

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE SCHOOLS PREPARED FOR CRISES?

LIFE AFTER COLUMBINE AND SANDY HOOK

A Record of Study

by

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## ABSTRACT

Despite safety measures that have been put in place since the mass school shootings at Columbine High School and Sandy Hook Elementary School, school districts are still ill prepared for an active shooter crisis. In this qualitative, exploratory study, four Texas superintendents of differing district sizes were interviewed. Information from the interviews was triangulated using school district policy, financial records, and emergency operations plans to gain an understanding of the overarching question: To what extent are schools prepared to address intruders and active shooters through the four stages of crisis planning?

Through the research conducted, the four areas of crisis planning were analyzed: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. While school districts are required to have an emergency operations plan, these plans are not monitored outside the school district. Thus, each district has different priorities, and the majority of the plans address neither the recovery phase nor the possibility of active shooters. Concerns raised through the interview process include the lack of inclusion of first responders in the planning process and multijurisdictional issues faced by many districts. A thorough review of policy reveals insignificant requirements by the state for keeping staff and students safe, and an analysis of financial records highlights the disadvantage experienced by smaller districts due to lack of equitable funding from the state. This inequity affords larger districts the option to be better equipped with safety and security measures, as well as hiring of security personnel.

Safety in schools is of utmost importance—mass shootings are occurring across the country, and our schools must prepare for the real crisis of an active shooter.

Upgrading security, revamping policy, and achieving equitable financing are essential elements to improve security and safety. Recommendations for future research target teachers as first responders, policy change, multijurisdictional ideas for handling emergency personnel, and the finances of rural school districts.

## DEDICATION

To my children, Megan, Morgan, Madison, and Mason: This process was as much for you as for me—showing each of you that education is a life-long process and that we are never too old to learn. Your encouragement to continue and finish kept me on path throughout this experience. All my love to you.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background**

In the United States, approximately 55 million students attend public and private schools, and a primary expectation is for school districts to keep these students safe (Zhang et al., 2016). Ensuring safety for elementary and secondary school students, educators, administrators, and others is essential (United States Department of Justice, 2013). Chris Murphy, Democratic Senator for Connecticut, where Sandy Hook Elementary School is located, said in a statement on the Senate floor, “No parent should have to fear for the life of their child when they drop them off at school.” Instead, there should be a sense of security—that their children will be safe. After the tragedies at both Columbine High School and Sandy Hook Elementary School, news reports were abundant as the public looked to investigate what could have been done to prevent the loss of life. As history shows, the loss of life tends to be an antecedent to more security measures and a higher sense of preparedness.

One example of a higher sense of preparedness is related to fire safety in schools. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, deaths related to fires in schools are almost nonexistent (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2014). New processes, fire safety codes, and laws have been enacted that have curbed the loss of life in schools due to fire. While fires still occur, the preparedness of the school, staff, and

students, along with stricter fire safety codes, have made negligible the loss of life due to a school fire.

While fire safety has evolved, schools are still working to catch up with the measurements needed in regard to school shooting crises. Looking back in history, the first mass school shooting in the United States occurred on August 1, 1966, at the University of Texas at Austin when a sniper in a bell tower killed 16 people and wounded 32 others (Texas Governor's Committee and Consultants, 1966). Almost 50 years later, lawmakers, school leaders, parents, and staff are still looking for answers. The mass shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado, where 13 students were killed in 1999, and Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, which took the lives of 27 children and school employees in 2012, are still a fresh reminder of a very real crisis that school districts face and for which they must be prepared (United States Department of Justice, 2013). Everytown for Gun Safety, a nonpartisan, nonprofit group dedicated to "understanding and reducing gun violence in America," keeps track of school shooting numbers and puts the current total at 160 school shootings since 2013, or an average of one per week.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Research conducted in Rhode Island found crisis plans to be lacking in the area of preparation, including coordinating with area law enforcement, fire, and emergency personnel (Dube, 2012). Likewise, a study conducted in Massachusetts found research lacking in the area of crisis planning, with information sharing of best practices being almost nonexistent (Goldman, 2008). A joint report by researchers from the United

States Secret Service and Department of Education identified 37 incidents of targeted school violence occurring in the United States from 1974 to June 2000 (U.S. Secret Service & U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Almost half of the incidents lasted 15 minutes or less from beginning to end of the shooting, while 25% of the incidents took place within just five minutes (U.S. Secret Service & U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The majority of these incidents were not stopped by law enforcement, a point that emphasizes how brief these incidents are in duration and why the schools themselves need to be prepared as first responders.

When reviewing the Cycle of Crisis Planning from the United States Department of Education, little research exists that includes all four areas of crisis planning. Donaghey (2013) found through his research that while schools tend to focus on recovery, they lack in their focus on prevention and mitigation. Others believe the response of the schools is an area of concern due to the top-down approach from state mandates (Pagliocca & Nickerson, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Since school shooting incidents have lasted 15 minutes or less on average, it is critical for school personnel to be prepared to respond while waiting for professional first responders to arrive.

A lack of research looking at actual crisis plans and their implementation becomes no longer acceptable with 160 school shootings since 2013—this is not a problem that is going away (Secret Service & Department of Education, 2004). Most incidents do not receive the type of public attention given to Sandy Hook or Columbine,

but shootings at schools are nonetheless increasing (Zadrozny, 2013). Preparedness of schools needs to increase as well.

Preparedness of the school includes not only the crisis plan but the implementation of the plan and recovery after implementation. Often, it is not the police who stop the violence on the campus, but instead the teacher or principal (Secret Service & Department of Education, 2006). One key finding of the Safe Schools Initiative is that even with prompt law enforcement response, most attacks have been stopped by means other than law enforcement (Secret Service & Department of Education, 2006). The implication for school districts relies on the importance of developing preventive measures, putting in place emergency plans, and including protocols and procedures (Erickson, 2001; Blair & Schweit, 2014).

After analyzing 160 incidents, Special Agent Katherine Schweit, head of the FBI Active Shooter Initiative, concluded that there is a need not only for preparedness but training of staff. (Blair & Schweit, 2014). After the shootings at Columbine High School, safety measures were adjusted, and first responder training was implemented across the nation (Erickson, 2001; Fein et al., 2002). Incidentally at Sandy Hook, safety measures were in place and first responders arrived quickly, which plagues the country with the question: What else can be done to keep students and staff safe?

Unfortunately, there is nothing currently in place to completely prevent these shootings, but the preparedness of the campus and staff can keep the loss of life to “negligible loss,” or the least possible number of lives lost. The United States

Department of Education (2007) believes that crisis preparedness is effective when schools prepare according to mitigation, preparation, planning, and recovery.

### **Purpose of the Study**

While many school shootings have occurred, there is little research on school shootings from the perspective of school district crisis plans. The majority of research discusses the “why” of the crisis or the shooter’s mental state as opposed to how to better prepare (Orcutt et al., 2014; Nickerson & Martens, 2008; Riley & McDaniel, 1998). Negligible loss is still too many lost lives, so how do our schools react in a crisis? The intent of this study was to examine the perspective of school superintendents in Texas in regard to crisis preparation. This exploratory case study unveils information to gauge perceptions of preparedness among superintendents within their own school districts. Interviews were conducted on a sampling of Texas superintendents regarding safety and security measures in Texas school districts. These data were triangulated with financial records, emergency operations plans (EOPs), and policy from both the state and district. As stated in Texas Education Code (TEC) §37.108, all schools are required to have a crisis plan; however, not all schools have the same preparedness for a crisis, nor do they all follow the four stages of mitigation, preparation, response, and recovery (US Department of Education, 2007; Dwyer et al., 1998). Using these four stages, the human component can also be a factor; the best crisis plan may not deter the loss of life if there is not enough training of staff. Another element addressed is the idea that not all schools are funded the same, resulting in financial constraints placed on schools that may prevent a district from affording the latest security advances.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This exploratory study used the punctuated equilibrium theory (PET) of policy change as the theoretical framework. This theory is based on the idea that school systems, which are considered bureaucracies, exist in an extended period of stasis, with changes occurring due to sudden shifts in radical change (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). While PET can take on different aspects, organizational information processing was used for the purpose of this study. Policies for schools are created through governmental organizations or local school boards by acting on information supplied. According to Baumgartner and Jones (1993), changes to policy are often not proportionate to the amount of information provided. Policymaking alternates between under- and overreaction to the provided information (Jones & Baumgartner 2005; Wood & Peake 1998). Overreaction to information could come from one event that shows a failure within a school system or an accumulation of problems over a period of time (Birkland & Lawrence, 2009). Within this framework, how a school system allocates attention to the problem is equally critical to how policymakers respond to the information.

Applying this idea of overreaction, school systems across Texas reacted to Columbine and then again to the shooting at Sandy Hook. Whether the reactions were warranted or considered overreactions depends on the school district. After Columbine, many safety measures were put in place that strengthened school security and improved response time for first responders. For example, no longer do police wait outside the school if there is a shooting; they immediately enter the building. (Columbine Review Commission, 2001; United States Secret Service & United States Department of

Education, 2004). After the Sandy Hook incident, many rural districts engaged in overreaction with allowing teachers to carry concealed handguns, and others spent money on entrance security and training more school resource officers (SROs). The missing elements from the research on the Columbine and Sandy Hook shootings are how each district addressed their EOP and their collaborative efforts to work with first responders.

### **Research Questions**

Through a case study, the following research questions were used to gain an understanding of the factors that can help or hinder our schools in a crisis situation. The overarching question is as follows: To what extent are schools prepared to address intruders and active shooters through the four stages of crisis planning? This study looked specifically at the following inquiries in relation to the overarching question:

- What are the school district superintendent perceptions about their district's preparation for crisis? (Mitigation)
- What are the school district superintendent perceptions regarding their school district's efforts and measures to reduce or eliminate risk to life and property? (Preparedness)
- What are the school district superintendent perceptions of their district's ability and capacity to respond to an emergency situation? (Response)
- What are the school district superintendent perceptions about restoring the learning environment and evaluating the phases of the crisis plan? (Recovery)

## Definition of Terms

This section defines terms that are important to know for understanding this study.

**Emergency Operations Plan (EOP):** a plan put forth by school districts that addresses before, during, and after a crisis situation.

**First Responder:** emergency service personnel who are the first to arrive and assist at the scene of an emergency.

**Mitigation/Prevention:** what schools and districts can do to reduce or eliminate risk to life and property.

**Negligible Loss:** the least possible number of lives lost.

**Preparedness:** the process of planning for a crisis.

**Recovery:** the steps to restore the learning environment after a crisis and the evaluation of all phases for continuous improvement.

**Response:** the steps taken during an emergency situation.

**Urbanicity:** a school's rural/urban setting.

## Procedures

This case study collected data from four superintendents in Texas school districts through an interview process in order to explore the process of crisis preparedness plans. The parts of each plan were categorized into the four areas of mitigation/prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. The interview questions were generated based on the research question topics of preparedness and crisis plans. These open-ended questions generated detailed responses that provided the researcher with a better understanding of school preparedness within the school setting, as well as highlighting

common themes. Documents covering the district financials and EOPs were gathered from each district and compared to the documentation of the interview questions. Policies from the state and each district were analyzed to allow the researcher to look at the broader picture. Once all data were collected, a triangulation of reported data occurred in order for the researcher to look for common themes among all the districts.

### **Significance of the Study**

In a news conference, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Democrat from California, said that after each mass shooting, a moment of silence is held in Congress. “We’re almost unworthy of that tradition to think a moment of silence should make us feel better,” Pelosi said. “We don’t need a moment of silence. We need a day of action” (ABC News, 2013). The action must be preparedness. According to TEC §37.108, all school districts in Texas are required to have a crisis plan in place. Often, the problem is not if the district has the plan, but if the plan addresses the components of mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery (United States Department of Education, 2007). While there is no quick fix for improving campus safety, one key component is monitoring the environment (Zdziarski et al., 2007). Not preparing appropriately for a crisis could not only have the impact of loss of life, but could bring legal ramifications as well (Brock, et al., 2009; Peterson & Straub, 1992). According to Trump, “Parents will forgive boards and administrators if student test scores go down for a year. Parents will not be so forgiving if students are injured or die in a tragedy that could have been prevented or better managed by school leaders” (National School Boards Association, 2008).

A report of school safety–related laws passed in 2013 legislative sessions showed 14 bills addressing school safety plan refinement (Education Commission of the States, 2013). Some of the changes include requiring schools to review and update safety plans regularly, to coordinate with local law enforcement agencies, and to give copies of school safety plans to local first responders (Education Commission of the States, 2013; Education Code 37.108(a), (c-2)–(d); Texas Association of School Board Policy, 2015)

Often an attitude of “that won’t happen here” overshadows the need to revamp the level of crisis preparedness. The significance of this study is to provide Texas school district superintendents with information indicating the level of crisis preparedness in their districts for the end goal of maintaining a safe learning environment. Digging deeper into districts’ crisis preparedness provides information and suggestions for implementation of stronger safety and security. At a time in education when results are crucial, when state aid is declining, and when accountability is at the forefront, school districts cannot lose sight of the basic need of safety.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One begins with background information on the lack of crisis preparedness in school settings, which leads to the statement of the problem and the purpose of the study, the theoretical framework used in the study, research questions, definition of terms, and the procedures followed. Chapter One concludes with the significance of the study and the overall organization of the record of study. Chapter Two is the literature review comprising the following topics: overview, policy, funding, crisis preparedness/management, school reactions,

perceptions of safety, safety measures, theoretical framework, and a conclusion. Chapter Three explains the methodology of the study. Chapter Four presents the findings of the qualitative data analysis, and Chapter Five is a discussion of conclusions and recommendations for future studies.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Overview**

A literature review is “a vital component of the research process that integrates, synthesizes, and critiques the important thinking and research on a particular topic” (Merriam & Tisdell, 1998, p.66). This review provides an important purpose for this research. According to Gall, et al., (2007), the literature review helps the researcher limit the scope of the study; allows the researcher the opportunity for new insight; focuses the researcher in order to avoid repeating research; gives the researcher information to design the study; and gives recommendations for future research. Maxwell (2005) argued that a literature review provides justification, guides the research, is a data source for testing theories, and provides a framework from which to work.

This chapter is a review of the literature in regard to the topic of school crisis preparedness. The organization of this chapter is by the following sections: background, policy, funding, crisis preparedness/management, school reactions, perceptions of safety, security measures, and theoretical framework.

#### **Background**

In 1966, the Austin Police Department did not have the equipment to respond to the crisis at the University of Texas bell tower. Police officers carried revolvers and shotguns, there were few radios, and at this time there was no specialized unit to respond to an active sniper (Cawthorne, 2007). Very little information is available from this

period of time that would allow schools to learn from mistakes or make adjustments to processes.

The availability of information on Columbine High School and Sandy Hook Elementary School allows for a deeper understanding of school preparedness. The Governor of Colorado created the Columbine Review Commission to conduct an independent review of the April 20, 1999 incident. William H. Erickson, former Chief Justice of the Colorado Supreme Court, chaired the commission. After a year of public hearings and examining thousands of documents, the final report was completed (Columbine Review Commission, 2001). According to the Columbine Review Commission (2001), the assault by two teenagers lasted 47 minutes, and another few hours passed before police or emergency personnel entered the building. The following recommendations were made to address the concerns of emergency preparedness: law enforcement should be trained that upon arriving at a scene of an active shooter, their highest priority is stopping the assault; an incident command must be put in place with prior training on large-scale emergencies; a digital trunked communication system is needed in order for all responding agencies to communicate; a major critical response plan must be in place for all agencies specifically for handling a school crisis; multi-agency planning sessions should occur to plan for worst-case scenarios; and every school should have emergency crisis plans, school emergency kits, and scheduled crisis drills at least once a year.

