A LITERATURE REVIEW AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL
VIOLENCE AND TEACHERS'PERCEPTION OF
THE ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY

by

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<u>ABSTRACT</u>

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<u>A Literature Review and Critical Analysis of School Violence and</u>
<u>Teachers' Perception of the Zero Tolerance Policy_</u>
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As a precursor to a proposed study examining teacher

perceptions of the zero tolerance policy, this paper will review

and critically analyze research and literature pertaining to

school violence and zero tolerance policies. The goal of the

proposed research is to identify the benefits, drawbacks, and

perceived effectiveness of the zero tolerance policy as a

preventative tool against school violence. The research

hypothesis for the proposed study is that the majority of public

school teachers will believe the zero tolerance policy is

ineffective, has a negative impact on students, and does not

prevent school violence; that is it does not fulfill its intended

purpose.

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A Literature Review and Critical Analysis of School Violence and Teachers' Perceptions of the Zero Tolerance Policy

Introduction

School violence has caught the attention of nearly everyone in the United States. With the recent shootings at schools across the country, people have become increasingly concerned about the safety and well-being of their school-age children while they attend school. In the eyes of society, school is supposed to be a safe place for children to learn and grow (Furlong & Morrison, 1994), not a place of violence and fear.

Given the regularity with which violent incidents are reported in schools across the United States, there appears to be an obvious increase in the number of violent acts in schools. Conversely, the statistics available through recent research indicate that the number of violent acts is not increasing (Rubel, 1978; Scherer & Stimson, 1984; Wayson, 1985), but, is in fact declining (Grier & Chaddock, 1999).

Despite the statistical decline of violent acts in schools, the perception of school violence has increased significantly (Furlong & Chung, 1995). Furlong and Chung (1995) reports that the media contributes to the perception that school violence is rampant through its extensive coverage of recent tragic incidents. Fostered by the media, violence is perceived to be an increasing and serious problem in schools across the country. Parents have reported increased fears about dropping their

children off at school and some parents are reluctant to send their children to school altogether (Weaver, 1993). Not only are students affected, but teachers have also reported fears. Reports of such violent incidents have a devastating impact on students, school personnel, and the community (Chandras, 1999).

As the fears of school violence increase, a child's education can be significantly affected. The opportunity for a successful education is seriously jeopardized when students, staff members, and the community fear both going to school and remaining after (Mulhern, Dibble, & Berkan, 1994). The perception of school violence, in itself, has the ability to physically and psychologically harm individuals; preventing them from achieving their maximum physical, social, or academic potential (Furlong, Morrison, & Clontz, 1993).

School districts have attempted to address the problem of school violence in various ways. In many schools, crisis intervention approaches have become the treatment of choice (Wolfe, 1995; Chandras, 1999) while other school districts have found that preventative actions and plans are the key (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Despite the method of prevention or intervention a district chooses, the type of plan and the information included within it varies significantly from district to district. Some believe crisis plans should include a code of conduct: specific rules and consequences that can accommodate student differences on a case-by-case basis (U.S. Department of

Education, 1999), while others believe there should not be any accommodations or altering of disciplinary actions. Rather, there should be a collaboration between schools, law enforcement, the courts, community agencies, parents, and the public (Mulhern, Dibble, & Berkan, 1994) that have rigid guidelines for violent acts.

One particular prevention strategy of interest is the "zero tolerance policy." Since the introduction of zero tolerance policies to the schools in the 1990's (Western Governors' Association, 1999), significant controversy regarding their efficacy has been generated. A zero tolerance policy is defined as a school or district policy that mandates predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). The purpose of a zero tolerance policy is to create a safe and secure environment for learning.

Zero tolerance policies have generated significant controversy regarding their appropriateness and effectiveness. Some believe the policy is too strict (Baldauf, 1999; Heaney & Michela, 1999), that there should be leniency for actions that may appear to be something they are not. Additionally, the policy does not accommodate less threatening situations. Others see zero tolerance as being too broad based (Chaddock, 1999). They feel there are not enough guidelines for disciplining violent acts and for determining which actions receive which disciplinary responses. As a result of these concerns, the zero tolerance

policy is considered inappropriate or ineffective in preventing school violence.

