and the discrepancies between the actual and desired amount of training delivered for the 11 categories of school violence. The dependent variables in the analysis were the size of community (rural or urban), and the independent variables consisted of the discrepancies.

Rural and urban respondents replied in a way that discriminated them from one another at the  $p = .05$  level. The results of the stepwise procedures produced a Wilks' Lambda of .96 ( $df = 11$ ).

The categories of Verbally Hostile Students, Student Fights, and Physically Hostile Adults, did not prove to be significant factors by which discrepant responses could be identified. Significant factors by which discrepancies could be identified were Physically Hostile Students, Students with Weapons, Verbally Hostile Adults, Gang Related Activities, Hostage Situations, Drive by Shootings, and Bomb Threats. School Violence categories with positive correlations were Students with Guns, Hostage Situations, Bomb Threats, and Gang Related Activities. Negative correlations were Drive by Shootings, Students with Weapons, Physically Hostile Students, and Verbally Hostile Adults. Table 12 shows the variables ordered by size of correlation with the function. Rural and urban responses varied significantly based upon the correlations for these school violence categories.



Table 12

Canonical Discriminant Functions Variables for Rural or Urban Communities and the Discrepancy Between the 11 School Violence Categories

School Violence Categories	Function
Drive by Shootings	-1.44
Students with Guns	1.21
Hostage Situations	.85
Students with Weapons	-.64
Physically Hostile Students	-.55
Verbally Hostile Adults	-.54
Bomb Threats	.47
Gang Related Activities	.41

## CHAPTER V

## DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' and principals' perceptions regarding violence prevention training as it existed in Iowa public secondary schools. The respondents were asked about the perceived level of danger existing in their schools, the actual amount of violence prevention training in their schools, and the amount of violence prevention training desired in their schools. The discrepancy between actual and desired amounts of violence prevention training was computed and analyzed. The study also searched for a relationship between size of community and the discrepancy between actual and desired amounts of training.

The study used a random sample of 240 secondary rural teachers and 240 secondary urban teachers from across Iowa. Additionally, 60 secondary rural principals and 60 urban principals were randomly identified. All teachers were asked to respond to the survey instrument which was developed for the purposes of this study. The returned responses totaled 80%.

The data analysis for this study was conducted using statistical tests evaluated at the  $p = .05$  level of significance. Perceived danger, actual amount of violence prevention training, and desired amount of violence prevention training were analyzed on an individual basis. Descriptive statistics provided mean, standard deviation, and correlations for perceived danger, actual amount of violence

prevention training, and desired amount of violence prevention training. Discriminate analysis was used to determine the extent to which rural and urban respondents could be discriminated between the discrepancies of violence prevention training. When such relationships were detected, t test means were analyzed.

#### Research Questions

The five research questions which sought to answer the research problem were:

1. To what extent do secondary teachers and principals agree in their perceptions about potential danger from violent acts in their schools?

2. To what extent do secondary teachers and principals agree in their perception about the actual amount of prevention training received or provided for specific types of student violence?

3. To what extent do secondary teachers and principals agree in their perception of the desired amount of prevention training received or provided for specific types of student violence?

4. What is the discrepancy between the actual and desired amounts of prevention training received or provided for specific types of student violence?

5. What is the relationship between the size of the community and the discrepancy between actual and desired prevention training?

### Summary

Survey responses by teachers and principals agreed in the perceived level of danger and their desire for violence prevention training for each of the 11 categories of school violence in this study. A significant difference of perception between principals and teachers was found in the amount of violence prevention training actually received and delivered in the secondary public schools of Iowa. Significant differences between respondents' actual and desired amounts of training were also found. Responses from rural and urban schools could be differentiated.

Question 1. To what extent do secondary teachers and principals agree in their perceptions about potential danger from violent acts in their schools?

Teacher and principal respondents were in agreement about the potential for danger in Iowa's public secondary schools. Teachers and principals ranked Verbally Hostile Students in the top category for potential danger. The category, Student Fights, was ranked second by both groups of respondents.

