

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE EXAMINATION OF SCHOOL SAFETY IN OKLAHOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of

MASTER OF HUMAN RELATIONS

By CAITLYN BRENNAN HIBBS

Norman, Oklahoma

2024

THE EXAMINATION OF SCHOOL SAFETY IN OKLAHOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RELATIONS

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Janette Habashi, Chair

Dr. Brenda Lloyd-Jones

Dr. Jody Worley



## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my Thesis Chair, Dr. Habashi. Dr. Habashi's guidance, knowledge, and spirit aided me in developing this research project. Furthermore, I want to thank my committee members, Dr. Lloyd-Jones and Dr. Worley, who have been a source of encouragement, feedback, and insight throughout this process.

I also want to give my sincere thanks to my parents, Craig and Charlene. My parents have always been my biggest cheerleaders in all areas of my life. Their devotion and steadfast love are what have motivated me to be where I am today. I am also extremely grateful to my brother Logan, who is my greatest inspiration. He is full of humility, commitment, and imagination, all of which I truly admire.

Lastly, I would like to thank my fluffy dog, Walter, for his unwavering support throughout this process. I would not have gotten through the late nights and countless rewrites without his comfort and solace as he laid under my desk.

## **Abstract**

This research study examines the current Oklahoma school safety laws and policies. This research focuses on three core areas: Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restrictions. By implementing these three areas, this research identifies common trends of Oklahoma public school safety, frequency of safety incidents, and disciplinary actions taken as a result of the incidents. This research aims to identify problems within the current safety laws, and identify implications to enhance the safety of Oklahoma public schools.

## Table of Contents

|                                     |    |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Chapter One: Introduction.....      | 1  |
| Chapter Two: Literature Review..... | 6  |
| Chapter Three: Methodology.....     | 21 |
| Chapter Four: Findings.....         | 32 |
| Chapter Five: Implications.....     | 49 |
| References.....                     | 56 |

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is an introduction to the research study of measuring the effectiveness of the State of Oklahoma's public education school safety and security measures. This chapter first identifies the problem of safety and security that schools across the nation are facing. Next, this chapter identifies why this issue is significant to Oklahoma schools. Thirdly, this introduction chapter addresses the purpose of this research and the research question that will lead this study. Finally, this chapter provides a description of future chapters within this research study.

### **General Statement of the Problem**

Public school safety and security has been an increasing issue across the nation over time. As this issue continues to surface, the responses and reactions differ. Mayer, Nickerson, and Jimerson claim that "Problems of school disorder and violence have sequelae that are not always considered by educational and political leaders such that key issues may be conflated, minimized, distorted, or overstated, often hindering systematic progress...with widespread efforts to "harden" schools focusing primarily on security approaches, often at the expense of focusing attention and resources to critical foci investigated in school safety research" (Mayer et al., 2021). Although school safety issues continue to spread, the prevention methods and responses are in question.

The topic of "school safety and security," includes a variety of elements. Per SchoolSafety.Gov- which is a federal website that integrates The U.S. Department of Education, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Justice- there are nine elements that they find to be key influencers of school

safety. These elements are bullying and cyberbullying, child exploitation, cybersecurity, emergency planning, infectious diseases and public health, mental health, school climate, targeted violence, and threat assessment and reporting (Find Resources, 2024). Furthermore, each of these key elements includes subtopics, such as substance abuse, conduct issues, and at risk- children being part of mental health. Understanding these elements is crucial in identifying why this issue is important. According to the authors Mayer, Nickerson, and Jimerson, “School safety is necessary for children and youth in schools to learn and experience a positive developmental trajectory” (Mayer et al., 2021). Comprehensively, school safety affects many parties, such as students, teachers, parents, and the community, and it is critical to identify what prevention methods are currently in place to further prevent security incidents in schools. Through the scope of public school safety and security, this research will target specific public school safety issues, school safety policies, and prevention methods in the State of Oklahoma.

### **Significance of the Research**

This qualitative content analysis research project is important since it will analyze the current policies, prevention methods, and disciplinary tactics implemented by the Oklahoma State Department of Education, and it will identify how effective these policies and measures are at mitigating safety and security incidents in public schools. Three key areas will be analyzed throughout the study, and these areas of focus will be Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restrictions. By reviewing the laws and policies of these three areas and current findings of these issues, there can be a better understanding of the effectiveness of school safety and security measures in Oklahoma public schools. Furthermore, it can provide beneficial information for state and school leaders, students, teachers, and community members of the significance of this issue and its ongoing threat to schools. This

research, data collection, and data analysis will be conducted within the social sciences field. According to Babalola and Nwanzu, the social sciences approach will serve the research “...as the process generates evidenced-based information that guild policy formulation and implementation, among others” (Babalola and Nwanzu, 2021). The social sciences approach will aid in connecting the literature of the current laws and policies with the findings in the three core areas of Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restrictions. This research will contribute to public schools and communities across Oklahoma in understanding the impact of the current policies and procedures in place under the State of Oklahoma.

### **Research Purpose and Question**

Oklahoma currently ranks in the bottom for education nationwide. According to the most recent U.S. News rankings, Oklahoma ranks 49<sup>th</sup> nationwide in terms of higher education and Pre-Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade education (Rankings, 2024). Their study was based on many factors, including test scores and graduation rates. Furthermore, U.S. News’ study pulled data from the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the National Center of Education Statistics to collect their data (Rankings, 2024). In addition to this, a study by Wallethub was conducted to determine the best state education systems using two primary factors: quality and safety. Wallethub pulled data from several federal agencies- such as the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Census Bureau- and offices to ensure they had accurate statistics. Within safety, they measured the amount of high school students that were threatened or injured, the number of high school students with access to illegal drugs, the share of high school students who participate in violence, the bullying incident rate, the disciplinary rate, school safety plan requirements, among many others (McCann, 2024). Their findings show that

Oklahoma ranks 50<sup>th</sup> out of 51 states- this includes the District of Columbia- and 35<sup>th</sup> in safety. This ranking is accurate with U.S. News' ranking of Oklahoma's education system. In bullying, for example, Oklahoma was the 9<sup>th</sup> highest state for students to experience bullying problems (McCann, 2024). Although there are many reasons that Oklahoma ranks severely low in education compared nationally, it is evident that school safety is an issue within Oklahoma's public education system.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of State of Oklahoma laws and policies for Oklahoma public schools through the key areas of Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restrictions. Furthermore, it will analyze how prevention measures are implemented in public schools, and if these safety areas are of increasing concern for public schools across the state through a qualitative content analysis. The data collected will aid in evaluating the relationship between current laws and policies and their outcomes in the State of Oklahoma public school system.