After the shooting at Sandy Hook, Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy created a committee chaired by Mayor Scott D. Jackson of Hamden. The Sandy Hook Advisory

Commission was a 16-member panel of experts tasked to review current policy and make specific recommendations in the areas of public safety. Areas to address included school safety, mental health, and gun violence prevention (Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, 2015). The final report included 12 recommendations. Some of the recommendations are basic, easy-to-implement ideas such as classroom doors being locked from the inside, all exterior doors having lockdown capabilities, a plan to decide how to handle substitute teachers and classroom keys, and including auxiliary staff such as school custodians in the discussion of school safety. However, some of the recommendations require processes put in place that school districts may not be able to accomplish as easily. These recommendations include creation of a school safety and security committee to ensure implementation of Safe School Design and Operation strategies (Homeland Security, 2012); an architect on the school safety infrastructure council; named safety and security wardens; classrooms located away from school entrances; and rooms holding fewer people located closer to school entry points (Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, 2015). The final two recommendations also require two locations within the school to contain all emergency contact information for students and staff, as well as safety and security training for faculty, staff, and students on how to respond to hazards and/or events (Connecticut Department of Emergency Services, 2014).

Another report detailing the incident at Sandy Hook from the perspective of law enforcement was prepared by the State Attorney General's Office of Connecticut. According to Article IV, Sec. 27 of the Connecticut State Constitution, the State

Attorney's Office is charged with the investigation and prosecution of all criminal offenses (Connecticut Constitution Article 4, §27). While there is nothing in statute that requires a written report, due to the seriousness of the crimes committed on December 14, 2012, the State Attorney's Office published a report (Sedensky, 2013). The difference in the State Attorney report compared to the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission report is that the advisory commission provided recommendations while the State Attorney just related the detailed facts.

As detailed in the State Attorney report (Sedensky, 2013), the following safety measures or procedures were already in place at Sandy Hook Elementary: the front doors were locked and secured with an electronic locking mechanism; a call box was outside the front door including a buzzer system and video camera; the office staff could view the live video and unlock the front door with a button; the office staff went into crisis mode by hiding; the school was notified over the intercom of the intruder; 911 was called; in two separate classrooms students and teachers retreated to a bathroom and locked the door; other classrooms close to the shootings remained silent and hid; students in classrooms farther away were able to escape the building; and one staff member stayed on the phone in the hallway with 911 while directing staff to safety (Sedensky, 2013; Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, 2015).

Police response time was less than six minutes from the first phone call placed to the time the first police officers entered the building (Connecticut Police Chief Association, 2013). Within those six minutes, the shooter had already taken his life upon their entrance, along with 27 others. The only part of the investigation that led to the

conclusion that more lives could have been saved reported that the two classrooms entered by the shooter were both unlocked and required no forced entry. Both doors had to be locked with a key from the hallway (Sedensky, 2013). This knowledge begs the question: Would the loss of life have been so high if the doors were locked prior to the shooter entering the building?

In summation, the Sandy Hook reports from the State Attorney General's Office of Connecticut and the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission show proof of many safety procedures in place; yet, there was still a significant loss of life. This study examines, through interviews of area superintendents, a more detailed look at school preparedness related to active shooters and safety plans.

### **Policy**

Although there are no federal laws requiring schools to have EOPs, the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act, as amended by No Child Left Behind (NCLB), directs that schools must have a plan promoting school safety (United States Code 20 §7161:3:B, 2007). Additionally, the State of Texas has put forth a policy to address safety in Texas schools. The TEC requires school districts to address mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery through adoption and implementation of a multihazard EOP as defined by the Governor's Office of Homeland Security (TEC §§ 37.108).

Districts are tasked with providing training to address emergency situations. Conducting security audits and holding safety drills are also expected, as is cooperative work with local emergency management agencies, law enforcement, and fire

departments. Other requirements of this mandated policy require districts to establish a committee to address school safety and security (TEC §§ 37.109), and a security audit of the district's facilities must be completed every three years, with the results of the audit reported to the district school board and to the Texas School Safety Center. While the actual plan must remain confidential in order to keep the district secure, a school district must provide written documentation verifying the following: the district has an appropriate EOP that has been reviewed in the last 12 months; district employees have received training in responding to emergencies; the district conducts school drills and has completed a safety and security audit; and the district has established a visitor policy governing building access, among other things (TEC §§ 37.108). Using information from the TEC, Texas school boards "adopt policies that inform district actions" (Texas Association of School Board Policy, 2015).

### **Funding**

TEC policy is considered a mandate according to McDonnell and Elmore (1987). In order to address the assurances of safety in schools, the rules are governed by the state. Mandates require compliance and enforcement with the rules set forth (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). Cost factors of TEC §§ 37 include salary increases due to increased workloads or hiring of personnel, cost for employee training, and cost for appropriate equipment or services. Because these costs are considered compliance costs, school districts are held accountable (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). Federal grants provide funding for some security measures, but grant money for the Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools program was cut by 33% between 1999 and 2008. Further

cuts came from the United States Department of Justice, which has placed about 6,300 police officers in public schools since Columbine. This program was discontinued in 2005, according to Ray, a spokesman for the department (CNN, 2009). One concern with safety preparedness costs falling to the school district is the fact that mandates are required regardless of a district's financial abilities. Varied results will exist, with some districts providing the minimum safety measures to comply and others providing a more comprehensive plan. Ensuring compliance from all districts requires that the policy mandate be put into effect (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987).

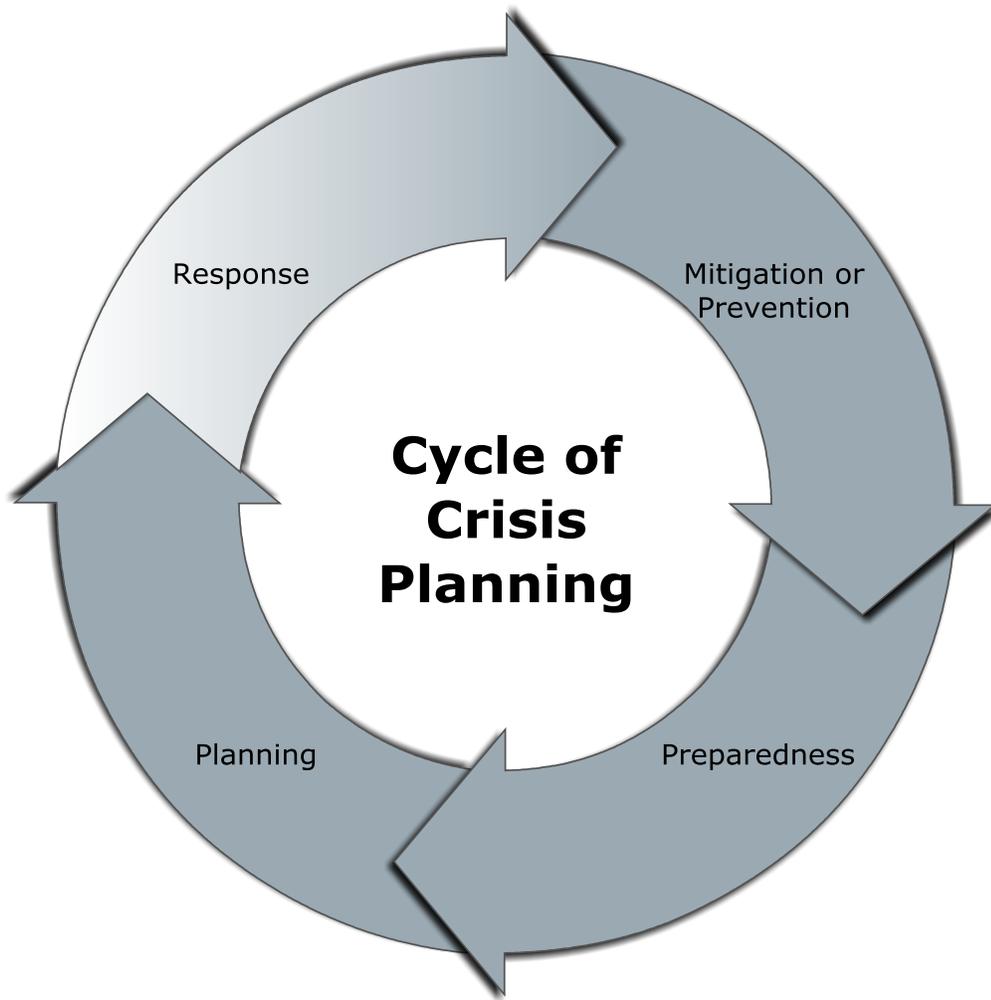
Even as this policy is mandated, school districts have the opportunity to address public concerns surrounding safety. Publicizing to the community the requirement of a safety plan for each school, upgrading existing security measures, and completing drills with students and staff provide high visibility, yet low controversy for the district (Hess, 1999). Controversy remains low because all stakeholders want to keep students safe at school. The Texas Education Agency mandates requiring safety measures in place, a safety plan, and training staff and students benefit everyone by providing a safe school environment.

### **Crisis Preparedness/Management**

The actual practice of the policy put in place is revealed when schools are evaluated after a crisis situation. McLaughlin (1991) stated that the implementation stage of a policy is where success lies. It is the people who interpret and implement the policy who make the difference in a crisis situation. In 1991, Gaustad published a report titled *Schools Respond to Gangs and Violence*, in which she wrote, "Every school and district

should prepare for the possibility of a crisis. Not only will a plan help a school survive a crisis, but the very existence of a plan helps to protect the school from legal liability” (p. 36).

Through extensive interviews and reviews of crisis situations, the *Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities* was created by the United States Department of Education (2007). The research revealed four phases of crisis planning called the Cycle of Crisis Planning (see Figure 1). The four phases consist of mitigation or prevention, which addresses steps for schools to reduce or eliminate risk; preparedness, the process of planning for a crisis; response, the steps to take during the actual crisis; and recovery, the steps to take after the crisis is over (US Department of Education, 2007). These steps for creating a high-quality EOP were provided to school districts by the White House in June 2013 (Department of Education, 2013) in the *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans (School Guide)*, the first joint product of the United States Department of Education and Department of Justice led by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Homeland Security led by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and Health and Human Services (Department of Education, 2013).



*Figure 1.* Cycle of Crisis Planning. Adapted from United States Department of Education (2007).

Using the United States Department of Education (2007) Cycle of Crisis Planning, many studies and/or reports have pointed to a lack of preparation and readiness in addressing active shooters in schools. Graham et al. (2006) reported a lack of crisis preparedness for incidents involving mass casualties, even seven years after the Columbine shooting in Colorado. Subsequent studies have cited problems with school

safety, lack of preparation, and overall management of a crisis for specific districts including Los Angeles County (Kano et al., 2007), Massachusetts (Goldman, 2008), and Idaho (Safe and secure schools assessment, 2008).

After the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) shooting that killed 32 and injured 13 on April 16, 2007, a state review panel found the administration of Virginia Tech and the campus police force at fault in several areas of crisis management (Report of the review panel, 2007). Other problems cited included a study by the United States Government Accountability Office, which reported problems nationwide in the areas of lack of training, equipment, and preparedness in crisis situations (Ashby, 2007). After the release of this report, according to Thompson (2007), Congressional criticism of Homeland Security also ensued in the area of federal emergency management efforts. The only report to dispute all the others was authored by three members of the President's cabinet stating that many of the nation's schools are prepared for a crisis (Leavitt et al., 2007).

After the Columbine shootings, some states started requiring schools to prepare for school shootings with lockdown drills, much in the way they prepare for fires or other disasters. According to a survey of school administrators funded by the American Association of School Administrators, these types of drills are now practiced routinely in nearly three-quarters of schools (Associated Press, 2005). A 2007 report from the National Center for Education Statistics and the Bureau of Justice Statistics showed that the number of in-school homicides dropped from 33 in the 1998-1999 school year to 13

in the 1999-2000 year, the year immediately following the Columbine shootings (Dinkes et al., 2009).

While the tragedy at Columbine brought awareness to the issue of school safety, many experts believe that immediate attention has begun to wane in the last few years. In 2007, a hearing was held by the United States House Committee on Education and Labor. The topic was *NCLB: Preventing Dropouts and Enhancing School Safety*. Kenneth S. Trump, President and CEO of Nation School Safety and Security Services, Inc., testified at the hearing:

Parents and educators are increasingly demanding that we not only do more, but do better, in improving safety in our educational climate. While many improvements in school safety, security, and emergency planning have been made in schools post-Columbine, the progress we saw in the months and years after that tragedy has been stalled and is slipping backwards in many school communities. (p. 3)

Trump (2007) stressed that Congress needed to address three areas through new legislation: create oversight of school safety programming; restore previously cut funding and expand that funding for prevention, security, police, and emergency preparedness; and improve school crime reporting in order to have evidence-based data. The key is that schools must plan, prepare, and practice (Trump & Lavarello, 2000-2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

## **School Reactions**

Once an incident such as Columbine or Sandy Hook occurs, in which the lives of children are lost, schools immediately begin to increase school safety such as more security officers, metal detectors, cameras, and crisis protocol. According to Hawkins et al. (1998), our society is quick to jump to solutions. They believe that instead of adding more security measures, effective schools prevent violence through prosocial, cooperative behavior and a culture of learning (Hawkins et al., 1998). Creation of new policies is often a “kneejerk” reaction and is not evidence-based to understand the overall effectiveness of school preparedness (CNN, 2009; Allen et al., 2008).

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten estimated that about 90% of districts have tightened security since the Sandy Hook shootings. Many schools now have updated school safety plans; more metal detectors, surveillance cameras, and fences; and ID badges and dress code requirements (Elkland et al., 2017; USA Today, 2013; Associated Press, 2014). Another push has been to hire more armed security personnel to protect staff and students. Mo Canady, Executive Director of the National Association of School Resource Officers, estimated a current count of about 10,000 SROs in the United States.

The summer after Sandy Hook, the National Association of School Resource Officers trained more than 2,000 law officers for schools, more than three times the 600 who were trained the previous year. Another reaction to the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School is that many states or local governments approved the arming of school personnel to increase campus security (USA Today, 2013). At least 33 states took

this approach, introducing 80 bills in 2013 that would arm school teachers or staff. Bills authorizing the carrying of guns passed in eight states: Alabama, Arkansas, Kansas, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Texas (Zadrozny, 2013). The difference at Sandy Hook that caused this reaction of arming staff was the age of children: previous shootings had happened at older levels, but this one proved that even the smallest children, those in elementary schools, are not safe; the realization was that every school is vulnerable, according Curtis Lavarello, Executive Director of the School Safety Advocacy Council (USA Today, 2013).

### **Urbanicity**

Urbanicity has been used as a reason for violence in schools: shootings, drugs, fights and other criminal behaviors. This perception has proved false with the two mass school shootings at Columbine High School and Sandy Hook Elementary School. Both schools are located in “good” neighborhoods, yet two of the deadliest crimes were committed on these campuses. Overall, school violence is on the rise in both rural and suburban areas (Furlong & Morrison, 2001; Rintoul, 1998; Bowman, 2002). Violence in schools appears to mirror violence in the surrounding neighborhoods and in society as a whole, according to Bill Modzeleski, Federal Department of Education (Associated Press 2006; Hawkins et al., 1998). As an example, schools in urban areas where violence and crime rates are higher have higher rates of violence in the schools (Lichtenstein et al., 1994; Hawkins et al., 1998; Everett & Price, 1997; DeVoe et al., 2003). The opposite is also true: schools located in rural and suburban areas have lower rates of violence as

do the surrounding neighborhoods. The perception by parents and the community is that schools in these areas are safe (Hawkins et al., 1998).