Teachers and principals showed Very Little or No concern about the potential for danger with regard to Students with Guns, Hostage Situations, and Drive by Shootings. The teachers and principals of Iowa indicate very similar perceptions regarding the potential for violence in Iowa's secondary public schools.

Question 2. To what extent do secondary teachers and principals agree in their perception about the actual amount of prevention training received or provided for specific types of student violence?

Teachers' and principals' perceptions differed significantly with regard to actual amount of violence prevention training. Principals perceived they provided more training than what teachers perceived they received. Teacher and principal respondents significantly differed in their perceptions about the actual amount of violence prevention training provided in 9 categories out of the 11 school violence areas measured. Gang Related Activities and Verbally Hostile Adults were ranked second and fifth for both teacher and principal respondents. These two categories were not statistically significant.

Question 3. To what extent do secondary teachers and principals agree in their perception for the desired amount of prevention training received or provided for specific types of student violence?

Teachers and principals desired to receive or provide more violence prevention training than what was offered. Teachers' and principals' responses did not significantly differ for any of the 11 categories of school violence.

Verbally Hostile Students and Physically Hostile Students were ranked first and second by both respondents. Bomb Threats, Hostage Situations, and Drive by Shootings were ranked ninth, tenth, and eleventh respectively by teacher and principal respondents.

Question 4. What is the discrepancy between the actual and desired amounts of prevention training received or provided for specific types of student violence?

Significantly large differences between the actual and desired means were found in 8 of the 11 categories of school violence. Large discrepancies existed in: Physically Hostile Students, Student Fights, and Hostage Situations. Five other school violence categories with medium differences were Drive by Shootings, Physically Hostile Adults, Verbally Hostile Students, Gang Related Activities, and Bomb Threats.

Question 5. What is the relationship between the size of the community and the discrepancy between actual and desired violence prevention training?

Rural and urban respondents differed significantly based upon the combination of responses in 8 out of 11 categories of school violence training. The types of school violence that helped separate the groups were: Physically Hostile Students, Students with Weapons, Students with Guns, Verbally Hostile Adults, Gang Related Activities, Hostage Situations, Drive by Shootings, and Bomb Threats.

Rural respondents were more likely to be dissatisfied with the amount of violence prevention training they had received in the areas of: Students with Guns, Hostage Situations, Bomb Threats, and Gang Related Activities. Urban respondents were more likely to be dissatisfied with the amount of prevention training they had received in the areas of: Drive by Shootings, Students with Weapons, Physically Hostile Students, and Verbally Hostile Adults.

### Discussion

The State of Iowa does not currently know to what extent violence exists in schools. Iowa is a rural area with no major metropolitan cities where schools more commonly appear to be at great risk. Because of this lack of variety, Iowa schools appear to be very alike with regard to the level of violence that they may commonly face on a daily basis when compared to schools in areas of the nation experiencing much greater threats.

Iowa school districts collect and report very little data about school violence issues. A type of data that is mandated by state law due to the Gun-Free Schools Act requires each school district to annually report weapons-related expulsions. Happily, these expulsions remain very small in number. It is likely due to the perception that schools do not frequently experience high levels of violence that the State of Iowa does not require districts to report on other forms of school violence or safety.

This study was in agreement with a previous study from Missouri in which teachers and principals perceived a very low incidence for danger to exist in their schools. Bachus (1993) reported from a survey of rural Missouri teachers that 81% felt that violence existed to a very small degree in their schools. This study found that teachers and principals of Iowa feel relatively safe in their schools as well. Iowa teachers and principals do not perceive very much danger from school violence yet they remain proactive with regard to desiring more inservice training than what they already had

received for each of the 11 categories of school violence. This research again parallels the findings by Bachus (1993). Missouri teachers were also proactive in their stance by wanting to find out more about various school violence training inservice topics.

Recent school shooting incidents around the country have enhanced the perception that public schools are unsafe places to learn and work. Recent articles on school violence and school violence research efforts have created mixed reviews about the perception of school safety issues. Some researchers have suggested that school violence is increasing while other researchers believe the incidents are only more serious in nature but have not increased in number. Whether the perceptions of increased violence are true or not, parents who can provide their children with safer options have enrolled their students in perceivably safer schools, private schools, or are choosing to home school. The topic of school violence has become an issue found in policy and political decisions alike without much attention focused on what it takes to deal with the real need for prevention and preparedness in the school setting.

