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Direct Message? Examining How Principals Frame Connecticut’s Anti-Bullying Policy

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School leaders across the country are challenged to build positive school climates by implementing policies aimed at tackling bullying. As educational policies — like anti-bullying policies — move from inception to implementation, school leaders oftentimes frame messages to garner support. As stakeholders engage in the policy implementation process, policies are often interpreted differently, potentially resulting in a transformation of the original intentions. The variety of options for ways to strategically frame anti-bullying policy has implications for practice in schools. The pressure for schools to be completely safe and secure while at the same time being open and welcoming creates a paradox for school leaders as they balance these values. This qualitative case study addresses the broader issue of state education policy implementation, with a specific focus on anti-bullying policies and laws. The findings of this study add to the growing body of work in organizational theory examining the role policy actors play in the implementation process as they utilize strategic framing. Additionally, this study provides insight on a critical area of needed investigation: bullying. This study has implications for policy makers and practitioners as its findings add to the bodies of research concerned with both implementation and school climate.
Direct Message? Examining How Principals Frame Connecticut’s Anti-Bullying Policy

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A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education at the University of Connecticut 2019
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Direct Message? Examining How Principals Frame Connecticut’s Anti-Bullying Policy

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

School climate problems, ranging from harmful commentary on social media and unthinkable acts of violence, to issues of teacher attitude and efficacy, flood local news broadcasts and garner national headlines while schools continually work to implement plans to combat negativity and promote a positive climate (Freiberg, 2010; Hall, 2017; Hosford & O’Sullivan, 2015; Lim & Eo, 2014; Malinen & Savolainen, 2016; Sugai & Horner, 2006, U.S. Department of Education, 2015; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey & Higgins-D’Allessandro, 2013). In particular, bullying in schools across the globe continues to be a pervasive threat to the well-being and educational success of students (Hall, 2017). In fact, the most common worry amongst parents across the country is that their child will be bullied (Pew Research Center for People and the Press, 2016).

School leaders across the country are challenged to build positive school climates by implementing policies aimed at tackling bullying. According to the New York Times, “pediatricians and parents have worried a great deal about bullying and the effects it can have on children, and the question of whether school programs and policies can make a difference” (Klass, 2017, para. 1). As educational policies — like anti-bullying policies — move from inception to implementation, school leaders frame messages to garner support (Benford & Snow, 2000; Coburn, 2001; Coburn, 2005; Coburn, 2006; Park, Daly & Guerra, 2013; Woulfin, Donaldson & Gonzales, 2016). As stakeholders engage in the policy implementation process, policies are often interpreted differently, potentially resulting in a transformation of the original intentions (Hall & McGinty, 1997). The variety of options for ways to strategically frame anti-bullying policy has implications for practice in schools. The pressure for schools to be
completely safe and secure while at the same time being open and welcoming creates a paradox for school leaders as they balance these values. Policy makers, educators, and the general public hoping to protect our children while achieving high academic outcomes should consider examining challenges related to bullying and climate within schools (Gower, Cousin, & Borowsky, 2017; Hall, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Promoting and maintaining a positive, safe, and supportive school climate is central to creating a school environment conducive to growth and learning (Thapa et al., 2013). The responsibility for cultivating a positive school climate beneficial for adults and children is generally left to school leaders (Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013). Since 1999, states have been creating laws and policies tasking leaders to create positive school climates and curb bullying. In 2015, Montana became the fiftieth state to pass an anti-bullying law, ensuring that every state now has some legislation in place (Baumann, 2015). In Connecticut, school leaders are tasked by state law to develop and implement plans that foster a safe climate (Connecticut General Statutes, 2011). Healthy and sound school cultures present the potential to increase student motivation and achievement (Hall, 2017; Stolp, 1996; U.S. Department of Education, 2015) along with teacher satisfaction and productivity (Hoy & Hannum, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Additionally, other research demonstrates that safe and supportive school climates are linked to fewer incidents of violence, strong attendance, and higher levels of student engagement (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. Following the introduction, the second chapter includes a review of the relevant literature to this topic and the conceptual framework guiding my research. In the third chapter that follows, I elaborate on the purpose of the study and the guiding research questions. Fourth, I describe the research methods for this study along with
its trustworthiness and limitations. The fifth chapter details the findings of this study. To conclude, the sixth chapter of this dissertation discusses the study’s significance and implications.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The literature review includes a comprehensive examination of research centered on the broader topic of school climate, specifically targeting work done to address bullying. Additionally, the review attends to the historical context surrounding bullying as a phenomenon and anti-bullying policies. Finally, the review of literature includes an overview of empirical work on framing theory and its relevance as an analytic tool for this research study.

School Climate and Anti-Bullying Policy

The notion of school climate is considered to be nebulous (Hoy & Hannum, 1997) and elusive (Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1990). While the definition of school climate is contested, scholars and practitioners note that safe and nurturing school environments are critical to the academic success of students (Executive Office of the President, 2016; Hall, 2017; Thapa et al., 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In their review of school climate literature, Thapa et al. (2013) attempted to clarify and define what it means to have a healthy school climate by noting that it includes the “norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe” (p. 4). Thapa et al. (2013) noted that a positive school climate should account for safety, healthy relationships, aligned goals for teaching and learning, a supportive institutional environment, and sustainable processes for school improvement and capacity building.

It is a vital but difficult endeavor for leaders to create safe and supportive schools. Schools across our nation struggle with creating efficient practices to identify, adopt, and sustain policies and systems that reach all students and stakeholders (Gower et al., 2017; Hall, 2017; Mayer, 1995; Sugai et al., 2000; Taylor-Greene et al., 1997). In 2015, the federal government
sent a memo to school superintendents across the nation stating “the task of creating and sustaining safe, supportive schools is challenging, complex, and absolutely essential to improving students’ connection to school and their overall achievement” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 1). In the review that follows, I elaborate on the historical shifts in school climate reform and anti-bullying policy creation.

**Bullying**

Research targeting bullying began in Scandinavia in the late 1970s, but did not gain much attention globally until the late 1990s (Freiberg, 2010; Hall, 2017; Olewus, 2003). Olewus (1978) conducted a large research study in Norway, coining the term ‘bullying,’ which is now a household label for hostile acts towards another person. According to Olewus (2003), “a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (p. 12). Today, researchers maintain a growing interest in ways to address issues related to school climate and bullying (Bradshaw, Pas, Debnam, & Johnson, 2015).

Bullying is a widespread phenomenon creating both short and long term problems for perpetrators, victims, and bystanders (Hall, 2017). As a result, principals, superintendents, and state leaders are becoming more focused on what really prevents bullying (Cohen, 2014). However, similar to the term ‘climate,’ Freiberg (2010) documented that the term bullying is highly problematic in theory and in practice as there is little agreement on what actually constitutes bullying.

A focus on climate and bullying maintains a relatively short history in the United States and primarily entered the public spotlight following the tragic school shooting that occurred at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado in 1999 (Freiberg, 2010). The mass shooting at
Columbine High School was the most followed news story in the United States in 1999 and one of the top three most followed stories of the decade (Pew Research Center for People and the Press, 1999). Media messaging plays a pivotal role in influencing institutional shifts (Russell, 2011) as the tragedy at Columbine led to a significant change in public action and the broader legislative agenda (Birkland & Lawrence, 2009). The two perpetrators were believed to be marginalized by their peers, making bullying the root cause of their actions (Freiberg, 2010).

Prior to Columbine, bullying was perceived to be a part of growing up in America and experiencing school (Freiberg, 2010). However, the reaction to this tragic event “mobilized local schools to implement state laws and federal programs more aggressively than they had before and to mobilize local resources” (Birkland & Lawrence, 2009, p. 1414) to address the safety and well-being of students bringing bullying to the forefront. This reactionary practice made character education a priority (Birkland & Lawrence, 2009) as schools across the nation began implementing policies to address issues related to bullying (Bradshaw et al., 2015; Freiberg, 2010, Hall, 2017). The impact of bullying has a widespread impact on school climate and one’s feelings of commitment towards their school (Mehta, Cornell, Fan, & Gregory, 2013) and affects the entire student body (Huang & Cornell, 2019).

Recently, increased technological advances resulted in the rise of mean behavior taking place in a digital forum, a phenomenon known as cyberbullying (Smith et al., 2008). Cyberbullying is defined as “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text” (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006, p. 152). Cyberbullying has become more prevalent due to the ease of accessibility to the internet by adolescents in addition to the anonymous forum it can provide (Manuel, 2011). In addition to combating traditional bullying, educators are now challenged to keep students safe “in a virtual world that has become a very dangerous
environment with few rules and very little oversight” (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009, p. 652).

“Cyberbullying puts targets under attack from a barrage of degrading, threatening, and/or
sexually explicit images conveyed using web sites, instant messaging, blogs, chat rooms, cell
phones, email, and personal online profiles” (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009, pp. 652-653).

Cyberbullying can be more unnerving than more traditional forms of bullying due to the
anonymous nature of the assault which allows cyberbullies to hide their identities leaving victims
feeling vulnerable and unsettled (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009).

Cyberbullying poses a wide range of challenges for school leaders. These challenges
include how and when to initiate interventions that occur off of school grounds (Hoff & Mitchell,
2009). Many schools face obstacles with access to information when trying to intervene in
cyberbullying cases, as their ability to prevent and regulate what happens online is limited
(Manuel, 2011). Additionally, even when instances occur at school, administrators have
difficulty discerning cyberbullying from simple teasing (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). Hoff and
Mitchell (2009) also note that even when administrators do intervene, they sometimes find
themselves in conflict with parents of cyberbullies who can be in denial about their child’s online
activity or are quick to endorse their child’s rights to engage in this conduct. Cyberbullying
causes an increase in students feeling “anger, powerlessness, fear, and sadness” (Hoff &
Mitchell, 2009, p. 661). In communities across the globe, parents, educators, law enforcement
officials, and community members are working to keep up with technological advances so they
are able to develop strategies and tools to address this growing problem in society (Patchin &
Hinduja, 2006; Smith et al., 2008).

In 2002, three years after Columbine, section 10-222 (d) of the Connecticut General
Statutes was adopted as the state’s first anti-bullying law. The law has been revised and updated
frequently, including in 2011, entitled, “An Act to Strengthen School Bullying Laws” (Connecticut General Statutes, 2011). The changes in the statutes at this time included a requirement that each district adopt a Safe School Climate Plan (SSCP). Each SSCP mandated that districts prescribe a process to handle all aspects of any bullying allegations including investigating, monitoring, and providing appropriate remedies. To support the implementation of the plan, each district has a Safe School Climate Coordinator and each school must have a Safe School Climate Specialist (administrator) and a Safe School Climate Committee comprised of educators and parents (Connecticut General Statutes, 2011). The most recent strengthening of statewide bullying policy followed another mass school tragedy—the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School that occurred in December 2014. Bullying and school climate remain a focal point in the United States as the tragedies that occurred at Columbine High School and Sandy Hook Elementary School rank in the top ten events that impacted our country according to a poll of millennials (Pew Research Center for People and the Press, 2016). All fifty states now maintain anti-bullying laws and policies (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). However, while rates of school violence have decreased overall, “many schools struggle to create and sustain nurturing, positive, safe, and equitable learning environments” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 2).

Similar to Connecticut’s mandates, in a study of policies across the nation, Hall (2017) found that a majority of anti-bullying policies aim to influence organizational and individual behaviors by prohibiting certain actions such as threatening and harassing, requiring practices such as teachers reporting incidents to administration, promoting positive expectations and discouraging bullying by including consequences for violations. While anti-bullying policy is perceived to be effective by educators and the general public, researchers have struggled to
associate the link between policy presence and the reduction of bullying (Gower et al., 2017; Hall, 2017). In fact, multiple studies show that bullying policies are not implemented as intended or have the desired curbing effect (Frieberg, 2010; Gower et al., 2017; Hall, 2017; Hall & Chapman, 2016, LaRocco, Nester-Rusack, & Freiberg, 2007). Frieberg (2010) contends that the disconnect in implementation occurs as school leaders face difficulty discerning the gap between the “letter and spirit of the law” and often attempt to diminish bullying through the “whack-a-mole philosophy” by punishing the perpetrator when a case of bullying pops up (p. 163). Thus, the practice of bullying intervention has been largely reactive. Hall (2017) posits that researchers should seek a more nuanced understanding how policies are implemented.