Despite the many concerns associated with zero tolerance policies in the schools, there are some educators who believe this is a much-needed policy (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). They recognize that there could be some flaws; they argue, however, most policies have room for improvement. Supporters of zero tolerance believe it is appropriate if it is imposed with common sense. They also contend that it is not intended to be a solution in itself (Grier & Chaddock, 1999). At the same time, supporters of the zero tolerance policy acknowledge that its effectiveness is yet to be determined. Due to a lack of much needed research, there is no evidence supporting the efficacy of the zero tolerance policy (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). The research proposed in this paper will attempt to fill that void.

Conclusion

There are currently a variety of opinions about which types of preventative measures are effective and which ones are not. Studies (Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Grier & Chaddock, 1999) reveal conflicting opinions about the zero tolerance policy. Zero tolerance policies in the schools have not been around long enough to be extensively researched. However, with the recent perception of increased violence in the schools, research needs to be done to determine its effectiveness and appropriateness. Once that is determined, preventative methods towards school

violence can be readily determined.

Rationale, Purpose, and Significance of the Proposed Study

The purpose of this paper is to review and critically analyze the research and literature pertaining to school violence and zero tolerance policies as a precursor to a proposed study examining teacher perceptions of the zero tolerance policy. The proposed study is important because of the potential impact it could have on children, teachers, administrators, and society. It will provide beneficial information towards directing schools in the right direction when it comes to the prevention of school violence. With the perception that violence is increasing in the schools, the concern about the safety and well being of faculty and students is also increasing. So, it is necessary to determine whether or not the zero tolerance policies in the schools are as effective and appropriate as they were intended to be. The research hypothesis for this study is that the majority of teachers in the public school system see the zero tolerance policy as having a negative impact on students and the prevention of school violence.

Research Questions

Based upon the preceding discussion, the following research
questions would be proposed:

1. How do teachers perceive the overall effectiveness
   of the zero tolerance policy in preventing violence
   in their school?

2. How do teachers perceive the benefits of the zero
   tolerance policy?

3. How do teachers perceive the drawbacks of the zero
   tolerance policy?

Review of the Literature

School violence appears to be a significant concern in today's society. As people read their daily paper or listen to the news, the topic of school violence frequently appears in the headlines. Articles describing children committing major crimes, such as armed robbery, murder, and assault with a deadly weapon, are front page material. Incidents of school violence, such as a six year old who killed his classmate in Michigan or the massacre at Columbine, horrify and give the impression that violence committed by children in schools is raging. However, such headlines may be misleading. Studies have shown that school violence is not increasing (Grier & Chaddock, 1999; Rubel, 1978; Scherer & Stimson, 1984; Wayson, 1985) but is actually declining.

Current Level of Violence

Currently, research shows that the number of violent incidents occurring in school is not increasing. In 1993, there were about 155 school-related crimes for every 1,000 students (age 12 to 18), but in 1997 that figure fell to 102 (Grier & Chaddock, 1999). More recent data on school crime raises questions about how frequently crime really does occur in the schools (Furlong & Morrison, 1994). Morrison and Furlong (1994) found that information on school violence is sketchy and contradictory. This is due to differing definitions of violence. According to a study conducted jointly by the Justice Department and the Education Department in 1998, there was no significant

change from 1989 to 1995 in the percentage of students reporting

victimization of violent acts. In comparing the data, there was

only a .1 percent increase from 1989 to 1995. Actual self-

reported victimization in the United States has been relatively

stable since 1973, peaking in 1981 (U.S. Department of Justice,

1992). In spite of the conflicting portrayals of school violence,

the data shows that schools are still less violent than general

society (Dear, Scott, & Marshall, 1994). However, what is

important to this study is not so much the statistics, rather it

is the idea that violence in the schools should not be occurring

at all.

Perception of Violence

    With the assistance of the media, school violence is

perceived by society to be an increasing problem. Between 1982

and 1993, 49.5% of news articles containing the words "school

violence" were published recently in 1992 and 1993 (Melvyl System

Data Bases, 1982-1993). It is media attention, such as the

massacre at Columbine, that is leading today's general public and

educators to perceive that school violence is increasing (Furlong

& Morrison, 1994). When in fact, the real problem is not that

school violence occurs more regularly, but that it occurs at all.

    With the extensive media attention and the public's

preoccupation with school violence, there is reason to believe

that the majority of educators in public schools will perceive

school violence as a growing area of concern (Furlong & Chung,

1995). This may lead some to conclude that America's schools are
unsafe and even characterize them as battlegrounds or war zones
(Stephens, 1997; U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of
Education, 1998). It is from research such as this that the
hypothesis for this proposed study came about.

