

## Secondary School Principal Perceptions of Multi-Optional Response Programs as a School Safety Measure

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### Abstract

The phenomenological research investigates the perceptions of principals on the use of multi-option response plans before, during, and after active shooter drills. The study discovers three central themes from eight Secondary principals. Active shooter drills in public schools are mandated by state legislation and create school culture challenges for stakeholders. Secondary school principals are required to prepare students and faculty for these potential risks. In individual states, school districts may direct principals to use a multi-option response plan for active shooter drills.

*Keywords:* Multi-option response, lockdown, principal perceptions, active shooter drills, school culture

Mass school shootings and media attention motivate school leaders to implement safety plans to minimize casualties in case a school shooting takes place on campus (King & Bracy, 2019). Most states require school administrators to implement and practice active shooter response plans (Musu, Zhang, Wang, Zhang & Oudekerk, 2018). Since 2004, multi-option response plans for active shooter drills have increased by 13 percent (Musu et al., 2004).

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the perceptions of eight secondary school principals in using multi-option response plans for active shooter drills. Research interviews were conducted to collect statements from participants about the use of multi-option response plans for active shooter drills. The findings from the secondary

principal interviews revealed three central themes expanding across different stages of an active shooter drill (before, during, and after).

The phenomenological research investigates the perceptions of principals on the use of multi-option response plans before, during, and after active shooter drills. The study discovers three central themes from eight secondary principals. Active shooter drills in public schools are mandated by state legislation and create school culture challenges for stakeholders. Secondary school principals are required to prepare students and faculty for these potential risks. In individual states, school districts may direct principals to use a multi-option response plan for active shooter drills

Across America, secondary educational leaders are concerned about school violence (Cuellar, 2018). According to Musu, Zhang, Wang, Zhang, and Oudekerk (2019), "37 active shooter incidents" took place in K-12 schools from the years 2000 to 2017. Also, approximately "one to two percent or 20 students" of all youth murders are committed on elementary, middle, and high school campuses (Rogers, 2019, p. 23). Media coverage of mass school shootings such as Columbine, Sandy Hook, and Marjory Stoneman Douglas have roused more than two-thirds of schools to practice active shooter drills in preparation for a possible school shooting (Campbell, 2018). The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2008) defines an active shooter as a person who is "actively engaged in killing or attempting" to murder individuals in a "confined and populate area" and typically uses guns.

As the media attention increased on school shootings after Columbine, school districts were motivated and directed by state officials to perform active shooter drills with faculty, students, and police (Jonson, 2017). School districts have evolved in the

type of response for active shooter drills ranging from a traditional lockdown or shelter-in-place to a full-fledge multi-option response, such as Run-Hide-Fight (King and Bracy, 2019). School officials will commonly adopt one of two active shooter response plans to train staff and students. The first plan or option schools will use for an active shooter drill is a "traditional lockdown" (Jonson, Moon, & Hendry, 2018). In a traditional lockdown approach, school leaders will train staff and students to lock the door, turn the lights off, hide in the corner of the classroom, and wait until the administrator or police to give an all-clear sign (Trump, 2011). Another method or response to an active shooter is a multi-option plan. In a multi-option response, school leaders defer to classroom teachers and faculty to determine what action to take based on the location of the shooter. School faculty may select a traditional lockdown, evacuate, or possibly barricade the classroom door (Jonson et al., 2018). Regardless of the school safety plan a building leader decides to implement, the leader must consider the impact multi-option response plans for an active shooter drill has on school culture. Also, building principals play a significant role in active shooter drills and training faculty and students in a multi-option response plan (Rogers, 2019). Principal leadership is essential to the success or failure of any initiative that can impact school culture (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996). Limited research exists exploring the impact of multi-option response plans for active shooter drills has on the principal position and school culture.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Throughout the years, scholars have examined the relationship between school culture and principal leadership (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996). Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) define school culture as a "framework that a group can use to solve problems and

pass them down from one generation to the next" (p. 6). School principals place forth great effort to foster a positive school culture, and at times they have to navigate a complex existing system that includes various stakeholder groups. One scholar claims, "school culture is one of the most complex and important concepts in education" (Stoll, 2000, p. 9). Due to the multifarious nature of school culture, scholars have attempted to examine the dynamic relationships among the school principal and educational stakeholders such as faculty, students, parents, and District Administrators in a school district (Getzels, Lipham, & Campbell, 1968). Hallinger & Leithwood (1996) explored the influence school culture has on a building principal, as well as how the principal's leadership impacts school culture.