Challenges to implementing a positive school culture most often relate to issues around educators’ practices and beliefs; specifically, the shift towards framing behavior positively as opposed to the traditional mindset of addressing student behavior with the tendency to rely on punitive and exclusionary practices (Bambara, Nonnemacher, & Kern, 2009; Bambara, Goh, Kern, & Caskie, 2012). Hall (2017) compellingly concludes that “the presence of a policy is necessary but it is not sufficient to affect student behavior… The mere adoption or presence of a policy does not mean that it will be immediately and consistently put into practice exactly as intended” (p. 57). In a recent study, Meyer et al. (2019) contend that effectiveness of state anti-bullying policies has been minimally tested to discern its ability to reduce bullying and the results have been mixed at best. Factors that can either help or hinder the implementation of building more positive climates include focusing on school culture, administrative support, professional learning, and student and family engagement (Bambara et al., 2009). Hence, I argue that we must look beyond bullying policy to further our understanding on ways to change this troubling phenomenon. Specifically, we must look at leaders in charge of implementing such
policies within schools: building principals.

**Framing Theory**

In the final section of this literature review I will present the value of using framing theory as a lens for this study. To more fully understand change within society and organizations, scholars could examine framing practices (Benford & Snow, 2000). In many cases, implementation struggles can be attributed to the lack of specified outcomes, unclear messaging, or general ambiguity (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). Additionally, “actors in organizations confront multiple, and often conflicting, ideas that are carried through the environment” (Rigby, 2014, p. 611). To navigate communication, leaders employ strategic framing to carefully craft their communication and develop salient messages around a change initiative (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Leaders engage in purposeful and strategic communication, or framing, of policy to encourage implementation (Benford & Snow, 2000; Coburn, 2006; Parket al., 2013, Woulfin et al., 2016). Specifically, principals are tasked with the responsibility to communicate ideas linked with a policy and motivate changes in practice within their schools (Coburn, 2006; Spillane et al., 2002; Woulfin, 2016). In particular, principals shape how teachers make sense of policies by influencing when and where information about policy is shared, by bringing in and privileging certain messages and not others, by being strong voices in the construction of understanding, and by creating formal settings for collaboration (Coburn, 2001). Therefore, principals shape how teachers make sense of anti-bullying policies.

It is imperative for school leaders to understand both sensemaking and framing, as these two theories are critical for the nuances of policy implementation (Woulfin, 2017). Spillane et al. (2002) implores researchers to note the role of complex sensemaking in the policy
implementation process as “top down comprehension can lead to differences in interpretation of the same messages and experiences” (p. 396). School leaders use framing to carefully engage in strategic sensemaking as they coordinate social action including the construction of problems and solutions and identifying salient motivators to persuade people to participate in the change initiative (Benford & Snow, 2000). Hill (2001) encourages scholars to pay closer attention to the language of educators and the ways language impacts policy implementation. Studies on school change note that “leadership practices are likely to influence teachers implementation of policy” (Coburn, 2005, p. 479).

Framing theory provides tools for studying the content and characteristics of frames (Coburn, 2006). Leaders seek to build capacity and confidence by carefully presenting their message. This framing process conducted by school leaders impacts the success or lack thereof in policy implementation (Coburn, 2006). Benford and Snow (2000) conceptualize three types of framing actions: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational framing. Diagnostic framing focuses on identifying a problem by assigning blame or responsibility (Benford & Snow, 2000). Prognostic framing involves the articulation of a proposed solution to the problem or at least a plan of attack or strategies to address the problem (Benford & Snow, 2000). Coburn (2006) argues that “diagnostic and prognostic framing are often intertwined, in that prognostic framing often rests implicitly on the problem definition and attribution that is part of diagnostic framing” (p. 347). Motivational framing provides a “call to arms” in an attempt to create a rationale for action (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 617). Framed messages tend to resonate and gain salience when they are consistent, empirically credible, and supported by leaders who are deemed as credible by their constituents (Benford & Snow, 2000). Woulfin et al. (2016) argue that researchers should pay more attention to how school leaders frame policies, as they
play such a critical role in the implementation process.

Examining how principals work with anti-bullying policy through the lens of framing theory is critical to understand the implementation process. Coburn (2006) identified a gap in sensemaking research, citing that many scholars ignored focusing on how problems are framed, thus impacting the meaning-making process. Coburn (2006) encourages frame analysts to “focus on strategic aspects of this process often ignored by sense-making theorists: how people use interpretive frames strategically to shape others’ meaning-making process in an effort to mobilize them to take action” (346-347). Park et al. (2013) asserts that school change research overemphasizes the examination of key practices and behaviors and focuses less on changing culture via sense-making. In connection with studies on school climate, Coburn (2006) notes that learning is situated in contexts and people’s active interpretation of school improvement matters because it orients their actions. Significant school reform and climate change is a social and political act. Leaders play a role in framing these initiatives while also creating structures for educators to collaborate and learn from one another while constructing norms and practices. Educators working together generates commitment and moral purpose (Jones & Harris, 2014). As adults work together, they make meaning and are most likely influenced one way or another by the leaders’ framing practice. Mutual sensemaking and clear and consistent communication between school leaders within a district leads to greater coherence and goal attainment (Daly & Finnegan, 2011). Fiss and Zajac (2006) propose that “frames are embedded in societal processes” and when analyzing framing processes one must consider “the historical, cultural, and structural contexts that filter and shape the conceptions of organizational constituents” (p. 1189). The passage below by Park et al. (2013) articulates the intersection of climate and framing:
Reform efforts that only focus on the technical and structural aspect of educational improvement often neglect the process of learning and sensemaking among actors as well as the larger frames that may influence these processes. In pursuit of educational excellence and equity, policy makers must not forget that schools are ultimately political and social systems where people’s interactions, preexisting knowledge, and assumptions come into play when new policies are introduced. For reform to make a difference, a complicated mix of frames, resources, capacities, and sensemaking have to come together into a meaningful whole. (p. 670)

More research is needed on how school leaders frame policies, since these leaders are intermediaries in implementation. This study explores how principals engage in framing on school climate and bullying. This focus enables us to understand how policy actors strategically present ideas to promote organizational change (Woulfín et al., 2016) and address bullying—a major issue in education worldwide.
CHAPTER 3
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This dissertation addresses the broader issue of state education policy implementation, with a specific focus on anti-bullying policies and laws. First, this study examines how and to what extent school administrators utilize framing during policy implementation. Thus, I explore how leaders implement anti-bullying policy while using framing as an analytic tool. As discussed in the literature review, leaders use framing to create a shared understanding of a problem or situation deemed necessary to change and seek to develop salient messages and strategies to garner support (Benford & Snow, 2000). Understanding how climate policies are framed holds the potential to foster a greater understanding of the ways leaders support and shape climate across an entire school community. This study adds to the growing body of work in organizational theory examining the role policy actors play in the implementation process as they utilize strategic framing (Woulfin, 2017).

Second, this study provides insight on a critical area of needed investigation: bullying. Reducing bullying is a key national public health objective as researchers, schools, and state agencies continue to develop bullying prevention policies and programs (Gower et al., 2017). Cowan (2011) implores researchers to “examine the discourse surrounding anti-bullying policy in organizations to gain a deeper understanding of how these policies are understood and utilized” (p. 325). In a report sponsored by the state of Connecticut, it was acknowledged that lacking a clear definition and coherent guidance impacted districts’ ability to verify and report bullying under the law, hence impacting implementation (LaRocco et al., 2007). This sentiment has been noted in pilot studies I conducted, as principals displayed a disconnect between the written policy and their implementation. Thus, schools appear to be in a difficult position to
close the gap between the letter and spirit of the law as they work to comply with legislation but also aim to achieve safer school climates (Freiberg, 2010). Along with understanding how school leaders frame policy, this study provides a unique look at how school leaders in a sample of small Connecticut school districts implement anti-bullying policy. I am hopeful researchers and policy makers will use the findings from this study to understand the implementation of anti-bullying policies to “inform efforts to create more effective policies” (Gower et al., 2017, p. 180).

Research Questions

To better understand the enactment of anti-bullying policies and, more specifically, the ways in which leaders interpret and communicate these policies, the following two research questions were used to guide this qualitative investigation:

● How do school leaders frame a state anti-bullying policy?

● What factors influence that framing?
CHAPTER 4

METHODS

I utilized a multiple case design (Yin, 2009), also referred to as a collective case study (Creswell, 2007), to understand how and to what extent school leaders use framing to implement anti-bullying policy and the factors that serve as influences. This design allowed me to examine multiple schools to “show different perspectives” (Creswell, 2007, p. 74) relating to implementation of anti-bullying policy. Yin (2009) suggests using a multiple case design when seeking to learn more about how schools adopt and implement certain practices in different contexts. The case study approach provides an “in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program, or system in real life” (Simmons, 2009, p. 21 in Starman, 2013). The case study methodology was appropriate for this research project as it was bounded in such a manner that led to in-depth understanding and comparisons between cases (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, using the case study design provided me with depth “detail, richness, completeness, and within-case variance” (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 314) on implementation issues faced by Connecticut principals within their unique contexts. By using the multiple case study design, I was able to understand similarities and differences within the unique contexts I examined while also developing a robust qualitative study (Yin, 2009).

This study leaned on tenants of framing theory. According to Yin (2009), applying framing theory in a case study is especially helpful as the cases that are selected on the basis of prior knowledge are most likely going to yield to strong theoretical base, and deeper layers that help expand our understanding of theory. Case study inquiry deals with a distinctive situation that relies on multiple sources of evidence, where prior development of theoretical propositions
guides data collection and analysis (Yin, 2009). Thus, utilizing framing theory in conjunction with the case study method is appropriate to further our understanding of the theory through an in-depth contextual investigation.

The data collection methods in this case study relied on multiple sources of information including interview and document review (Creswell, 2007). In this study, I used interview methods while also conducting document review. I engaged in in-depth interviewing to gain a deeper understanding of “the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). My interview questions were open-ended and semi-structured in nature to elicit responses from the participants (Creswell, 2014). Appendix A details the interview protocol for participants. Questions were derived from tenants of framing theory and bullying research. Interview participants included school principals, assistant principals, and central office employees.

To understand how school administrators frame current anti-bullying policies a semi-structured interview process focused on extracting narrative dialogue to provide a “systematic study of personal experience and meaning: how events have been constructed by active subjects” (Osipina & Dodge, 2005, p. 153). Therefore, I utilized key techniques from Seidman (2006) including the use of asking the participants to tell stories and reconstruct their experiences. For example, I asked them to tell me stories about their experiences applying Connecticut’s anti-bullying policy in their work. My questions aimed at eliciting ways in which diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing strategies were used (Benford & Snow, 2000). The use of in-depth semi-structured interview protocols helps us explore specific phenomena in our world such as organizational change and how they are experienced by specific actors (Osipina &
Dodge, 2005). Using this qualitative approach to understand how a school leader frames policy fits well because the act of framing is so heavily based on sensemaking and interpretation.

**Sample and Data Collection**

Participants for this study were selected using critical case sampling (Creswell, 2007). Given the need to understand how school leaders frame a state policy at the local level, I sought out districts that fit within the average number of bullying cases across the state. By using the Connecticut State Department of Education’s data warehouse, *EdSight*, I was able to compare bullying statistics across the state. According to *EdSight* over the past three years, 62% of the districts in the state of Connecticut had at least one documented act of bullying. As I scoured the data reports, I noted two districts of interest. My interest centered on the unique scenario where elementary districts operated independently of regional secondary districts. I identified two small districts operating independently with a strong link. One district, Valley\(^1\) includes two schools; a lower (K-2) and upper (3-6) elementary school. The second district, Aries\(^2\) is a regional secondary school district, comprised of a regional middle school (7-8) and high school (9-12). The elementary school district, Valley, transitions students to the secondary regional district, Aries. Descriptive data for each of the four schools included in the study is available in Table 1. Interestingly, while these districts are linked together for the transition from elementary to secondary schools, both districts operate independently with separate superintendents and local boards of education.