Through the use of qualitative content analysis, this study will seek to address the following research question.

How are Oklahoma's laws and policies effective in promoting school safety in the areas of Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restriction?

### **Description of Chapters**

Within this research study there will be five chapters which includes the Introduction of Chapter One. Chapter Two is the Literature Review. In Chapter Two, it will analyze the current State of Oklahoma laws and policies of Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restrictions for public schools. Next is Chapter Three which serves as the

Methodology. This chapter will evaluate the type of methodology selected- which is qualitative content analysis- and the purpose that it will serve to the research. It will also evaluate the data collection process and the data analysis, and it will assess the limitations of the study. The Findings of the research will be in Chapter Four. Within this chapter, the data collection sources will be analyzed through the qualitative content analysis, the codes and themes of the data sources are evaluated, and it will help better understand the effectiveness of Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substances Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Prevention in Oklahoma public schools. Lastly, Chapter Five is the Discussion chapter which will evaluate the implications of the study and future research, and it will determine the recommendations to of the research to create safer public schools across Oklahoma.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Literature Review Introduction

The aim of this research is to examine the effectiveness of the Oklahoma State Department of Education's laws and policies surrounding school safety and security. The mission of the Office of School Safety and Security in Oklahoma is to "Enable and empower all school staff and students through training and application of appropriate resources in their safety and security preparedness efforts" (*Office of School Safety and Security*, 2024). School safety and security measures are instrumental to the physical safety and emotional safety of students, parents, teachers, administrators, community members, and other school faculty and staff members.

Per the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, the definition of school safety is defined "...schools and school-related activities where students are safe from violence, bullying and harassment, and the influence of substance use" (Safety, 2024). To explore the definition of school safety and Oklahoma's State Department of Education school safety and security measures, this chapter examines three major concepts supported by State of Oklahoma laws and policies for public schools. The three key concepts for Oklahoma safety and security measures that are concentrated on in this literature include 1. Bullying Prevention, 2. Illegal Substance Prevention, and 3. Dangerous Weapon Restrictions. These three themes create a pillar for the research goal by determining the effectiveness of the State of Oklahoma's School Safety and Security measures in public education. These three themes also serve as a basis for the data collection process of Chapter Three.

Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restrictions center around one major topic which is protecting the school and the individuals inside of the school. The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments claims that there is a link between school safety and student performance outcomes which may include academic performance, attendance records, and even graduation rates (Safety, 2024). Moreover, school safety and security can deeply impact the emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing of students. Although school safety and security take on a multitude of forms that may include bullying, student discipline, substance abuse, and many others, this research, only focuses on the three themes of Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons. Furthermore, this research explores the Oklahoma State of Education laws and policies of each of these three themes in order to assess how effective these laws and policies are in keeping schools safe and protected.

**1. Bullying Prevention.** The first concept to analyze the effectiveness of Oklahoma public schools' safety and security methods is by examining the Bullying Prevention laws and policies. The Oklahoma State Department of Education defines the term "bullying" as "any unwanted, aggressive behavior committed in person or by electronic communication directed toward a student or group of students" (Bullying Prevention, 2024). Furthermore, this act of behavior either results in or is reasonably perceived as being done with the intention of causing physical or emotional harm to an individual or a group, and it interferes with the educational mission of the school or student that is harmed; oftentimes, the act of bullying is repeated. As a result of these actions, the Oklahoma State Department has implemented the School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act as a means of mitigating bullying in public schools.

The School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act has three major ideas that will be discussed in this section. The first major aim of the School Safety and Bullying Act is clearly identifying its purpose and definitions. Along with the previously mentioned definition by the state department, bullying also includes “... any pattern of harassment, intimidation, threatening behavior, physical acts, verbal or electronic communication directed toward a student or group of students...” (School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 2022). These acts are also done with the intention of causing physical or emotional harm to the targets. Furthermore, this can be done either at school or done through electronic communication. The term “At School” means that this act was done on school grounds, in school vehicles, or at school-sponsored or school-sanctioned events and activities (School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 2022). The other method for bullying is done via electronically. Per the Oklahoma State Department of Education, “Electronic Communication” is any form of written, verbal, pictorial or video communication that is done using an electronic device (School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 2022). Both forms of bullying can impact students significantly. Additionally, bullying has to include a form of threatening behavior which can mean that a reasonable person would find it to potentially harm students, school personnel, or school property (School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 2022). Threatening behavior can either be an isolated event or a pattern of events. Ultimately, the purpose and the definition of “bullying” is instrumental to understanding how it impacts students and school officials, and helps configure methods and strategies to prevent bullying from occurring.

The second key idea of this section is the Safe School Committee, and it includes five topics. The five topics within the Safe School Committee as part of this Act are as follows.

(A) The first focus of the School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act is that each public school must establish a Safe School Committee. This committee must be composed of at least seven members that includes teachers, parents of currently enrolled students, students, and a school official who is part of any bullying investigations (School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 2022). Although this committee can also include other members of school staff and the community, the main purpose of the committee is to create a more positive learning environment. This committee serves as a way to expand prevention services and promote a stronger school climate.

(B) The second focus of the School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act is that the selected committee must be a source of studying bullying prevention methods and making recommendations to the school site's principal. The main recommendations that the committee would make to the principal would be strategies that help resolve unsafe learning conditions such as crime prevention, student bullying reduction tactics, methods to develop the relationship between students and community or school staff members, professional development assistance for faculty and staff to recognize and reports acts of suspected human trafficking, and professional development for faculty and staff to implement bullying prevention methods (School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 2022).

(C) The third stage of the School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act is to assist the school site and district school board in creating response programs. These response programs would be geared towards individuals or students within the school system that have experienced forms of sexual assault and violence (School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 2022). The response program would not only help faculty and staff identify when this act of assault is occurring in a student, but also its incorporates methods to assist the student.