Not only is there a parent perception that rural and suburban areas are less likely to have violence in the schools, but teachers also believe that the schools in urban areas have much higher crime rates (Rintoul, 1998). This perception is based on preconceived notions that are false (Graveline, 2003). According to Furlong and Morrison (2001), rural areas report violence rates at 14.3% while urban areas have a 14.7% rate of violence. Turcotte (2006) found that while violence occurs in all types of schools, there are some differences in problems faced on campuses. Urban districts deal with more high-crime issues in surrounding neighborhoods, with students lacking in social development and a diverse population that is often poor. Rural or suburban schools, on the other hand, have issues more related to a lack of quality healthcare, substance abuse, and parents dealing with high unemployment rates (Turcotte, 2006). In a study by Siaoosi (2006), it was found that the areas of commonality between urban and other districts in relation to high numbers of violent incidents are schools with large numbers of students receiving special education services and large numbers of students on the federal free/reduced lunch program.

Besides the actual neighborhoods, demographics also come into play, according to a study by the National Center for Education Statistics. Because the crime rate is higher in urban areas where there is a higher population and typically less affluent and more minority students, it was found that “Black students were more likely to report

having experienced any form of victimization than were White or Hispanic students” (DeVoe et al., 2003).

At one time, heightened security in schools only occurred in urban school districts, but in the late 1990s and early 2000s, security in all schools began to increase (Addington, 2009). According to Addington (2009), in a span of four years (1999 to 2003), security personnel in schools increased from 59 to 74%, security camera use increased from 39 to 58%, and locked school doors increased from 39 to 53%. While security is on the rise at schools, there is little research addressing the differences in campuses that have high security versus those with lower security. Nickerson and Spears (2007) researched the characteristics of schools that use authoritarian behavior management as opposed to educational/therapeutic behavior management. They found that the use of security personnel and metal detectors are authoritarian practices used primarily in large schools with a higher percentage of students receiving free/reduced lunch (Nickerson & Spears, 2007). Neither urbanicity nor the level of neighborhood crime related to the level of security was addressed in their research. Violence in schools has been a concern in the past, but the types of crimes are becoming more severe, prompting a White House conference in 2006 to discuss the increasing number of violent incidents occurring in public schools. This conference produced a preparedness guide to help schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), realizing that regardless of the location or size of a school, all schools need to be prepared for a crisis situation.

## Perceptions of Safety

In a survey conducted after the Columbine shooting, over half of the parents in the study surveyed feared for their child's safety at school (Carroll, 2007). According to Addington (2009), increasing school security measures after Columbine was a large-scale effort to reassure parents of their children's safety at school.

While there is limited research on the perception of teachers, the existing research tends to be more directed on training. The National School Safety and Security Services organization trains schools on how to handle acts of violence using assessments of school security, preparedness, and proactive safety (National School Safety and Security Services, 2005). Much research addresses the administrator role in a crisis situation; however, within the code of ethics for educators it is stated that an educator will make a constructive effort to protect the student from conditions detrimental to learning, health, or safety (Association of American Educators, 2014).

Along with the educator's code of ethics, administrators also have a moral, ethical, and legal responsibility to do their best to protect students and staff. A survey of school administrators showed that administrators believe increased security measures are effective in increasing student safety, the most common security measures being cameras, metal detectors, and security personnel (Garcia, 2003). While administrators and even parents are reassured regarding safety, the relationship between increasing security and student perceptions is different. Research suggests that student fears are heightened due to increased security. Two empirical studies address this issue. Schreck and Miller (2003) completed an analysis of the cross-sectional *National Household*

*Education Survey: School Safety and Discipline* report. Part of their findings showed that students are more afraid of metal detectors, causing worry regarding being a victim of assault, and that increased security personnel and locked doors cause worry about robbery, theft, and assault (Schreck & Miller, 2003). As the study indicated, all the effects of increased security hold that when statistically controlling for student demographics, urbanicity, and crime on campus, students have a fear of victimization (Schreck & Miller, 2003). The second study conducted by Bachman et al. (2010) was based on their investigation of the *School Crime Supplement of the National Crime Victimization Survey*. In this study, findings showed that metal detectors in schools are significantly related to increased fear in students. While most research does not distinguish among races in regard to fear of students, within this study, the use of security personnel in the school increased fear for white students but not for African-American students (Bachman et al., 2010).

Hyman and Snook (2000) supported the negative relationship between school security and student perceptions of safety. Practices such as unannounced locker searches, daily metal detector screenings, the use of police officers in schools, and the overall increased use of prison-like security measures in schools cause students to question the safety of their school (Hyman & Snook, 2000; Brooks et al., 2000; Bracy, 2011). Overall research, in both theoretical and qualitative studies, supports the conclusion that student perception of safety in their schools decreases as security measures increase.

## **Security Measures**

As school security is designed to reduce violence in schools, research offers the idea that increased security measures may have the opposite effect. Invading student privacy through strip searches, random locker searches, and consequences that are rooted in the policies of zero tolerance cause students to lose faith in school authority, to have feelings of anger, and potentially to harbor a desire for revenge (Hyman & Perone, 1998).

A number of studies have been conducted looking at just one particular security measure in relation to students, but few assess the effects of the overall security measures in place. May et al. (2004) found that according to campus administrators, SROs have a positive influence on their schools through reducing altercations, drugs, and theft. McDevitt and Paniello (2005) also had positive results regarding SROs on campus from the view of the students, who reported favorable impressions of their school SRO. Reviewing seven studies on the use of metal detectors in schools, Hankin et al. (2011) found that the use of metal detectors to reduce violence shows limited effectiveness. Overall, their review showed one study with a 6% decrease in students carrying weapons, but no decrease in fighting. The other six studies showed no decrease in violent behaviors or weapons (Hankin et al., 2011). An ethnographic study of two high schools regarding overall security conducted by Bracy (2011) showed that students react more negatively to increased security measures.

Security measures such as security cameras, security personnel, locked doors, locker searches, and metal detectors actually perpetuate or increase school crime (Mayer

& Leone, 1999; Nickerson & Martens, 2008). In an effort to keep students safe, schools create a locked-down, jail-like atmosphere, which may result in an undesired effect.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Baumgartner and Jones (1993), through an analysis of policymaking cases, found that (1) policymaking, depending on public agenda, can become stagnate or make great strides; (2) punctuated equilibrium is dictated by political institutions; and (3) policy changes play a critical role in organizational changes. Sabatier (2007b) believed that while PET began with a concentration on national policy, it is used more frequently in relation to public policy. “This theory focuses on the interaction of political institutions, interest mobilizations, and boundedly rational decisionmaking” to affect policy (True et al., 2007, p. 158). In other words, according to Speth (2004), punctuated equilibrium through the analysis of information can lead to policy change or new policies.

Chubb and Moe (1990) believed that a school organization’s capacity to change is limited by its’ bureaucratic ways. In their view, bureaucratization represents the addition of layers of management to schools. These new layers may include specialized directors or security personnel for a district. Each of these new layers adds a person who can stop change or a person who can slow down change. This results in school districts that are unable to respond to new challenges. As each policy works its way through these layers, the result is often an organization that is slow to respond. Organizations are slower to make the big changes and instead stick to incremental decisions until the pressure to change becomes more critical to them. The key to this theoretical perspective is to analyze the relationship between organizational characteristics and separate

incremental from nonincremental decision processes (Robinson, 2004). In essence, PET helps create a balance between information coming in and the policies or procedures in a school system.

### **Conclusion**

Through this literature review, the topics of policy, funding, crisis preparedness, crisis management, school reactions, urbanicity, perceptions of safety, security measures, and theoretical framework are discussed to provide a basis for the study. The research shows that violent crime in schools, while often underreported, are occurring (Hurst, 2005; Hevesi, 2006; Bucher & Manning, 2005). All schools, no matter the size, location, or ethnic makeup, need to have an EOP in place. No longer can the plan just address fire safety evacuation, but all areas of violence that could occur, while paying attention to the Cycle of Crisis Planning through mitigation or prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this case study is to examine the perspective of school districts in Texas in regard to crisis preparation. This study is based on qualitative data collected through interviews of four school district superintendents in the state of Texas.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (1998), “there is no standard format for reporting case study research” (p.193). While there is no standard, this study’s overall structure is based on a combination of structures. Stake (2006) believed that using vignettes to draw the reader into the research provides a stronger description. Using this structure, themes, assertions, and interpretations are discovered. Similarly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) believed in the stronger description of the problem while making sure the study focuses on elements studied and lessons learned. Finally, this study uses Yin’s (2003) single-case holistic design to focus on crisis preparedness within schools while using Merriam’s and Tisdell’s (1998) idea of seeking to understand a process.

When completing qualitative research, validity of the research is crucial. Lincoln and Guba (1985) adhered to the idea of member checking as “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314) in a study. These member checks consist of taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study to confirm the credibility of the information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which, in the case of this research, allowed the interviewee to have an opportunity to correct errors or misinterpretations from the transcribed interview data.

Triangulation of data is another element of validity in qualitative research; it is a systematic process of sorting data to find common themes or categories. According to Cresswell and Miller (2009), data collected through observations, interviews, and documents allow the researcher to categorize. Validity comes into play as the researcher relies on multiple forms of data instead of one form. Therefore, this qualitative study used information gathered from area superintendents such as observations, interviews, and documents to focus on crisis preparedness and gauge a better understanding of the overall process and evaluation.

### **Background**

The United States Congress created a mandated policy to “collect, collate, analyze and report full and complete statistics on the condition of education in the United States; conduct and publish reports and specialized analyses of the meaning and significance of such statistics; assist state and local education agencies in improving their statistical systems; and review and report on education activities in foreign countries” (Tonsager et al., 2010, p. ii). Taking this to the state level, the TEC requires districts to complete audits once every three years. The process developed was a district self-assessment to analyze the safety and security of each district in the state of Texas.

The aftermath of several school shootings since 1999 had school safety gaining national attention. While data on crime and safety had been collected for many years prior, the need to implement a tool to monitor the current safety and security of schools while providing feedback for improvement became an urgent necessity. The Texas School Safety Center was authorized by the 77<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature in 2001 to serve as a

central location for the dissemination of information, focusing on the safety and security of healthy learning environments, including research, training, and technical assistance to public schools throughout the state. While the information gained from the Texas School Safety Center is important for school districts, it is very technical in nature and does not give the human side of crisis preparedness. Therefore, this study gathered qualitative information to allow superintendents the opportunity for a narrative approach.

### **Research Design**

Understanding that there are varying paradigms that allow researchers to gain information in different ways, the qualitative phase of this study is based on the Positivist approach, specifically the view of epistemology in relation to Positivism, which states that there is one and only one truth or probability of truth and holds the ontological understanding that reality is independent of experience. Positivist theories of truth believe that truth is knowable and universal throughout (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). The interview data collected are based on a representative sampling of public schools in Texas; these results could apply to a larger population in public schools across the state. Within the Positivist theory, since truth is universal, the representative sample provides an indication on how other schools in similar situations would respond to the same interview (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). Therefore, researching by examining the relationship among the schools allows for a qualitative case study based on the Positivist epistemological and ontological foundation.

Often, evaluation research is used to make judgments about the worth of educational programs, and school administrators are able to use the information

collected to make decisions that impact schools. According to Cohen et al. (2007), evaluation research is parochial since it focuses on a single entity, but it does examine multiple aspects of what is being studied—in this instance, school crisis preparedness. To address the parochialism, according to Joyner et al. (2013), an evaluation study needs to accomplish one or more of the following:

Provides an early test of a new approach or model of evaluation, develops an instrument that can be used in other studies, evaluates a program that is widely used but has little systematic evaluation or documents how the evaluation results were used by groups of stakeholders. (p. 121)

This study addresses Joyner’s (2013) evaluation study guideline of evaluating a program that is widely used, but has little systematic evaluation, specifically evaluating school crisis preparedness.

### **Data Collection**

In order to look at multiple contributors of the crisis preparedness of a school district, data were collected from local and state policy, financial records, documents pertaining to the EOP, and answers to interview questions. The documents related to each school district’s financials and policies were collected from the school districts. The EOP was provided by each superintendent with the understanding that the documents would not be shared with the public due to confidentiality.

The interview questions were created for four school district superintendents in Texas to gain a better understanding of the crisis preparedness within each district, as well as provide an evaluative component (see Appendix A) specifically addressing the

four components of crisis planning (see Figure 1). Open-ended questions allowed the interviewee to expand the answers related to funding, policies, training, and safety measures in order to explain how the topics apply to each specific school district.

### **Participants**

Texas school districts are divided into 20 regional service centers. Region XIII comprises 60 school districts located over 16 counties. The four school districts in the study are located within the same Central Texas region but in different counties. District A is located in Williamson County, District B is located in Lee County, District C is located in Burnet County, and District D is located in Bastrop County. Each school district is located within 25 to 55 miles from the same major metropolis.

District size in Texas is classified as 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A, 5A, or 6A, with the study districts falling at 2A, 3A, 4A, and 5A. This University Interscholastic League (UIL) classification is based on the number of students at the high school and is reclassified every two years. A 6A district has each high school at or above 2,100 students, 5A has the high school population between 1,060 and 2,099, 4A high school population is between 465 and 1,059, 3A high school population is between 220 and 464, 2A high school population is between 105 and 219, and 1A has a high school population of 104.9 and below. These numbers, for classification purposes, change every two years. Financially, the study districts are not the same except in the financial classification of the state. School districts in Texas are categorized as either Chapter 41 or Chapter 42. The Texas Education Agency labels any district exceeding the Tier 2 \$319,500 equalized wealth level as Chapter 41. A district with a property wealth sufficiently below the

equalized wealth level is considered a Chapter 42 district (Texas Education Code, 2015).

All districts in the scope of this study are currently under the Chapter 42 designation.

Table 1 shows a comparison of the four districts in the study. Areas of comparison include UIL classification, number of students per district, ethnicity breakdown of each district, and the socioeconomics of each district.

Table 1

*District Comparison*

District	UIL	Students	Ethnicity			Eco Dis
			AA	H	W	
A	2A	420	2.40%	41.20%	54.30%	57.50%
B	3A	944	8.70%	11.90%	75.60%	41.50%
C	4A	3218	1.30%	29.20%	66.60%	56.50%
D	5A	4178	12.80%	56.80%	27.50%	75.70%

The superintendents completing the interview range from a first-year superintendent to one with six years' experience. District A's superintendent, while a small district administrator, stays very involved with the state legislature, is the Region XIII Texas Association of School Administrators Legislative Representative, and has testified multiple times during legislative sessions. He is the most experienced in the superintendent role of the others in this cohort, currently working on his doctorate and having been published in education journals. District B's superintendent is finishing his first year in a 3A district. His career has been at the middle and high school levels, with

his previous position being that of a 4A high school principal. Superintendent B has his doctorate and is very involved in the Texas Association of School Administrators, as well as community organizations. Superintendent C has the most administrative experience. He has been at the administration level in two large school districts, with a previous position of deputy superintendent and four years as superintendent. He is a mentor superintendent for Texas Association of School Boards, he is very involved in community organizations, and his district was recognized as an HEB Excellence in Education district under his leadership. The final superintendent from District D has her doctorate. She has been in her position for five years. She too is heavily involved with the legislature in order to advocate for Texas schools. As with all the other superintendents, she is highly involved in the community.