\(^1\) Pseudonym
\(^2\) Pseudonym
Table 1 – Descriptive Data for Participant Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Valley K-2</th>
<th>Valley 3-6</th>
<th>Aries MS</th>
<th>Aries HS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>1025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian /Alaska Native</td>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino or Hispanic</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
<td>Less than 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>92.2%</td>
<td>88.2%</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
<td>94.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Therefore, administrators at the four schools served as separate cases along with each individual administrator’s frames serving as a bounded case. In Valley, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the principals of both elementary schools as well as one interview with their central office employee tasked with implementing Connecticut’s anti-bullying law. In Aries, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the principal and assistant principal at the high school level, the principal and assistant principal at the middle school level, and one interview with the central office employee tasked with implementing Connecticut’s anti-bullying law. Making the case more compelling, one of Valley’s district leaders is a former state employee with direct ties to school climate policy. A demographic overview of each participant is available in Table 2. While the documented experiences of one district are not generalizable, their narrative serves as a point of interest around the implementation process in this case focused on anti-bullying.
Table 2 - Demographic Participant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years in Education</th>
<th>Years in Current Position</th>
<th>Details of Work Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aries Central Office</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Less than 5</td>
<td>Central Office at Aries, Former: Curriculum Director, High School Principal and Assistant Principal, Middle School Classroom Teacher (Multiple Districts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Principal</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>More than 15</td>
<td>Principal at Aries High School, Former: Middle School Principal, High School Assistant Principal, High School Classroom Teacher, Private School Classroom Teacher (Multiple Districts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Assistant Principal</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Less than 5</td>
<td>AP at Aries High School, Former: High School Assistant Principal, High School Classroom Teacher (Multiple Districts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS Principal</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>More than 10</td>
<td>Principal at Aries Middle School, Former: Assistant Superintendent, Middle School Principal and Assistant Principal, Curriculum Department Chair, IT Coordinator, Classroom Teacher (Multiple Districts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS Assistant Principal</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>More than 10</td>
<td>AP at Aries Middle School, Former: Curriculum Department Head and Classroom Teacher (All in Aries)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valley Central Office</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Less than 5</td>
<td>Central Office at Valley, Former: employee at State Department of Education working on School Climate, Elementary Classroom Teacher (Multiple Districts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6 Principal</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Less than 5</td>
<td>3-6 Principal at Valley (spent time as K-2 Principal at Valley), Former: 3-6 Assistant Principal, Curriculum Specialist, Classroom Teacher at Upper Elementary Level (Multiple Districts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-2 Principal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Less than 5</td>
<td>K-2 Principal at Valley (spent time as 3-6 Principal at Valley), Former Curriculum Specialist, Classroom Teacher at K-2 Elementary Level (All in Valley)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prior to the interview, demographic question inventories were completed for each participant to provide background information on career experience and on topics including experience and trainings on school climate initiatives (Seidman, 2006). Interview protocols used open-ended questions to elicit responses from the participants (Creswell, 2014) and are available for review in Appendix A. Questions provided opportunities for participants to describe their experience with Connecticut’s school climate policy, ways in which they frame their initiatives, and the factors that influence their framing.

To elicit narrative stories about anti-bullying practices/policies school leaders implement in their respective schools, I interviewed each school administrator two times. The interview allowed each administrator reconstruct narrative experiences applying Connecticut’s anti-bullying policy and strategies they used to elicit support from other members of their school community. The second interview allowed me to ask additional questions seeking depth and extracting narrative anecdotes from the initial interview. Additionally, I conducted a document review of materials that were used in support programs delivered to students or trainings provided for teachers and staff. Next, to understand what reported factors influence each participant’s understanding of their anti-bullying policy, I relied on interview data from both the principals and central office employees. By interviewing both building and district leaders, I was able to ascertain the supports and messaging at the district level and better understand the factors shaping framing processes within the district. Finally, to hone in specifically on the act of framing, I relied on the interviews with school and central office leaders. The protocol used aspects of framing theory to explore (Seidman, 2006) how leaders are shaping their message. Questions specifically targeted diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing strategies (Benford & Snow, 2000). To support interviews, I reviewed documents and artifacts including
professional development agendas, slide decks from trainings, and each district’s safe school climate plan.

**Data Analysis**

The web-based software application Dedoose was utilized to code the interview and document data. Prior to assigning any codes, each transcript was read in its entirety one time and listened to as an audio recording one time adding memoing and notes where applicable. Following the initial memoing and review, each transcript was read twice while engaging in the coding process with Dedoose and Microsoft Word.

I relied on both deductive and inductive processes to code and analyze the data. Deductive coding was based on the conceptual framework (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) and situated in the literature on frame analysis. For example, frame codes for diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames were available in my codebook. Additional deductive codes included noted factors to climate implementation including positive school culture programs, administrative support, and professional learning (Bambara et al., 2009). Boyatzis (1998) supports thematic coding utilizing theory because it allows researchers to develop thematic codes based on established theory and offers empirical comfort and support. Additionally, I remained open for codes to emerge progressively through the analysis process (Miles et al., 2014), thus including an inductive process, “seeking what emerge[s] as important and of interest from the text” (Seidman, 2006, p. 117). This process allows researchers to utilize theory to drive their analysis while also being open to the evolution of their research and questions during the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Boyatzis (1998) believes a deductive and inductive coding hybrid is necessary for case study researchers.
After the initial coding process, I sought to identify themes or patterns that emerged from the data. Themes may be generated inductively from raw data or from previous research or theoretic constructs (Boyatzis, 1998). After coding all of the interviews, data was divided into themes and then reviewed through multiple matrices. The search for themes or patterns across an entire data set is especially beneficial in case-study forms of analysis, including the use of narrative interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Creswell (2007) noted that case study lends itself to analysis where the researcher focuses on a few key issues or themes, “not for generalizing beyond the case, but for understanding the complexity of the case” (p. 75). Thematic analysis allows us to use a wide variety of information in a systematic manner that increases "accuracy or sensitivity in understanding and interpreting observations about people, events, situations, and organizations" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 5). When analyzing their study, researchers should seek to identify issues with each individual case and follow up by looking for common themes that transcend across all of the cases (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). Thematic analysis is flexible, highlights similarities and differences across a data set, and is useful for “producing qualitative analyses suited to informing policy development” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97). Thus, I intended for the thematic analysis of each case interview to provide themes for comparison and contrast within and between cases.

**Trustworthiness and Limitations**

As a practicing school administrator in the state of Connecticut, I brought my own experiences with anti-bullying law and school climate policy implementation. I remained aware of what Miles et al. (2014) calls the “one-person research machine” (p. 293). By defining the problem, conducting the sampling, designing the interview protocols, analyzing the information, and writing the entire study I had the potential to create a “vertical monopoly” (Miles et al.,
Throughout the study, I worked to remain aware of my personal bias at all times to ensure the study was presented in a trustworthy manner. I addressed this limitation by using multiple data sources. For example, relying on both interview and document analysis. Further, I utilized member checking by having participants review my findings and notes to ensure I captured their voices and not mine (Miles et al., 2014).

A second limitation of the study relates to the lack of generalizability of the findings. Yin (2009) cautions case study researchers to avoid over-generalizing. It must be noted that this research is not intended to generalize findings across our state or nation. In his work, Yin (2009) makes it clear that "case studies, unlike experiments, are not generalizable to populations or universes" (p. 15). Instead, the study provides a contextualized example of how school leaders are framing messages around bullying. Additionally, this study answers questions linking to how and why certain framing strategies may or may not be used. It is my hope that leaders at the state, district, and school level will look at this research and ask similar questions within their own context.

A third limitation to this study relates to the emphasis on framing theory in the analysis of the data. Boyatzis (1998) notes that a heavy reliance on theory can impact data analysis because the researcher may end up projecting through the worldview and chosen theory as opposed to voices in the study (Boyatzis, 1998). Throughout the process you must be willing to consistently review the applicability of theory driven codes to the data (Boyatzis, 1998). I believe that the methodology used for this study in conjunction with the use of inductive coding and member checking makes this use of theory authentic and valuable to furthering the discussion around how school leaders frame policy.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I discuss key findings directly related to my research questions. The first research question focused on the ways in which school leaders framed state anti-bullying policy. As discussed in the literature review, there are three types of framing actions: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational framing (Benford & Snow, 2000). Problem identification falls within the realm of diagnostic framing (Benford & Snow, 2000). Proposing solutions or developing strategies to remedy the problem relies on prognostic framing (Benford & Snow, 2000). Finally, the development of salient messages and a rationale for action utilizes motivational framing (Benford & Snow, 2000). The second research question aimed at identifying the factors that shaped the principal’s frames, thus examining influences on their sensemaking. Coburn (2006) notes that “local actors in schools actively construct their understanding of policies by interpreting them through the lens of their preexisting beliefs and practices” (p. 344). Therefore, the second research question helps build our understanding of why principals might have framed their work with anti-bullying policy in a certain manner.

The findings below include cross case analyses that highlight the nuances of each administrator’s experience framing Connecticut’s anti-bullying policy. Summaries of individual case findings can be found in Table 3. While all participants in this study work within the same region, the data is clear that their work with Connecticut’s anti-bullying legislation is being framed multiple ways. Of the three types of framing, diagnostic and prognostic framing were most frequent. All principals identified strategies used to motivate school community members around anti-bullying policy, but a majority of their framing work is linked to identifying
problems and generating strategies and solutions. Figure 1 details the percentage of each frame used by participants.

Figure 1 - Percentage of Frames Used

![Pie chart showing frame usage percentages]

Table 3 - Summary of Frames Used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>Summary of Frames Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HS Principal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic</td>
<td>Cyberbullying, Data Exists - But Doesn’t Tell All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prognostic</td>
<td>Special Programs, Veteran Teachers Know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational</td>
<td>What’s Good for Kids, Special Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HS Assistant Principal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic</td>
<td>Cyberbullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prognostic</td>
<td>Special Programs, Veteran Teachers Know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational</td>
<td>What’s Good for Kids, Special Programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Diagnostic Framing

Diagnostic framing focuses on identifying a problem by assigning blame or responsibility (Benford & Snow, 2000). There were two common problem identification patterns within the findings. First, all school leaders, regardless of grade level, framed the influx of social media as major barrier in anti-bullying implementation. They lamented the difficulty of managing
problems that develop outside of school within the school community. For example, Valley’s 3-6 Principal explained “the online culture is so rapid” that educators and community constituents find it difficult to be proactive, thus making it an easy problem for others to relate to. Secondly, almost all participants discussed the use of data to define bullying problems. To illustrate this point, the Aries Middle School Assistant Principal shared her belief that data can be a convincing tool to promote actions and changes when using it to define behavior problems. While their schools did not have vast numbers of verified bullying cases, they used data with their teachers to identify trends and patterns in behavior to target resources to curb bullying. At times, the threat of bullying rising was framed as a problem, and examination of data helped demonstrate pockets of “mean-spirited” behaviors that needed to be addressed before problems continued. All schools discussed the practice of reviewing bullying and discipline data with small teams of teachers and support staff members to identify patterns and shape discussions linked to problems. Thus, the number of bullying cases and or disciplinary issues demonstrated by data collection was used to strategically message the prevalence or absence of problems related to bullying.

**Cyberbullying**

“The cyberbullying part makes me crazy because it's just sometimes I feel like it's a run around trying to pin stuff down there and that you have such little control over because so much of that is happening outside of your watch and yet it is our responsibility.” - Valley K-2 Principal

Bullying on social media is a problem (Kircaburun, Jonason, & Griffiths, 2018). Regardless of grade level, all principals were up front about framing social media and cyberbullying as a problem. When walking into Valley’s K-2 Elementary School’s main entrance, I was immediately struck by the bulletin board with social media icons including Twitter and Snapchat. This was a visible sign that parents at the kindergarten to second grade level need to be aware of the social media influences on their children. All principals felt peer
interaction on social media was a problem. Table 4 includes excerpts from each principal’s interviews referencing the problem with technology in relation to bullying in school.