Furthermore, the researchers believed that events and changes in society "influence principal leadership" and subsequently impact the school culture (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996). Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the principal and educational stakeholders as well as the possible role that society has on school culture. As the fear of mass shootings increases among educational stakeholders, principals are left with facilitating active shooter drills. To explore how school administrators can foster a positive building climate and incorporate a multi-option response plan for an active shooter drill, the study uses Hallinger and Leithwood's (1996) Framework, Locus of Leadership within the School and Culture to interpret the findings. Hallinger and Leithwood's Framework (1996) relates to this research because school principals are expected to create a safe and secure learning environment within a culture that is vulnerable to societal fears as well as pressure from Superordinates (central office), students, staff, and parents. School principals are essential in planning, training, and

communicating active shooter drills with limited discussion on the effect of multi-option response plans for active shooter drills have on their roles as cultural leaders.

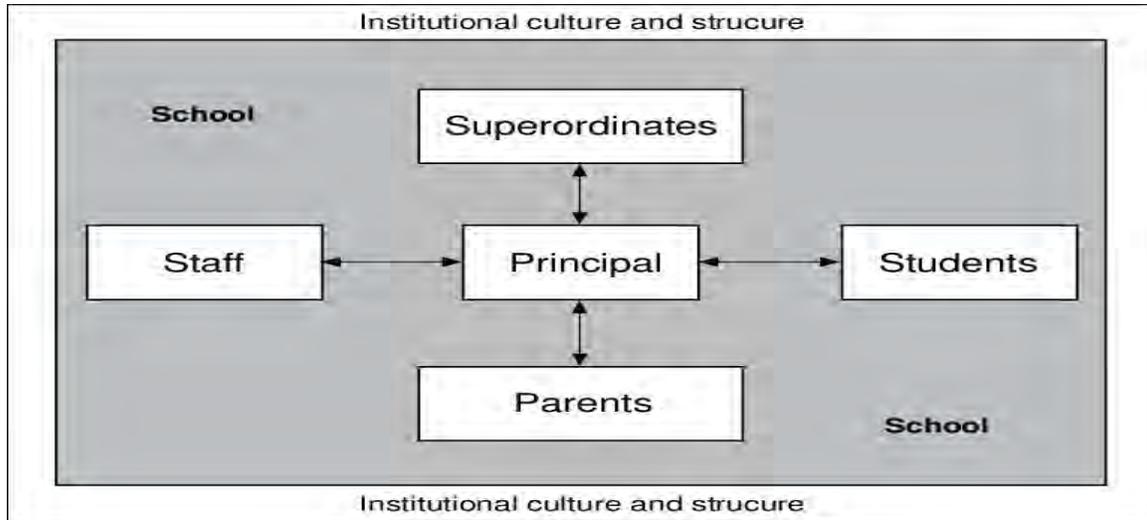


Figure 1. Locus of Leadership Within the School and Culture: Institutional Culture and Structure

### Method

A qualitative study was used to conduct this research by focusing on the primary research question, what were the perceptual changes of principals who have implemented multi-option response plans for active shooter drills?

### Research Design

The phenomenological analysis was performed as a way to capture the "lived experiences" of principals about the "phenomena" of multi-option response plans for an active shooter drill (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Phenomenology research was used because all school principals in this study share the same experiences of using multi-option plans for active shooter drills (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I developed a semi-structured interview process with three primary questions and an additional broad question to gather "direct information from study participants" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005,

p. 1279). Focusing on the various stages (before, during, and after) of multi-option response plans for active shooter drills, I asked building principals three primary questions and one additional overarching question:

- 1) How has the implementation of multi-option response plans changed your perceptions on school safety and response before an active shooter drill or event? Are there any perceptual changes with students, faculty, parents, and other patrons?
- 2) How has the implementation of multi-option response plans changed your perceptions on school safety and response during an active shooter drill or event? Are there any perceptual changes with students, faculty, parents, and other patrons?
- 3) How has the implementation of multi-option response plans changed your perceptions on school safety and response after an active shooter drill or event? Are there any perceptual changes with students, faculty, parents, and other patrons?
- 4) What other things would you like to share about your (principal) perspective on multi-option response plans for active shooter drills? What other things would you like to share about your (principal) perspective on school safety?