### **Procedures**

The superintendent interview comprised 10 open-ended questions (see Appendix A). The questions asked of the superintendents were based on the research questions regarding crisis plans and the stages of crisis planning from the United States Department of Education (2006). These interview questions were created to gain a deeper understanding of how a school district would respond to a crisis and how it would respond after a crisis.

The questions addressed planning for both instructional and noninstructional facilities, the financial aspect in crisis funding, the four phases of emergency management in relation to a multihazard EOP, the training of emergency plans, and the community or organizations involved in the planning.

Initially, permission was sought to include the school district in the research through an email to each district superintendent. A follow-up phone call explained the research project and gave background information. Each school district superintendent then sent a letter on district letterhead to inform the researcher of the intent of the school district to participate. Consent for the individual superintendent to participate was gained through a one-on-one conversation prior to the interview, with each superintendent signing a consent document.

One week before the interviews, an email was sent including the interview questions in order to allow superintendents the opportunity to prepare. The interviews were conducted during the month of October 2016, with follow-up phone calls two to three weeks later to clarify information as needed. Interviews were conducted in person at the participants' offices, with the conversations being digitally recorded for future reference. Notes were also taken during the process to provide information for follow-up questioning as needed.

In addition to conducting the interviews, the researcher analyzed each district's crisis plan in order to assess the relevance in relation to the four stages of crisis planning. During the interviews, as information from the superintendents applied to the EOP, it was noted by the researcher for further analysis. These plans are not allowed to be published due to the security risk it would pose for the district.

Preparation occurring prior to the interviews included an analysis of the financial records and policy, both state and local. Going into the interview with the financial

information and the policies in place for each district again allowed the researcher to make notes as the interviews transpired to address in the later analysis.

Once the interviews were complete, all digital data were transcribed by the researcher using Dragon software and were sent to the individual participant for review. Participants were asked to correct any errors, add any clarifying information, and strike through anything they did not want published due to security concerns.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Recognizing the importance for the researcher in this exploratory study to have an understanding of school district policy, structures of the Texas public school systems, and situational factors of school districts, my current role as Superintendent of Schools affords me a solid knowledge base. There is acknowledgment that my current role may also provide a bias in how the researcher perceived an answer to a question, given the fact that my current day-to-day operations mirror those of the superintendents interviewed.

For the purpose of this study, conducting a case study allowed the researcher to focus on problems that school districts face in providing secure environments for staff and students. While a case study is a useful tool in conducting research in the education field, its key is the basis of building a relationship between the researcher and the interviewee (Shank, 2002; Creswell, 1998). At the time of study, the four superintendents interviewed were in the same education service center region as the researcher, providing the opportunity for combined meetings, casual conversations, and joint trainings. With this familiarity, the interviews transformed into a conversation that

put the superintendents at ease, thus allowing true reactions to be observed and included within the data analysis. Along these same lines, the familiarity opened the opportunity for a more frank discussion, as they each realized the commonality in dealing with the same type of concerns in emergency planning.

Measures were taken to safeguard confidentiality of the districts according to TEC 37.108 (c-1), which states that safety and security audit information is not subject to disclosure. However, TEC 37.108 (c-2) states that certain exceptions regarding disclosure are permitted (TEC §§ 37.108). In order to apply the TEC to this study, portions of the EOPs are discussed within Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, but the entirety of the EOP is not included in the Appendices.

### **Data Analysis**

This qualitative study used inductive reasoning processes to interpret and code the meanings from data. Inductive reasoning is referred to as a “bottom-up” approach, as observations are used to create the themes or commonalities of the data (Holloway, 1997). Throughout this study, the researcher spent time learning as much as possible about the superintendents, the school districts, policy, the financial aspects of each district, and the EOPs. The triangulation of the verbal, written, and observed data allowed the researcher to delve into the comparison looking for differences and commonalities of the districts. Each set of data for the district was compared to the other districts looking for common patterns and themes. This constant comparative analysis strategy was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Comparative analysis in the case of this research involved taking one piece of data, such as an open-ended answer to an

interview question, and comparing it to the same question answered by a different superintendent.

With all of the information collected, the data were categorized within the following headings: Mitigation or Prevention, Preparedness, Planning, and Response. Each participant was assigned a different-color index card highlighting the main ideas. This research utilized Creswell's (2007) method of coding as the basis for research. In order to assist in the coding, QDA Miner software was also used. Some themes were preconfigured using the four stages of preparedness, while other themes materialized once the information was obtained. The researcher then categorized the schools according to the collaborative preparedness efforts of each school district and the EOP of the district. Triangulating these data with financial records and policies related to crisis preparedness gave the researcher a more detailed understanding of the school districts in the study while evaluating the districts in relation to the four stages of crisis planning.

### **Assumptions**

1. Throughout the interview process, the participants had firsthand knowledge of the scope of the study and were able to answer the questions asked.
2. The superintendents interviewed answered the questions honestly, as the crisis plans are used by school districts to improve their safety and security from year to year.
3. The data were categorized and interpreted to reflect the true intent of the participants' answers.

4. The references to crisis preparedness, specifically mitigation, preparation, planning, and recovery, for all participants had the same meaning.
5. The design used in this research study was appropriate.

### **Limitations**

1. The study was limited to four school superintendents in one region of Texas.
2. The study was limited by the funding of their school districts from the State of Texas; we have to assume that funding is the same for all.
3. This study was limited by each school district's board of trustee's specific agenda for the spending of funds.
4. This research was limited to the information gathered from the interview questions and school district documentation.
5. This research was limited by the varying size of the school districts and the location in relation to first responders.
6. This research was limited by the perceptions of campus safety representing a snapshot at a specific point in time. A campus can change throughout the year in areas such as staffing, substitutes, construction, or the number of people on campus.
7. This research was limited by the relationship the researcher had with the superintendent from District B and District C. District B superintendent was a member of the same graduate cohort, and District C was a supervisor and superintendent mentor for the researcher.

## **Conclusion**

In order to collect information to have a positive impact on school crisis preparedness, this study was completed to provide school districts more detailed information on how to provide the safest environment before, during, and after any crisis situation. Due to the researcher's background knowledge of the superintendent position, as well as the collection of data prior to the interviews, a more in-depth understanding of the research occurred for the study. School district superintendents have a heavy burden placed on them, as they are tasked with the acts of preventing crisis, preparing for crisis whether man-made or naturally caused, planning and responding to crisis, and then recovering from crisis.

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

#### **Overview**

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of four Texas school districts in regard to crisis planning. The reporting of information from interviews, financial records, policy, and district EOP is organized by each school district. The interviews and EOP are also categorized by each research question, which are related to the four stages of crisis planning. Financial records for the past three years and the school district EOP were inspected for each district. Also analyzed were the policies for each district in regard to safety. After the inspection of the documents, the superintendent of schools was interviewed to discuss processes and procedures as they relate to the four areas of crisis planning: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

District C's superintendent included his Emergency Management Coordinator in the interview to address anything he left out. The superintendent of schools for District D requested that her Director of Purchasing and Organizational Planning email notes to her regarding the research questions in an effort to address all areas. These two districts are the only two with a dedicated person for safety and security of the district.

### **District/City Information**

The actual interview of each superintendent occurred in their respective districts. The superintendent of District A, which is a 2A district and the smallest district in this study, has an office located in the combined high school/middle school building. The drive to this district is approximately 35 miles to the northwest from the researcher's home. The town comprises a main street with a few local businesses. One of the homes in this city was the location for filming *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Other tourist attractions include a lake known for great fishing and a restaurant/dance hall frequented by people from the larger surrounding cities.

All district buildings including the football field, bus barn, and maintenance area are located on the same adjoining property. The perception of the researcher is that the compactness of the district allows for quick response and help from all staff. In an evacuation scenario, buses could be available to evacuate students extremely quickly. Should a problem occur at the elementary school, the administrative staff of the middle school or high school are within 50 yards, as the buildings are connected by a walkway.

District B, the 3A school district, is located 20 miles to the south of the researcher's home. Driving through this town to reach the administration building, the researcher noted that while it has more businesses than District A, the majority are locally owned (there is only one chain gas station). Located in the city is the Pioneer Village Museum dating back to the 1850s, as well as a huge replica of the city in the 1940s located in one of the shops.

The school district has an administration building approximately 200 yards from the schools, which was the location of the interview. Three schools make up the district, and while all are in separate buildings, they are located on the same property attached to the sport fields and maintenance buildings. The researcher noticed that while the three schools are separated, they have common areas such as athletic fields, gyms, and a field house. In an emergency at one school, help from other schools could occur quickly due to the proximity. The openness of the land among the schools or buildings, however, could result in more serious concerns as students move freely between the schools.

The distance to District C, the 4A district, from the researcher's house is 79 miles to the west. Located in the Highland Lakes area, the city is often visited for its historic town square with shops and restaurants. Known for its musical light display at Christmas and its Bluebonnet Festival in the spring, this city appeals to families and tourists.

District C is unique in that it is a consolidated district. This district is consolidated with another small town located 10 miles to the east. One of the district's elementary schools is located in this smaller town. All other schools are located in the larger town: a high school, middle school, three elementary schools, and an alternative school. Other buildings in the school district include an administration building and professional development building, along with a maintenance building, bus barn, and sport fields. This district is spread out over the city more than the first two districts discussed. Driving through this town, the researcher noticed multiple chain restaurants, a large chain grocery store, and many other businesses, along with a hospital. The distances between schools and administration buildings would create a longer wait time

to get help from other schools should any incidents occur. Another issue noticed driving through the city is that delays of first responders are possible due to traffic on the major highway. The researcher conducted the interview for this district in the professional development building because the administration building was in the process of being remodeled. Along with the superintendent, the Emergency Management Coordinator of the district was present.

The final district is a 5A district, which is the largest of those researched. District D is located 41 miles southwest from the researcher. This city is located on a major highway, with the city limits connecting to a large metropolitan area. Many restaurants, both local and chain-owned, shopping areas, and entertainment make up this city. Known as the Sausage Capital of Texas, this city has two large barbecue restaurants that are well known throughout the state.

The school district has seven schools, an administration building, a sport complex, a maintenance building, and a bus barn. One difference in this district is that the district also houses a county juvenile boot camp for grades 7 to 12. The researcher noticed that the lack of proximity from one school to another, as well as the highly traveled highway through the city, could cause many concerns with wait time for a school in a crisis situation. This interview was completed in the administration building conference room with the superintendent and researcher. The superintendent did have notes provided by the Director of Purchasing and Organizational Planning.

## City Statistics

In order to compare the location of the four districts, Table 2 provides information related to each city. District C is highlighted to show the two cities that make up the consolidated district. Looking specifically at a comparison of school population, city population, and school district square mileage, District D has a more dense population of students living inside the city limits, while Districts A and B have more students living outside the city limits. District C is the outlier due to the vast district boundary covering over 700 square miles. As the two districts were consolidated into one, both sets of boundaries were combined. Median income and poverty level remain fairly constant for all cities, and when comparing the poverty levels to the national average, which according to the United States Census Bureau is 13.5%, three of the cities have a higher poverty level and one is close to the national average (Proctor et al., 2016). Through a comparison of ethnic makeup, District D is the outlier. While Districts A, B, and C have closely related percentages, District D's relation of white to nonwhite is more evenly distributed. The proximity of this district to a large metropolitan area has forced many minority families to move due to a revitalization of the major city. Housing prices have pushed many families to the outlying smaller communities.

Table 2

*City Statistics*

District	School Population	City Population	District Size, sq. mi.	% White	% Nonwhite	Median Income	% Below Poverty Line
A	420	1,419	98	82%	18%	\$32,542	12%
B	944	1,282	291	80%	20%	\$32,083	15%
C	3,218	5,987	707	84%	16%	\$27,093	14%
		1,353		88%	12%	\$36,250	8%
D	4,178	8,135	165	57%	43%	\$38,750	16%

**Policy Review**

A review of policy for the four school districts allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of the legal requirements for the EOP. Two policies are required of school districts: CKC(LEGAL) and CK(LEGAL). Also noted was that all four districts have policy CKC(LOCAL). A legal policy provides statutory context through a combination of federal law, state law, and court decisions. A local policy is based on decisions made by the school board of the district.

Looking specifically at CK(LEGAL), this policy titled TEC37.109 (see Appendix D), the sections within this policy include safety and security committee, safety and security audit, disclosure, and agreements. The first section takes the overarching multihazard EOP and breaks it down to specific campuses by requiring each to have an EOP consistent with the district plan. Each of the four districts within this research project has both a district plan and campus-specific information.

The district must also submit an audit to the Texas School Safety Center every three years while also reviewing the reports submitted with district employees. As

discussed with the superintendents, this audit is purely based on the information provided from each school district. As there are no checks and balances of the information provided, there are concerns of honesty, true understanding of the questions asked, and detailed information, which could cause the school district to look bad to the public eye. Applying this to the current study, one of the assumptions for this study states the following: The superintendents interviewed answered the questions honestly, as the crisis plans are used by school districts to improve their safety and security from year to year. This assumption is also made for completion of audits.

Section two explains the audit process, which must occur TEC 37.108(c-1). In order to keep districts safe, documents presented for the audit are not subject to disclosure as described in the disclosure section. An example of the lack of disclosure would include the evacuation plan for a campus. Applied to this current study, should disclosure occur, an active shooter could gather information prior to an incident, thus causing more damage or fatalities by knowing where students and staff have relocated.

Finally, the section titled *Agreements* from TEC 37.2121 requires a district to provide information to the Texas School Safety Center if the district enters into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for mutual aid in an emergency situation. This part of the policy could address the concerns voiced regarding multijurisdiction, which one district discussed and is shown later in the analysis. In essence, a district located within two jurisdictions could create an MOU with the closest first responders to provide support for the entire district, thus decreasing the response time. CK(LEGAL) looks at the larger picture by reporting to a state agency and having legal agreements for possible

coordination of agencies, while CKC(LEGAL) applies to the inner workings of a school district in response to safety.

Analyzing CKC(LEGAL) (see Appendix B), titled *Safety Program/Risk Management*, an EOP has three headings: emergency operations plan, train derailment, and disclosure (Texas Association of School Boards, 2017).

The section titled *Emergency Operations Plan* addresses the rules of adopting and implementing a multihazard plan. Stated are the requirements for addressing mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery while also providing for district employee training, drills, measures to ensure coordination with first responders, and implementation of a safety and security audit.

The next section on train derailment is specific only to districts located within 1,000 yards of a railroad track. Should the district meet that criterion, a plan must be included in the multihazard EOP. All four districts meet the 1,000-yard requirement, yet train derailment is outside the scope of this research and was therefore not discussed during the interviews.

The final section in policy CKC(LEGAL) is disclosure. This section addresses Government Code Chapter 552 and has nine statements that a district must verify. All but two of these refer back to the EOP for the district. The two outliers are the safety audit and a visitor policy. Though listed in policy that a district must verify its audits, there is no agency in the state that monitors verification completion or even to what degree audits are completed. Again, the only information supplied is through the safety audit every three years, and that information is only as accurate as what the person

submitting it shares. The first verification is that a district not only has a plan, but that coordination exists with outside agencies such as law enforcement, health department, and fire department. Ensuring that the plan is a fluid document, the second verification states that the plan must be reviewed yearly. The four phases of emergency management must be included, which is verification three. Requirements for training district personnel, determining the types of training, and conducting emergency drills are addressed in the fourth and fifth verification. Verification six is specific to train derailment and ensuring that a district includes a plan within the multihazard plan. Seven and eight address school board involvement; the safety and security audit results are presented to the school board, and the district addresses recommendations by the school board for improvement to the plan. The final verification relates to having a visitor policy for access to buildings (Education Code 37.108(a), (c-2)-(d)).