Table 4 - Examples of Cyberbullying Frames

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>Diagnostic (Problem Identification) Frame - Cyber Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HS Principal</td>
<td>“There are just times when it's really tough and you know, that the students had been hurt and feel terrible about something yet you can't resolve it because you just don't know. So I would say in terms of the difficulty for us, it's, it's any different digital electronic stuff that you can't wrap your head around. Very tough.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Cyber bullying and you know, that's, that's difficult to track down. Um, it's, it's tough. Like we had a situation earlier this year where, um, there was an Instagram account that was posting unflattering pictures of kids. Unflattering pictures of girls and with comments that were really hurtful and it came to our attention because a kid brought to our attention and we and we just couldn't get to the bottom of where it came from. And to this day we have no idea where it came from.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Assistant Principal</td>
<td>“Sexting and other issues that are becoming really relevant to this generation of students in the use of technology and all of that, which kind of overlaps the sexting and the texting and the social media and all that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS Principal</td>
<td>“We're mandated to investigate anything that happens outside of school that potentially could come into the school. It happens over the weekend all the time. Kid texted other kid. Then it becomes the school’s problem.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS Assistant Principal</td>
<td>“It's tough when the kid’s like, ‘Well my friend put it on there. They were on my Facebook, on my phone.’ Parents are telling us my kid is saying he didn't do it to his friend and this is his account.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6 Principal</td>
<td>“I think we're being more reactive just because it's so immediate and so it can happen so quickly and there's so many things beyond our scope that influence how kids treat one another and you know, deal with one another. It's so easy to send a text message. The online culture is so rapid.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-2 Principal</td>
<td>“The fact that the whole social media thing falls on the school, that makes me crazy because you could have ninety nine point nine percent while they're home on social media and also trying to prove that it's impacting a child's educational experience is also super vague. But the social media piece, I can't control what the kids are doing at home on social media and it honestly, it makes me crazy that parents make it the school's responsibility instead of the family's responsibility to deal with that here.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At some point during each interview, every administrator discussed framing social media as a problem. Interestingly, there were no questions in the interview protocol directly mentioning social media. Coburn (2006) noted the interconnectedness between diagnostic and prognostic framing as leaders define a problem and then strategically develop solutions. This idea was supported in the findings, as the principals in this study sought to offer potential solutions for their widely agreed upon social media problem. This included internet safety programs offered to families and students by outside presenters, law enforcement officials, or professionals from local youth service bureaus including social workers and counselors. The use of outside professionals helped legitimize this problem and support seriousness of the message being framed by school leaders.

Data: Data Drives Planning, Data is Double Edged, Data Exists but Doesn’t Tell All

Data was used strategically by all administrators in their framing to create salient messages. Depending on the framing goals, data was used to identify the existence of a problem or to support the idea that a problem was being addressed. For example, in the middle school and elementary school, the administrators met with respective committees to review disciplinary data to track patterns of behavior and plan accordingly. This strategy was labeled *Data Drives Planning*. The data was used to identify and frame problems for the school as a whole, groups of students, and in some cases individual students. The use of data also demonstrated the interconnectedness between diagnostic and prognostic framing. As a diagnostic practice, problems are shared through strategic messaging. Prognostic framing was connected to data because these strategic messages provide potential solutions to the problems being framed. For example, behavior and bullying data at Valley’s 3-6 Elementary School led to the framing of issues on the bus. In response, monthly bus meetings with students and teachers were established.
to address the problem and message appropriate bus behaviors to the students. Valley’s 3-6 Principal also noted that the bus meetings helped message to students, parents, and teachers that the school was proactive about solving issues when the data shows a problem.

However, using data to diagnostically frame bullying as a problem in a public forum posed a challenge to some participants. In particular, some secondary administrators in Aries discussed the historical pattern of tracking and reporting bullying at the district level, specifically at Board of Education meetings. Anecdotes were shared about a former Board of Education member who had an interest in bullying data being reported at Board meetings. The Aries Middle School Assistant Principal discussed the challenge of data demonstrating that the school was addressing and verifying acts of bullying, but that too many verified acts of bullying might suggest a problem that is out of control. This framing was labeled as *Data is Double-Edged*.

In contrast, the Aries High School Principal seemed comfortable reporting to outside constituents about bullying regardless what the data demonstrated. He referenced the fact that the Aries High School main office maintains a log of all bullying investigations that have been completed. The HS Principal explained,

*We don’t thread the needle that closely. So if someone’s being a jerk to a kid, we’re going to deal with it. Now is it bullying under the law? Who cares? The bottom line is, is there a victim? Is there a kid that’s being the aggressor? It may go in here as not verified under the auspices of the law (pointing to bullying log). That doesn’t mean that we didn’t intervene in each of those places.*

Thus, his framing is less around using data to diagnose the problem by verified acts of bullying and relies more heavily using the prognostic frame of doing what’s best for students and helping them solve their problems and resolving the conflicts that arise. Therefore, I labeled this framing as *Data Exists, But Doesn’t Tell All*. Regardless whether bullying data existed, the focus was always on the best solutions for students.
Prognostic Framing

Prognostic framing involves the articulation of a proposed solution to the problem or at least a plan of attack or strategies to address the problem (Benford & Snow, 2000). Overwhelmingly, administrators in all schools engaged in prognostic framing on the importance of special programs, often with some instructional component for students, while addressing bullying behavior in school. These special programs were framed as proactive solutions to bullying and mean spirited behavior in schools. In contrast, principals in this study used different prognostic framing with their teachers. In some cases at the secondary level, principals spent less time on mandated bullying training with their staffs based on the assumption veteran teachers know what to do to intervene with peer situations. On the other hand, some participants utilized the legal weight of anti-bullying law to communicate the importance of closely adhering to the state and district anti-bullying guidelines.

Special Programs

Across the study, principals framed special programs within their respective schools to students, parents, and teachers as valuable educational programs to communicate the importance of character and that combating bullying was a priority. Along with providing strategic communication about “research based” social and emotional curriculum materials or the creation of a program modeled from a “nationally recognized organization,” many participants felt confident in the positive results of their special program offerings. The high school administration developed the most commonly cited special program, “The Power of Words.” Every administrator mentioned the “Power of Words” as the middle school and elementary school administrators have tried to forge some connection. The programs varied across grade levels. Nuances based on grade level emerged with PBIS and Second Step dominating the
elementary school conversation and a rotation of programs offered at the middle school.

The Aries High School Principal explained that the original rendition of the “Power of Words” program started right after the original anti-bullying legislation was passed. Prior to the program becoming a district developed program, it was a paid-for presentation put together by a nationally recognized organization. However, due to the overwhelming demand by schools to proactively promote anti-bullying programs, Aries had difficulty booking them and opted to create their own program based on the structure of the purchased program. Data from the state of Connecticut indicated that schools used over 150 different thematic programs to educate stakeholders on ways to prevent and reduce bullying (LaRocco et al., 2007). The research also noted that, “for the most part, schools [were] not using research-based programs” (LaRocco et al., 2007, p. 43). The tie to research-based and recognized programs is a prognostic framing strategy to foster confidence and legitimacy around a curriculum or presentation that they also feel brings a strong message to their school and community.

In addition, the Aries High School Principal framed it to staff as the optimal time from an age-appropriate standpoint. He explained, “Tenth graders are at that sweet spot to handle an open mic event” thus targeting sophomores. The event included opportunities for students to speak openly and encouraged students who were bullies or experienced bullying to stand up and talk about their experience and teach others. As part of the document review process, the Aries Principal shared a video communication that was developed in partnership with students to communicate the school’s anti-bullying message. The Aries High School Assistant Principal concluded, “We decided to make it our own. It’s more than just a program, it’s a part of the culture here.” This program served as Aries High School’s main forum to promote and shape
their anti-bullying message. The ability to legitimize its value from a research-based, historical, and pedagogical standpoint is evidence of prognostic and motivational framing.

While the middle school and elementary schools noted the “Power of Words” program, they also relied on their own special programs to frame their response to bullying and climate. The Aries Middle School Principal admitted to often looking for special programs and a “fresh approach” to motivate and communicate with students. The middle school administrators listed several special programs they utilized including bibliotherapy, elements of PBIS, and Rachel’s Challenge, a program that developed after the tragedy at Columbine High School. The Aries Middle School Principal shared, “Everyone wanted a program. They wanted someone to come in and fix it.” The use of these multiple programs strategically communicates a thoughtful and responsive approach to bullying. The Aries Middle School Principal also acknowledged that they historically communicate with the public about their many programs as they “probably have more different programs around than you can shake a stick at.” Thus, they lamented some of the aspects of “canned” programs, but noted the importance of having such offerings for the school and community.

At the elementary level, the schools used their work with research-based programs such as PBIS, Responsive Classroom, and Second Step in prognostic framing by offering these as strategic solutions in their messaging. The principals discussed the value of having legitimate programs purchased by the district to show teachers and community their commitment to supporting social and emotional growth with their students. Valley’s 3-6 Principal acknowledged the importance of communicating the use of research-based programs to teachers and families, but questioned their success within the school due to competing challenges. He shared, “We say we do things like responsive classroom. Ten years ago we were doing it with
fidelity, but with all of the changes in demands those things are unfortunately going by the wayside.” He also acknowledged that they followed PBIS by posting and communicating expectations, but felt more work needed to be done. The aforementioned responses allude to the strategic nature of framing to achieve legitimacy around salient messages even though gaps may exist. Valley’s K-2 Principal felt more confident with the implementation of their special programming and strategically targeted their work for students and families. She spent time with her climate committee to focus on developmentally appropriate language. Monthly, the school hosts town meetings where they focus on being “bucket fillers” a concept she felt was more appropriate than using words like “mean” or “bully.”

I think that the bucket filler piece is more developmentally appropriate and this is just my personal opinion is more developmentally appropriate because our kids get the whole idea that I’m either filling someone's bucket up or dipping into someone's bucket. That's much more understandable for them than teaching them what empathy looks like or it's just, I mean, it's just another way of rephrasing that.

At the K-2 level, the programs were framed as legitimate, research-based, and developmentally appropriate to teachers and parents.

Letter of the Law vs. Veteran Teachers Know

The principals from Aries and Valley employed different frames directed at teachers the through trainings they led. The Aries High School and Aries Middle School administrators utilized the Veteran Teachers Know framing strategy in some capacity. This strategy purposely spent less time working on anti-bullying with teachers, under the assumption veteran teachers had been previously trained. In contrast, to some degree at the middle school and certainly at the elementary schools, the principals practiced the Letter of the Law prognostic framing strategy. This approach with teachers accounted for yearly training on the anti-bullying policy as described in the state policy.
When speaking about spending professional training time communicating about anti-bullying practices, the Aries High School Principal explained that they typically discuss challenges that arise at their faculty meetings. He concluded, “Right now it’s not a bullying thing.” The Aries High School administration acknowledged spending time with new teachers communicating about anti-bullying practices, but felt their veteran teachers had previously been trained regarding bullying and focused their attention in other places. While state law mandates anti-bullying training, the high school administration strategically communicated about issues they felt were more pertinent and remained confident in the awareness of their veteran staff of the expectations under the law. The Aries High School Assistant Principal confirmed this strategy as she compared the framing from her previous district to her practice in Aries.

In my previous district every year we went through the bullying laws and you had to sign off that you went through and it was like everybody in the school. That's probably still in effect, but it's not happening here. I mean definitely for new teachers because we have meetings every month and trainings that we do for our new staff, um, but there's nothing specific in place in terms of ongoing year around that.

The Middle School administrators took a framing approach that fell in the middle of Veteran Teachers Know and Letter of the Law. In their practice, they did not feel the need to craft a strict legal message to leverage fear amongst their staff, but also did not want to completely dismiss the need for their veteran educators to revisit the policy. The Aries Middle School Principal noted, “We do emphasize the reporting, the timelines, because those are those very important, in, that's where you get into trouble with the parents in OCR is if you don't follow the timelines, but other than that, the rest of the plan is pretty much common sense. You see something, you say something, you know.” The Aries Middle School Assistant Principal acknowledged always doing an update on the bullying policy to start the school year but her principal shared that it wasn’t much stating, “if it was a bigger issue then we would, we would do
more and it would be more focused.” He went on the explain, “It's not anything direct. We don't
go out there and say here's the state statute, dah dah. You have to do this. They know that
already. They've heard it over and over every year.” Thus, they comply with the law, but also
strategically spend a short amount of time in training out of respect to their veteran teachers and
the other competing initiatives at the school.