(D) The fourth part of the School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act centers on the State Department of Education. Per this Act, the State Department of Education must develop a policy for schools to model that highlight the various components that need to be included in the school district's bullying prevention policy, and it provides a list of research-based programs that can aid students that are victims of bullying (School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 2022). The Oklahoma State Department of Education has a duty in leading and guiding school districts in their bullying prevention policies.

(E) The last concept of the School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act is that it does not apply to technology center schools (School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 2022). The research in this chapter only focuses on public schools, therefore, this section is not relevant to the primary research.

The third major part of the School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act is the Control and Discipline of Child. Within this section, there are seven key ideas, and they are as follows.

(A) The first part of the Control and Discipline of Child is that each district's school board must adopt a discipline policy for all students attending public school in that district. The policy must address any forms of bullying that are done either at school or via electronically, contain a method of reporting acts of bullying to school officials or law enforcement agents, contain that school employees are required to report forms of bullying and any trainings for school employees, include the method of publication for the policy, contain information as to which district personnel is conducting the bullying investigation and who is enforcing the bullying policy, and include a timely warning procedure to notify parents or guardians of the victim and

perpetrator (School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 2022). The overall purpose of this section is to establish the policy and its goals, and to create a clear description of the process of investigation.

(B) The next stage of the Control and Discipline of Child section is to include involvement in the development of the policy. Per the Oklahoma State Department of Education, “district board of education shall make an effort to involve the teachers, parents, administrators, school staff, school volunteers, community representatives, local law enforcement agencies and students” (School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 2022). The inclusion of these various parties will allow for different voices and concerns to be heard and addressed in the development of the policy.

(C) Next, the School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act states that any child of a teacher within the district will share the rights as any other student (School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 2022). By including this, it will help mitigate preferential treatment to students of teachers when bullying is concerned.

(D) The fourth part of this section is directed towards students that have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). An IEP is part of the Individuals with Disabilities Act, and states that “the State Board of Education shall not have authority to prescribe student disciplinary policies for school districts or to proscribe corporal punishment in the public schools (School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 2022). Since an IEP is under federal supervision and not the State of Oklahoma, this subject will not be a main source of discussion in the research.

(E)The fifth aspect is in regard to school dress code. Ultimately, it is up to each school district to implement their own dress code policies, including school uniforms (School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 2022).

(F) The sixth focus is that each school district has the right to adopt campus-site services to students who are in violation of the district's policies (School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 2022). This infers that school districts are allowed to use acts of services on their campus sites as a means of students' discipline.

(G) Lastly, the Oklahoma State Board of Education is required to monitor the school districts' compliance with the six beforementioned parts, establish a method to collect documented and verified incidents of bullying, and publish an annual report of the collected bullying incidents across public schools in the state (School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 2022). Ultimately, the Oklahoma State Department of Education is required to uphold their own policies to ensure Oklahoma public schools are investigating and documenting acts of bullying.

**2. Illegal Substances.** The second concept of this literature review is illegal substances. For this research, the term “illegal substances” will focus on drug and alcohol abuse in schools although it takes on additional meanings. Per the State of Oklahoma, the term “drug” is defined as any articles or supplements recognized by the official United States Pharmacopoeia, the official Pharmacopoeia of the United States, or the official National Formulary (Drug Abuse Education Act of 1972). Furthermore, to be considered a “drug,” it has the intention of being used in certain ways. These intended uses are for “...diagnosis, cure, mitigation, treatment, or prevention of disease in man or other animals; articles, other than food, intended to affect the structure or any function of the body of man or other animals” (Drug Abuse Education Act of 1972). Lastly, a “drug” can be considered intoxicating liquor and beverages or tobacco (Drug Abuse Education Act of 1972). Once again, however, this research will focus on the substance of a drug and alcohol, excluding tobacco.

In order to mitigate drug and alcohol abuse in young people and in public schools in Oklahoma, the Drug Abuse Education Act of 1972 is implemented. The purpose of the Drug Abuse Education Act of 1972 was to develop a drug abuse education program in schools. Per this act, it is directed towards public school children in Oklahoma for kindergarteners through twelfth graders, and it is intended to teach these children the dangerous effects that drugs and alcohol have on the mind and body (Drug Abuse Education Act of 1972). Not only is it in place to deter young students from experimenting with drug and alcohol abuse, but it also is supposed to be a learning and development experience for them.

Within the scope of the Drug Abuse Education Act of 1972 is the Oklahoma Drug Abuse Prevention and Life Skills Education Act. The Prevention and Life Skills Education Act is focused on the drug and alcohol abuse curriculum that is taught in schools. As stated in the act, “The Legislature finds that for the purpose of preventing drug and alcohol abuse among our young people, and for preventing or alleviating problems which lead to and are closely associated with drug and alcohol abuse, it is desirable that all Oklahoma school districts develop and implement a curriculum for drug and alcohol abuse prevention for all grade levels” (Oklahoma Alcohol and Drug Abuse, 1972). Schools and school districts are required to implement their own curriculum concerning drug and alcohol abuse. Additionally, the curriculum can include life skills training, problem solving methods, responsibility educational tools, communication help, and decision-making skills (Oklahoma Alcohol and Drug Abuse, 1972). This legislation supports the idea that if schools and school districts are implementing prevention curriculum, the issue of drug and alcohol abuse in young people can be mitigated.

Although there is not a required set of curriculum listed publicly for schools and districts to follow in the Oklahoma Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Life Skills Education Act, there are, however, requirements for state agencies and officials to adhere to. There are three primary requirements for these agencies and officials that is listed below.