Media attention toward school violence may be responsible for some of the increased awareness and outrage by parents and communities throughout the nation. Pearl, Mississippi; Jonesboro, Arkansas; Paducah, Kentucky; and Springfield, Oregon, are just a few examples of incidents resulting in extraordinary sorrow and a possible greater loss of perceived safety in schools. The data collected for this



study were returned previous to these events and free from the chilling effects of the media attention that accompanied each incident over more recent months.

Many educators may still believe that school violence will never occur in their home schools. Some studies discuss the possibility that educators are denying that violence exists or that serious incidents could occur in their home schools. This researcher would suggest that administrators and teachers are not so much in denial about school violence, but that they may not be relating to the problem for lack of first hand experience with violence itself. Most administrators and teachers were successful and nonviolent when they were students in school. It is likely they were socially adept people who were very unlikely to have personal experience with major forms of violence. The traditional strategies of first ignoring the inappropriate behavior of others, to stay away from individuals who might harm them, and to politely ask someone to change their inappropriate behavior may be too well rehearsed by the people who generally work in our schools. Contemporary violence may seem inconceivable to many educators today who found success with these simple strategies. It is very difficult to prepare for the inconceivable to occur in everyday life. As a result, school violence appears random in nature to most educators and can be easily rationalized as being beyond the scope of everyday preparation.

The societal and media perception that school violence is increasing naturally may lead Iowa educators into

believing that the violence must be happening down the road at the next school. Educators in Iowa did not report violence to be prevalent in their own schools, however, incidents do periodically happen and are likely to materialize at some point in the future. Schools that have not yet experienced acts of violence may create a false sense of security that their school is safe from violence. In order to maintain a safe school environment, educators must challenge current perceptions of safety and randomness.

Traditionally, administrators have been charged with this role of keeping the students, staff, and facilities safe. Today, we understand better than ever that students' basic needs must first be met before learning can occur. Schools have begun serving breakfast so that students' hunger does not slow learning. Mental health services are provided during the school day so that the emotional stability of students can be maintained. Recent research into the human brain and learning provide a compelling case for eliminating the fear of violence among students and replacing fright with the perception of safety. Students who fear being threatened or harmed during the course of the school day do not have the full capacity of their mind focused on learning. Lower order survival systems of the brain are activated during times of fear and stress. The limbic system, which is good for saving our lives when faced with an emergency situation, is not constructed for learning. In the contemporary era of emphasizing student achievement, we must have the full attention of students' minds in the classroom.

Protecting the learning climate of the school must be a high priority for administrators and their communities. Superintendents, principals, and law enforcement cannot afford to wait until the frequency of incidents rises to the point of public discontent. A proactive stance by school leaders is the first step in gaining control over safety before it is ever lost. Evaluation of policies and procedures that address adequate and necessary methods of violence prevention must result in violence prevention training for school employees as the undeniable step toward enhancing school safety. It is very difficult to bring a school back from the brink of chaos.

#### Conclusions

The results of this study support the following conclusions:

1. The researcher is pleased that educators are not preoccupied with a threat of school violence. Although the increased media attention toward school violence is front page news in many newspapers in the country, the overall perception of potential danger from violence was reported to be small in Iowa's public secondary schools.

2. The impact of a possible false perception about the level of violence in public education could be disastrous. Students who fear violence and who are also less likely to become violent in the school setting may flee public schools for the safety of private schools or home schooling in increasingly large numbers. This would encourage a true increase of violence in public school systems. This

self-fulfilling prophecy could ultimately threaten the entire public school system and weaken democracy in the United States.

3. Principals perceived that they were providing more training than teachers perceived they had received. Those perceptions significantly differed in 9 of the 11 categories of school violence. Those categories were: Students with Weapons, Students with Guns, Physically Hostile Students, Student Fights, Physically Hostile Adults, Drive by Shootings, Hostage Situations, Verbally Hostile Students, and Bomb Threats. As a result of this difference in perception, principals may need to emphasize current violence prevention efforts as they directly pertain to the needs of teachers to maintain school safety.