The approach at the Valley Elementary Schools was more focused on the *Letter of the
Law*. Valley’s K-2 Principal emphasized the importance of teachers knowing the law and
expectations for anti-bullying implementation. Unlike the Aries approach, all teachers were
presented with anti-bullying information each year, regardless of experience. She shared, “We
talk to our staffs at the beginning of the year about, you know, timelines and forms and making
sure we're educating them on what the expectations are.” In Valley, the anti-bullying policy was
presented at the start of the school year and was revisited during professional development in the
winter as well. Valley’s 3-6 Principal acknowledged wanting to spend more time on the training
and felt at times it felt more like a “checklist” training. Yet, both Valley administrators made it
clear that the expectations of the law were communicated to teachers. Valley’s K-2 Principal
purposely focused on the law when presenting to teachers. She shared, “I'm just strategic on our
part to say like, we want to make sure you're paying attention to this because this is no joke.” In
Valley, following the law was framed as a way to prevent bullying, and also to prevent issues
with non-compliance by the district.

**Motivational Framing**

Motivational framing provides a “call to arms” in an attempt to create a rationale to
action (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 617). Framed messages tend to resonate and gain salience
when they are consistent, empirically credible, and supported by leaders who are deemed as valid
by their constituents (Benford & Snow, 2000). The motivational framing techniques used by participants in this study were salient, however it should be noted that the participants in this study utilized this framing strategy with less frequency. The less veteran administrators utilized the legal aspects of anti-bullying laws to motivate action, in some cases drawing upon the fear of repercussions. Four of the six school administrators used messages centered on “doing what was best for kids” or “providing students with tools to cope through conflict” as motivation messages to rally support. Additionally, it can be argued that the prognostic framing of Special Programs could also be seen as a motivational framing. In the section that follows, I will explain three motivational framing techniques, Special Programs, The Law Matters, and What’s Good for Kids.

Motivational Special Programs

School administrators in Valley and Aries engaged in prognostic framing by communicating to students, parents, and teachers that special programs were a strategic solution and combatant to bullying behavior. The abovementioned programs allowed Valley and Aries administrators to publically frame that combating bullying was a priority. Furthermore, the school leaders framed aspects of character education via programs such as “Second Step” or the “Power of Words” as an important remedy to bullying behavior. In addition, Special Programs were also framed motivationally by publicizing partnerships with credible outside groups or their basis in research. For example, many conversations around the “Power of Words” also included references to the Anti-Defamation League, the creators of the program the model for the “Power of Words.” The same argument could be made regarding Rachel’s Challenge, a national program that developed after the Columbine High School tragedy. On the elementary level, PBIS and Responsive Classroom were presented as “research-based” programs. This approach adds
legitimacy and was used to motivate buy-in from teachers and families. The Aries Middle School Principal discussed the desire to identify a special program that would have staying power. He explained the loss of progress with bibliotherapy, a special program using literature to conjure salient messages around anti-bullying practices.

I didn't want something short term. And after a few years that [bibliotherapy] sort of ran its course a little bit, you know, looking at it, it's sort of like, okay, so what's a fresh approach? But it also has to be a fresh approach that's going to build on something. I want things to scaffold. And so that, that's always been an issue. I don't like isolated programs. And it when it starts becoming isolated or when one group starts to do it, the book, the one book, one school became an English program you started to resent it.

Therefore, the aim was to find sustainable and motivational programs that permeated across departments and the school. The “Power of Words” program appeared to do this based on interview data from all participants.

The Law Matters

The strategic communication around the Letter of the Law was also utilized in motivational framing. In some cases the motivational frame was a fear tactic used towards teachers and or students. In regards to teacher communication, Valley’s K-2 Principal explained, “Teachers are rule followers, you know, so when you say like, this is the law, we have to do this. I do think it's important that people know we are legally responsible to do these things.” She explained that she believes teachers respond to presenting bullying “as serious” knowing they do not want to “drop the ball.” The Aries Middle School Assistant Principal relied on motivational framing when the law first came out as she reported, “It started as the big policy and the big law… That’s all we talked about in PD was like, you know, learn about what bullying and what is in the law.” Although it is not the case in Aries, the high school assistant principal reported emphasizing The Law Matters as motivational frame in her previous district, which she reported was much more compliance driven.
The Law Matters motivational framing was also used to proactively communicate in middle schools to alert students and families via written correspondence when an initial bullying infraction occurred. The administrators used a written letter to frame initial behaviors in the context of the law and create a salient notice to students and families. The Aries Middle School Principal explained,

We have a letter that we send to them when we see mean spirited behavior, let's say, but the first time we will send home a letter saying your son or child was involved in a mean-spirited event, should this continue x, y, and z under statute would be called bullying.

The Aries Middle School Assistant Principal added,

A letter that explains the bullying law. It's about like, hey, your child has been down here for some sort of mean spirited behavior. They've been talked to. They've received a warning. I want you to understand what bullying is, what the laws are. Please talk to your child about this.

This strategy was not practiced at the other schools. Letters were used at the elementary schools once bullying was verified, as described in the law. On the other hand, Aries High School did not practice any messaging in writing. The Aries High School Assistant Principal explained,

I think it is looking at what's going to be doing more harm than good. Um, you know, it's, it doesn't feel useful in the process and it doesn't seem to give answers, it almost brings in more questions than it does giving answers because a letter is going to be just an official jargony kind of thing that's not really going to help them to understand the actual situations.

Hence, the elementary school administrators utilized letters because they are required by law, the high school administrators did not use letters because they felt they were counterproductive, and the middle school administrators used letters proactively to create salient messages before proactively enforcing the letter of the law.

What’s Good for Kids

At some point while interviewing all administrators, it became evident that the message about doing What’s Good for Kids was shared to motivate teachers around enacting the anti-
bullying policy. As evidenced by the aforementioned frames, the leaders of each school placed emphasis on certain frames over others. Regardless of framing tactic, all administrators noted the importance of delivering the message that the work must be what was best for kids. *What’s Good for Kids* served as a broad motivational frame that could be interpreted in a variety of ways depending on the practices in place at each school. Table 5 includes examples of participants discussing what’s good for kids as they explained how they motivate their school community to support anti-bullying initiatives in their district.

Table 5 - Examples of Motivational Frames - What’s Good for Kids

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>Motivational (Salient) Frame - What’s Good for Kids</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HS Principal</td>
<td>“I would say we’re all crusaders to make sure that as much as we can, no student was going to feel isolated or bullied. So it's, you know, I think that interpersonal piece is there in spades.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS AssistantPrincipal</td>
<td>“I think really what drives us is just trying to help kids get along. I don't see it being driven by, [the law], because obviously there are things we're doing because we don't think it's in the best interest of kids.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS Principal</td>
<td>“My takeaway is it is there that there were good intentions of creating a law basically to protect kids that weren't being protected appropriately, more being helped, don't disagree with it. Do I think it needed to be a law? If that's what it takes to make sure that those things are put in place to help those kids, then yeah.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS Assistant Principal</td>
<td>“I'm going to get tripped up on the word. Like bullying, harassment, like what's the word? Sometimes I feel like doesn't really matter as long as we fix it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-2 Principal</td>
<td>“You know, trying to put yourself in that kid's shoes and what it must be like for somebody who is on the receiving end, to have to get up and come to school every day in a situation that's really so uncomfortable for them.”</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The motivational frame of *What’s Good for Kids* provided safety and security for administrators and staff members, especially at the high school level. As opposed to seeing compliance with the law as the primary objective for teachers, the high school placed keeping kids safe as the
ultimate message shared with teachers. The High School Assistant Principal shared her perspective on her principal’s framing by sharing,

I also feel that like [Name], the principal certainly has, you know, their [Aries High School], their approach and their comfort factor with, with what is the right thing to do what can make a huge difference too and I think that has had an impact on me and sort of easing my, my level of expectation of what it is that we should and shouldn't be doing and making it, you know, making it a more of a what's reasonable and what's appropriate and what's good for the student kind of approach, which makes it a lot less frightening and stressful. You know what I mean? Because you're just of being reasonable and, and a good common sense, you know.”

By motivationally framing to faculty members that all bullying policy is really about supporting students, the stress of verifying what may or may not be bullying becomes less of an issue. This was highlighted further as the Aries High School Assistant Principal compared the difference in frames from her previous job as an administrator in another district. The motivational frame used in her previous district was more similar to the elementary school practice of The Law Matters, creating a greater salience for compliance with the letter of the law. She described her experience as a high school administrator in a different school district the first year the law was put into effect.

I felt like because it [the law] was so new and people were so focused on it and it was my first year I've probably attacked it from a much more policy driven, um, black and white kind of an approach of like what is the policy saying, ‘What like to do?’ Am I crossing the T's and dotting my I's, keeping myself out of trouble? I think when I initially approached it as, um, cause there was a bit of a fear factor. I mean, I think the legislation was pretty specific in its expectations and also very clear that, you know, it could come back on administration or others who are involved if they weren't following through with the right procedures, you'd be getting the legal aspect of it coming at you. So I think a little bit of fear and I'm just wanting to make sure I did right was what drove me initially. And then of course, as I got more comfortable with it and then I think as everybody else started to get more comfortable with it and it's not becoming a checklist that became much more real and appropriate in terms of, as far as I see it anyway.

This shift was the result of a change in the way the law was being framed in each of the schools.

In the Aries High School Assistant Principal’s previous school district, teachers and
administrators were encouraged to play it safe by following the strict guidelines of the law. At Aries High School, the message was about doing what’s best for students as opposed to a strict approach. The Aries High School Assistant Principal concluded,

There are things that we do because of the law that you probably wouldn't, like we wouldn't be so praised on paperwork, but I think really what drives us is just trying to help kids get along. I don't see it being driven by, you know, the law, because obviously there are things we aren’t doing because we don’t think it's in the best interest of kids.

I mean, certainly I guess when you're not following the letter of the law that people can call you on that, but I think we find that if you're making, if you're doing things with the best interests of students in mind and you're actually having an impact, then people aren't gonna be coming back at you trying to decide whether or not you found a lot because they're not going to care. They're happy with the outcome.

The middle school and elementary schools also motivationally framed What’s Good for Kids, but not to the extent shared by the high school. It was evident that the letter of the law played a greater role in encouraging safety and compliance in the lower grade levels. Yet even with a greater focus on The Letter of the Law, the Aries Middle School Assistant Principal acknowledged, “I'm going to get tripped up on the word. Like bullying, harassment, like what's the word? Sometimes I feel like doesn't really matter as long as we fix it.” At the end of the day, all administrators were encouraging support from their faculty by motivationally framing the idea of What’s Best for Kids. She acknowledged the message of “fix problems for kids” was something emphasized with faculty and staff.

Factors that Influence Principal’s Sensemaking

The findings of this study not only attended to the frames used by the various administrators, but also accounted for the factors that shaped each principal’s frames. Understanding the factors that led to certain frames was important as the response to a policy is dependent on how teachers and administrators understand the problem needing to be solved (Coburn, 2006). I utilized interviews with the six school administrators to understand what
factors shaped their framing. In addition, I also interviewed central office leaders in both participating districts. Interestingly, both central office administrators were in their first year in the district and were rarely mentioned as an influence by any of the participants. However, the central office interviews made sense given Coburn (2006) encourages researchers to pay attention to how school leaders make sense of policy due to their important role in framing and helping teachers construct meaning of the work being implemented. Table 6 includes an overview of the factors that guided each principal’s framing. I found that the factors influencing each administrator were highly contextualized and often based on their prior experiences.

Table 6 - Factors Influencing Principal’s Sensemaking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>Factors Influencing their Sensemaking</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HS Principal</td>
<td>Early Training, Personal Experience, Major Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Personal Experience, Age Level Assumptions, Principal Alignment, Lack of Training, The ‘B’ Word, Major Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS Principal</td>
<td>Early Training, Follow the Law, Personal Experience, Major Events, The ‘B’ Word, Age Level Assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Major Events, Age Level Assumptions, Principal Alignment, The ‘B’ Word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6 Elementary Principal</td>
<td>Personal Experience, Age Level Assumptions, The ‘B’ Word, Lack of Training, Major Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-2 Elementary Principal</td>
<td>Rule Follower, Age Level Assumptions, The ‘B’ Word, Lack of Training, Major Events</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each administrator’s personal and professional experiences seemed to play a role in their approach to framing anti-bullying implementation. Two administrators vividly recalled being bullied as students and discussed its impact on their work. One administrator discussed her personal practice of being a “rule follower” and how that shapes her school’s very strict interpretation of the bullying policy. All administrators discussed seminal events in public schools including Columbine and Sandy Hook as influences on their current work. For example, the Aries Middle School Assistant Principal discussed the impact of the Columbine tragedy on her and her approach to bullying. She explained, “I mean you never really know why, but just, you know, what would make two kids who are going through school, you know, and the flags and we have to notice flags more.” In reference to Sandy Hook one administrator shared, “that one being Connecticut, probably hit home a little more.” Some participants also alluded to hoping they never experience suicidal tragedies as a result of bullying.