(A) The first requirement is that the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Department of Education work in conjunction with the Oklahoma Alcohol Abuse Policy Board. By working together, these groups are to establish criteria and curriculum for this program, so that schools and districts do have guidelines to follow (Oklahoma Alcohol and Drug Abuse, 1972). By doing so, this will provide more guidance to schools and districts to create their curriculum for this act. Next, these officials and agencies are to have annual reviews of alcohol and drug abuse policies which includes any disciplinary actions for students that violate the policies (Oklahoma Alcohol and Drug Abuse, 1972). The Oklahoma Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Life Skills Education Act does not include the current policies surrounding disciplinary actions for students or schools in violation of the policies. Thirdly, these officials and agencies will work together to create training programs for counselors. The training will focus on developing and implementing strategies for schools to hire and train counselors in substance abuse prevention and life skills programs (Oklahoma Alcohol and Drug Abuse, 1972). Lastly, these groups are to collaborate with one another in the effort to create more trainings and development for teachers and administrators. Similarly to the counseling program, this training is to provide teachers and administrators with the issue of substance abuse and the preventive methods to mitigate it (Oklahoma Alcohol and Drug Abuse, 1972).

(B) The second requirement under the Oklahoma Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Life Skills Education Act is reporting. Per the act, “The State Department of Education shall distribute information or reports provided by the Oklahoma Drug and Alcohol Abuse Policy Board, to each school district and, upon request, to members of the public” (Oklahoma Alcohol and Drug Abuse, 1972). The Oklahoma State Department is required to release information or reports surrounding drug and alcohol abuse in public schools, the prevention methods for abuse, and life skills education for students. The release of information and reports is beneficial for schools, districts, and administrators to identify problem areas across the state, analyze prevention measures that are helping to lower substance abuse, and evaluate the benefits of substance abuse curriculum in other schools in Oklahoma.

(C) Lastly, each school district’s board of education is required to uphold substance abuse prevention programs. Per the act, “Final determination of materials to be used, means of implementation of the curriculum, and ages and times at which students receive instruction about life skills and drug and alcohol abuse prevention shall be made by the school district board of education” (Oklahoma Alcohol and Drug Abuse, 1972). School boards not only hold some responsibility for the programs and being compliant with the State Department’s regulations, but they are also responsible for clearly communicating prevention methods throughout the community. The act claims that each school board shall inform parents and guardians of students within the district about the substance abuse prevention policies and the instruction methods that will be used to teach it in classrooms (Oklahoma Alcohol and Drug Abuse, 1972). This allows for transparency throughout the district and all parents and guardians are being informed on this topic. Moreover, parents and guardians then have the choice to decide if they want their children

to receive life skills and drug and alcohol abuse prevention instruction (Oklahoma Alcohol and Drug Abuse, 1972). No student is required to receive instruction if a parent or guardian omits them in writing.

Illegal substance abuse in young people is an issue that the State of Oklahoma has been addressing through the Drug Abuse Education Act of 1972 and the Oklahoma Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Life Skills Act. The purpose of these is to provide training for students, staff and teachers, and administrators to understand the risks of substance abuse in young people and create prevention methods to alleviate this issue.

**3. Dangerous Weapons.** The third and final concept of analyzing the effectiveness of Oklahoma public schools' safety and security measures is examining dangerous weapon laws and policies. Oklahoma identifies dangerous weapon laws on school property in State Bill 834. However, it is important to acknowledge Oklahoma's understanding of the term "school property." This statute defines "school property" as "...any publicly or privately owned property held for purposes of elementary, secondary or vocational technical education, and shall not include property owned by public school districts or private educational entities where such property is leased or rented to an individual or corporation and used for purposes other than educational" (Possession of Firearm on School Property, 1992). Within the Oklahoma public school system, school property is considered as such if the property is being used for public education purposes only.

Under this Statute, Section 1280.1 identifies the Possession of Firearms on School Property. Within this section, it states that it is unlawful for any individual to be in possession of a firearm while on any public or private school property and while in any school bus or school vehicle used for transportation (Possession of Firearm on School Property, 1992). Although this

section seems straightforward, there is nuance to this law. There are three areas within this section that highlight allowable weapons and firearms on school property that are not considered a violation of the law. First, hunting and fishing guns and knives may be allowed on school grounds under set criteria. The weapons must be kept in a privately owned vehicle and stored correctly, and the vehicle containing the weapons is only permitted to be driven onto school property to transport a student to and from school (Possession of Firearm on School Property, 1992). Additionally, if a handgun is carried in the vehicle, the owner must have a valid handgun license to carry it that is authorized by the Oklahoma Self-Defense Act. The second set of criteria for allowing weapons on school grounds is for the purposes of participating in the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation training courses- such as hunting and fishing certifications and safety or firearms courses, team shooting programs, or other school courses. (Possession of Firearm on School Property, 1992). For any team shooting programs or other events, the courses and events must be approved by the school administration and also provide that the weapons are displayed or stored properly. Thirdly, any peace officer or other authorized personnel by law can be in possession of a weapon while on school property, if it is part of their role duties and responsibilities (Possession of Firearm on School Property, 1992). Therefore, School Resource Officers would fall under this category and are allowed to be in possession of their firearms while actively serving in their roles on school property.

Individuals who violate the criteria within the section of Possession of Firearms on School Property may face criminal charges and convictions. Convictions may include guilty of a felony that is punishable by a fine of no more than five thousand dollars, imprisonment for not more than two years, and a possible revoke of their handgun license paired with a one hundred dollar fine (Possession of Firearm on School Property, 1992). Although this statute does include

a section regarding weapon restrictions and laws on school property and the coinciding punishments, it still leaves available areas for weapons to be allowed on school grounds.

Also, within the context of dangerous weapons on school property is the right to search by school personnel. Under the Oklahoma State Statute for Schools, it allows superintendents, principals, teachers, or security personnel at Oklahoma public schools to search student property upon reasonable suspicion. Reasons that would warrant a search would be for dangerous weapons, controlled dangerous substances, or for missing or stolen property if the property is reasonably suspected to have been taken from someone in the school (Pupils- Dangerous Weapons- Dangerous Substances, 1971). In order to conduct a search, however, it must fall within certain standards. First, the authorization of a search of a student or student's property can only be done if the student is on school grounds, if the student is in transit within the authority of the school, or if the student is attending a school sponsored function (Pupils- Dangerous Weapons- Dangerous Substances, 1971). Furthermore, the personnel conducting the search of the student or of the student's possessions must be of the same sex as the student, and the search must also contain a witness, preferably the same sex of the student.