4. Teachers and principals agreed on the desired levels of preparation for the 11 violence prevention skill areas. They desired Very Little to Some training in all areas. Teachers and principals did not see a need for a great deal of training at the time of the survey.

5. This study found that types of violence that might result in the greatest potential for life threatening injury and impact the entire school campus such as Drive by Shootings, Hostage Situations, Physically Hostile Adults, Students with Guns, Students with Weapons, and Bomb Threats were areas in which teachers and principals indicated a minimal level of desire for violence prevention training. These were also the types of violence that Iowa teachers and principals least expected to occur in their schools. This

study also found that types of violence with a lower potential for life threatening injury such as Verbally Hostile Students, Physically Hostile Students, Student Fights, and Gang Related Activities were areas in which teachers and principals desired the greatest amount of violence prevention training. These areas of violence were reported to occur most often.

The types of violence with a lower potential for life threatening injury are less apt to decay the sense of order in the school. In comparison, the more severe types of violence receiving a lesser desire for training, imply a major breakdown of traditional control and authority when they occur. As a result, the desire to admit that such control can be lost in the school setting may play a major role in dampening desire to provide or receive training for the more unthinkable acts of violence.

Iowa teachers and principals do not expect violence to occur from students using weapons or guns in their schools. Some training was strongly desired for these categories of violence by Iowa educators. Iowa teachers and principals do not expect violence to occur from students who become physically hostile in their schools. Iowa educators strongly desired more training for Physically Hostile Students than either the Students with Weapons or the Students with Guns categories of violence. This means that desire for some training in these areas was strong in comparison to the other eight areas of violence prevention training.

6. Teachers and principals were not satisfied in any of the 11 categories of school violence training with their current levels of preparation. Significant differences between actual and desired levels of training were found for the school violence categories of Physically Hostile Students, Student Fights, Physically Hostile Adults, Drive by Shootings, Hostage Situations, Verbally Hostile Students, Bomb Threats, and Gang Related Activities. Schools might consider beginning their violence prevention efforts in these areas.

7. The degree to which teachers and principals indicated a desire for more school violence training varied depending upon the size of their community. Educators from rural schools tended to be more dissatisfied with their current levels of training in four specific areas of school violence than were their urban counterparts. These areas of school violence training were: Students with Guns, Hostage Situations, Bomb Threats, and Gang Related Activities. Rural teachers' and principals' awareness regarding school violence has led them to want to know more about how to discourage and react to potentially harmful incidents. Despite the fact that teachers and principals report a low potential for school violence in all Iowa schools, the impact of media coverage and the desire to keep Iowa schools safe have touched even rural Iowa.

#### Recommendations

The following recommendations for future research are based on the results of this study:

1. The perception of whether school violence has increased or decreased must be addressed. It is unknown whether the perception that schools are becoming more unsafe is true or not. School districts should be required to report incidents of school violence using a standardized incident reporting form on a local level and then they should be submitted to a national database. If violence is indeed increasing, accurate data are important in identifying most needed solutions.

2. Students with Weapons, Students with Guns, and Physically Hostile Students were areas of violence prevention training where Iowa teachers and principals indicated the largest discrepancies between actual and desired levels of violence prevention training. It is important to include these categories when planning for violence prevention training.

3. Schools have again been asked to repair a weakness in contemporary society. Violence has entered our schools. Schools cannot control the violent choices of behavior commonly made by individuals in communities. Community problems require community solutions. School leaders, though technically responsible for the safety of students, should not have to solicit and convince resources such as police departments, sheriff departments, state and federal law enforcement, or state departments of education to support the training of educators in violence prevention. This includes the training of administrators. Any mandated training placed upon schools must not come at the expense of the educational

mission of schools. Time and expense to train educators to address the potential for violence should be borne by all of society, not just educational institutions.