Another unique finding relates to each administrator’s perception of the law. Administrators who have experienced more conflict with bullying policy implementation see some aspects, including the vague definition of bullying as problematic. On the other hand, leaders who interpret the law more loosely see bullying as less problematic, potentially because they have experienced less conflict with the law. The two administrators with the least noted angst around anti-bullying policy were trained by the state at the inception of the policy. The Aries High School Principal described the initial state trainings impactful on his initial approach. He shared, “to me that was a game changer because I think the state did a really fine job of outlining the problem of providing, um, kind of, uh, examples of, of how to implement a program.” He also shared a reflection of his training that, “if you go and you just listen you don't necessarily listen to the details and requirements, you can’t help but walking away with like,
wow, this is something that really needs to be addressed.” The remaining four administrators discussed training themselves or learning through experience. It also became evident that their grade level leadership played a role in how they made sense of anti-bullying policy.

**Training or Lack Thereof**

The amount of experience each administrator had impacted their sensemaking related to anti-bullying policy. The Aries Middle School Principal and Aries High School Principal both served as principals during the inception of Connecticut’s anti-bullying law. Both principals referenced the initial workshops conducted by the state of Connecticut when the law was first established. Several principals even referenced the presenter by name. The Aries High School Principal shared, “When having a champion like [State Presenter] at the time of the implementation of this law was huge because I think a lot of us might have unfairly minimized the issue. To me that was a game changer because I think the state did a really fine job of outlining the problem of providing, um, kind of, uh, examples of, of how to implement a program.” Both administrators discussed the value of the early workshops conducted at the state level in helping them plan for implementing the new policy.

Conversely, other administrators lamented the lack of formal training available to them. Even though the Aries High School Assistant Principal was in her first year of administration when the law came out, she acknowledged that she had minimal formal training. She recalled,

I had a personal interest in knowing and understanding the bullying legislation when it first came out because it was my first year as an AP and it felt bigger than myself and it felt kind of scary to feel that there was, it was the real first test of like, you know, ‘Am I going to understand how to interpret this and make it, you know, um, and do it right in practice?’ And I mean, I must've read the the legislation a zillion times, you know, and felt myself kind of getting to a point of craziness with it and it's like, ‘Oh, you know, we're not doing this, we're not doing that. We have to do this.’ You know, and kind of, you know, in building my capacity and my district's capacity or the school's capacity to be able to respond to legislation appropriately. Um, but I felt like every time you turned around, somebody was using the word bullying and all you had to do was have a parent
or a student or somebody say someone's being bullied. And even though it may not look like that, it may not actually be like that at all. It suddenly brought this tremendous process into place which felt a little bit overwhelming. So I think personally for me, it felt like too much when I was first starting, just because it was new and it was new for me in a new role and a lot of expectations on myself.

This similar sentiment was shared by other participants who were not practicing school administration when the law first came out. The Valley K-2 Elementary Principal shared, “I'm going to say there was pretty much no ed leadership training other than like my law class where we touched on bullying and like case examples of cyberbullying.” The Valley 3-6 Principal also acknowledged, “You know, I probably needed a little bit more training there.” As evidenced in a previous section, the Aries High School Assistant Principal changed her framing after working with the Aries High School Principal. In Valley, both administrators discussed teaching themselves about the policy by engaging in their district plans and learning through experience with students and families. They relied on additional factors to shape their framing practices.

**Principal Alignment**

In the two schools with multiple administrators, the assistant principals demonstrated coherence with their principal’s vision. Thus, I concluded that in those two cases the principal was an influence on their framing. The Aries Middle School Assistant Principal alluded to “spending time figuring out how we work as a team.” However, the most compelling case of this example was between the high school administrators. In an excerpt from a statement used earlier in this paper in reference to the Aries High School Principal, the Aries High School Assistant Principal shared,

I think that [he] has had an impact on me and sort of easing my, my level of expectation of what it is that we should and shouldn't be doing and making it, you know, making it a more of a what's reasonable and what's appropriate and what's good for the student kind of approach, which makes it a lot less frightening and stressful. You know what I mean? Because you're just of being reasonable and, and a good common sense, you know.
As evidenced previously, the Aries High School Assistant Principal shared several examples of her first administrative job in another district, which started during the first year Connecticut’s anti-bullying law was adopted. As a first year assistant principal, she followed a strict procedural implementation, something she attributed to her previous district's approach. Conversely, her current principal, adopted a much different approach and was not heavily influenced by the procedural regulations. Hence, the Aries High School Assistant Principal shifted her approach to align more closely with her principal.

**Personal Experience**

Multiple participants in the study cited their own personal experience with bullying as students. The impact on their reported practice varied according to their own personal internalization of their experience. The Aries High School Principal provided a recollection of bullying where he noted an ability to empathize, but didn’t feel it impacted him greatly.

I can think back to like I'm going to say elementary grade level, like I can certainly remember distinctly incidences where I was at fault for, you know, kind of conspiring with other kids to isolate a particular kid or something and I certainly can remember being on the receiving end of that too. So you know, if I, if, if I needed to think back like why is this important, I think I can empathize with the feeling of isolation and how, you know, obviously at this age I, I'm not in that kid's head back then. I'm kind of on the outside looking in, but you can still see that this is, this is really not a good place for anyone to be. So yeah, I would say I'm a pretty empathetic person. I think. I'm not sure if I needed those incidences to color my whatever my response would be any way.

In contrast to the experience shared by the Aries High School Principal, other administrators shared specific anecdotes and felt those experiences had an influence on their current understanding and approach with bullying. The Aries Middle School Principal discussed growing up in several countries and coming from a family of mixed ethnicities. He discussed the challenges and its impact on his ability to empathize with students. In addition, the Aries High School Assistant Principal shared a personal account of her experience with bullying.
Um, I was always very silent about it. In fact, I remember I was actually just telling a story to my parents, like a week ago about something that happened to me in school that would've been considered bullying, that I never mentioned to them until now, um, because I don't think at that time we looked at it in that way and I also grew up in an inner city school and I know that there was a lot, a lot of stuff going on and my dad was a cop and it wasn't like I didn't think that people could help me.

She mentioned the connection between her personal experience and the current approach to promote student voice and framing around *What's Best for Kids* because she hoped students like her would not remain silent.

The Valley 3-6 Principal felt his personal experience as a victim of bullying distinctly shaped how he frames anti-bullying policy. He discussed the toll bullying took on him as a high school student.

To me it's all about that emotional impact, you know, and you know, whether it'd be physical or mental or verbal, you know, thinking about what kind of emotional impact that's causing on the other, on the highlighted kind of in my personal story that you started off kind of like more as a physical piece, but you know, through my avoidance it then became more of an emotional piece and a mental piece, you know, some of my own doing.

So I think if there was one event from my childhood that's kind of helped shape some of my philosophy around this is, you know, we have to, you know, we have to be there for kids and we have to let them know that it's okay and we have to let the, we have to have teachers that are willing to, you know, talk with students and open up to students and take some of that extra time. But again, facilitating that culture of it's okay, you don't have to be silent.

During his interview, the Valley 3-6 Principal discussed the intense impact bullying had on him. He shared anecdotes about refusing to take the bus home because he was afraid to encounter the student who bullied him. He described the physical and mental pain of being a victim of bullying, acknowledging that he walked home in a snowstorm to avoid any encounters.

Coincidentally, he framed the bus as the most problematic place for bullying in his current building as well.
Rule Follower

Unlike some of her colleagues, Valley’s K-2 Principal did not identify with a bullying experience in her past. She did, however, identify as a “rule follower.” She was able to directly link this to her framing of *The Law Matters*. In her schools, she expected all teachers to be aware of the timelines and protocols articulated in the law. She shared, “I don’t ever want a parent to say, ‘I told you this was happening and you did nothing.’ I'd rather look into it and make the determination then just brush it off.” When describing her strategic framing she acknowledged, “I may have freaked them out a little bit this year” when using the law as a motivational and prognostic frame to encourage Valley’s K-2 anti-bullying implementation. She clarified, “I don’t want to be blindsided.” This finding demonstrates how Valley’s K-2 Principal values and leadership style led to a certain type of framing and reported sensemaking by the faculty and staff that she leads.

Major Events

Throughout the interview process it was evident that certain events, mostly at the state and national level impacted the need to amplify framing around bullying. The Aries High School Assistant Principal explained, “I think it depends on what's happening in your school. It depends on what's happening in your community, in the state and the, you know, the nation. And obviously right now there's a lot to be concerned about in terms of violence, but it isn't necessarily being couched under the auspices of bullying.” Some administrators linked the start of their administrative careers with major events. The Aries Middle School Assistant Principal became an administrator in 1999 and reminisced about the impact of the Columbine High School tragedy. She connected this major event to her focus on bullying. In his first day as a principal the Valley 3-6 Principal started on the day following the Sandy Hook tragedy. He
acknowledged, “I think it's only been in through unfortunate tragedies that we've really started to shed a light on it.” Administrators discussed other major events such as suicide and lawsuits as drivers heightening awareness and focus on how they present bullying. The Aries Middle School Principal discussed the nuances of change relating the salience of messaging around bullying.

It's just that it's just interesting that we've changed. We're giving it a label and so now we have to have certain days where we're nice to each other. So what do you think led to that shift in priority? I think it's the attention. It's the, it's the attention from the press. Do I think it was always there? Probably, if you probably talk to your parents or your grandparents and they'll tell you all sorts of stories about Tommy getting beaten up or this or that and how they use the handle it back then. Now the priority is to handle things so that it doesn't get to that point.

It is evident that major events at the local, state, and national level impact the level of attention given to bullying. This attention influences the framing strategies used by principals to communicate with teachers, students, and families.

**Using the B-Word**

Several administrators in the study struggled with using the term bullying, and a few referred to it as the “b word.” Others substituted words and phrases like “mean spirited” or “unkind” as replacement terms for bullying. This framing of how the term bullying was used was often explained through anecdotes of conflicts resulting in difficult interactions or tense disagreements between administrators and parents. Many participants found the practice of classifying bullying as a challenge. The Valley 3-6 Principal compared bullying to “those Russian dolls.” The bullying matroska has multiple layers as you attempt to pull it apart. Like his colleagues who struggled applying the term bullying to specific student cases, the Valley 3-6 principal struggled where to draw the line between mean spirited and bullying while facing the pressure of implementing the law. The Valley K-2 Principal cynically questioned whether a first
grader who made aggressive physical contact with a classmate on multiple occasions should be classified as a bully. On one hand the student repeatedly created a hostile environment. However, she also questioned the skill set of a first grader and their ability to socialize appropriately. The ambiguity and complexity of these situations led the Valley 3-6 Principal to compare bullying to peeling the layers of a matroska. Examples of the challenges faced by principals in defining bullying can be found in Table 7. They also explained that overusing the term bullying creates challenges. This internal challenge and struggle to make sense of bullying holds the potential to impact how each principal is framing bullying.

Table 7 - Using the B-Word

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>Using the B-Word</th>
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| HS Assistant Principal | “If everything is bullying, then nothing is bullying.”  
“You need to be careful not to like use it as a catchall term for anything that is inappropriate.”  
“In some ways I feel like by making it so laser focused more recently that it becomes just a word that’s becomes meaningless because everybody’s using it for everything.” |
| MS Principal        | “Once the law came out, I think people started using the term more frequently. My child’s being bullied being it because it was in the news and it was the popular term at the time. I think prior to that, it was just mean behavior, mean kids, mean girl group. The mean boy group, the cliques. Same. Same concept, different terminology you think after.” |
| MS Assistant Principal | “I’m sure you know that bullying the word gets thrown around a lot. Are you really trying to understand truly what the word means by definition of the law and how we handle that? You know, mean spirited, you know, that you try to kind of vary those different things.”  
“I think it’s, it’s one, you know, clearly defining what bullying is and what it isn't. Because it is a, it is a, a word, as you well know, that gets thrown around very loosely.” |
| 3-6 Principal        | “I find it problematic. I find that the term is used very loosely, you know, for whatever reasons. So that, again, we’re working from a very strict definition of what bullying is and what constitutes bullying here at the school. Um, I find it problematic to refer to somebody as a bully as I try to refer to it as bullying behaviors. And I think there is a subtle difference, um,” |
because you're, you're, you're, you're, you're drawing attention to the behavior rather than the individual. Um, so I always try to be very cognizant how I'm addressing that with students and with parents, you know, these are, you know, these are bullying behaviors.