Effects on Education

     The effect of perceived school violence needs to be
addressed. As these perceptions about school violence continue
and the level of concern increases, children's sense of safety in
school will most likely decrease. As a result, the education
children receive may be negatively impacted. The opportunity for
a successful education is seriously jeopardized when students,
staff members, and the community fear going to school and
remaining after (Mulhern, Dibble, & Berkan, 1994). The concern
about school violence is continuing to grow at a very rapid pace
and without further research to determine effective preventative
measures, public schools may no longer be the education of the
future (Stevenson, 1994). Currently, no research has identified
the specific cause(s) of school violence, however, it is
happening and something needs to be done (Berger, 1974; Poland,
1997).

     For many students, school is a key resource in their life
(Morrison, Furlong, & Morrison, 1994). It is a place of
opportunity where they can explore different things without fear.
However, if there is a perceived fear for their safety, the

resource no longer exists. According to Abraham Maslow (1970) and his hierarchy of needs, safety is a basic need and must be met in order for children to achieve the cognitive outcomes that we intend as a result of schooling. If school does not fulfill that need, a child's education will be negatively impacted.

Fears and concerns of school violence may lead some to believe school is no longer the ideal place to learn and grow. A study of school violence done in 1995 by Chandler, Chapman, Rand, and Taylor, stated that 14.6 percent of students aged 12 through 19 reported violence or property victimization at school (U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of Education, 1998). This means that almost 15 of every 100 students have experienced a violent act in school. According to Howard M. Knoff (2000), continuing issues of school safety and students' mental health needs have never been so professionally and publicly prominent as over the past two years. School is a place parents drop their loved ones off and trust that they are in a conducive learning and growing environment. A basic need children have is to be safe and secure (Furlong, Morrison, Chung, Bates, & Morrison, 1997).

As children fear the level of safety in a place where they are expected to thrive, (Furlong & Morrison, 1994), their level of education is going to be greatly affected. School is a place with the goal of educating individuals. So, anything that adversely affects an individual's ability to learn should be of considerable concern. Teachers report that crisis-related

problems, such as threats of violence, affect a students' ability to concentrate (Stevenson, 1994) and are commonplace in preventing students from progressing educationally (Pitcher & Poland, 1992). As a result, these perceptions could be of significance to whether a child is receiving an optimal level of education. When a child's educational opportunities are threatened, there is a need for further research to explore the problem.

It is evident that violence in the schools does affect children, but it cannot be forgotten that it impacts the staff too. A recent example of this occurred in Florida where a student killed his teacher. Teachers, administrators, and other school personnel enter the school each morning and must face the same challenges and fears related to school violence. As Weaver (1993) stated that students cannot learn, teachers cannot teach, and parents are reluctant to send their children to schools where crime and violence are perceived as an ordinary part of the school day. The perceived violence in the schools affects everyone.

Actions taken by Schools

With the numerous effects of violence on a child's education, there is not only a need for further research, there is also a need for society to take action. According to the U.S. Department of Education (1998), violence that occurs in the community has found its way inside the schoolhouse door. Society

needs to be prepared and willing to respond and act on what is currently happening. One after another, school communities across the country, (King & Muhr, 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 1998) have been forced to face the fact that violence can happen to them. Even though these experiences are troubling and unforeseen, they can not prevent society from taking the initiative to act (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

The 1997-1998 school year served as a dramatic wake-up call to the fact that guns do come to school and are used by some to kill (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Through acts such as shootings, the topic of school violence has become a "national epidemic" (Gorski & Pilotto, 1993). It appears that the attempts to make the public aware of current situations has taken on a "bandwagon characteristic" (Morrison & Furlong, 1994). As the media continued to inform society of the latest attacks in Arkansas, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Colorado, society began to realize the seriousness and genuineness of the situation. Communities became aware that this could possibly happen to them and actions, or plans, began to be developed by school districts in preparation of such acts.