### ***Researcher Description***

I served as a school administrator for 20 years serving as an elementary and middle school principal for a combined total of seven years, as well as a high school Dean, Assistant Principal, and Athletic Director for a combined 13 years. My school administrator experience was located in an urban, diverse school district with close to

18,000 students in K-12<sup>th</sup> grades. As a school leader, I would coordinate and facilitate active shooter drills and faculty school crisis meetings. During my final two years of service as a middle school principal, I trained building faculty in the Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, and Evacuate, otherwise known as (A.L.I.C.E.) (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2016). Also, I would communicate with parents, central office administrators, and the local police department before and after an active shooter drill. Furthermore, I have experience facilitating and training teachers, students, and support staff with applying A.L.I.C.E. at the middle and high school levels. This current research is enhanced because of my principal experiences with multi-option response plans for active shooter drills in an urban setting. On the other hand, my experience and thus perspective were from a different Midwest state as well as schools with entirely different cultures. I did not have previous relationships or interactions with the participants of this study. As a former building principal, I believe when District Administrators adopt policies and practices with limited feedback from building principals, they are unaware of the impact initiatives play in school culture. Superordinate positions, known as District Administrators, are defined as Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Special Education Directors and Chief School Business Official. Thus, this study attempts to provide building principals a voice in sharing their perceptions of how multi-option response plans for active shooter drills influence the building leader's position. I had previous training with interviewing teachers, students, and faculty members. Typically, field notes were taken during these interviews and discussed among stakeholders if necessary.

### ***Participants and Recruitment Process***

This study took place in a Midwest U.S. state and was stratified based on secondary schools that use a multi-option response for an active shooter drill. I used pseudonyms to keep participants and their schools confidential. I solicited over 25 school district superintendents in Kentucky, Illinois, and Ohio through email, who used multi-option response plans for active shooter drills. I secured six district superintendents between Illinois and Ohio that agreed to have building principals participate in the study, contingent upon principal participation approval. The other 19 superintendents either declined or did not respond to the inquiry. Next, I emailed 33 building principals in the six districts, and eight principals at the secondary levels agreed to be interviewed for the study. I used purposive sampling to secure school principals using a multi-option response plan for an active shooter drill (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008).

Table 1 illustrates the school demographics, where principals serve as leaders. The overall sample of eight principals consisted of two high school principals serving students from 9th through 12th, two middle school principals serving students from 6th through 8th grades, and four junior high school principals serving students in 7th and 8th grades. All eight principals in this study ranged from having five years of principal experience at their current school to 1 year as the principal. Also, three of the principals were female and five were male. All eight principals lead schools that use a multi-option response for an active shooter drill, but differences exist among schools' implementation ranging from partial to full adoption.

**Table 1***Secondary School Building Demographics*

	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5	School 6	School 7	School 8
Grade Levels	9-12	9-12	7-8	7-8	7-8	7-8	6-8	6-8
State	OH							
Student Enrollment	1840	481	288	633	805	1015	1915	658
% of Students with Disabilities	9.1	21.2	16.1	12.2	10.6	9.1	13.8	12
Total Faculty	135	51	24	43	76	65	110	44
% of staff with Disabilities	0	0	.24	0	0	.65	0	.44
% of Caucasian	90.6	68	61.5	85.9	64.9	89	86.6	64.1
% of African-American	1.7	16.5	16.6	1.8	8.6	2.1	2.7	2
% of Hispanic	2.7	10.1	17.2	4	6.9	3.3	4	19
% of Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0	0	4.1	0	0	0	0
% of multiracial	3.4	4.8	4.4	4.2	6.8	3.2	3.7	3.2
% of Free-Reduced Lunch	15.9	66.9	76.3	16.4	13.9	17.5	34.1	12
% of EL Learners	0	2.6	4.5	0	2.8	0	0.8	3
# Years Principal at School	5	2	3	1	5	4	1	5

## **Data Collection**

I scheduled the principal meetings and coordinated a date and time to interview in their office at school. Principal interviews were scheduled for January and February of the year 2020. I sent all school principals a recruiting script and an informed consent letter. Next, the principals informed me of possible dates and times to conduct the interviews. I scheduled each principal interview by using Microsoft Outlook and sent an email calendar invitation. Only one principal had to reschedule and preferred to conduct a phone interview due to a school cancelation for inclement weather. The other seven principals were interviewed at their school office. Principal interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes, with an average of 60 minutes. As previously stated, principals were asked three central open questions, and then time was allocated for principals to elaborate on their responses or share any other insights. I received permission from each principal to audio record the interview and take field notes. Next, I asked the administrators if they would like me to provide them with a copy of the audio recording, field notes, and the transcription. All eight secondary principals declined a copy of any data. After concluding all eight recorded interviews, I transcribed each interview.