Comparing policy CKC(LEGAL) to each school district, as seen in Table 3, show areas that have not been addressed in the multihazard EOP by district. Each X represents an included area, while a blank represents noninclusion.

Table 3

*Comparison of CKC(LEGAL)*

<b>District</b>	<b>Four Stages</b>	<b>Training</b>	<b>Drills</b>	<b>Coordination</b>	<b>Train Derailment</b>	<b>Board Presentation</b>	<b>Visitor Policy</b>
A		X	X				X
B		X	X				X
C	X	X	X	X		X	X
D		X	X	X		X	X

Through the comparison of school districts in Table 3, the two smaller school districts do not have all four stages of crisis planning included in their multihazard EOP. The area lacking is recovery; both touch on the idea, but not in a comprehensive way regarding reunification. In specific response to students, District A stated:

We have two places in town that we can take all of our students should we need to evacuate. They are close enough that it would not take very much to get back into the learning process. Our plan is that we have evacuation points in different areas but that's an area that I'd really like to improve on. (personal communication, October 19, 2016)

District B had a similar response: “Currently we don't have a place for reunification of students and parents” (personal communication, October 14, 2016). While the researcher did not give credit on Table 2 for this area, there is no requirement for how explicit the information should be in the area of recovery. Instead, the researcher used best practices for analysis based on the Department of Education’s Cycle of Crisis Planning (Department of Education, 2013).

Also lacking is the coordination with first responders and the inclusion of first responders in the planning, meetings, and drills for Districts A and B. According to the superintendent of District A while answering question four, “We currently don't share our multihazard plan with first responders or county in any way” (personal communication, October 19, 2016). District B’s superintendent answered the same question with, “They currently don’t have a role in creating the plan. This is an area that we plan on reviewing and including in our district plan” (personal communication,

October 14, 2016). Through the conversation with the superintendents in the two larger districts, the researcher understood coordination with first responders to occur through their designated personnel, causing the researcher to conclude that as a district becomes larger and can afford extra personnel, they have more opportunities for coordination with outside agencies.

The areas in policy that address training, drills, and procedures for visitors to the campuses/district show all four districts in compliance. Drills are conducted in each district, staff is trained, and each district has a visitor protocol in place for each campus or district building. Districts A and D required the researcher to show a driver's license prior to meeting with the superintendent of schools. In Districts B and C, the superintendent met the researcher at the door, not requiring the researcher to go through the visitor process.

There is no documentation that the two smaller districts, A and B, present the security and safety audit to their school boards. Searching each district's board book, which archives board meeting agendas, the researcher found that only two districts' board agendas included a presentation of the audit results. Presentation to the school board for District C occurred in November 2014, and District D presented to their board of trustees in September 2014. Both presentations were delivered by the designated personnel for each district. Since this is a three-year process, the next presentations would occur in the fall of 2017. Taking CKC(Legal), which is dictated by the state through the education code, and adding to the requirements allows districts to create a local policy without changing the legal policy.

While local policy is based on decisions by the local school board, these policies are vetted through the Texas Association of School Boards legal team, which explains why all three districts have the same CKC(LOCAL) policy in place (see Appendix C), which states, “The Superintendent shall ensure updating of the District’s Emergency Operations Plan and ongoing staff training” (Texas Association of School Boards, 2017). Through the interview process with each superintendent, it was revealed that each district does comply with this policy. This policy, while brief, allows the board of trustees for a school district to apply it to a superintendent’s evaluation under the area of district management, with the goal being that the superintendent demonstrates effective planning and management of the district administration, finances, operations, and personnel. Looking specifically at each district and whether the policy is followed, the researcher is confident that each superintendent is diligent in updating the plan and training the staff.

### **Themes**

After the interviews were completed, the data were transcribed by the researcher. In order to label, sort, compile, and organize the qualitative data, the program QDA Miner was used to assist in creating codes for the data. Originally, four codes were preassigned: mitigation, preparedness, planning, and response. These codes were chosen specifically because they identify the four stages of crisis planning. Continuing the data analysis revealed other topics. One such theme labeled *multijurisdiction* was only present in two districts and would be considered a high priority in providing support to campuses in crisis. Multijurisdiction refers to a district that is serviced by first

responders through more than one government agency. Examples include a school district that logistically is within two separate counties or towns or a district that has facilities inside and outside of a city, requiring responses from city and county. Two other two themes, one of financial concerns and one of providing information for reunification, were represented across all four districts.

During the interview process, participants discussed the initial planning of the EOP for their district. During that discussion, a concern for providing the newest and most up-to-date security measures is a reality in three of the districts due to lack of finances. Another acknowledged issue was dealing with multijurisdictional support from first responders. None of the participants discussed this as a concern; rather, it was mentioned in regard to response time. The superintendent's response from District D included, "EMT [emergency medical technician] has been a bigger issue for us because we cover multiple counties so we have Travis County and Bastrop County and the EMT services out of Bastrop County" (personal communication, October 24, 2016). Finally, the lack of a reunification plan was a concern in three of the four districts. Each of these codes is discussed in relation to the research questions.

Throughout the analysis, each of the four districts is referred to by a letter, with A being the smallest and D the largest in student population. Table 4 breaks down each district by the overall population of students, the percentage of low socioeconomic students in the district, and the amount of money set aside for security. This information was gathered through the Texas Education Agency's Texas Academic Performance

Report (TAPR). Each district in Texas receives this report each year with information regarding students, staff, financials, and academics.

Table 4

*District Information*

<b>District</b>	<b>Student Population</b>	<b>Professional Staff</b>	<b>Auxiliary Staff</b>	<b>Percent Eco Dis</b>	<b>Financial Investment</b>
A	405	43	22	57.50%	\$6,698
B	962	97	50	41.50%	\$25,600
C	3,132	266	170	56.50%	\$76,062
D	4,299	368	224	75.70%	\$282,097

Within Table 4, professional staff refers to teachers and administrators while auxiliary staff refers to teacher aides, office personnel, maintenance staff, custodial staff, and transportation staff. Districts A and B have an adult-student ratio of 1:6, while Districts C and D have a ratio of 1:7. Each of these districts receives federal Title I money due to the percentage of economically disadvantaged students, a practice often referred to as students receiving free or reduced lunches. The district financial investment in safety and security, according to the 2016 TAPR, shows District D spending \$65 per student, District C spending \$24 per student, District B spending \$26 per student, and District A spending \$16 per student. With District D so significantly different in comparison, the superintendent replied the following:

Security cameras have been the most costly security measures. After Sandy Hook we put in the vestibule for safety in three of our buildings because our schools did not have anything to secure the elementary schools and the high schools. The middle school already had it. We've also included card readers at the entrances of

our buildings for all of our staff to come in and out which has been very costly.  
(personal communication, October 24, 2016)

The four original codes of mitigation, preparedness, planning, and response, as well as the additional codes of multijurisdiction, financial constraints, and reunification will be discussed in relation to the research questions for this study.

### **Analysis of Research Questions**

#### **Question 1: What are the school district superintendent perceptions about their district's preparation for crisis? (Mitigation)**

Question one of the interview addressed mitigation, which refers to actions a district takes to reduce the loss of life and property. The superintendents were asked to discuss all those involved in the creation of the district multihazard EOP. Each district reported having a team that works together to create the plan. Comparing the four districts demonstrates that as a district gets larger, the size of the team also increases. While this is understandable as the larger districts have more schools, the glaring concern is that the two larger districts have personnel dedicated to the safety and security of the district while the two smaller districts must give the extra duties to a staff member who already has other responsibilities. District A reported a team of five, but the superintendent stated, “We are a very small district. In a very small district we wear a lot of different hats” (personal communication, October 19, 2016). In other words, with such a small team, each person takes on multiple positions in case someone were out of the district at the time of a crisis. District B reported a team of eight, with the technology director taking the lead. “Our technology director has this as his primary responsibility.

He facilitates the plan, the creation of the plan and helps to maintain it” (personal communication, October 14, 2016). District C reported a team of 11, which includes the Emergency Management Coordinator. While the superintendent is involved in the overall process, many duties that fall to a superintendent in a smaller district are taken on by the coordinator. According to the superintendent of District C:

So as superintendent I oversee the (EOP). The emergency coordinator’s role compiles and manages the EOP. Day-to-day operations fall to the emergency coordinator. That includes training and implementation of the plan at the different campuses and facilities. (personal communication, October 20, 2016)

District D reported a team of 14, which includes the Director of Purchasing and Organizational Planning. Both Districts C and D discussed that they brought in local first responders to view the plan and offer suggestions while providing input for best practices according to their specific areas. According to the superintendent of District C, “We have a framework and then we bring them in and coordinate and facilitate together with those discussions over the plan. Each participant then provides input as to best practices or other recommendations” (personal communication, October 20, 2016).

As larger districts ensure that the mitigation level is at its highest, smaller, rural districts struggle through the planning process. Without the same personnel as larger districts, the majority of the work falls to the superintendent or an employee hired for another position who takes on safety and security as well.

**Question 2: What are the school district superintendent perceptions regarding their school district's efforts and measures to reduce or eliminate risk to life and property? (Preparedness)**

In order to gauge the preparedness of each school district, questions two and three were asked of the superintendents. One question was to find out who and if anyone else besides campus personnel is trained and the type of training received. The next question was multifaceted, looking specifically at active shooter/lockdown drills, the district monitoring of drills, and whether or not first responders are included in the drills.

Looking first at training, Districts A and B do not train any others besides school personnel. District A's superintendent replied to this question:

As far as site training we do with them—that is something we have not done that I think is something to look at in the future in our county as we begin to have a higher level of risk or safety than we've previously had. (personal communication, October 19, 2016)

Outside of training personnel, Districts C and D train transportation, maintenance, and food service workers. District C is the only district that provides training for substitute teachers. The superintendent of District C explained as follows:

Primarily we trained at the beginning of the year campus district staff but our coordinator meets with our substitutes multiple times during the year. That was something that we had found after our first incident, we created a module especially for substitutes. (personal communication, October 20, 2016)

The actual training for all school districts occurs during back-to-school activities, with the exception of the additional training for substitute teachers a few times during the year. Looking outside the district, the two larger districts also share the training with first responders. These answers again relate back to the lack of dedicated safety personnel. The two districts that train beyond the school are the two with safety coordinators. An area of concern that plagues both Districts A and B was verbalized by the superintendent of District A:

If I'm off campus then somebody has to take over my role, if the principal's off campus they have to plan for someone to take over their role. So we have to make sure we have people ready. We have to make sure we understand all positions because there's not a lot of us. (personal communication, October 19, 2016)

As we looked at the active shooter drills, none of the districts at this time reported participating in a true active shooter drill. All the districts perform a lockdown or intruder drill at least once a year. There are differences in the drills held at each district. Districts A and B call for a lockdown drill, and the staff proceeds to lock the doors and account for all the students. District C, besides having a drill, also participates in a tabletop drill with the fire department and the police to go over scenarios of possible intruders or active shooters, as discussed in the interview: "We have done tabletop drills that we discussed with the fire department and the police and our staff and went over the scenario of what happens" (personal communication, October 20, 2016). District D takes

the normal drill and escalates it to include an “intruder” coming into the building in order to see how the staff responds:

We do have intruder drills; in fact we have one coming up. We give our principals a heads up that in the next couple of weeks are going to be having an intruder drill; we don't give a date and time, but we want to see what the campus will do what somebody enters the facility. (personal communication, October 24, 2016)

All four districts monitor the completion of the drills either at the campus level or through the district security personnel. While all the districts monitor drills and train personnel, the level of specificity of the monitoring, as well as the training of personnel in support positions, continues to reveal the financial disparities among the four districts.

**Question 3: What are school district superintendent perceptions of their district's ability and capacity to respond to an emergency situation? (Response)**

Response refers to the immediate action taken; and in order to understand the districts' response to a crisis, a question was asked of the superintendents about the inclusion of first responders. Looking at the inclusion of first responders in the drills, only District C has them participate in drills. The other three districts notify first responders of upcoming drills, but they do not have them on the campuses. According to District A:

We don't really have first responders for the drills. We do make sure that they are available to our campuses so that the kids see and know who they are, but when

we actually come down to doing the drills we do not include them in the drills.  
(personal communication, October 19, 2016)

Through this questioning, other concerns and solutions came to light, specifically from District C:

One of the concerns was when the first responder rolls up, and they don't know who to talk to—there was no designated place. So we've gone through and said here's where the students and staff are located, and we have a command post for the administrator in charge to meet the chief. Another thing we discovered is school district personnel walk around in regular clothes, while PD and FD [police and fire departments] are in their uniforms. In order to know who is in charge for the school we now all wear white vests. (personal communication, October 20, 2016)

The district used this strategy even without a crisis on campus: when the superintendent was called to a bus accident, he put on his white vest so the first responders knew he was the representative from the school district.

While originally the question looked at how first responders are included in the EOP, the answers from the superintendents went down a different path. The answers actually coincided with question 10 about SROs and response time of first responders, as well as the groups that are the first responders, hospitals, and nurses, as reflected in Table 5.

Table 5

*First Responders*

<b>District</b>	<b>SRO</b>	<b>Police</b>	<b>Fire</b>	<b>EMT</b>	<b>Hospital Distance</b>	<b>Nurses in District</b>
<b>A</b>	No	City	Volunteer	Volunteer	15 minutes	RN
<b>B</b>	No	City	Volunteer	Volunteer	30 minutes	1 RN 1 LVN
<b>C</b>	3	Two Cities, County	Professional and Volunteer	Professional	60 minutes	2 RN 3 LVN
<b>D</b>	3	City, Two Counties	Professional	Professional	40 minutes	2 RN 3 LVN

As noted in Table 5, District A does not employ an SRO. Response time is between two and five minutes for first responders in this district. Previously, this district employed a chief of police for the district, but as money from the state decreased, the district had to make a decision to rely on the city police instead of funding the position. “The hard decision was having the chief of police leave and to decide: do we continue that or can we just rely on the city police department? As a small rural school district, funding is extremely difficult” (personal communication, October 19, 2016). The concern of both smaller districts is having to choose between positions instead of being able to fund all positions that are needed.

District B does not have an SRO. Prior to the state budget cuts, a staff member was a licensed peace officer and provided SRO support to the district along with his normal duties. Response time for this district is also five minutes. While two to five minutes appears to be a quick response, as stated earlier in Chapter Two, the response time from the police was less than six minutes from the first phone call placed to the

time the first police officers entered the building at Sandy Hook, and it was not fast enough to save the lives of 27 people (Connecticut Police Chief Association, 2013).

District C and District D have faster response times with the inclusion of an SRO on campus, but the concern for these campuses is the multijurisdictional response for getting more help. Superintendent D stated, “The longer response would be the EMT; depends on which school due to multiple jurisdictions” (personal communication, October 24, 2016). With different schools in different counties or cities, the school must work with multiple first responders. The team to respond is not always the team that would be the fastest to arrive, which can compromise the schools in a crisis situation. This situation was conveyed by District C’s superintendent: “We have an interesting situation where we have a volunteer department with the county, yet we have a fire department that is professional and sometimes our volunteer department can get there faster” (personal communication, October 20, 2016). The problem this situation creates is one of two departments vying for the control of the emergency situation, putting the school district in the middle.

While superintendents in Districts A and B mentioned not including the first responders, through the interview process, overwhelmingly the small town atmosphere of both of these districts was seen as a positive for the superintendents in response time. The local police and fire department are more readily available to offer support should it be needed.