School response to violence typically takes one of two forms: crisis intervention policies or prevention response plans. According to Wolfe (1995) and Chandras (1999), crisis intervention approaches are often the treatment of choice in a large number of schools experiencing violence. This is because

many schools believe it is not necessary to fix something before it is a problem. Such approaches posit that the actual crisis is not the focus situation, rather it is the individuals' perceptions and responses to the situation. Crisis intervention policies are reactive rather than preventative. In contrast, others find that preventative actions and plans are the key (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Preventative measures can reduce violence and troubling behaviors in school (Poland, 1994; Knoff, 2000; Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Stevenson, 1994; Pitcher & Poland, 1994). Those who choose to use a preventative strategy believe that through education and awareness, one has the necessary knowledge to stop an act before it is fully carried out. Some of the most promising prevention and early intervention strategies involve the entire educational community - administrators, teachers, families, students, support staff, and community members - working together to form positive relationships within the school (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

School Based Prevention Plans

As previously stated, prevention plans are one option school districts have chosen to initiate in response to school violence. A prevention plan can be very beneficial, however, the level of benefit it offers is limited to its effectiveness and appropriate implementation. According to Stephens (1994), of the National School Safety Center, in order for a school safety plan to be effective it must be comprehensive, continuing, and broad based.

Comprehensive means that it must build on previous plans and ideas. Continuing means that it is effective from this point forward with no exceptions. Broad based means it must cover a wide range of possible acts and provide guidelines to define them. Prevention plans appear to be a necessary tool in school districts, however, the development and implementation of them can be very tiresome and challenging.

Individual school districts have different ideas of what should be included in a prevention plan. Some include a code of conduct, specific rules and consequences that can accommodate student differences on a case-by-case basis (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Others provide for collaboration between schools, law enforcement, the courts, community agencies, parents, and the public (Mulhern, Dibble, & Berkan, 1994). To date, there is no right or wrong answer on what should be included in a prevention plan. The plan needs to be appropriate for the district and simple enough to be effectively carried out. The details need to be developed by a team of individuals that are aware of the various situations that could occur in their district.

Prevention plans should not only provide ideas pertaining to "after the fact", but they should also offer options, or ideas, relating to the cause or warning signs of problem behaviors. School personnel may fail to recognize problem situations which, left unaddressed, can precipitate crisis events or worsen an

existing crisis (Cornell & Sheras, 1998). The implementation of a prevention plan is seen to possibly eliminate, or at least reduce, the room for error. In a prevention plan, there are certain steps to follow if a particular action occurs or if signals of a violent act occur. This is important because the early warning signs allow people to act responsibly by getting help for the individual before problems escalate (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Being able to recognize the signs of an individual in trouble, or considering violence, allows educators to act appropriately through following the guidelines of the prevention plan.

Along with the use of prevention plans, other various forms of prevention have been explored. Incidences have led schools to try increasing the number of security personnel, installing two-way intercoms in every room, using identification cards, and assigning more police to arrival and dismissal times (Pitcher & Poland, 1992). However, despite these attempts, violent acts persist.

"Zero Tolerance"

As tragedies in the schools continue, school districts are called upon to impose more severe penalties for any kind of school disruption, a stance that has led to a common prevention method known as, zero tolerance. A "zero tolerance policy" is defined as a school or district policy that mandates predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses

(U.S. Department of Education, 1998). It outlines penalties for violent or threatening behavior by students in school or at school sponsored activities (Zero Tolerance, 1999). The purpose is to create a safe and secure environment for learning.

The "zero tolerance policy" is a fairly recent addition to the array of school violence prevention techniques. According to the Western Governors' Association (1999), the zero tolerance policy was initially endorsed in the early 1990's. There are still some concerns about whether this is an appropriate resolution to the problem of violence. However, there are some that believe it is successful because the behaviors that are and are not considered acceptable are clearly outlined, as are the consequences.

Initially, the term zero tolerance "referred to policies that punish all offenses severely, no matter how minor" (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). In the 1980's, it grew out of state and federal drug enforcement policies (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). From there, in 1983, the term was used for the first time in the Lexis-Nexis national newspaper database (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). In 1986, it was used by a U.S. attorney to impound seacraft carrying drugs. As a result, in 1988, the term received national attention. It was at this time that "zero tolerance" made its mark by being applied to issues such as environmental pollution, trespassing, skateboarding, racial intolerance, homelessness, sexual harassment, and boom boxes (Skiba & Peterson, 1999).

Since the initial application of zero tolerance policies, there has been significant controversy on its effectiveness. Some find it to be beneficial in reducing the issue at hand, while others find it detrimental and unable to fulfill its intended purpose. Considered ineffective in drug rehabilitation, many community drug programs phased it out. However, at the same time, the concept began to take hold in the public schools (Skiba & Peterson, 1999) and by 1993, zero tolerance policies were being adopted by schools across the country (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). In 1994, the policy was mandated nationally by the federal government when President Clinton signed the Gun-Free Schools Act (Skiba & Peterson, 1999).