Secondly, there are restrictions as to what can occur during the search. While the student cannot be subjected to a strip search, cold weather wear, shoes, and hand and head coverings- except for religious head coverings- shall be removed (Pupils- Dangerous Weapons- Dangerous Substances, 1971). Next, school personnel have full access to school lockers, desks, and any other school property, and these items may be searched at any time without a necessary reason. In order to mitigate potential issues of student privacy, the State claims that "Schools shall inform pupils in the student discipline code that they have no reasonable expectation of privacy

rights towards school officials in school lockers, desks, or other school property” (Pupils- Dangerous Weapons- Dangerous Substances, 1971). Lastly, items found through a search may be transported offsite. A superintendent of a school district has the right to designate the transportation of searched items to local law enforcement, and the transported of these items must be a member of school personnel if not a law enforcement agent themselves (Pupils- Dangerous Weapons- Dangerous Substances, 1971). These provisions allow for school personnel to the right to search school property and school students under reasonable suspicion. For schools to have the right to search, this could aid in potential safety and security issues and help mitigate potential threats of the school.

Students found to have violated any weapon laws and policies will face punishments. For any student found to be in possession of a firearm while on public school property, or in a public school vehicle, will be suspended from their school for no less than one year (Out of School Suspensions, 1997). The use of the term “firearm” in this context may take on many forms. The definition, per the United States Code 921, has four major means. The first meaning is any weapon that that is designed or can be converted to create an explosion. This may include a starter gun, bomb, grenade, rocket, missile, mine, or any similar device (U.S. Congress, 1968). The second definition is any weapon that may be converted and expel a projectile by the action of an explosive or other propellant, and it has a barrel with a bore of more than one-half inch in diameter; this does not include a shotgun, shotgun shell, or any other weapon used for sporting purposes (U.S. Congress, 1968). Thirdly, it cannot include any firearm with a muffler or silencer, and fourthly, it cannot be any destructive device. A destructive device “shall not include any device which is neither designed nor redesigned for use as a weapon; any device, although originally designed for use as a weapon, which is redesigned for use as a signaling, pyrotechnic,

line throwing, safety, or similar device” (U.S. Congress, 1968). Ultimately, implementing laws and policies regarding dangerous weapons, their restrictions, and potential punishments are an important piece of creating safe and secure public schools.

School Safety and Security is a principal aspect of education and student learning through Oklahoma public schools. Through analyzing the policies and legislation for Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restrictions, there is a better understanding of the measures that the State of Oklahoma and the Oklahoma State Department of Education have taken in order to address these issues and their relationship to school safety.

## **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter introduces the research methodology for this qualitative content analysis study regarding the effectiveness of the State of Oklahoma's public education school safety and security methods. The purpose of implementing a qualitative content analysis is to "quantify and analyze the presence, meanings, and relationships of certain words, themes, or concepts" (Columbia Public Health, 2023). This methodological approach allows for a deeper understanding of underlying trends, commonalities, or differences in the research to assess the State of Oklahoma's laws and policies that impact public safety and security. Elo and Kyngäs claim that using qualitative content analysis is beneficial in analyzing large volumes of textual data and sources (2008). This approach allows the researcher to sift through and organize data in order to support the research question and bridge the relationship between the data sources and research question.

Through qualitative content analysis, this study will analyze three major topics that directly impact Oklahoma's safety and security methods within public education. These three topics reflect the literature discussed in Chapter Two. The purpose for including the three selected topics is because each issue is directly linked to school safety and protecting students and staff in schools. The subject of school safety is a necessary part of student success and achievement. Per the National Center of Safe and Supportive Learning Environments, "The levels of crime and substance abuse that a school experiences are strongly correlated to school-wide test scores, graduation rates, and attendance rates" (Safe, 2024). Therefore, instituting prevention methods and programs to mitigate school safety can aid in student achievement. The three topics are as follows:

- (1) The Effectiveness of Bullying Prevention
- (2) The Effectiveness of Illegal Substance Prevention

### (3) The Effectiveness of Dangerous Weapon Restrictions

By using qualitative content analysis, these three pillars will analyze the impact that Oklahoma school safety laws and policies have on public education.

#### **Research Question**

The purpose of this research is to examine the effectiveness of Oklahoma laws and policies in place for school safety and security. This research aims to provide insight and possible answers to the following question.

RQ1: How are Oklahoma's laws and policies effective in promoting school safety in the areas of Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restriction?

#### **Methodology Selected**

A qualitative content analysis has been selected to be the most appropriate method of research to address the research goal and answer the research question. Additionally, the qualitative content analysis will be used to analyze Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention Dangerous Weapons Restrictions in Oklahoma public schools. The purpose of using a qualitative content analysis research design is to analyze sources- such as scholarly articles, government documents, statistical research data- and determine common meanings and themes appearing in the research (Content Analysis: Columbia Public Health, 2023). Ultimately, qualitative content analysis identifies trends within the research, and highlights how these trends contribute to the safety of the public education system in Oklahoma.

#### **Data Collection**

This section outlines the data collection process of the study. The data collection process will review the three selected areas- Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention, and

Dangerous Weapons Restrictions - in order to identify the relationship between these areas and the impact they have in the State of Oklahoma's public education system. Due to implementing a qualitative content analysis, the data collection process of this study will consist of State of Oklahoma reports and statistical data and reports archived from the National Center of Educational Statistics. The data collection sources are from years 2015-2023. The data collection sources and the sources' research years are seen in Table 1.

**Table 1**

| <b>Research Area</b>         | <b>Research Source</b>                                                                | <b>Research Year(s)</b> |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Bullying Prevention          | Oklahoma State Department of Health, Bullying Prevention Resource Guide               | 2019-2021               |
| Bullying Prevention          | National Center of Educational Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences            | 2015-2017               |
| Bullying Prevention          | Oklahoma State Department of Education, Annual School Incidents and Suspension Report | 2022-2023               |
| Illegal Substance Prevention | Oklahoma State Department of Education, Annual School Incidents and Suspension Report | 2022-2023               |

|                              |                                                                                       |           |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Illegal Substance Prevention | National Center of Educational Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences            | 2015-2017 |
| Illegal Substance Prevention | National Center of Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences              | 2019-2020 |
| Dangerous Weapons Prevention | National Center of Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences              | 2015-2017 |
| Dangerous Weapons Prevention | Oklahoma State Department of Education, Annual School Incidents and Suspension Report | 2022-2023 |
| Dangerous Weapons Prevention | National Center of Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences              | 2019-2020 |

The following is the collection of the data and will follow a qualitative content analysis with the aim of identifying key themes and addressing the research goal.