## ***Analysis***

I coded the data using Tesch's eight steps in the coding process and generated eight themes (Tesch, 1990). The Eight Steps include:

1. I got listened to all interviews at least three times, which took approximately four to five hours per interview.

2. As I listened to each interview, I typed the statements of each principal interview for all four questions and added any additional comments from the principals that were outside the four questions.
3. I placed the principal interview comments into possible topics or main ideas.
4. Next, I placed the primary topics or main ideas at the top of column using Microsoft Excel.
5. Next, I reviewed the topics of the column and reviewed the transcribed principal statements and wrote down an abbreviated code next to each statement.
6. Then, I reviewed my topics and grouped them together to create three primary themes or categories.
7. Next, I reviewed the themes and categories and performed an initial examination.
8. My final step was to review and recode any data if the statements were not appropriately placed.

## Results

**Table 2**

*Secondary Principals Multi-Optional Response Themes for an Active Shooter Drill for Different*

Communication Theme 1	Culture of Fear Theme 2	Heightened Awareness among Faculty, Students, & Parents Theme 3
Principals must have proactive communication with all stakeholders (parents, faculty, students, and central office) before, during, and after the active shooter drill.	Principals observe increased anxiety levels among students & staff.	Principals state they have to deal with parents that bring social media concerns about other students, and the parents are anxious
Principals collaborate and communicate with school resource officers.	Principals state it is important to work through fears with faculty during an active shooter drill.	Principals share when students make flippant comments or posts threatening messages on social media, teachers or parents report it, and it is taken seriously.
	Principals claim that after the Parkland school shooting, parents were afraid to send their child to school.	

Table 2 provides three central themes in this research study: communication, culture of fear, and a heightened awareness among faculty, students, and parents. The first theme stated in the research was the importance of principal communication to educational stakeholders before, during, and after a multi-option response plan for an active shooter drill. The second theme in this study was that all eight principals claimed active shooter drills created a culture of fear among students and faculty. The third theme disclosed in this study was the side effects of a fear-based culture: a heightened awareness among

parents, students, and faculty when a student makes a flippant comment in the classroom or on a social media platform.

All eight principals in the study stated communication before, during, and after an active shooter drill is paramount and expected from educational stakeholders. Principals have many levels of constituents that demand and need to know that an active shooter drill is taking place. Principals communicate with the district office, school resource officers, parents, adjacent organizations, faculty, students, and any other entity that would be possibly impacted by students evacuating through random doors, fake gunshots in the building, and other abnormal commotion that accompanies this type of response. The principal from School 1 in Table 1, which had full A.L.I.C.E. implementation as a multi-option response describes the first theme of communication and stated,

I have various tasks I need to complete. First, I have to check our school and district calendars to make sure we don't have any conflicts with testing, assemblies, etc... Second, I have to coordinate with our school resource officer and his police department. Third, I schedule and facilitate a meeting with [the] police and my administration team. We talk through all the roles and what types of things need to get done. We need to know what boxes need to be checked. I do have a staff member in a motorized wheelchair that I notify before we run a drill. We don't announce all the drills but one staff member will stay home if she is aware of a planned drill. Also, I have to prepare my script in advance before the drill. I need my script so that I know what to say over the all school intercom, then teachers can decide what action needs to take place. The school resource officer will escort the person acting as the active shooter drill and it's quite

disturbing when you see students and staff fleeing. Teachers have to make quick decisions Also, I have to be very clear and concise with my script to make sure students understand it's only a drill (Principal, School 1).