According to Skiba and Peterson (1999), the initial motivation behind the adoption of zero tolerance policies was the fear that drugs and violence were spreading in our nation's schools. Concern about escalating drug use and fear of random violence led to demands to take action and implement these "get tough" (Heaney & Michela, 1999) policies such as zero tolerance. However, controversy surrounds the zero tolerance policy. Zero tolerance policies have been criticized as being too specific (Baldauf, 1999) or too broad-based (Chaddock, 1999), as well as, discriminatory. According to Aleta Meyer (Baldauf, 1999, p. 2), "Different situations require different strategies". She argues that there needs to be some flexibility because no two situations are exactly the same, and they should not be categorized as such.

Another argument is that the zero tolerance policy is considered by some to be too broad. As Rev. Jesse Jackson has stated (Chaddock, 1999, p. 14), "Such policies in schools are too broad based". The lack of flexibility on "look-alikes" has forced some school districts to take ridiculous actions (Heaney & Michela, 1999). These acts are the result of the entire school community having no ownership of policies or programs. Consequently, if this is the case, the district is headed towards failure (Heaney & Michela, 1999). Along with the tendency to be inflexible, the zero tolerance policy has also raised concerns related to discrimination. According to Skiba and Peterson (1999) and a study conducted by Marlantes (1999), a disproportionate number of students at risk for exclusionary and punitive discipline practices are poor and African American.

While researchers such as Baldauf (1999), Skiba and Peterson (1999) suggest that the policy is not effective, there are others such as Grier and Chaddock (1999) that feel the policy has the potential to be effective. There does not appear to be a problem with the term zero tolerance. Rather, this form of rigid discipline needs to be imposed with common sense (Grier & Chaddock, 1999). As many researchers would probably agree, this policy is not a solution by itself (Grier & Chaddock, 1999). Rather, it is most beneficial as part of a multifaceted program (Grier & Chaddock, 1999). If one considers things such as these, the zero tolerance policy should continue to assist schools with

their discipline. Whether the zero tolerance policy is effective or not still waits to be determined through much needed research (Skiba & Peterson, 1999).

Conclusion

As the country prepares to move into the 21st century, the topic of school violence and the "zero tolerance policy" will still be one of great concern. There are several questions still unanswered about its appropriateness. As more research is done on the topic, more opinions and perceptions are yet to be heard. However, it can not be disputed that the "zero tolerance policy" is surely a topic of necessary discussion. Due to the conflicting beliefs of what actions should be taken, there is a level of increased concern. It is for this reason that research is being done on a continual basis in this area. However, until research can define a solution, efforts need to be made in an attempt to reduce the concern of violence.

Research Proposal

<u>Purpose, Significance, and Rationale of the Proposed Study</u>

The purpose of the proposed research study is to describe teachers perceptions of the zero tolerance policy dealing with school violence as measured by a survey of elementary, middle, and high school teachers from two separate public school districts from Wisconsin and Minnesota.

This study has the potential to be significant because there is currently a lack of research on the topic area. The zero tolerance policy in the schools has not been around long enough to be extensively researched. However, with the recent perception of increased violence in the schools and subsequent implementation of zero tolerance policies, research needs to be done to determine its effectiveness and appropriateness. Through research studies, such as this, the efficacy of zero tolerance policies as preventative methods towards school violence can be readily determined.

In particular, this study is important because of the potential impact it could have on children, teachers, administrators, and society. It will provide beneficial information towards directing schools in the right direction when it comes to the prevention of school violence. With the perception that violence is increasing in the schools, the concern about safety and well-being of faculty and students is

also increasing. So, it is necessary to determine whether or not the zero tolerance policies in the schools are as effective and appropriate as they were intended to be.

Subjects

Subjects for this research will be obtained on a volunteer basis. Subjects will be drawn from two school districts, one from Minnesota and one from Wisconsin. The two districts, Spicer, MN, and Independence, WI, were chosen because they are of similar size and both districts currently have a zero tolerance policy in place. At the beginning of the 2000/2001 school year, a meeting will be conducted with district administrators to inform them of the research project and its benefits to schools and the fight against school violence. At that time, permission will be obtained to attend faculty meetings at their schools to inform the teachers of the research and ask for their participation.