(1) The first concept in the data collection process is the effectiveness of Bullying Prevention methods in public schools. In this section, three data sources are used to assess Bullying Prevention in Oklahoma public schools. The first source is taken from the “Bullying Prevention Resource Guide” that was published by the Oklahoma State Department of Health. This source is significant to the data collection process not only because it includes the

Oklahoma public school bullying laws and policies mentioned in Chapter Two, but also because it provides data provided and published by the Oklahoma Youth Behavior Survey from year 2021. This data compares the prevalence of bullying on school property, bullying electronically, and the differences between male and female students being bullied between year 2019 and year 2021 (Sylvester et al., n.d.). This source will assist in the data collection process as it highlights the differences in bullying tactics over a two-year period.

The second source used in the data collection for Bullying Prevention is taken from the National Institute of Education Statistics. This source was published by the Institute of Education Sciences and is named “Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2019.” This source of information will be useful to the research because it provides a wide range of data surrounding school safety. The subject of bullying on school grounds and electronically is discussed throughout the report, and it provides statistical data reports of students between grades 9-12 who have reported being bullied (Wang et al., 2020). Additionally, the report compares data from all 50 states, therefore, the bullying reports for Oklahoma can be compared nationwide.

The third source used is from the Oklahoma State Department of Education’s Annual School Incidents and Suspension Report. The most updated report is from the school year 2022-2023. This report identifies bullying incidents that include the bullying of students and the bullying of teachers and staff members. Furthermore, it addresses the disciplinary measures taken for these incidents that includes in school suspension, out of school suspension, or out of school suspensions for the remainder of the school year; this is across all grade levels, as well (Oklahoma State Department of Public Education, 2024)

Each of these three sources will be instrumental in providing data and support for the research goal and question. Ultimately, these three sources will aid in understanding the level of bullying across Oklahoma public schools and where Oklahoma compares to nationwide.

(2) The second concept analyzed in the data collection process is to measure the effectiveness of Illegal Substance Prevention in Oklahoma public schools. For this section, there will be three sources analyzed. The first source used is from “Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2019” that was also used in the Bullying Prevention section. This source serves the purpose of analyzing the amount illegal substances in public schools nationwide. Within this source, it contains data for the percentage of students in grades 9-12 who reported using alcohol at least one time on school property, students in grades 0-12 who reported using marijuana at least one time on school property, and students in grades 9-12 who reported that illegal drugs were made available to them on school property within the last year (Wang et al., 2020). This source is impactful to the research as it explores the amount of illegal substances on Oklahoma public school campuses compared nationwide.

The second source used is from the Oklahoma State Department of Education’s Annual School Incident and Suspension Report. This report was mentioned in the Bullying Prevention section of this chapter. This report accounts the number of substance related incidents- including possession, use, and sale of- and the number of suspensions for these incidents across all grade levels (Oklahoma State Department of Public Education, 2024). This report is valuable to the research since it provides illegal substance abuse data and the disciplinary actions that coincide with it.

The last source identified for this section is from the “Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools in 2019–20” report that was also used in the Dangerous Weapons

section of this data collection. This report provides statistical data in regard to the distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs or alcohol, and the disciplinary actions that followed these violations (Wang et al., 2022). This report does not include state specific data, but rather categorizes states by regions. Oklahoma is categorized in the “South” region for the data description.

(3) The third concept examined in the data collection process is the effectiveness of Dangerous Weapons policies and restrictions in Oklahoma public schools. For this data collection section, there will be three sources used to aid the research. The first source is taken from the Oklahoma State Department of Education’s Annual School Incidents Report previously mentioned in the Bullying Prevention and Illegal Substance Prevention sections. Within this report, it provides statistical data related to property incidents that included a form of weapon, and other weapon incidents that exclude firearms but may include toy guns, pellet guns, knives, and other weapons (Oklahoma State Department of Public Education, 2024). Furthermore, this source reports the suspension counts across the state. The suspension of students includes in school or out of school suspensions or out of school suspensions given to students for the rest of the school year, and it also lists the weapon-related reasoning for the suspension (Oklahoma State Department of Public Education, 2024). This source is beneficial to the research because it provides insight as to the amount of weapon related incidents occurring in a school year across Oklahoma public schools.

The second set of data for this section is from “Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2019” report that was mentioned in the Bullying Prevention and Illegal Substance Prevention sections of this chapter. This report is significant to the research as it highlights the following: students in grades 9-12 that reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school

property, students in grades 9-12 who reported carrying a weapon at least 1 day during the previous 30 days, and the number of students who brought firearms to or possessed firearms at school (Wang et al., 2020). Additionally, this report compares these themes across each state. This source is significant to the research as it identifies dangerous weapons on school grounds and compares this data nationwide.

The last set of data for this section is pulled from the National Center for Educational Statistics. Published by the Institute of Education Sciences, this report is titled “Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools in 2019–20.” This source was previously mentioned in the Illegal Substance Prevention section, and it categorizes Oklahoma under the “South” region in the report. Within the report, it provides statistical data for physical attacks with a weapon, threat of physical attack with a weapon, robbery with or without a weapon, possession of a knife or sharp object, and use or possession of a firearm or explosive device (Wang et al., 2022). This source will aid in the research as it provides information regarding weapon related incidents in the southern region of the United States.

The sources used in the data collection process are instrumental in addressing the research question: Are Oklahoma’s Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restriction laws effective in promoting school safety in public schools? The sources analyzed will help in understanding the effectiveness of Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substances Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restrictions, and how they influence the safety and security of Oklahoma public schools.