**Question 4: What are the school district superintendent perceptions about restoring the learning environment and evaluating the phases of the crisis plan?**

**(Recovery)**

Recovery after an incident refers to restoring the learning environment or reunification between parents and students, as well as evaluating how a crisis was handled. Though the interviews with the superintendents, two questions were asked to address recovery. These questions looked specifically at the after-action review and the plan for students after a crisis. All four districts participate in an after-action evaluation. In District A, the superintendent commented about making sure to adjust and make changes as needed:

We talk about things like did we come out in time, did everybody get to the places they need, do we need to reorder staging areas. That's the value of having a drill so that you can make the changes you need to. (personal communication, October 19, 2016)

District D has an interesting addition of a scribe to gather more information:

Debriefs are conducted immediately following incidents or drills. After-action reports are reviewed and discussed as well. During actual incidents, scribes are designated and their notes are included in the debriefings and after-action reports. (personal communication, October 24, 2016)

Districts went over areas that did not follow the plan, asked for input on ways to improve, and shared information with campus staff. According to District B's superintendent:

Every second and fourth Monday we have a leadership meeting. If we've had a drill we go over the drills with this group discussing items like substitutes, concerns, any changes that need to be made. Campus principals or the directors then take this information back to their staff. One concern we've had is the shared faculty between campuses; it becomes a logistics issue. (personal communication, October 14, 2016)

(Shared faculty relates to teachers who travel between the schools.)

Districts C and D take the evaluation one step further with immediately providing an update to the multihazard EOP with any changes that needed to be made. According to District C, "it's a living document; we make changes or update different pieces or tweak with the after-action meetings" (personal communication, October 20, 2016). Again, having the ability to continually update the plan is made possible through having a dedicated person that handles all the safety and security for the district. Districts A and B note that changes become available in the next year's plan.

Reunification to the learning environment after students leaving is an area that is very different in all four districts. The superintendent for District A discussed having an evacuation site for students. District B does not at this time have an evacuation site lined up. District D has protocols and kits for each campus to assist in the reunification process. District C has a very detailed reunification process. Besides having a place for evacuation, the district has created protocols for parents to pick up their children after a crisis. The superintendent specifically discussed the possibility of an active shooter in regard to reunification:

How to address getting parents to stop and wait—we spent a lot of time walking through that discussion even down to the point where the parent gets a ticket and if their child has been shot, you don't get to go with the ticket to the holding place with kids. You are funneled to another area with counselors. How to get those parents separated out is a part of the plan; we plan to have PD there at the very beginning to help us to get pet parents to stop and to wait. (personal communication, October 20, 2016)

### **Emergency Operations Plan**

Through an analysis of each district's multihazard plan, the researcher was able to triangulate the data from the interviews, policy, and the plan. In regard to the answers given by the superintendents, the multihazard plan provided more detail in understanding the answers to the interview questions while also addressing the overarching research question of whether districts are prepared for intruders or active shooters. Realizing that mandates from the state only address the basics that must be covered, Table 6 is a list of selected practices from the Department of Education and the Department of Homeland Security that all schools should consider when planning for a crisis situation.

Table 6

*Best Practices for School Districts*

<b>Selected Practices</b>
Allocate time to emergency management planning
Conduct an assessment of vulnerabilities
Conduct regular drills
Identify and acquire equipment to mitigate and respond to emergencies
<u>Develop an emergency management plan and update the plan on a regular basis</u>

*Note.* Adapted from Department of Education, (2013).

The researcher applied Table 6 to the conversations with the superintendents and the analysis of the EOP. The time to plan is part of each district's protocol, yet most districts update each summer in order to address training needs with staff at the beginning of school. Instead, the EOP should be a fluid document, having the planning on a continuum so that as each drill is completed, districts update or upgrade to address the evaluation of the drills conducted.

Overall the plans are similar in the basic items included. Each plan includes overall concepts, objectives, and general statements without giving information on how the plan is carried out. For instance, while all four districts have an area stating that a reunification plan is in place, only one district has a full plan published. It appears through inspection that all the districts have used a template to create a basic plan. Districts need to include specifics for their district so that in the event of a crisis, first responders know what to expect.

While many of the sections regarding mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery were discussed in previous sections, it is critical to look at the specifics of the EOP in regard to intruders or active shooters. Each district has an EOP comprising 10

sections: Authority, Purpose, Explanation of Terms, Situation and Assumptions, Concept of Operations, Organization and Assignment of Responsibilities, Direction and Control, Readiness Levels, Administration and Support, and Plan Development and Maintenance. Upon review of these sections, they are appropriately titled “Basic Plan” since little district detail is provided. The differences in the plans occur within their appendices. For the purpose of this section of analysis, only items related to intruder or active shooter were analyzed. Additionally, the specific details of the EOP are not shared within this research due to the need for confidentiality. Instead, generalities are discussed so as to prevent compromising the safety of any district.

District A has four specific pages titled Evacuation, Lockdown, Severe Weather, and Reverse Evacuation within the appendix. The specific “To Do” page in the event of an intruder or active shooter provides the staff with 13 steps to follow. These steps include items such as what to do when the announcement begins, where to assemble the class, and the process for holding the students. The one-page document is written so that each teacher can have it posted in their classroom. Districts B and D do not include a separate page for a lockdown on campus. The information within each plan only gives a vague response to a lockdown, which in essence requires staff to lock down the entire campus with students inside. No mention is given of what to do with students who are out of the classroom, what to do if the entire class is in another area, or how staff will know when the crisis is over. District C has by far the most extensive plan, with an entire section of the appendix set aside for information related to an intruder or active shooter.

This section provides detailed information from the beginning of a crisis to the final steps of reunification after a crisis of an intruder or active shooter is over.

### **Financial Records**

All school districts in the State of Texas are required to post on their district Website their adopted budget. Within this budget, all districts report under Function 52, *security and monitoring*. Because districts may have special projects that would increase this budgeted amount for one year, this study analyzed the budgets of each district for the last three years in order to look for a pattern. It was also taken into account that security can be paid out of *cocurricular/extracurricular activities* according to Function 35 or out of *debt service* according to Function 71. In order to analyze whether any of the budget amounts in Function 35 or 71 were used to supplement Function 52, follow-up questions were asked of the superintendents.

District A is a 2A district with a total budget of \$4,012,865. Of this total, \$44,318 was budgeted in 2014 for Function 52, security and monitoring. In 2015, this district had an increase in its overall budget to \$4,416,638, yet the security and monitoring line item decreased to \$9,198. For the current year 2016, the district again had an overall increase in its budget to \$4,532,798 and once again lowered Function 52 to \$6,698. Looking at the last three years, this district increased the overall budget by \$519,933 while decreasing security and monitoring by \$37,620. When asked about the most costly security measures put in place, according to the superintendent:

Our security system is about \$30,000 which includes cameras, and for a small school we have a pretty good infrastructure with technology). The Raptor system,

which was about \$35,000 to \$40,000, we have a crossing guard that we pay for that salary, and used to have a chief of police which is about \$35,000 to \$40,000.

(personal communication, October 19, 2016)

District B is a 3A district with a total operating budget of \$9,067,324 in 2014.

Function 52, security and monitoring, was budgeted at \$26,300. For the next year, 2015, District B increased the overall budget to \$9,676,589 and also increased the security and monitoring to \$33,100. The current 2016 budget increased to \$9,799,068, and the Function 52 line item decreased to \$25,600. In comparing the last three years, District B increased the overall budget by \$731,744, and the security budget line item went up \$6,800 from 2014 to 2015, but decreased by \$7,500 from 2015 to 2016, which averages out to a decrease of \$700. This district's superintendent responded to the question about costly security measures for his district:

Upgrading our cameras has been our most costly security measure. We've added more cameras although we still need to have more. One of the areas that we are working on, but it's going to be very expensive is trying to find a way to secure our secondary campus from the outside. We're looking at some fencing to go around the front, but the concern is that the back will still be open because of the students who go back and forth to the gym or to the AG [agriculture] building.

(personal communication, October 14, 2016)

District B passed a bond allowing for a safety vestibule to be included in the remodel of the high school. Also discussed was the potential for a technology surplus in the budget.

“Any surplus technology funds we use to buy extra cameras” (personal communication, October 14, 2016).

District C is a 4A district with a 2014 total operating budget of \$30,590,076. Function 52, security and monitoring, was budgeted at \$67,874. During the 2015 budget cycle, the overall budget increased to \$32,301,020, as did the security and monitoring line item to \$76,062. The current budget for 2016 increased to \$32,363,680, and again the security and monitoring item increased to \$81,804. Over the past three years, the overall budget increased by \$1,773,604, and the Function 52 line item also showed an increase of \$13,930. Costly security measures for this district are as follows according to the superintendent:

Most costly security is the SRO: we have one primarily at the high school and goes to the middle school time during the day; at least once a week he goes to visit the elementary but day-to-day at the high school. The radio system is also a little bit ongoing but it was just an initial \$15,000 for an initial investment which ties in with the first responders through the tricounty system. (personal communication, October 20, 2016)

This district also recently passed a bond through the bond buying program and was able to create a secure entrance at every school, to provide more cabling for security cameras, and to provide fencing at all schools.

District D is a 5A district with a 2014 total operating budget of \$35,108,925. For the 2015 budget, the overall budget increased to \$37,726,726, and Function 52 security and monitoring also increased to \$273,648. The current budget year of 2016 has the

overall budget at \$39,095,687, while Function 52 totaled \$282,097. However, while the amount of dollars increased, the percentage spent in the line item remained the same at 0.7%. Overall for the past three years the budget has increased by \$3,986,762, and the security and monitoring line item has increased by \$10,078. When asked about costly security measures put in place, the superintendent responded:

Security cameras have been the most costly security measures. After Sandy Hook we put in the vestibule for safety in three of our buildings because our schools did not have anything to secure the elementary schools and the high schools. We've also included card readers at the entrances of our buildings for all of our staff to come in and out, which has been very costly. We are moving away from keys. (personal communication, October 24, 2016)

Even in the largest district, trying to find ways to upgrade old campuses with the newest security measures continues to be a struggle as seen in the following response:

“Financially, we would like to change our card readers to electrical instead of battery-operated and upgrade our alarm system, but that would be very costly so for now we just are using what we have” (personal communication, October 24, 2016).

After meeting with each superintendent and discussing Function 52, it's clear that there is not a common use across the four districts for the use of this money. The two larger districts fund a staff member to handle and oversee safety and security in the district. District D pays the salary of its Director of Purchasing and Organizational Planning, and District C pays for an SRO for its outlying school, as well as the salary of the Emergency Management Coordinator.

Districts B and C are also using bond money to upgrade fencing and vestibules on campuses. All four districts use other line items to fund police at athletic events, on the campuses, and within the district, as well as more cameras and radios. Examples include line item 36, cocurricular/extracurricular activities, which is used to pay for security at athletic events; line item 12, *instructional resources, technology budget*, is often used to fund the purchase and installation of security cameras. Through the interview process, each superintendent discussed using money from multiple areas to fund major security items. Finally, during the interview process with all four districts, comments were made about needing to upgrade security after the crisis at Sandy Hook. A common theme from all districts arose, as stated by the superintendent of District A: “It has always been about finding the budget to be able to get things done that we need” (personal communication, October 19, 2016).

A final comparison of the four districts in funding applies to the square mileage of the district boundaries for small schools. The State of Texas funds school districts differently according to the square mileage making up the school district boundary. Schools under 301 square miles receive less funding per student than those above 301 square miles. Of the four districts in this study, Districts A and B do not meet the 301 square miles and are considered small districts. Should this penalty be removed from state funding, District A would receive an additional \$524,336, and District B would receive an additional \$746,395 a year (Equity Center, 2017). As both district superintendents discussed the lack of funding to be able to upgrade security or provide

an SRO, these additional funds would allow them to get closer to the staffing or security measures of the larger two districts.

### **Conclusion**

As the interview data were analyzed and compared to the financial, policy, and EOP data, major differences in the four districts were highlighted. The ability to finance capital improvements or extra personnel in the area of safety is clearly the largest difference in the school districts. While the section on finance is only considered one area within the research, the money or lack of money encompasses all the areas researched. The ability to hire a dedicated person to coordinate the EOP or an SRO to improve the response time to a campus would allow smaller districts to improve upon the overall safety of the district. Other areas of concern relate to having first responders in multiple areas. The multijurisdictional issues are a concern in response time for the two districts spread across multiple municipalities, as well as the overall lack of including first responders, not only in the creation of the EOP but also in participating in the drills. The more familiar first responders are of the crisis response, the easier and quicker they will be able to help should a crisis occur.

Throughout this chapter, the researcher provided an analysis of interview data, financial records, policy, and EOPs as they apply to the overarching research question of how prepared the schools are in addressing intruders and active shooters. Realizing that no school district can be completely prepared and that there is no fool-proof plan that can be created, there are safety measures, planning, and considerations that must be implemented or improved in order to provide a more secure educational environment.

With the realization that school districts, not just in Texas but across the country, must continue to upgrade security and safety in order to keep staff and students safe, EOPs should be at the forefront for all superintendents. Media continue to report on school shootings, as well as other mass shootings in public venues. As said best by the superintendent of District A, “So priorities have to change as the time changes. Today's message is a different era even from five years ago; we have to plan accordingly as the country's changing” (personal communication, October 19, 2016).

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY

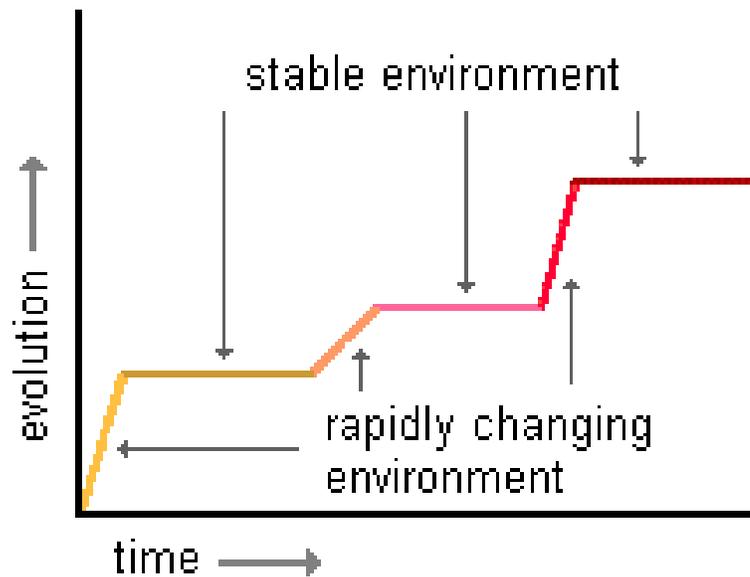
This evaluative case study intended to analyze the preparedness of school districts in relation to active shooters using the four stages of crisis planning: mitigation, preparedness, planning, and response. By applying analysis of the interview data, financial statements, policy, and EOP to the PET framework, the researcher was able to provide background information on how and why school districts are not in a continual state of change or improvement in regard to safety and security. Other areas to discuss include the overall process of crisis planning and financial constraints in relation to safe and secure schools.

#### **Discussion**

School districts are required to follow TEC policy with little to no variance. Looking specifically at the realm of school safety, school districts are doing the best they can with what they have, and no school district is deliberately failing to provide safety and security for their staff and students. Yet the following topics regarding preparedness unfolded as the research progressed: evolution of how school districts change, school district adaptation to changes in society, changes in crisis planning, and how funding and location can affect crisis planning or security. These topics, along with reflections from the researcher, are discussed in the following sections.