Instrumentation

A survey (see Appendix A), developed by the researcher, will be distributed to teachers from Spicer and Independence Public Schools on a volunteer basis. The survey is two pages long and consists of eight demographic questions and sixteen questions related to discipline, violence, and school policies. The survey is based on a 5-point Likert Scale. The points from one to five represent - strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree, not applicable.

Selecting an appropriate Likert Scale for research is very

important to the results you hope to obtain. The reason for selecting this particular Likert Scale is to force people to make a choice and really think about what they believe. People tend to take the "easy way out" by selecting a neutral position on a Likert Scale, if it is made available. A five point Likert Scale should eliminate the opportunity for a neutral response and result in stronger study results.

Teachers will make the decision to voluntarily participate in the study. If they do choose to take part, they will read the informed consent and complete the survey during the faculty meeting inservice at their school.

Research Questions

Based upon the preceding discussion, the following research questions have been proposed:

1. What is the perception of teachers of the overall effectiveness of the zero tolerance policy in preventing violence in their school?

2. What are teachers' perceptions of the benefits of the zero tolerance policy?

3. What are teachers' perceptions of the drawbacks of the zero tolerance policy?

Proposed Data Analysis Methods

In analyzing the results of this research, descriptive statistics will be most beneficial. For example, a frequency distribution will be used to describe subjects responses to each

of the questions. Also, a comparison will be done between the

Minnesota and Wisconsin school districts to look for comparable

and contrasting results.

Critical Analysis

The topic of school violence is something that affects society as a whole. To date, there has been some research done that looks at the number of violent acts taking place and determining whether the number of acts are increasing or not (Rubel, 1978; Scherer & Stimson, 1984; Wayson, 1985; Grier & Chaddock, 1999). Society is aware that violence is occurring in the schools and is demanding action to be taken to prevent school violence. However, despite the perceived increase in the number of violent acts, there is currently a lack of research available to determine the most appropriate policy for schools to follow.

Over the past years, many districts have tried different strategies in an attempt to decrease violence in their schools. For example, many schools use the crisis intervention approach as the treatment of choice (Wolfe, 1995; Chandras, 1999) while other school districts have found that preventative actions and plans are the key (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). There is not enough research available to determine which strategy is more effective or appropriate. There does not appear to be any consistency from one district to another; they each have their own idea of what works without research to support their decision.

Of those districts who have taken the preventative route, one particular strategy that has caught the attention of most

over the past decade is that of the zero tolerance policy. Since its introduction in the schools in the 1990's, there has been much controversy regarding its efficacy (Western Governors' Association, 1999). Some believe the policy is too strict (Baldauf, 1999; Heaney & Michela, 1999). They believe the policy is not flexible enough in accommodating to less threatening situations. On the other hand, there are some who see the policy as being too broad based (Chaddock, 1999). They feel there are not enough guidelines for making discipline decisions.

This controversy gives use to another concern, the efficacy of the zero tolerance policy. Since this is such a recent policy, there has not been much opportunity to do research on it. So, its effectiveness is yet to be determined. Due to a lack of much needed research, there is no evidence of support leading either towards or against its effectiveness (Skiba & Peterson, 1999).

Contributions of Current Research Proposal

To date, there have been problems with research in relation to school violence. Along with the obvious problem of a lack of research, there have also been problems with the research that is available. Such problems include things such as defining school violence and finding reliable sources of data. Over the years, the media has played a significant role in contributing to the perception that school violence is rampant through its coverage of recent tragic incidents (Chandras, 1999). They have increased the fears of society leading schools to take action before

thoroughly thinking them through and determining whether they are appropriate and effective.

As previously stated, due to the recent introduction of the zero tolerance policy, there is currently a lack of research available determining its effectiveness. It is for this reason that this research study is important. The intent of this study is to describe the perceived effectiveness and appropriateness of the zero tolerance policy and offer school personnel actual data on which to base their decisions in relation to school violence. It will offer input on what steps are or are not appropriate.

With the fear of violence in the schools on the rise, it is important that research on prevention methods like the zero tolerance policy be carried out. Such research provides teachers the opportunity to offer their input and perceptions towards the zero tolerance policy and its effect on their school. Also, the data will be most useful because it will come from people who are not only responsible for carrying out the policy, but are also possible victims if the policy fails. It is for this reason that the data obtained will be most beneficial in determining whether the zero tolerance policy is fulfilling its intended purpose of preventing school violence.