### **Data Analysis**

Within this research project, the collected data from State of Oklahoma reports and archival data and reports from the National Center of Education Statistics will be analyzed. The

data collected will be categorized into the research areas of Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention, and Dangerous Weapon Restrictions. The purpose of collecting this data is to assess the effectiveness of the research areas and their impact on Oklahoma public schools. Analyzing the collected data will identify how the laws and policies evaluated in Chapter Two affect public schools across the state. In order to analyze the data effectively, the collected sources will be uploaded to the Nvivo research software. Researchers Elo and Kyngäs state that “Qualitative data analysis software programs can be used to make content analysis more manageable and ordered, and may facilitate new levels of analysis” (2008). Through Nvivo, the researcher is able to categorize and code common trends, themes, and relationships among the data sources.

The Comprehensive School Safety Framework (CSSF) guides this research. The CSSF is founded in three pillars to evaluate school safety, and its foundation is to enable systems and policies to enhance school safety. The first pillar is through Safe Learning Facilities. An important aspect of this pillar which connects to the research is having codes and standards (Global Alliance, 2022, p. 4). This research reviews the current laws and policies and analyzes if these policies are being upheld and effective. The second pillar of the CSSF is School Safety and Educational Continuity Management. A key element of this pillar is that it highlights physical, environmental and social protections (Global Alliance, 2022, p. 4). The core areas of this research- bullying, illegal substances, and dangerous weapons- are assessed to identify physical and social protections in public schools. Lastly, the third pillar is Risk Reduction and Resilience Education. A main component of this pillar is formal and non-formal training (Global Alliance, 2022, p. 4). This pillar is significant since the laws and policies for Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention, Dangerous Weapons Restrictions include forms of curriculum.

## **Limitations**

One limitation of this research is that it does not encompass every element of school safety and security issues across the State of Oklahoma. This research is solely analyzing the three areas of Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substances Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restrictions. Additional areas of school safety in Oklahoma that are not in the research are Drill Reporting, Asthma Awareness, Behavioral Threat Assessments, School Resource Officers, Human Trafficking, and many others (*Office of School Safety and Security*, 2024). Therefore, this research does not attest to how other areas impact public school safety in Oklahoma.

A second limitation of this study is that the literature, methodology, and findings do not focus on specific school districts or schools within the State of Oklahoma. This is due to a lack of public information and reporting resources available. Instead, the research will focus on public schools across the state, and it will include state and regional comparisons across the nation. This is a limitation since various demographics cannot be evaluated and included in the research. Demographics that could impact school safety are size of school or district, socioeconomic background, absenteeism, and many others. Each of these could impact the effectiveness of Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substances Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons. Furthermore, the limited resources available for schools and school districts does not allow a comparison between rural schools, urban schools, and suburban schools in Oklahoma.

## **Trustworthiness**

The data sources collected in this research present shared statistics and findings of bullying, illegal substances, and dangerous weapons. The data sources in this research not only cover all three topics, but they also allow the researcher to compare the data findings of the sources. Furthermore, the collected data sources are from national and state recognized

organizations and agencies. Therefore, the collected data sources offer credibility and validity to the research.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

This chapter will analyze the findings of the collected data sources. The data sources, as mentioned in the Methodology Chapter, consist of reports from the Oklahoma State Department of Health, the Oklahoma State Department of Education, and from the National Center of Educational Statistics. In order to analyze the data sources, NVIVO was implemented to facilitate the coding and theming process. Each data source was uploaded to NVIVO, then the sources were analyzed and organized into codes, and lastly, the codes helped determine the themes for each research area.

Overall, NVIVO assisted in determining three major codes throughout all the data sources and their relationship to the research areas. The first code is School Property. School Property was found in Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substances Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restrictions. Per the State of Oklahoma and as mentioned in Chapter Two, school property is defined as “...any publicly or privately owned property held for purposes of elementary, secondary or vocational technical education, and shall not include property owned by public school districts or private educational entities where such property is leased or rented to an individual or corporation and used for purposes other than educational” (Possession of Firearm on School Property, 1992). The second code is Disciplinary Action, and it is found in all three research areas. Under the Oklahoma State Department of Education, bullying, abusing or distributing illegal substances, or bringing or using weapons on school property will result in disciplinary action. The last code is Injuries, and this is found in Bullying Prevention and Dangerous Weapons Restrictions. There is limited information from the Oklahoma State Department of Education that determines what an injury is as a result of bullying or weapons. Within the OSDE’s Title IV Annual Incident Report Definitions, it does not specifically define

bullying or weapons related injuries, however, physical injuries are defined as “...those in which one or more students, school personnel, or other persons on school grounds or property require professional medical attention. Examples include stab or bullet wounds, concussions, fractured or broken bones, or cuts requiring stitches” (Title IV, 2021).

Once the three codes were determined, NVIVO facilitated in breaking down the codes into major themes of the research area and the data sources. Within Bullying Prevention, four themes were identified across all three codes. These themes include Bullying on School Property, Student Suspensions, Resulting Injuries from Bullying, and Cyberbullying. Next, two themes were identified for Illegal Substances across two codes. The first theme is Use, Possession, or Sale of Illegal Substances, and the second theme is Student Suspensions. Lastly, three themes were identified among Dangerous Weapons across all three codes. These themes consist of Use, Possession, or Sale of Dangerous Weapons, Resulting Injuries from Dangerous Weapons, and Student Suspensions. These themes will be used in this chapter to further investigate Oklahoma’s public schools’ Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substances Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restrictions. The three major research areas and their corresponding codes and themes are identified in Table 2.

**Table 2.**

| Research Area       | Code                | Theme                               |
|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Bullying Prevention | School Property     | Bullying on School Property         |
| Bullying Prevention | Disciplinary Action | Student Suspensions                 |
| Bullying Prevention | Injuries            | Resulting Injuries from<br>Bullying |

|                                |                     |                                                   |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Bullying Prevention            | School Property     | Cyberbullying                                     |
| Illegal Substances Prevention  | School Property     | Use, Possession, or Sale of<br>Illegal Substances |
| Illegal Substances Prevention  | Disciplinary Action | Student Suspensions                               |
| Dangerous Weapons Restrictions | School Property     | Use, Possession, or Sale of<br>Dangerous Weapons  |
| Dangerous Weapons Restrictions | Injuries            | Resulting Injuries from<br>Dangerous Weapons      |
| Dangerous Weapons Restrictions | Disciplinary Action | Student Suspensions                               |

## Research Findings

(A) The first key concept analyzed in this chapter is Oklahoma’s Bullying Prevention in public schools. The following data collected sources were uploaded to NVIVO and analyzed: Oklahoma State Department of Health, Bullying Prevention Resource Guide; National Center of Educational Statistics, American Institute for Research, National Center of Educational Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences; Oklahoma State Department of Education, Annual School Incidents and Suspension Report. Once these data sources were analyzed, four themes were identified. The following themes are (1) Bullying on School Property, (2) Student Suspensions, (3) Resulting Injuries from Bullying, and (4) Cyberbullying. Each of these themes will be evaluated in this section.