The principal's response is essential to the study. It describes the numerous stakeholder groups a principal communicates with before, during, and after a multi-option response for an active shooter drill. It is common for school principals to interact with many stakeholders through various email lists for district, staff, parents, students, and community. Besides the routine principal correspondence of weekly newsletters, highlights, the itinerary of essential dates, fundraising, etc., school administrators have to make sure to communicate before, during, and after a multi-option response for an active shooter drill. According to a study completed by Klocko and Wells (2015) principals listed email communications as one of their primary job responsibilities and stressors. One of the many communication challenges for principals is to consider how to make sure the message of a vital safety drill is not a lost in the myriad of other principal emails, voice-blasts, and notifications delivered on a daily and weekly basis. Principal communication with "District Administrators, Staff, Students, and Parents" may determine the level of collaboration among the principal and the four groups declared in Figure 1 (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996, p. 209). Principal communication is an essential component of creating a positive school culture. Scholars claimed "schools can no longer function as fortresses that close out the surrounding community; instead, creating high levels of transparency through a constant flow of communication is critical" (Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016, p. 37). Principal communication is essential to a positive and safe

school culture. Still, it is paramount to alleviate the level of fear among faculty, students, and parents with multi-option response plans for active shooter drills.

The second theme in this study was that all eight principals claimed performing multi-option response plans for an active shooter drill creates a culture of fear among students and faculty. The principal from School 4 in Table 1 stated,

I had parents come to my school the morning after the Parkland shooting informing me they were afraid to send their child to school because of the possibility of a school shooting. Also, we have noticed an increase of kids with anxiety, phobias, and fear of coming to school after we have an A.L.I.C.E. drill. You should know that we've had to hire over a million dollars in mental health professionals to work with anxious, phobic students. I've even had staff members get unnerved by trainings and possibility of school shooters. They've asked me to purchase bullet proof vests (Principal, School 4).

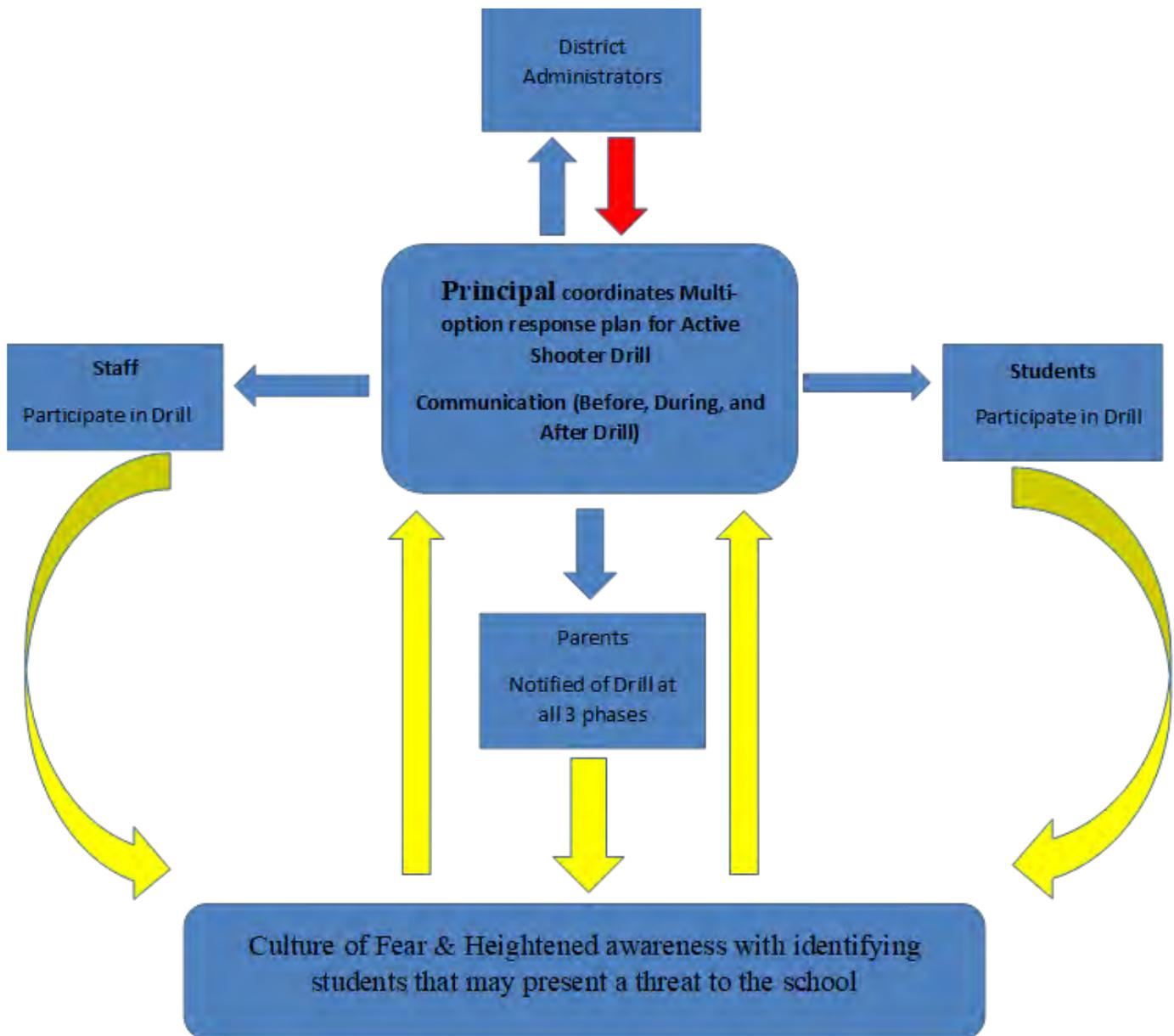
The principal's comments represent the culture of fear that exists among students, faculty, and parents. The culture of fear among faculty, students, and staff existed in every school. The levels of anxiety among educational stakeholders varied; however, every principal in this study expressed the fear of a school shooting was elevated after a multi-option response plan for an active shooter. As the secondary school leaders in this study attempt to create a positive school culture where students have an opportunity to thrive, the unintended consequences of performing active shooter drills may come at a cost. Hallinger & Leithwood's (1996) claimed, "culture has an impact on schools at the institutional level, on the community context, on the beliefs and experiences of administrators, administrative practice, and on a school's particular culture" (p. 109).