K-2 Principal

"When the 'b word' comes out and I think people more panic then. I think it's the same kind of thing. Like I said, like you feel like when somebody says the bullying word, you're like, 'Oh no. What does this, what did I let happen? What am I going to get in trouble for? What am I, what am I gonna be called in to do?'"

"Like somebody called someone stupid. Are we documenting that so that you know, just that predefined is so tricky because you want to protect the kids and you want to make sure stuff like this isn't happening, but you also don't want to arbitrarily or bog down the system or create something that's not there."

Grade Level Factors Shaping How Principals Approach Bullying

Grade level leadership appeared to be a factor shaping how each administrator made sense of bullying within their context. Anti-bullying policies exist to protect students across grade levels, but also puzzled several of the participants in this study. Coburn (2006) asserts that “local actors in schools actively construct their understanding of policies by interpreting them through the lens of their preexisting beliefs and practices” (p. 344). The developmental nuances at each respective grade level often times had administrators thinking these complexities would be easier to mete out at younger or older grade levels depending on their perspectives. For example, they often made assumptions that their colleagues in other buildings had an easier time defining problems linked to bullying in their schools. The Valley K-2 Principal explained the difference between upper elementary school students and primary students as she explained,

Like how do you say, you know, if a sixth grader is consistently calling somebody names or putting their hands on somebody that's more clear cut than the child that doesn't know how to communicate with somebody who wants to be friends with and is constantly like pulling on his sweatshirt or you know what I mean, like that is really hard and I find I'm dreading the day that I have to actually go to the definition and be like yes, this is bullying or no, this is not because looking at a kindergartner as opposed to, you know, it's just such a different, there's so much more developmentally. I don't know that it matches our youngest kids because socially they're trying to figure themselves out. And
like again, I don't think this isn't a blame thing, but sometimes we will look at it for a five year old. He wanted him to play and didn't know how to get his attention.

I think that primary educators are less likely to fill out like an office discipline referral than the older older grade levels are. So sometimes we don't have the documentation and for kindergartener or to remember what's happened, you know, a month prior or even a year or a year prior is, is tricky. So I, I find it less cut and dry here then with the older kids.

Table 8 includes excerpts from participants providing examples of their grade level framing.

Table 8 - Grade Level Assumptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>Grade Level Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HS Assistant Principal</td>
<td>“I think in high school it's, it's difficult to always feel like you have a real handle on things because the kids are moving throughout the building with different teachers all the time. And you know, it's not like in elementary school where this one teacher is seeing the same student do the same thing to that where you can be very clear on the fact that this is a bullying instance.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I wouldn't be surprised if there's a big difference in that in terms of age because having worked at the high school level only, I'm sure that we probably talk to the students and work with them in a very different way than an elementary school age child. So I certainly might feel differently if I had elementary aged kids sitting in front of you. Maybe didn't know how that student might internalize it or they'd be scared or those kinds of things. So I certainly could see that maybe it would be age dependent and also, I mean, but I could also be completely wrong just because I don't have that experience in for different age groups. So I could see how maybe a parent of an elementary school kid would be like this. And I want to know if this is what's being accused of by child, whereas maybe you know, parent of a 17 year olds, it's like whatever, you know, like, yeah, it could, it could be very different.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS Principal</td>
<td>“When does does the child take the ownership themselves at one point and middle school level? It is that transition in having taught high school, you know, I know they get it. I know when they'll get it, it just won't be for a while.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS Assistant Principal</td>
<td>“It's hard to say what that line is. That's the hardest thing. Is it the kid who is constantly rolling their eyes at someone? But it's kind of targeted and kind of the same kid. And I think that's that hard line. I find sometimes to that low level kind of immature seventh grade, you know, they're stupid or I don't like them. That's the stuff I think I find the most difficulty with. What do I call it? You know, I think overall it's a really nice kid. I think we have kids who are immature. I think we have kids who say things they shouldn't, so I think it's just trying. Again, I'm here to teach you to be better people.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and yes you need to learn math and English and science and all that stuff, but the world needs good hearted people.”

“PBIS does work probably much easier with the elementary. They do get very excited with some of our kids with stickers and stuff, but so they can get very excited with the little things.”

3-6 Principal

“I feel like the staff here working with the older kids, that's, that's kind of the two was kind of like, you know, we're, we're reacting to, uh, whereas, you know, the, the kind of nurturing the leader of the kindergarten teachers, like know that that's, you know, that's not nice to apologize to that, you know, to that student, you know, that's ingrained in the work that they do every second of the day where the teacher here is about, yeah, we got to get through this math lesson today.”

“So working with the primary students, um, you know, I got kind of in that mode where, you know, you're, you're still building the foundation with them. Whereas over here I've always kind of felt like for lack of a better term, some of the die had been cast, like some of the kids had made some of these choices. It looks different in the primary grades than it does over here.”

K-2 Principal

“I wish there was a look-for us for like what a standard would look like in kindergarten. Whatever it looked like in third grade. I wish because what bullying looks like in sixth grade, is it different than what it looks like in kindergarten or then we say it's not bullying? Um, so I find that part very tricky.”

“But again, I don't think elementary teachers see that as a problem that's happening in their grade levels. I think they see it as like a middle school, high school problem. Um, and maybe not as aware that there are elements of that happening, you know, like we talked about before, third, fourth, fifth, sixth grade because it's not necessarily in their face all the time.

It is evident that some of the principals in this study struggled to identify how to classify bullying under the law. The challenge of verifying whether or not student discipline situations were labeled as bullying or simply classified as another indiscretion posed a problem for some administrators more than others. The complexity of bullying itself, combined with grade level assumptions was a challenge for most participants in the study. Some participants felt bullying might be easier to identify at grade levels outside of their own. For example the Aries High School Assistant Principal felt that elementary school leaders would have an easier time identifying bullying because there are much fewer transitions and complexities in the typical
elementary school. However, the Valley K-2 Principal felt middle and high school principals would have a much easier time discerning bullying behaviors due to the complex developmental needs of the primary school learner. Valley’s 3-6 Principal felt leaders could be more proactive at younger ages due to the developmental approach in contrast with the more business-minded approaches of the upper grades. He contended that once students reach the upper primary grades there are more pressures academically and fewer chances to shift the way students think. He concluded, “The die had been cast.” While the middle school leaders acknowledged the complexity of bullying, they also accepted that some mean behavior is “typical middle school behavior.” The Aries Middle School Assistant Principal explained,

I think it's just that line of, I don't want to say typical middle school behavior to some degree, but they are kids. They do say mean things sometimes. Is that bullying or is that just teach them how to be good human beings because again, that word is strong. That's a tough form to write up and fill out on some. That's I think just the tough thing. If a kid just says ‘you're a jerk’ three times to a kid, does that mean now it’s bullying by the law? It's happened more than once and is targeted to a kid.

The high school administrators agreed that bullying behavior is more common in the freshman and sophomore years as those students are “still maturing and navigating the social scene.” This discrepancy between grade levels demonstrates an important contextual consideration when seeking to understand sensemaking and framing.
CHAPTER 6
SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS

This study is significant to educators across our nation and world. It aims to address a critical area of researcher interest: policy implementation, while taking a deeper look at a policy that continues to garner international attention: bullying. By understanding how leaders frame policy around bullying, we can support practitioners in their quest to develop safe and supportive school environments. I am hopeful this work will foster discussion centered on how leaders frame and shape policy messages and encourage closer examination of the factors that shape their framing.

From the perspective of framing, this study relied on the experiences of multiple school administrators implementing state anti-bullying policy. While certainly not generalizable, the findings forward our understanding of framing and encourage future researchers to pay attention the factors that influence framing done by school administrators. As evidenced by the findings, framing and sensemaking are highly contextualized. Research shows that variations in educators’ personal values along with the context they work in leads to potential shifts in policy implementation at the ground level as they make individualized decisions (Anagnostopoulos, 2003; Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977). This case study accentuates the need for principals to develop social and political skills to strategically deliver and craft policy messages (Woulfin et al., 2016) as they demonstrate “the capacity to be simultaneously on the dance floor and the balcony” (Fullan, 2006, p. 114). In other words, leaders are working on the ground level with policy, while also crafting the social and political messages to ensure successful implementation with fidelity. In particular this case study forwards the conversation for educational frame analysts to pay attention to factors such as grade level and years of experience as potential areas
that influence how messages are shaped in schools. The findings demonstrated the differences between elementary, middle, and high school factors that influence sensemaking around bullying policy. Often times, policies apply to all schools with little regard for the differences in grade level. In this case, that impacted how each leader made sense of the same policy. It could prove useful for scholars to examine grade level factors for other educational policies.

Additionally, this case study addresses the national public health issue of bullying that many educators are seeking to highlight (Gower et al., 2017). Hall (2017) showed that we perceive anti-bullying policy to be effective, but limited research proves this to be the case. All fifty states in our nation have an anti-bullying policy (Hall, 2017), yet little is known about the actual process of implementing these mandates. This study heeds to the plea of Cowan (2011) by continuing the conversation around bullying policy in the United States. The findings from this study clearly show that Connecticut’s anti-bullying policy is being framed in a variety of ways due to the factors that shape each leader’s sensemaking. In turn, a great amount of variance exists in the implementation of the policy (Frieberg, 2010). In the section that follows, I will discuss future considerations for organizational theorists including implications for framing theory as well as other institutional considerations.

**Framing Theory in a Loosely Coupled System**

The persuasive tactic of framing is intended to garner and maintain support for causes (Park et al., 2013) and was certainly done in a variety of ways across both Aries and Valley. In these cases, framing strategically highlighted attention towards bullying at times while in other cases framing was used to downplay aspects of the law. Principals acted as what Weatherly and Lipsky (1977) called “street level bureaucrats,” public agents who serve as liaisons between the written policy and its implementation. The pressures and demands of each context influence
how the policy is put into practice at the ground level. The Aries High School Assistant Principal accentuated this point by sharing,

But every situation is so different. Humans are, it's not cut and dry all the time. And you can look at it from all sorts of different angles and come up with all sorts of different things so you know whether or not you can figure out every possibility of how something like this can go and look with every possible solution to it, you know, that's impossible. So there's, there has to be something on paper. But I think if we're holding people accountable for following through on that in a way that doesn't make sense, that's where we started to have a real breakdown, you know, because then people again are going to be driven by fear of not following the policy and they're going to be trapped into doing something that they don't feel is appropriate. And then suddenly we're, we're trying to take the humanness out of what we're doing.

The personal and professional experiences of the school leaders in this study shaped how they portrayed anti-bullying policy to teachers, students and families in turn impacting their implementation. Therefore, as each leader engaged in the process of sensemaking they ended up interpreting the policy through their own lenses (Anagnostopoulos & Rutledge, 2007; Coburn, 2006; Coburn, 2005; Coburn, 2001; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). As evidenced in the findings, depending on the individual leader, their sensemaking played a direct role in their framing of anti-bullying policy.

Although the design of the study could not attend to larger organizational and institutional factors, it would be prudent to take a broader look at the findings of organizational theorists and attempt to apply them to policy implementation. Framing theory allowed us to see how principals directed messaging around bullying policy to help us understand their work at the ground level. However, it should also be noted that solely focusing on framing theory may ignore other issues including more macro level concepts. When we investigate using organizational theories, we must acknowledge that each viewpoint allows us a glimpse at certain aspects of a very complex system while leaving others out.
For scholars looking to investigate this case further, the use of institutional theory works well. Based upon the responses of the participants, I found myself wondering about the outcomes of working in a loosely coupled system. School systems in general are what sociologists refer to as “loosely coupled” because the ties among the structures and its actors are “weaker, more unpredictable, and more intermittent” (Weick, 1982, p. 676). Schools are unlike other organizations and often experience loose ties between decisions and implementation because more variables (Weick, 1976; Weick, 1982) and greater ambiguity exists regarding goals and the technical practices needed to achieve desired outcomes (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Evidence of challenges within a loosely coupled system is visible throughout the study. Valley’s 3-6 Principal alluded to the challenges in a loosely coupled system by stating,

> You know, and everybody's working from their own definitions of that's why you get that, that variance to it. But I don't know if there can be that one definition. Like I said, sometimes it's situational, you know, um, you know, and I think sometimes it's also a level of tolerance from the principal, but I think from the school, the community, the individual. So I mean there's so many factors that can, that can play into what you're trying to find that, that consistency is almost impossible sometimes, but, you know, but again, I think just kind of of having that clear message out as to what it is and what it isn't.