4. School administrators should begin to determine the extent of safety on their campuses by conducting a school climate survey. Evaluation studies should also include how much violence prevention training has been provided for staff, how much training is desired by staff, and how much training is sufficient before prevention training begins. School districts may want to contact neighboring districts in regards to what training they have offered their teachers on violence prevention. Districts may want to share resources and expertise while preparing educators to deal with school violence.

5. Teachers and principals perceived the most danger from the school violence category of Verbally Hostile Students. There was also a significant difference in the perception between teachers and principals regarding Verbally Hostile Students. Teachers perceived significantly more violence from Verbally Hostile Students than did principals. Teachers typically spend more time with students than do principals and as a result are more likely to be aware of the prevalence of Verbally Hostile comments. In the effort to reduce forms of physical violence in schools, attention must first be given to the reduction of verbal forms of violence. Policies and violence reduction training for teachers must mirror this strategy.



6. Future studies should assess involvement in violence prevention training with regard to how productive their training has appeared to be, what improvements have resulted in their school due to violence prevention training, and the overall worthiness of violence prevention training in the effort to provide a safe learning environment.

7. Replication studies are appropriate to include perceptions of central office administrators, school board members, elementary teachers and elementary principals perceptions, parents, and members of the community.

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Appendix A  
Letters of Transmittal, Surveys,  
and Postcards



January 27, 1997

Dear Iowa Educator

I am undertaking a study for my doctoral dissertation of secondary teachers and principals of Iowa concerning school violence. The focus of this study is to determine actual and desired levels of training needed to defuse or prevent school violence. You have been randomly selected to be part of this study, and I am requesting your help. Since the study has identified a group of representatives from your school, it is important that each identified respondent complete the questionnaire.

Will you please complete the attached instrument and return it to me as soon as possible? The instrument is concise, and should require only five minutes to complete. As you will notice, questions will have three responses, one being perceived level of danger, the second being actual amount of training received and the third being desired amount of training.

When you have completed the questionnaire, please fold and return it in the no postage necessary return envelope enclosed. Responses will be recorded and reported only in the aggregate. No individual or school will be identified in the results. The number affixed to your postcard is only for follow-up purposes should that be necessary. After responses are tabulated, all questionnaires will be destroyed to protect confidentiality.

Your participation in this investigation is deeply appreciated and vital to the success of the study. Thank you for your valuable time and effort.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Fischer-Jurgensen  
Researcher

cc: Dr. Robert Decker  
Dissertation Chairperson

**School Violence Teacher Survey**

Dear Iowa Educator,

Your anonymous participation will help examine school violence training in Iowa's public secondary schools. Please follow instructions as outlined in Sections I and II.

Definition:

**Violence**--Behaviors by individuals that intentionally threaten, attempt, or inflict mental or physical harm on others (Reiss & Roth, 1993)

**Section I--Instructions**

For each of the 11 categories of school violence listed below, use the definition of responses to circle one number in each of the three columns.

In the first column, please indicate the extent of danger you perceive happening in your school from the categories of school violence. In the second column, indicate the **ACTUAL** amount of training you have received for each category. In the third column, indicate the amount of training you **DESIRE** to receive for each category.

**DEFINITION OF RESPONSES:**

1. Very little or None
2. Some
3. A great deal

(A response is required in each column)

Categories of School Violence:	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
	<b>PERCEIVED LEVEL OF DANGER</b>	<b>ACTUAL AMOUNT OF TRAINING</b>	<b>DESIRED AMOUNT OF TRAINING</b>
1. Verbally Hostile Students. . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
2. Physically Hostile Students. . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
3. Student Fights . . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
4. Students with Weapons (other than guns). . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
5. Students with Guns . . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
6. Verbally Hostile Adults. . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
7. Physically Hostile Adults. . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
8. Gang Related Activities. . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
9. Hostage Situations . . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
10. Drive By Shootings. . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
11. Bomb Threats . . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3

**Section II:** To complete this portion of the survey, please circle the appropriate number from the range of choices.

Designate your gender

- |         |           |
|---------|-----------|
| 1. Male | 2. Female |
|---------|-----------|