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Appendix A

May 31, 2000

Dear Teacher:

 I am writing to request your participation in a survey of the perceptions of teachers regarding the effectiveness and appropriateness of the zero tolerance policy, in relation to school violence. The survey is designed to be completed in about ten minutes. It should be returned in the enclosed, self-addressed envelope at your earliest convenience, and no later than November 15, 2000.

While your participation in this research is entirely voluntary, I hope that you will choose to participate. If you choose not to participate, please indicate such on the survey and return it to avoid follow-up requests. All responses will be treated with confidentiality and the data will be entered so that no respondent is identifiable. Only group results will be reported.

 Thank you in advance for your participation in this project. Please feel free to call   me at (715) 233-1272, or my advisor at (715) 232-2229, if you have any questions regarding this study.

 Sincerely,

_____   _____

Dana R. Konter   Dr. Denise Maricle
UW-Stout Graduate Student   UW-Stout Professor
                                                                      Research Advisor

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT:
I understand that by completing this survey/questionnaire, I am giving my informed
consent as a participating volunteer in this study. I understand the basic nature of the study
and agree that any potential risks are exceedingly small. I also understand the potential
benefits that might be realized from the successful completion of this study. I am aware
that the information is being sought in a specific manner so that no identifiers are needed
and so that confidentiality is guaranteed. I realize that I have the right to refuse to
participate and that my right to withdraw from participation at any time during the study
will be respected with no coercion or prejudice.

NOTE: Questions or concerns about participation in the research or subsequent complaints should be
 addressed first to the researcher or research advisor and second to Dr. Ted Knous, Chair, UW-Stout
 Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11HH, UW-Stout, Menomonie,
 WI 54751, phone (715) 232-1126.

**TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY IN
 RELATION TO SCHOOL VIOLENCE**

This questionnaire is part of a study to explore teacher perceptions of the zero tolerance
 policy in relation to school violence. Your cooperation in the study would be of great help.
 All information gathered through this survey will be kept confidential.

Section 1: Background Variables

1. Gender: _____ Female   _____ Male

2. Age: __ 20 to 30   __ 31 to 40   __ 41 to 50   __ 51 to 60   __ 60+

3. Ethnicity: __ White/Caucasian __ Black/African American
   __ Asian/American   __ Pacific Islander
   __ Native American   __ Hispanic/Latino
   __ Other_____

4. Check your marital status: __ Single __ Married __ Divorced __ Other

5. Do you have children?   __ Yes   __ No
   * If so: How many? _____
   What are there ages?_____
   What type of schooling?   __ Home   __ Public
   __ Private   __ Other

6. Employment Status: __ Full time   __ Part time   __ Other

7. How long have you been employed at your current school district?
   _____

8. School Population: __ <500   __ 501-1000   __ 1001-1500
   __ 1501-2000   __ 2001-2500   __ 2500+

===

Please rate the following statements related to your perceptions of the zero tolerance policy in relation to school violence. Indicate your choice by circling a number from 1 to 5.

1 = Strongly Disagree   **2** = Disagree   **3** = Agree   **4** = Strongly Agree   **5** = Not Applicable

Section 2:

1.   I perceive violence in the school to be increasing.   1 2 3 4 5

2.   I believe violence in our school is an area of concern.   1 2 3 4 5

3.   Violent acts in schools across the country are occurring often.   1 2 3 4 5

4.   Violent acts occur in our school often.   1 2 3 4 5

5.   Our school has a clearly stated purpose behind their discipline policy. 1 2 3 4 5

6.   Our school discipline policy is effective.   1 2 3 4 5

7.   I understand our school discipline policy; it is straight-forward.   1 2 3 4 5

8.   Our school discipline policy is strictly enforced.   1 2 3 4 5

9.   I understand the zero tolerance policy (in relation to school violence). 1 2 3 4 5

10. Our school effectively carries out the zero tolerance policy.   1 2 3 4 5

11. Our school zero tolerance policy allows no room for error or   1 2 3 4 5
     judgment calls.

12.   Zero tolerance policies are too strict.   1 2 3 4 5

13.   Zero tolerance policies are NOT effective.   1 2 3 4 5

14.   Our schools zero tolerance policy fulfills the intended purpose behind 1 2 3 4 5
      the discipline policy.

15.   Our schools zero tolerance policy does NOT interfere with our schools 1 2 3 4 5
       mission and goals.

16.   Zero tolerance is a necessary disciplinary policy in schools across the 1 2 3 4 5
      country.