Effective leadership and policy implementation in a loosely coupled system relies upon faith, confidence, and symbolism as opposed to strict coordination and detailed inspection (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Confidence in an organization grows when leaders are able to create themes and symbols to hold structures together (Weick, 1982). While organizations may lack technical unison and productivity, they utilize myths and symbols to promote legitimacy and inspire confidence within the organization and to their clients and constituents (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

As I reflect back to the framing strategies used by school administrators, it appears that many of the messages were predicated on the logic of confidence. Research-based practices, large scale community and school programs, and formal documentation processes could all be
seen as instilling confidence and legitimacy in the school’s anti-bullying work. This logic of confidence has become a traditional practice within schools as they work to implement policy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) as leaders of social movements carefully craft their messages (Benford & Snow, 2000). Thus, the complex, ambiguous and autonomous nature of education and its weak technical core makes it difficult to tightly align policy into practice, thus creating a loosely coupled system. While the bullying research does not specifically cite loose coupling, Hall (2017) suggests that the mere existence of an anti-bullying policy has not equated to outcomes concerning a reduction in bullying. Thus, a logic of confidence has been established around policy, but has not always delivered legitimate results.

**Implications for Practitioners**

I remain hopeful that this work can be useful for scholars and practitioners. As a school leader, I am committed to understanding more about creating safe and supportive school environments. Additionally, I remain committed to understanding more about implementing educational reforms with fidelity and success. If we want educational “reforms to be salient and credible, leaders must pay attention to developing strategies that address problems in a substantive way” (Park et al., 2013, p. 660). Research shows that school administrators play a critical role in creating a positive school climate (Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013; Louis & Walhstrom, 2011) and are integral in leading change (Bryk, 2010; Fullan, 2006; Hallinger, 2011; Hanford & Leithwood, 2013; Harris, 2011; Harris, 2012; Jones & Harris, 2014; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). In short, “principals are at the nexus between policy and practice” (Woulfin, 2017, p. 166) as they play a critical role in the implementation process (Burch & Spillane, 2003).

Paying attention to bullying is imperative for educators and school leaders in 2019 and beyond. The shift in American and global politics in the present has resulted in increased
attention being placed on the bullying. In particular, “concerns about a rise in hate crimes and bias incidents have surged since the campaign and election of President Trump, who has frequently used coarse language and racist rhetoric when describing immigrants, people of color, and women” (Vara-Orta, 2018, para. 9). Huang and Cornell (2019) conducted a study noting a modest rise in teasing and bullying since the 2016 election, imploring researchers to investigate further. This pattern of behavior was recently discussed by the Anti-Defamation League as they cited a rise in identity based bullying, “between what young people hear in the public and political discourse and racial bullying in schools (ADL, 2019, para. 6). Some authors and researchers coined this disturbing pattern as the “Trump Effect” when schools have reported an increase of bullying comments among school children that imitate political rhetoric (Sparks, 2019). This recent shift continues to highlight the need for researchers and practitioners to pay attention to bullying and the impact it has on our students.

The participants in this study do the work on the ground level each and every day as they strategically craft messages around countless topics and initiatives, including bullying. As I close this study, I look back to one of the participants for advice on our next steps as leaders in educational change. We must continue to explore how leaders are dealing with bullying and implementing policies across our nation. As the Valley K-2 Principal acknowledged, “I don't know that there's as much training for people in our position for how to prepare for that [referring to bullying and student based issues] as there should be. I don't know that there's enough. I don't know that I walked out of my own it program feeling like I was prepared enough for that portion of the job.” While we certainly cannot prepare for every situation that will be faced in schools, we can certainly focus on the importance of crafting messages as school leaders move through the highly complex, political, and often ambiguous organization of American
public schools. To do so we must heed the advice of framing scholars and pay closer attention how school leaders make meaning and frame key policy initiatives. At the end of the day we educators are seeking to do what’s best for kids.
REFERENCES


Klass, P. (2017, August 28). In the fight against bullying, a glimmer of hope. *New York Times*


APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Principals / Assistant Principals

Round 1 Interview: District and school level systems and practices to implement anti-bullying policy

During today’s interview, I am hoping to gain a better understanding of your experiences and practices with Connecticut’s anti-bullying law. Please feel free to offer any anecdotal experiences to illustrate your answers to my questions. I may even ask you to elaborate, as I am particularly interested in your specific experiences.

1. How long have you been an educator?

2. How long have you been in your current position?

3. Prior to serving in this position, where else have you worked?

4. Can you please describe your district’s approach to addressing Connecticut’s anti-bullying law?

5. Can you please describe your school’s approach to addressing Connecticut’s anti-bullying law?

6. What are your perceptions on the current state of your school’s approach to curb bullying?
   - Can you please describe student based programs are offered to combat bullying?
     - prompt for PBIS, assemblies, outside presenters
   - To what degree is bullying prevalent in your school community?

7. What about your approach to anti-bullying is working well?
   - What about your approach to anti-bullying is currently challenging?

8. In your mind, what if any, are problems related to bullying?

9. Please share a few strategies that you use to address bullying?
   - Are there any other leadership activities that you do to address anti-bullying policy?

10. How do you motivate and generate support around anti-bullying policy?

11. How do you present your school’s approach for bullying to teachers?
   - Can you please describe trainings offered to teachers/staff on the bullying program?
   - How did teachers respond to this?
12. Is there anything else you’d like to share about your approach to implementing CT’s anti-bullying law at your site?

When I return, it would be great for you to bring a couple artifacts related to your site’s anti-bullying systems and practices.

Round 2 Interview: Personal and professional experiences shaping implementation

1. Who do you collaborate with on anti-bullying? [see role-specific questions]

2. What professional experiences have shaped your implementation anti-bullying policy?
   - leadership preparation, district PD, media, other reading

I’m also interested in hearing about some of your personal experiences related to bullying.

3. Thinking back, tell me about a personal experience that shaped your perspective on bullying?
   - How does that shape your work today?

4. Could you also share any experiences from your time as a teacher that shaped your perspective on bullying?
   - How do those experiences shape your work today?

5. When in your career has bullying been viewed as more or less of a priority? Can you explain what you think leads to this ebb and flow in priorities?

6. From your perspective, what is bullying?
   - Can you share an example of bullying?
   - Within your district, to what extent do other leaders hold this definition of bullying?

7. Please tell me about a time that there was a disagreement over Connecticut’s bullying policy with a teacher, parent, or student? If yes, can you please describe the interaction? If not, what do you attribute this agreement to?

Thank you for bringing artifacts on your site’s anti-bullying program.

8. Artifact Walk:
   - Can you explain what this is?
   - How did you develop it? Did you collaborate with anyone to design it?
   - How does it tie to the district policy/system?
   - How did you use it in practice?
   - How did teachers/staff/students respond?
   - How would you improve/change it?
   - Has it changed over time?
Do you have follow-up planned? Why or why not?

Additional Questions for Elementary Principal

1. Who do you work with in your school on addressing bullying? Can you describe your work together?

2. How do you interact with district leaders on issues related to anti-bullying policy?

Additional Questions Secondary Principal

1. How do you work with your assistant principal to address bullying in your school?

2. Who else do you work with in your school on addressing bullying? Can you describe your work together?

3. How do you interact with district leaders on issues related to anti-bullying policy?

Additional Questions for Assistant Principal

1. How do you work with your principal to address bullying in your school?

2. Who else do you work with in your school on addressing bullying? Can you describe your work together?

3. How do you interact with district leaders on issues related to anti-bullying policy?
Central Office Administration

During today’s interview, I am hoping to gain a better understanding of your experiences and practices with Connecticut’s anti-bullying law. Please feel free to offer any anecdotal experiences to illustrate your answers to my questions. I may even ask you to elaborate, as I am particularly interested in your specific experiences.

1. How long have you been an educator?
2. How long have you been in your current position?
3. Prior to serving in this position, where else have you worked?
4. Can you please describe your district’s approach to addressing Connecticut’s anti-bullying law?
   - To what extent has this shifted over time?
5. How do you work with school administrators to address CT’s anti-bullying law?
6. Can you share some examples of how you’ve led administrators in your district to implement Connecticut’s anti-bullying law?
   - What is your evidence that this is effective?
   - What are some areas of opportunity for improvement?
7. What professional development and/or training experiences have you implemented on anti-bullying policy?
   - What have been the results of this?
8. Who else do you work on your anti-bullying policy with aside from administrators?
9. What are your perceptions on the current state of your district’s approach to curb bullying?
   - To what extent is bullying prevalent in your district?
10. What about your district’s approach to anti-bullying is working well?
    - What about your district’s approach to anti-bullying is currently challenging?
11. Please share a few strategies that you use to address bullying?
    - Are there any other leadership activities that you do to address anti-bullying policy?
12. How do you motivate and generate support around anti-bullying / safe school climate policy?
13. From your perspective, what is bullying?
    - Is the definition you shared widely agreed upon? Why or why not?
14. Is there anything else you’d like to share about the district’s approach to implementing the state’s anti-bullying policy?
APPENDIX B

FRAMING FACTORS SUMMARY MATRIX

The tables below show trend patterns for the most frequently coded factors that were combined into themes describing each participant’s influences on framing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framing Factors</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>K-2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of Training</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Alignment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rule Follower</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Experience</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Major Events</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the ‘B’ Word</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level Assumptions</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(* Shift indicates a change that occurred after HS AP joined the Aries School District)

*Training* – Reference to specific workshops and professional development linked to Connecticut’s anti-bullying law.

*Lack of Training* – Reference to comments around a little to no formal training experiences.

*Principal Alignment* – Reference to matching viewpoints with higher ranking administrator.

*Rule Follower* – Reference to strict adherence to guidelines and mandates.

*Personal Experience* – Reference to anecdotes in personal life. Participants all experienced personal bullying victimization for inclusion in the matrix above.

*Major Events* – Reference to significant local or national events around school and/or student safety. Many of the events referenced garnered local or national media attention.

*Using the ‘B’ Word* – Reference to difficult situations classifying acts of bullying. Anecdotes referenced challenging scenarios with parents and/or students related to the term “bullying.”

*Grade Level Assumptions* – References to age and/or grade level as factors that influenced how administrators framed bullying situations and behaviors.
Framing Factors | Summary Framing Factors
--- | ---
*Training* | Both HS Principal and MS Principal discussed the benefits of early training when Connecticut’s anti-bullying law was developed. This appeared to give them more confidence in their decision making.

*Lack of Training* | Three administrators discussed the challenges with training themselves and developing their own understanding on Connecticut’s anti-bullying law. This caused a lack of confidence in their decision making around bullying.

*Principal Alignment* | Both secondary assistant principals discussed developing practices aligned with their principal. The HS Assistant Principal was most notable, as her framing strategies shifted significantly under HS Principal in comparison to her practice in her previous district.

*Rule Follower* | K-2 Principal described herself as a rule follower and appeared to practice attention to detail in her daily work. HS Assistant Principal began her career as a rule follower, but shifted as she moved to Aries High School and assimilated to the leadership approach modeled by HS Principal.

*Personal Experience* | Being a victim of bullying as a child significantly shaped the work on 3-6 Principal and HS Assistant Principal. MS Principal also shared experiences of being a bullying victim, but felt less of an emotional connection to that feeling in his daily practice.

*Major Events* | All administrators discussed the impact of major events ranging from school shootings, teen suicides, and other major news events linked to bullying.

*Using the ‘B’ Word* | All administrators with exception of the secondary principals had challenging scenarios using the label “bully” about students at some point in their practice. HS AP found it less problematic after working at Aries High School. Administrators described difficult scenarios where parents disagreed with their assessment of bullying. They found the use of the term “bully” to be problematic.

*Grade Level Assumptions* | All administrators were influenced by their grade level. K-2, 3-6, and HS AP all felt that it would be easier to identify bullying behavior at grade levels outside of their own. This finding demonstrates the contextualized factors that grade levels play in policy implementation.