Designate your Age Group

- |            |                |
|------------|----------------|
| 1. 20 - 29 | 4. 50 - 59     |
| 2. 30 - 39 | 5. 60 or above |
| 3. 40 - 49 |                |

Designate the category that best represents your current education

- |       |               |
|-------|---------------|
| 1. BA | 3. Specialist |
| 2. MA | 4. Doctorate  |

Designate years experience in your present position

- |              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1. 5 or less | 4. 16 - 19    |
| 2. 6 - 10    | 5. 20 - 25    |
| 3. 11 - 15   | 6. 26 or more |

Designate your total years of teaching experience

- |              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1. 5 or less | 4. 16 - 19    |
| 2. 6 - 10    | 5. 20 - 25    |
| 3. 11 - 15   | 6. 26 or more |

Designate your total years of administrative experience  
(Administrators Only)

- |              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1. 5 or less | 4. 16 - 19    |
| 2. 6 - 10    | 5. 20 - 25    |
| 3. 11 - 15   | 6. 26 or more |

Fold and place the survey into the NO POSTAGE NECESSARY envelope. Return both the anonymous survey and the postcard separately in the mail. The postcard only indicates that you have completed the survey.

**The survey is at no cost to you.**

Thank you, *Elizabeth Fischer-Jurgensen*

January 27, 1997

Dear Iowa educator

I am undertaking a study for my doctoral dissertation of secondary teachers, and principals of Iowa concerning school violence. The focus of this study is to determine actual and desired levels of training needed to defuse or prevent school violence. You have been randomly selected to be part of this study, and I am requesting your help. Since the study has identified a group of representatives from your school, it is important that each identified respondent complete the questionnaire.

Will you please complete the attached instrument and return it to me as soon as possible? The instrument is concise, and should require only five minutes to complete. As you will notice, questions will have three responses, one being perceived level of danger, the second being actual amount of training you have provided faculty, and the other being amount of training you desire to provide faculty.

When you have completed the questionnaire, please fold and return it in the no postage necessary return envelope enclosed. Responses will be recorded and reported only in the aggregate. No individual or school will be identified in the results. The number affixed to your postcard is only for follow-up purposes should that be necessary. After responses are tabulated, all questionnaires will be destroyed to protect confidentiality.

Your participation in this investigation is deeply appreciated and vital to the success of the study. Thank you for your valuable time and effort.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Fischer-Jurgensen  
Researcher

cc: Dr. Robert Decker  
Dissertation Chairperson

### School Violence Principal Survey

Dear Iowa Educator,

Your anonymous participation will help examine school violence training in Iowa's public secondary schools. Please follow instructions as outlined in Sections I and II.

Definition:

**Violence**--Behaviors by individuals that intentionally threaten, attempt, or inflict mental or physical harm on others (Reiss & Roth, 1993)

#### Section I--Instructions

For each of the 11 categories of school violence listed below, use the definition of responses to circle one number in each of the three columns.

In the first column, please indicate the extent of danger you perceive happening in your school from the categories of school violence. In the second column, indicate the **ACTUAL** amount of training you have provided faculty for each category. In the third column, indicate the amount of training you **DESIRE** to provide faculty for each category.

#### DEFINITION OF RESPONSES:

1. Very little or None
2. Some
3. A great deal

(A response is required in each column)

Categories of School Violence:	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
	<u>PERCEIVED LEVEL OF DANGER</u>	<u>ACTUAL AMOUNT OF TRAINING</u>	<u>DESIRED AMOUNT OF TRAINING</u>
1. Verbally Hostile Students. . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
2. Physically Hostile Students. . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
3. Student Fights . . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
4. Students with Weapons (other than guns). . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
5. Students with Guns . . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
6. Verbally Hostile Adults. . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
7. Physically Hostile Adults. . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
8. Gang Related Activities. . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
9. Hostage Situations . . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
10. Drive By Shootings. . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
11. Bomb Threats . . . . .	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3

**Section II:** To complete this portion of the survey, please circle the appropriate number from the range of choices.

Designate your gender

- |         |           |
|---------|-----------|
| 1. Male | 2. Female |
|---------|-----------|