School communities living in a perpetual state of fear will foster an educational environment that is not necessarily conducive to the mission of educating students. The culture of fear in schools due to the potential of school shootings, as well as student drills that perpetuate preparing for a potential shooting, places building principals in the center of an organization that was not intended to address societal challenges, such as mass shootings. Thus, building principals have to formulate avenues to conquer this culture of fear among stakeholders to focus on their school's academic mission. Stoll (2000) posited that school leaders are "culture founders," and the primary way a school culture can change is by the leader "installing new values and beliefs" (p. 13). In this day and age, where the normalization of media coverage of mass shootings and states mandating school districts implement active shooter drills in schools, building principals are tasked to create a school culture that embraces this new normal. Although principals adhere to the board of education adopted policies with facilitating multi-option response plans for active shooter drills, teacher unions have started to dissent. Recently, teacher unions such as the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) (2017) and National Education Association (NEA) have begun to oppose or, at a minimum, demand drastic changes to active shooter drills and multi-option response plans in schools (Walker, 2020). The AFT and N.E.A. have argued that multi-option response plans for active shooter drills do not enhance school safety and create fear among students (Walker, 2020). In the best interest of all educational stakeholders, school superintendents and building principals will need to determine the most constructive and effective means to prepare for an active shooter without traumatizing faculty, students, and parents.

The unintended consequences of multi-option response plans for active shooter drills may be the catalyst with increasing numbers of students identified as potential school shooters. The third theme in this study was all eight principals claimed performing multi-option response plans for an active shooter drill is how principals have observed a heightened awareness among teachers and parents with identifying students that may present a threat to the school. A high school principal from School 2 in the study cited in Table 1 stated, "There is a heightened awareness of students making threats on social media or a feeling a staff has about a kid which requires me to investigate a student" (Principal, School 2). A junior high school principal from School 6 in Table 1 reiterated, "I have to deal with parents that bring social media concerns about other students, and the parents are anxious" (Principal, School 6). The same principal elaborated during the interview and expressed the investigations in these matters take a significant amount of time from other principal responsibilities. A different high school principal from School 1 in Table 1 directly stated, "When students make flippant comments or posts threatening messages on social media, teachers or parents report it, and it is taken seriously" (Principal, School 1). Another junior high school principal from School 5 in Table 1 reported, "When students make or post some flippant comments about shootings or guns, police get involve[d] and will investigate the student" (Principal, School 5). Hallinger & Leithwood's (1996) model coincides with the results from the third theme as it pertains to school culture. Hallinger & Leithwood (1996) posit that "values and normative expectations" have a significant role in educational leaders (p. 109).