## **Evolution of Change**

PET has three components: deep structures, equilibrium periods, and revolutionary change according to Gersick (1991). *Deep structures*, applied to school districts, refers to the rules and policies school districts must follow. These structures are in place to provide stability, and there is little variance from the state leadership creating policy. Each school district within this research project has deep structures in place. As this study has shown, the four school districts in this study have implemented policy set forth by the State of Texas. *Equilibrium periods* refers to day-to-day operations; not every day is the same, and small changes will occur constantly that do not change the overall deep structure. In other words, while policy stays the same, processes or procedures to address the policy change. District C gave an example of this period of equilibrium when the superintendent stated, “We changed our protocol for bomb threats. If the police get the call, we automatically evacuate as the PD is required to search the campus, but if we get the call first then we evaluate with input from the campus” (personal communication, October 20, 2016). This small procedural change does not affect the deep structure of the EOP; it only addresses a way to improve. *Revolutionary change* refers to a game changer; something has happened to upend the way school districts operate. Examples of a revolutionary period would be the massacre at Columbine High School, which changed the process for first responders to enter the building. Using these concepts and applying this information to the districts studied, Figure 2 shows how PET applies to safety and security in school districts.



*Figure 2.* Punctuated equilibrium theory in crisis situations. Reprinted from Wolf (2015).

The PET model in Figure 2 shows how schools evolve over time. Districts go through long periods of stability, as shown with the arrows titled “stable environment.” These periods of stability are punctuated by relatively short bursts of fundamental change, titled “rapidly changing environment” on the graph. The line graph continues to rise as school districts evolve through the years, or to put it another way, school districts learn from their mistakes and continue to get better. Applying the analysis of the four districts to this figure would show the first increase as the Columbine shootings causing school districts to evolve in the area of crisis planning, followed by a period of stability. The next jump is a smaller, more gradual increase that could have resulted from legislative updates or changes for school districts, again followed by a period of stability. The final increase is again a large increase, which would represent the Sandy Hook

Elementary School massacre, which leads the researcher to believe that we are again in a period of stability.

Taking it one step further, Figure 2 also applies to the increased security of the four school districts. As the rapidly changing stages occurred, such as Sandy Hook, the four school districts increased their financial obligations toward a more secure environment. According to the superintendents, each district upgrades to secure vestibules in older schools. Three of the districts were forced to raise taxes through the bond process in order to finance the construction, while the fourth district transferred funds within the current accounts and used fund balance to pay for the costs.

In an effort to understand why school districts do not continually upgrade and improve upon security, we must look back at the research in Chapter Two. Baumgartner and Jones (1993) believed that changes are either an overreaction or underreaction to information, while Birkland and Lawrence (2009) believed that one event could show a failure within a school system or an accumulation of problems over a period of time. To apply Gersick's (1991) explanation of PET, organizations make changes or improve through times of upheaval. Overall, school districts remain in a stable period for long periods of time. Yet when a major incident occurs, the school system has a dramatic change prior to another stable period. These changes can result in upgraded security, a need to increase funds or local policy/procedural changes. The pattern of the PET demands that school districts understand that the current period of stability will end, again bringing us back to the question of school districts being prepared for active shooters.

## **Adaptation to Societal Changes**

As mass shootings are occurring more often around the country, school districts must remember that preparing for a crisis in general and preparing for an active shooter are not the same (United States Department of Education, 2013). When a 911 call regarding an active shooter on a campus is made, first responders have one objective—protect students and staff. Active shooter situations are defined as “those where an individual is actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area” (United States Department of Education, 2013, pg. 56).

Even as the Department of Education states that active shooter situations should be treated differently, three of the four school districts in this study do not have a separate plan for an active shooter crisis, and none of the four school districts interviewed have specific active shooter drills. It was implied that the shelter-in-place or lockdown drills are considered to address the issue of an active shooter. The most troubling comment was that school districts are behind in updating the training needs in the event of an active shooter.

Digging deeper into the four districts studied, concern remains in that school districts do not have the ability and capacity to respond to an active shooter. Looking specifically at the response time to campus, all four districts stated the response time of first responders to be five minutes on average. Keep in mind that according to the Connecticut Police Chief Association (2013), the response time from the police was less than six minutes before the first police officers entered Sandy Hook Elementary School. The only areas where the districts participating in this study would have a shorter

response time would be the secondary campuses in Districts C and D, as both have an SRO on campus. Realizing the lack of response for Districts A and B, the lack of financial support comes to the forefront again.

School administrators believe that increased security measures are effective in increasing student safety, the most common security measure being security personnel (Garcia, 2003). Should they have the funding received by other school districts, each district would have an SRO, as previously reported by the two districts without the security. The most relevant advantage of an SRO on campus is the increase in response time, making the SRO the true first responder to an incident (Barnes, 2016). SROs have reported that being stationed on campus creates a safer environment, and the police uniform and authority of the officer are viewed as deterrents (Barnes, 2016). There is also evidence to suggest the importance of integrating an SRO into school district safety planning (Benigni, 2004). The perspective of an SRO in creating and managing an EOP is the perspective of the first responder. Both districts in this study without an SRO had one previously, but due to budget cuts at the state level had to let them go, which sums up the concern that rural districts, without the proper funding from the state, sacrifice security of students and staff.

Another theme that applied to two districts is the concern with multijurisdictional help in a crisis. Even though this theme did not encompass all those interviewed, the importance lies in the commonalities across the state, as this applies to school districts that are spread out into multiple cities or multiple counties. Looking back at the question of adapting to changes in society, increasing the wait time of first responders is not only

unacceptable, but not prudent. The two larger districts interviewed place the first-responder-coordination requirement on the superintendent in order to receive help the fastest. There are many districts that find themselves in the same situation, and while it's fortunate that there has not been a loss of life due to wait time, this particular theme remains a priority and will be further discussed in the section on implications.

### **Crisis Planning**

The PET concept of the equilibrium period is where most of the school districts have displayed change in safety and security. Preparing for a crisis situation through an EOP is commonplace for school administrators. While having an EOP falls under the concept of deep structure and is a mandate by the state, the implementation of the plan remains in the equilibrium period, where changes should occur regularly in order for continuous improvement. Research conducted on the four school districts shows a variation in continuous improvement. Through this equilibrium period where changes occur, districts must rely on the evaluative phase of planning. Evaluating EOPs, drills conducted, and personnel within the security committees allows school districts to keep up with changes and address areas of need. Realizing that “plan, prepare, and practice” must be a regular occurrence for safety drills, there is currently no monitoring that these drills are occurring, and there is no oversight (Trump & Lavarello, 2000-2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Even with no oversight, the school districts complete drills monthly in each district: fire, tornado, intruder, and shelter-in-place. McDonnell and Elmore (1987) addressed the idea that without mandates, superintendents will lack follow-through. While realizing that some mandates need to be in place to require

superintendents to address policy changes, the superintendents interviewed did not need mandates to follow through because they prioritize the ultimate goal, the safety and security of staff and students.

As shown in the previous chapter, the superintendents' comments and answers to questions regarding crisis planning were varied. All four districts have followed the requirements set forth by the state in response to EOP creation; however, only one district, District C, has taken the requirements and expanded in all areas. While two of the superintendents understand all the concepts of crisis planning and were able to clearly communicate concerns, the other two answered the questions with not near as much depth. Along those same lines, according to McLaughlin (1991), those who interpret and implement the policy through the EOP are the ones who make a success or failure from crisis preparation. In order to create an EOP, interpretation and implementation are essential to achieve success.

Planning and managing change in schools requires superintendents to create committees that encompass members across the district in order to gain other perspectives. With this understanding, the superintendent is not the sole person creating an EOP; districts create committees, and some districts are able to hire a dedicated coordinator who can attend trainings across the state on best practices. Observations showed the two larger districts answering at a higher level, the difference being that these districts are supported with a dedicated person responsible for the overall planning of emergency operations. Besides the dedicated personnel including the coordinator and an SRO, the larger districts are able to include more personnel on their security

committees. Realizing that more doesn't always mean better, being able to divide out the jobs as opposed to each person having multiple responsibilities in a crisis allows for stronger coordination of a crisis situation. For example, in a smaller district, the superintendent wears multiple hats and is often responsible for being the incident commander and the communication officer. These two positions in a crisis are essential, and one person holding both positions causes one to be lacking.

While all four districts have these security committees, the inclusion of first responders from the beginning of the process through the actual completed drill is missing. Elkland (2017) stated that having first responders on safety teams allows for effective response to a crisis. First responders need to be included and take a more active role in emergency plans for school districts. On the school district side, first responders should be included in the beginning planning process to ensure that best practices are being used. Planning is occurring at the district level, but first responders are included more as an afterthought instead of at the beginning of the planning process. The knowledge and skills they can bring to a planning session are essential for schools to understand police and fire procedures, as well as for first responders understanding school district procedures. Once districts have drills scheduled, those schedules need to be shared with first responders in order for them to practice response as well. The norm should not be a first responder arriving on campus for the first time during a crisis, as the time spent to acclimate with the building wastes valuable time.

School districts have the obligation to plan and manage the change needed in order to provide a safe and secure learning environment. Districts are creating the

mandated EOP as directed by the Texas Education Agency and the TEC, even as the actual creation varies in information across districts. More work is still needed to address the inclusion of first responders in the mitigation and preparedness phases, as well as the restoration of the learning environment and the reunification portions of recovery. The researcher's perception of the interviews conducted tends to relate back to the lack of urgency in believing that an active shooter crisis could occur in any school and in any district of any size.

### **Funding and Location**

As for the financial aspect of providing needed security, for small districts to have the same safety measures as larger districts, funding would be required from the state. Larger districts have extra personnel who can dedicate their day to improving security in the district, while in the smaller districts, that job falls to the superintendent, who is already overburdened with multiple jobs due to lack of administration personnel. Even though the larger districts have those extra positions, requirements or improvements still need to occur to address the specifics of active shooters.

Addressing the lack of funding, Figure 3 is a representation of the information gathered during the interview process. With increased funding by the state, the school districts in this study would address hiring of personnel. A dedicated coordinator for safety and security would alleviate some of the extra duties that not only the superintendents in small district take on, but also the extra duties picked up by the other members of the district. Although not discussed during the interviews, having a dedicated person who could attend the training that occurs at the Texas State University

Safety Center would allow the districts to stay up to date on best practices. Another hire essential to school safety is the SRO. This position not only provides day-to-day support, but decreases the response time by becoming the first responder in the event of a crisis.

The other two areas needing more financial support, depicted in Figure 3, are related to purchasing. These costs would not be ongoing each year, except in terms of replacement cycles for the purchasing of security items. The first expenditure is maintenance, bringing old buildings up to date with the newest security or even addressing areas that are currently not secure. The other area all four districts discussed is the purchase of more security cameras, updated alarm systems, or key codes to enter buildings.



*Figure 3.* Financial implications.

Sedensky (2013) stated that Sandy Hook had the latest security measures in place: secure vestibule, camera system to view the front door, and a call box at the front door. Districts A, B, and D do not have secure vestibules in all schools. In fact, only District C has been able to provide a secure entrance for each school due to the passing of a bond. The amount of money to bring older buildings up to date with the newest security is not something the state would be able to finance; thus, the burden falls back to the districts. Through conversations, a concern remains that while each superintendent knows a crisis could happen, school districts tend to become complacent. It was noticed that the smaller districts do not worry as much as the larger districts. Whether it's a small district mentality of "we know everyone in town" or the idea of "things like that don't happen here," rural districts do not have the same sense of urgency (personal communication, October 14, 2016).

Unfortunately, being a smaller or rural district does not mean an active shooter situation won't occur. Hawkins et al. (1998) referred to safe communities and the perception that schools in these areas have a false sense of security. Instead, what has been shown is that the two deadliest school shootings did not occur in inner-city schools. As the study by Hankin et al. (2011) reported, school violence does not decrease according to the security measures in place for any school, rural or inner-city. Instead, the only measures in place that show signs of decreasing student deaths in active shooter incidents are training and having procedures in place—showing that a sense of urgency needs to exist in school districts. While the study by Hankin et al. (2011) elevates training and procedures as the keys to active shooter incidents, the district

superintendents stated that there needs to be a balance, and should there be security measures that have proved to provide results, all districts of all sizes should have the ability to provide that security. Until the state is able to fund in an equitable fashion, rural districts are left to wonder why their students do not warrant the same security as students in large districts.

### **Reflections from the Researcher**

As the case study was completed, the researcher had to refer back to any bias held. Holding the position of superintendent in another district gave the researcher an insight to the answers given through the interview process, a better understanding of the financials and the job, and knowledge of how to dig deeper into the questioning.

The job of superintendent is all-encompassing in a school district. Realizing that the superintendent is responsible for every person and every occurrence within the school district places a heavy burden on the position and person. Throughout the interviews, the sincerity of each superintendent was genuine. All four are aware of the implications of failing to have the most up-to-date security, an SRO, and a strong crisis planning process.

Even though there is research that implies a lack of district leadership, the researcher believes that this is a misunderstanding of the vastness of the job. Looking first at the EOP, Elkland (2017) completed research with the administrators rating EOPs as less effective than other school personnel rating the same plans. The understanding of the superintendent of how the complexity of the plan pertains to an entire district is one explanation. The “less-effective” rating could also be ascribed to continuous

improvement, as superintendents rarely are satisfied with the status quo and constantly search for ways to improve schools. Another explanation could be the ambiguity in the development of the plan (Cornell & Sheras, 1998). As a result of complexity and ambiguity, EOPs may appear to lack the quality and quantity of effective crisis intervention strategies that are multidimensional. Once again looking at the specific position of superintendent, the majority of the decisions made are multidimensional. Decisions made regarding one person can have ripple effects through the entire district. Seldom is this multidimensional decision-making realized by others in the district. For this reason alone, district leaders may not be able to convey the multidimensional piece of the EOP to all staff.

Another area of concern is in the effective execution of the EOP, including the evaluation conducted after a drill or crisis (Elkland, 2017). With the education background of the superintendents, this is an area of strength for all four. Bringing the teams back together to discuss the plan and areas of concerns falls into the field of continuous improvement where high level school personnel tend to excel. The effective execution of a plan and the debriefing by the security team in order to improve are crucial (Brock et al., 2009). However, Elkland (2017) also wondered if superintendents perceive each drill or crisis as unique and if they have difficulty making event-specific changes to comprehensive crisis plans. This could explain how the two districts without dedicated security personnel tend to make changes to the plan at a higher level instead of more detailed changes. Even looking at the two roles of superintendent and principal, a principal making change affects one campus, one set of faculty and students, while a

superintendent making changes, depending on the size of the district, affects multiple schools, multiple sets of faculty and students.

Through body language and tone of voice, it appeared that at times some of the answers given were what the superintendent thought the researcher might “want to hear” as opposed to what the district was actually doing. There were also times during the interview process where the superintendents were unable to answer the questions and had to be prompted with ideas. This occurred more often in the larger districts where there is a dedicated safety person, causing the researcher to question whether the extra personnel provides a barrier to the superintendent thus removing them from day to day safety concerns. In other words do larger districts become more bureaucratic and does that affect the superintendent’s lack of urgency as they are further removed from the planning?

A final thought using my bias in regard to superintendents is political. Although this area was not discussed in the interviews, it is an area of concern. The role of the superintendent is changing, whether through legislative actions, the Commissioner of Education, or the Texas Education Agency. This position is no longer an education manager, but instead a chief executive officer (CEO) of a multimillion dollar business. In other words, as problems occur, much like in a corporation the CEO is held responsible in the public eye. Yet, besides a university president no other positions are responsible for such a large number of students on a daily basis. So effectiveness may instead be related to the burden of responsibility of the job.