Designate your Age Group

- |            |                |
|------------|----------------|
| 1. 20 - 29 | 4. 50 - 59     |
| 2. 30 - 39 | 5. 60 or above |
| 3. 40 - 49 |                |

Designate the category that best represents your current education

- |       |               |
|-------|---------------|
| 1. BA | 3. Specialist |
| 2. MA | 4. Doctorate  |

Designate years experience in your present position

- |              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1. 5 or less | 4. 16 - 19    |
| 2. 6 - 10    | 5. 20 - 25    |
| 3. 11 - 15   | 6. 26 or more |

Designate your total years of teaching experience

- |              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1. 5 or less | 4. 16 - 19    |
| 2. 6 - 10    | 5. 20 - 25    |
| 3. 11 - 15   | 6. 26 or more |

Designate your total years of administrative experience  
(Administrators Only)

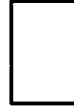
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|--------------|---------------|
| 1. 5 or less | 4. 16 - 19    |
| 2. 6 - 10    | 5. 20 - 25    |
| 3. 11 - 15   | 6. 26 or more |

Fold and place the survey into the NO POSTAGE NECESSARY envelope. Return both the anonymous survey and the postcard separately in the mail. The postcard only indicates that you have completed the survey.

**The survey is at no cost to you.**

Thank you, *Elizabeth Fischer-Jurgensen*

Elizabeth Fischer-Jurgensen  
1906 S. 5th Ave  
Marshalltown, Ia 50158



TO: Elizabeth Fischer-Jurgensen  
1906 S. 5th Ave  
Marshalltown, Ia 50158

Please mail this postcard at the same time as you return the survey. They are being sent to different addresses to protect your anonymity.

Sincerely,

*Elizabeth Fischer-Jurgensen*

February 12, 1997

Dear Iowa Educator,

On January 27, 1997, a brief questionnaire was mailed to you. The questionnaire pertained to secondary teachers' and principals' perspectives about school violence training. Many teachers and principals across Iowa have already responded, but I have not yet heard from you. If you have mailed your response, disregard this second mailing. Since the study has identified a group of representatives from your school, it is important that each identified respondent complete the questionnaire.

Please complete the survey by February 21, 1997. Your response is vitally important to the study.

If you would like a copy of the results, contact me at (515)752-5726. Thank you for your participation in this investigation.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Fischer-Jurgensen  
Researcher