## Findings

As shown in Figure 2, building principals are an integral component in school safety as this significant aspect has the potential to impact the school culture. These school leaders oversee multi-option response plans for active shooter drills from start to finish and must address the various concerns of their stakeholders. Fear is a common thread among the stakeholders in Figure 2. The principal from School 5 in Table 1 states, "Some parents do not want their student to participate in our A.L.I.C.E. training and active shooter drills" (Principal, School 5). Building principal from School 7 addresses the fear among faculty and parents through a safety committee. School 7 principal states, "in our safety committee meetings, the teachers and parents will inform me about concerns and things to consider during drills... like what should we do if the shooter enters this section of the building?" (Principal, School 7). Despite communication efforts placed forth by building principals through safety committees, faculty meetings, and parent conferences, principals continue to work through these cultural challenges. The principal from School 6 claims, "when a child gets profiled by a school as a possible school shooter, their parents are concerned because they were profiled and didn't feel they will be treated fairly" (Principal, School 6). This statement provides evidence of an additional challenge a building principal must confront within the school culture.



*Note:* This model conceptualizes the numerous stakeholders building principals have to communicate (blue lines) with for a multi-option response plan for an active shooter drill. The red line constitutes the relational hierarchy between “District Administrators” or District Administrators administration and the principal. Staff, students, and parents exhibit fear with active shooter drills, and that fear manifests itself with identifying potential school shooters, which is communicated back to the building principal.

*Figure 2.* Institutional Culture and Structure

## Discussion

The eight school principals in this research were utterly mindful of the role multi-option response plans for active shooter drills may have on school culture. Building leaders shared that multi-option response plans for active shooter drills disrupted the normalcy of the school environment among parents, students, and faculty. However, school administrators influence on educational stakeholders in a school setting cannot be denied (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996). Principals are at the heart and center of school culture, and their effectiveness may determine if the handling of sensitive safety drills hinders or improves school culture (Sanfelippo & Sinanis, 2016; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996).

### **Communication, Communication, and Communication**

This study contributes to educational leadership by capturing the experiences of secondary school principals with multi-option response plans for an active shooter drill in the context of a school culture framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Secondary principals have a leadership opportunity by utilizing effective communication strategies when facilitating safety drills.

Principals in this study realize that active shooter drills may create an element of fear as an unintended consequence. One high school principal in this study revealed that practicing a multi-option response plan for an active shooter drill creates “fear of the unknown” (Principal, School 2). The high school administrator’s comment regarding this culture of fear that exists may have an impact on school climate. King and Bracy’s (2019) study highlights the “consequences of safety drills” in a school setting (p. 285). The investigators claim that when students and faculty are directed to engage in a multi-

option response plan for an active shooter drill that stakeholders have a “heightened sense of fear of being killed or harmed at school” (King & Bracy, 2019, p. 285). As school principals continue to lead and facilitate multi-option response plans for active shooter drills, they must consider solutions to mitigate the negative impact safety drills may have on the school culture.

Data from this study suggested that building principals may foster positive relationships when they consistently communicate with stakeholders before, during, and after active shooter drills. Principals that cultivate positive relationships may increase "trust" between parents, students, and teachers, fostering a favorable culture (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015, p. 72). Also, the data implies that as a result of principal communication, stakeholders are more willing to approach school leaders to express their fears and concerns, which may be a result of performing multi-option response plans for active shooter drills. The high school principal from School 1 in Table 1 states that during an active shooter drill, teachers "are paralyzed and fearful of making wrong decisions" (Principal, School 1). The same principal elaborated and shared the leader's role is to communicate with staff after the drill concludes in a debrief meeting or in conversation. The principal shared that the debrief meetings allow teachers to share their concerns as well as insights with the pros and cons of the active shooter drill. When a teacher shares their interests, the building leader communicates with faculty that there is "no perfect response and go with your instinct" (Principal, School 1). The interaction between the principal and faculty members may suggest that there is a certain level of trust among stakeholders embedded in the culture. According to Gruenert & Whitaker (2015), "in an effective culture, members are confident that they can share their professional struggles"

(p. 72). Teachers willing to confide in their principals in the spirit of making effective decisions in a multi-option response plan may explain the third finding.