In summation, addressing the overarching question of how schools are prepared to address intruders or active shooters, this study shows that the larger the district, the more prepared the district is in terms of safety measures put in place. How the school system allocates attention to the crisis is as critical as how those who create the policies respond to the crisis; however, the financial inequities across the four districts have an impact on all areas of safety and security.

### **Implications**

The research conducted in this study provides an awareness of some of the problems faced by school districts. While the research was only conducted with four districts, the variety of district size allows for a look at different situations that could occur across the state. The findings in this study should provide an understanding for the State Legislature, the Texas Education Agency, and school district personnel. A true understanding of these challenges will provide a basis for improvement that will allow all schools, as well as the state, to provide the same types of security and safety for students so that schools are safer overall. This section on implications based on research takes the concerns addressed earlier and expands to highlight problems that may occur across the state.

Often, implications of research address the need for a model or process to be put in place. With the help from the United States Department of Education (2007), as seen in Figure 1, the Cycle of Crisis Planning already provides a framework that all school districts should be following. The implication for school districts, therefore, is evaluation of the district EOP to ensure that all four areas of crisis planning are covered. Realizing

that districts are never “finished” with the EOP and that it must be continually reviewed and revised, this framework is a tool to remind districts of the importance of reviewing and improving existing plans.

With the framework already in place, the phase of recovery continues to be the area where the most work is needed according to interview data with the representative superintendents. In a later article, the United States Department of Education (2013) provided more information on the recovery phase (see Table 7), but this information needs to be updated at the school district level. Updated changes include the emotional recovery of staff and students in multiple steps previously not included in the original recovery phase.

Table 7

*Recovery Phase*

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Steps for Recovery

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During recovery, return to learning and restore the infrastructure as quickly as possible.  
Strive to return to learning as quickly as possible.  
Restore the physical plant, as well as the school community.  
Monitor how staff are assessing students for the emotional impact of the crisis.  
Identify what follow-up interventions are available to students, staff, and first responders.  
Conduct debriefings with staff and first responders.  
Assess curricular activities that address the crisis.  
Allocate appropriate time for recovery.  
Plan how anniversaries of events will be commemorated.  
Capture "lessons learned" and incorporate them into revisions and trainings.

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*Note.* Adapted from Department of Education (2013).

Realizing that the four phases of crisis planning need to be included in the overall process of planning, the evaluative results in this study could provide support for other district superintendents to upgrade their overall EOPs to provide updated planning and training for a crisis. While school districts are known for their collaborative practices, using that skill to work with other districts to plan would allow for a more fluid EOP to be created using the four phases of crisis planning. This collaborative work often occurs at Regional Education Service Centers. These centers of expertise serve as a basis for developing educational capacity, supporting curriculum coordination, and facilitating links with policymakers (Fadeeva and Mochizuki, 2007). Monthly regional meetings

with other superintendents occur at the regional service centers in Texas. These centers are funded through the legislature to provide support to school districts. This is especially true in smaller, rural districts that do not have the same level of personnel support. The meetings provide opportunities for superintendents to receive professional development. Currently, these meetings tend to focus on accountability, special populations, and human resources. Including crisis management within their constructs would provide needed support for all districts to gain a better understanding of how to improve upon the safety and security across all school districts.

No longer can districts write a plan and then assume that staff know how to respond by reading it or discussing it at back-to-school teacher meetings; instead, safety drills should take on a “practice makes perfect” attitude. The more you practice, the more you build up the procedural memory in your brain. “Muscle memory” refers to memories stored in your brain that are actually a type of procedural memory that can help you become very good at something through repetition. Practicing all four phases will take time away from student learning, but at a time when mass shootings are occurring in multiple public areas, schools do not have a choice. A crisis could occur at any time, and districts must prepare, practice, and successfully respond to that crisis in order to minimize the loss of life in the event of an active shooter.

Throughout the interviews and analysis of the emergency operation plans, the first reaction of the researcher was the most prepared school district was the one with the most detailed emergency plan. However, once all information was gathered and the researcher was able to dig deeper into the conversations of each superintendent,

something else came to the forefront. In an emergency situation there is no guarantee that a detailed emergency plan will save more lives. Instead we have to acknowledge that just because a plan is more detailed or inclusive of all four components suggest by the United States Department of Education (2007) in the Cycle of Crisis Planning, there is no guarantee the plan is better than the others. Ultimately it depends of many factors besides the actual plan. Some of those factors include implementation of the plan, the response time of first responders, the response of the staff, and even the time of the crisis. In other words, a crisis with staff who are not trained properly may fail; should first responders not arrive in a timely fashion, the plan may fail; should the crisis occur at a time of day when a large number of students are outside, the plan may fail. Realizing that outside factors have just as much emphasis on the success or failure of an emergency plan highlights again that there is no guarantee that more is better when dealing with the lives of children in a crisis situation.

To conclude with a recap of a comment made by one of the superintendents, “priorities change as the times change” (personal communication, October 19, 2016). In other words, mandates from the state, new procedures or policies put in place, improving the EOP of the district, and a sense of urgency will change as each a new crisis occurs in schools.

### **Recommendations**

After analyzing the results from this study, the researcher uncovered areas that need to be researched as school districts work to improve safety and security of students and staff. These recommendations for future research address areas where no previous

research was found in the areas of multijurisdictional emergency personnel and teachers as first responders. Other recommendations extend current research on crisis planning and rural school support.

The recommendation where research is plentiful is in crisis planning. Research is available on having an EOP in place. Gaustad (1991) stated that every district should prepare for the possibility of a crisis through planning. The United States Department of Education (2007) created the Cycle of Crisis Planning (Figure 1) to show school districts how the process should be a continual, fluid process. In later years, documentation on preparing a high-quality EOP was shared with states from the United States Department of Education (2013), as well as numerous developmental charts throughout the years to improve upon crisis planning.

With all the information available, crisis planning is still in need of reform. This was brought to the forefront during an analysis of the EOPs for the four districts. The concern raised continues to be how to better prepare the schools. Two areas stand out as needing more research: the recovery phase and policy reform. The recovery phase specifically refers to the reunification of students to parents in the event of an active shooter. After Columbine, information getting to the parents, as well as reunifying students to their parents, happened slowly (Columbine Review Commission, 2001). Eighteen years later, this is still a concern. The other area where more research is needed applies to changing the deep structure of crisis planning according to PET. According to Gersick (1991), the only way to change the deep structure of crisis planning would be

through policy reform. In order to reform policy, research of best practices across the United States would need to occur.

The next recommendation for future research is in the area of rural school districts. Research is needed to look at how smaller districts can provide the highest level of security without the same financial means as larger districts. Some areas of this research are obvious—smaller districts have fewer staff members to participate in the planning and no dedicated security personnel, and funding is based on the number of students, meaning less money. So often rural school districts struggle financially, and security measures are extremely costly; examples include security cameras, radios, SROs, and the addition of safety vestibules in the schools.

In the overall financial realm of school finance, research on legislation increasing or reducing funding to school districts in an inequitable manner should be prioritized. This includes but is not limited to school funding and the application of the small-school-district penalty. Looking specifically at the disparities of per-pupil spending through a comparison of small districts and large districts could provide a better understanding of how student safety depends on which district a student attends.

Multijurisdiction is another area where research is needed. Multijurisdiction refers to school districts residing in more than one city and/or county. One school in the district could be located within the city limits, which would send any emergency call to the city police or city fire department. Another school in the same district could be located outside city limits, which would have the emergency call going to the county police and county fire department. There are other scenarios regarding

multijurisdictional status, such as a school district being located within two counties, a school district within two city limits, and other combinations that would result in multiple calls to first responders. While jurisdictional issues among cities is common, no research was found in relation to emergency personnel in different jurisdictions responding to a crisis at a school, prompting the recommendation to find ways for districts to use the same first responders for all schools within a district without putting a financial burden on the smaller districts.

The final recommendation addresses teachers' roles in crisis planning. As teachers are often the true first responders in a crisis, teachers need to be involved in the crisis planning process. A case study of teachers who have been involved in a crisis situation would provide detailed information to help in the overall planning process for school districts. Current research about teachers' actions in a crisis have been reported in legal reports, but lack the perceptions of the teachers themselves (Columbine Review Commission, 2001; Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, 2015). The perspective of teachers who have been in midst of a crisis is the only way to learn what else schools can do to improve safety in an active shooter situation.

### **Conclusion**

This study is one of few to base research on the four stages of crisis planning for a school district: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. Four school districts consisting of different sizes give a sample representation of what would be seen across the State of Texas should this study be replicated in other school districts. This refers back to Hatch's and Cunliffe's (2006) idea that since truth is universal, the

representative sample will provide an indication on how other schools in similar situations would respond to the same interview. Looking specifically at the superintendents' perceptions allows for a view from the top. Ultimately, the superintendent is responsible for the entire school district in keeping students and staff safe, as well as finding ways to provide safety measures requiring financial considerations. This study is also the only one to date that triangulates financial data and the district EOP with views from the superintendent.

So, to what extent are schools prepared to address intruders and active shooters through the four stages of crisis planning? Schools are doing the best they can with what they have. Is there room for improvement? Yes. No one knew that schools would become a place of such heinous violence. Teachers became educators to teach children, not knowing that with the change in times, they would many times be considered the true first responder to a massacre. The goal is for this study to provide a basis for more research on safety in our schools in a time when public shootings are becoming a more common occurrence. As Gersick (1991) pointed out, waiting for a change in deep structures of a school through an active shooting is not the time to improve upon the safety plans or security provided for our students and staff—at that point it is too late.

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## APPENDIX A

### SUPERINTENDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

***Mitigation refers to actions taken to reduce the loss of life and property by lessening the impact of incidents and disasters.***

1. Please discuss by title, department and/or organization all those involved in the creation of your district Multi-Hazard Emergency Operations Plan? What was each person's role?

***Preparedness refers to actions taken that involve a combination of planning, resources, training, exercising and organizing to build, sustain, and improve operational capabilities.***

2. Besides training of campus personnel, who else is trained within your organization? Explain the training that occurs as well as the time frame.
3. For instructional and non-instructional facilities, explain how active shooter drills are practiced? How does the district monitor the completion of drills as well as provide feedback? Are any first responders included in the drills, if so, how?

***Response refers to immediate actions to save lives, protect property and the environment, and meet basic human needs.***

4. Is all or a portion of the district Multi-Hazard Emergency Operations Plan shared with any of the following? What is their role in the plan?

Local law enforcement

Fire Department  
Local Health Department  
Local Hospital  
Any other please list

***Recovery refers to actions taken to restore the learning environment and support functions***

5. Explain your district process for after action reviews of incidents or drills
6. Explain your plan for students after a crisis

***Finance***

7. What have been your most costly security measures put in place?  
Have there been any security measures your district wanted to put in place that were not implemented due to finances? If answer is yes, please explain.
8. Has the Board of Trustees requested specific security measures above and beyond what the administration has recommended? If yes, please list.
9. What percentage of your current budget is set aside for security? Are there other accounts used for security within your budget?

**Security Measures**

10. Do you employ a School Resource Officer? If the answer is no, what would be the average response time from the closest law enforcement to a secondary campus; elementary campus

## APPENDIX B

### SAFETY PROGRAM/RISK MANAGEMENT EMERGENCY PLANS

#### CKC(LEGAL)

##### EMERGENCY OPERATION PLAN

The District shall adopt and implement a multihazard emergency operations plan for use in the District's facilities. The plan must address mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery as defined by the Commissioner in conjunction with the governor's office of homeland security. The plan must provide for:

1. District employee training in responding to an emergency;
2. Mandatory school drills and exercises to prepare District students and employees for responding to an emergency;
3. Measures to ensure coordination with the Texas Department of State Health Services (TDSHS) and local emergency management agencies, law enforcement, health departments, and fire departments in the event of an emergency; and
4. The implementation of a required safety and security audit [see CK].

##### TRAIN DERAILMENT

The District shall include in its multihazard emergency operations plan a policy for responding to a train derailment near a District school. The District is only required to adopt the policy if a District school is located within 1,000 yards of a railroad track, as measured from any point on the school's real property boundary line. The District may use any available community resources in developing the policy.

##### DISCLOSURE

A document relating to a school multihazard emergency operations plan is subject to disclosure under Government Code Chapter 552 if the document enables a person to:

1. Verify that the District has established a plan and determine the agencies involved in the development of the plan and the agencies coordinating with the District to respond to an emergency, including TDSHS, local emergency services agencies, law enforcement agencies, health departments, and fire departments;
2. Verify that the District's plan was reviewed within the last 12 months and determine the specific review dates;
3. Verify that the plan addresses the four phases of emergency management listed at EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN;

4. Verify that District employees have been trained to respond to an emergency and determine the types of training, the number of employees trained, and the person conducting the training;
5. Verify that each campus in the District has conducted mandatory emergency drills and exercises in accordance with the plan and determine the frequency of the drills;
6. Verify that the District has established a plan for responding to a train derailment if required [see TRAIN DERAILMENT];
7. Verify that the District has completed a safety and security audit and determine the date the audit was conducted, the person conducting the audit, and the date the District presented the results of the audit to the Board;
8. Verify that the District has addressed any recommendations by the Board for improvement of the plan and determine the District's progress within the last 12 months; and
9. Verify that the District has established a visitor policy and identify the provisions governing access to a District building or other District property.

*Education Code 37.108(a), (c-2)–(d)*

[See GRC for emergency management training requirements and response to requests from other governmental entities for mutual aid]

APPENDIX C

SAFETY PROGRAM/RISK MANAGEMENT EMERGENCY PLANS

CKC(LOCAL)

EMERGENCY OPERATION PLAN

The Superintendent shall ensure updating of the District's Emergency Operations Plan and ongoing staff training.

## APPENDIX D

### SAFETY PROGRAM/RISK MANAGEMENT EMERGENCY PLANS

#### CK(LLEGAL)

#### SAFETY AND SECURITY COMMITTEE

In accordance with guidelines established by the Texas School Safety Center (TxSSC), the District shall establish a school safety and security committee. The committee shall:

1. Participate on behalf of the District in developing and implementing emergency plans consistent with the District multihazard emergency operations plan to ensure that the plans reflect specific campus, facility, or support services needs;
2. Provide the District with any campus, facility, or support services information required in connection with a safety and security audit, a safety and security audit report, or another report required to be submitted by the District to the TxSSC; and
3. Review each report required to be submitted by the District to the TxSSC to ensure that the report contains accurate and complete information regarding each campus, facility, or support service in accordance with criteria established by the center.

*Education Code 37.109*

#### SAFETY AND SECURITY AUDIT

At least once every three years, the District shall conduct a safety and security audit of the District's facilities. To the extent possible, the District shall follow safety and security audit procedures developed by the TxSSC or a comparable public or private entity. The District shall report the results of the safety and security audit to the Board and, in the manner required by the TxSSC, to the TxSSC. *Education Code 37.108 (b)–(c)*

#### DISCLOSURE

Except as provided by Education Code 37.108(c-2) regarding certain emergency operations plans [see CKC], any document or information collected, developed, or produced during a safety and security audit is not subject to disclosure under Government Code Chapter 552. *Education Code 37.108(c-1)*

#### AGREEMENTS

Each school district that enters into a memorandum of understanding or mutual aid agreement addressing issues that affect school safety and security shall, at the TxSSC's request, provide the following information to the TxSSC:

1. The name of each entity with which the District has entered into a memorandum of understanding or mutual aid agreement;

2. The effective date of each memorandum or agreement; and
3. A summary of each memorandum or agreement.

*Education Code 37.2121*