enclosure

cc: Dr. Robert Decker  
Dissertation Chairperson

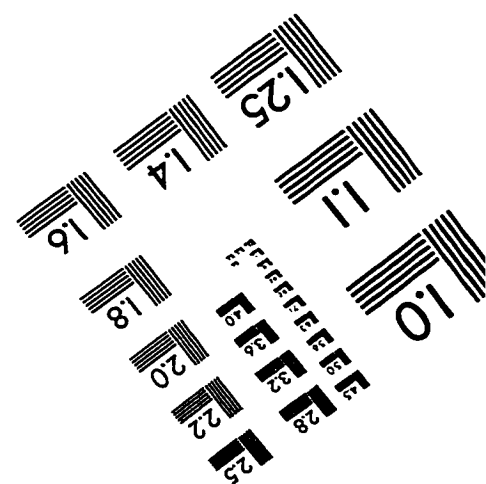
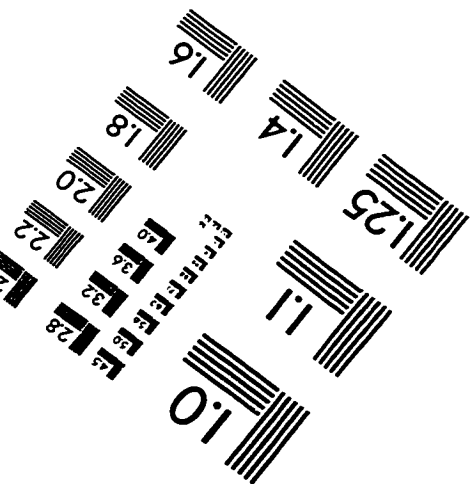
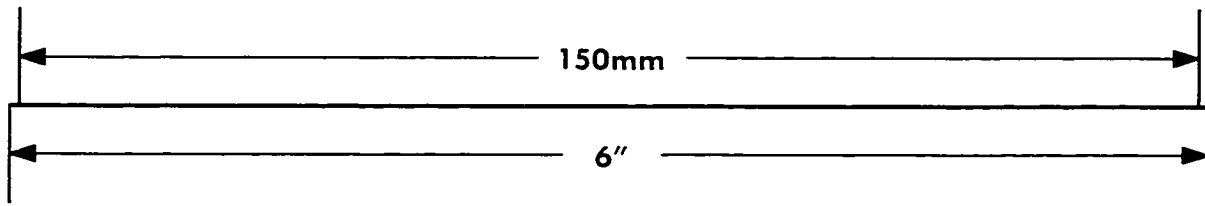
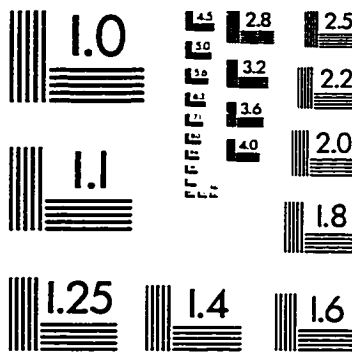
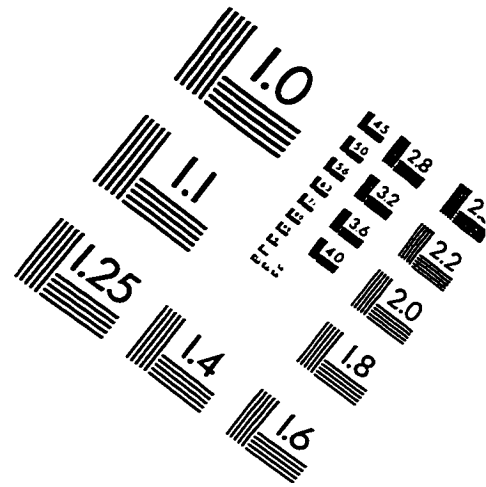
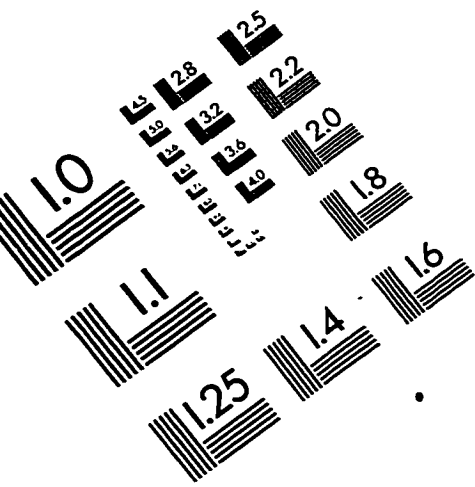


Appendix B

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 477)

Variable	Number	Percentage
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	291	61.4
Female	183	38.6
<u>Age</u>		
20-29 years	51	10.8
30-39 years	89	18.8
40-49 years	179	37.8
50-59 years	143	30.2
60 + years	12	2.5
<u>Level of Education</u>		
Bachelors Degree	219	46.2
Masters Degree	201	42.4
Specialist Degree	35	7.4
Doctorate Degree	19	4.0
<u>Years in Present Position</u>		
5 or less	155	32.7
6-10	95	20.0
11-15	47	9.9
16-19	44	9.3
20-25	118	24.9
26 or more	15	3.2
<u>Total Years of Teaching Experience</u>		
5 or less	66	13.9
6-10	66	13.9
11-15	57	12.0
16-19	46	9.7
20-25	97	20.5
26 or more	142	30.0
<u>Total Years of Administrative Experience</u>		
5 or less	24	24.2
6-10	25	25.3
11-15	17	17.2
16-19	14	14.1
20-25	6	6.1
26 or more	13	13.1
<u>Community Size</u>		
Rural	246	51.6
Urban	231	48.4

# IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)




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