As "national attention focusing on school shooting" increases among staff, students, and parents, principals are collaborating with stakeholders on school safety (Jonson, Moon, & Hendry, 2018, p. 154; Blad, 2018). Principals have observed more awareness among stakeholders recognizing students that may pose a potential risk. Secondary principals demonstrate they "value" and adhere to "normative expectations" established within the school culture by investigating students that exhibit signs of presenting a potential threat to the safety and well-being of faculty and students (p.109). Educational stakeholders (students, faculty, and parents) trust their school leaders to follow through with the information of a possible threat, which demonstrates the learning organization is "working together" to create a safe environment (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996, p. 109). Scholars have found a school culture in which stakeholders are willing to inform school administrators that a potential school shooter has formulated a plan to cause harm and is successful in preventing actual violence (Goodrum, Woodward, & Thompson, 2017, p. 215). Future and current school leaders may want to consider ways to connect with staff, parents, and students before facilitating school safety drills.

### **Limitations**

This study explored principal perceptions about the phenomena of multi-option response for active shooter drills with several limitations. The sample size ( $N= 8$ ) was small. Future research should expand the sample size, as well as consider private middle and high schools. All ( $N= 8$ ) schools were from urban or suburban schools in the Midwest, and school principals in other regions may provide additional insight. Also, the

study was qualitative and based on interviews with secondary principals. It is difficult to ascertain that participants are honest as the topic of preparing for a school shooting has an elevated level of concern (McCarthy & Webb, 2000). Regardless of limitations, this research produced significant findings that illustrate principal leadership is at the center of school culture, and how they communicate, build trust, and foster relationships with stakeholders are paramount to their building.

My intention with this research is to provide future and current school principals with research that could assist them in understanding the professional complexity of multi-option response plans for active shooter drills and the potential impact their leadership may have on the school culture. School crisis preparation is unavoidable in society today. Effective school leaders must continue to pursue research and implement best practices to assist their effectiveness with a school crisis. From my investigation, I located one study that examined the efficacy of multi-option response plans for active shooter drills (Jonson, Moon, & Hendry, 2018). The research was experimental and did not involve children in a school setting but focused on adult participants in a multi-option response training (Jonson, Moon, & Hendry, 2018.).

Building principals are expected to implement and facilitate the board of education adopted policies, regardless of the potential benefits or consequences they may have on school culture. Sanfellippo and Sinanis (2016) claim, "school culture cannot be separated from school leaders, because the actions of the individual directly shape and influence the organization" (p. 35).

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## Appendix A

### Interview Script to School Administrator/Principal pertaining to multi-option response plans before, during, and after a drill or event.

#### Demographic Questions (Part A)

1. Name of Administrator: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Name of School: \_\_\_\_\_
3. What grade levels attend this school? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is the enrollment size of this school? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is the Racial Demographic of this school? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What percentage of students attending this school have IEP's? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How many teachers are employed at this school? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What percentage of staff members need physical or mental support during crisis drills (fire, tornado, active shooter, etc... )? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Does this school have a full or part time School Resource Officer? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Name of District: \_\_\_\_\_
11. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_
12. What is your racial background: \_\_\_\_\_
13. How long have you been at this school? \_\_\_\_\_
14. Your role: \_\_\_\_\_
15. Do you use a multi-option response for an active shooter drill or event? \_\_\_\_\_
16. How many years has your school/district utilized multi-option response? \_\_\_\_\_
17. Have you been trained in multi-option response plan? \_\_\_\_\_
18. Has your staff been trained in multi-option response plan? \_\_\_\_\_
19. What is the multi-option response plan your district has adopted? \_\_\_\_\_
20. Are your multi-option drills single, dual, or multi? \_\_\_\_\_ \* think of A.L.I.C.E.

## Principal Perceptions on multi-option response during active shooter drill (Part B)

1. How has the implementation of multi-option response plans changed your perceptions on school safety and response **before** an active shooter drill or event?  
Are there any perceptual changes among students, faculty, parents, or other patrons?
2. How has the implementation of multi-option response plans changed your perceptions on school safety and response **during** an active shooter drill or event?  
Are there any perceptual changes among students, faculty, parents, or other patrons?
3. How has the implementation of multi-option response plans changed your perceptions on school safety and response **after** an active shooter drill or event?  
Are there any perceptual changes among students, faculty, parents, or other patrons?
4. **Research Question 4:** What other things would you like to share about your (principal) perspective on multi-option response plans for active shooter drills?  
What other things would you like to share about your (principal) perception on school safety?