(1) The first theme NVIVO helped facilitate within Bullying Prevention is Bullying on School Property. Bullying on School Property appeared in two data sources. The first source, the

Bullying Prevention Resource Guide published by the Oklahoma State Department of Health, measured the percentage of bullying incidents on school property. According to this source, there was a slight decrease in bullying from years 2019 to 2021 as bullying reports went from 19% to 18% (Sylvester et al., n.d.). Although there was a slight decrease over a two-year period, bullying on school property remained a prevalent issue. Furthermore, the report highlights the discrepancy between male and female bullying on school property. Per the report, females were at higher risk of being bullied on school property with a 22% chance, compared to male students at 15% (Sylvester et al., n.d.). This report highlights not only that bullying on school property is a continuing issue, but that there are gender disparities between male and female students.

The second source for Bullying on School Property is from the research report “Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2019.” One area that is measured in this report is titled “Percentage of public school students in grades 9–12 who reported having been bullied on school property or electronically bullied during the previous 12 months, by state or jurisdiction.” Within this measure for the State of Oklahoma, in 2017 there were 21.3% of students who reported having been bullied on school property (Wang et al., 2020, p. 164). Additionally, the average for this measurement across the nation was 19%; therefore, Oklahoma’s bullying on school property report was higher than the national average. This report identifies that Oklahoma’s bullying report percentage on school property is higher compared nationwide, and that bullying on school property is a prevalent issue for the state.

(2) The second theme identified for Bullying Prevention is Student Suspension. Student Suspension measures are included in one data source. The source is from the Oklahoma State Department of Education’s Annual School Incidents and Suspension Report. The report includes

data from bullying of students, bullying of teachers and staff, and the disciplinary actions that correspond with these bullying incidents from school year 2022-2023. There are three levels of suspensions that are reported, and they include one or more days of in school suspension, one or more days of out of school suspension, and remainder of the year out of school suspension. The report measures students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade, sixth grade through eighth grade, and students in ninth grade through twelfth grade. The incidents and the corresponding disciplinary action are seen in Table 3.

**Table 3.**

| Grade Level                       | Bullying of Students Reported Incidents | One or More Days of In-School Suspension | One or More Days of Out of School Suspension | Remainder of the Year Out of School Suspension |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Kindergarten-5 <sup>th</sup>      | 1,376 Incidents                         | 338 Suspensions                          | 381 Suspensions                              | 22 Suspensions                                 |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>  | 2,004 Incidents                         | 668 Suspensions                          | 662 Suspensions                              | 95 Suspensions                                 |
| 9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> | 660 Incidents                           | 204 Suspensions                          | 341 Suspensions                              | 56 Suspensions                                 |

Per the report, it is concluded that students in grades sixth through eighth grade have the highest level of bullying of students' incidents and suspensions as a result of the bullying actions (Oklahoma State Department of Public Education, 2024). Additionally, bullying of teachers and staff incidents are measured and their corresponding suspension counts are in Table 4.

**Table 4**

| Grade Level | Bullying of Teachers or Staff Reported Incidents | One or More Days of In-School Suspension | One or More Days of Out of School Suspension | Remainder of the Year Out of School Suspension |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|

|                                   |               |                |                 |                |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Kindergarten-5 <sup>th</sup>      | 255 Incidents | 27 Suspensions | 140 Suspensions | 3 Suspensions  |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>  | 228 Incidents | 51 Suspensions | 116 Suspensions | 11 Suspensions |
| 9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> | 123 Incidents | 32 Suspensions | 85 Suspensions  | 20 Suspensions |

This data shows that there were fewer bullying incidents and suspensions from bullying of teachers and staff compared to the bullying of students (Oklahoma State Department of Public Education, 2024). Furthermore, both incident and suspension counts highlight the presence of bullying in schools, and the three forms of suspensions used as disciplinary measures for students who are found to be bullying students or teachers in school

(3) The third theme assessed for Bullying Prevention is Resulting Injuries from Bullying. For this code, one source is used from the data collection and is the Oklahoma State Department of Education's Annual School Incidents and Suspension Report. This report measures bullying of students and bullying of teachers and staff that resulted in physical injury across grades kindergarten through fifth grade, sixth grade through eighth grade, and ninth grade through twelfth grade in school year 2022-2023. The results for physical injury of students and physical injury of teachers or staff are found in Table 5.

**Table 5**

| Grade Level                      | Bullying of Students Resulting in Physical Injury | Bullying of Teachers or Staff Resulting in Physical Injury |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Kindergarten-5 <sup>th</sup>     | 60 Injuries                                       | 28 Injuries                                                |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> | 104 Injuries                                      | 5 Injuries                                                 |

|                                   |             |             |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| 9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> | 20 Injuries | 11 Injuries |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|

Per this source, students in grades six through eight had the highest levels of student injuries, but the lowest in teacher or staff injuries (Oklahoma State Department of Public Education, 2024). These reports indicate that although bullying that results in physical injury is less common compared to the amount of incidents that occur, there is still a presence of injuries, especially among middle school students.

(4) The last theme for Bullying Prevention is Cyberbullying, or electronic bullying. The source used from the data collection is “Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2019.” In this report, Cyberbullying is defined as “occurring when willful and repeated harm is inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones or other electronic devices” (Wang et al., 2020, p. 48). The measurement used for this code is the percentage of public school students in grades nine through twelve who reported being electronically bullied. In the report year of 2017, 16.1% of these Oklahoma public school students reported being electronically bullied (Wang et al., 2020, p. 164). Furthermore, this percentage was higher than the national average. The national average of high school students who reported being bullied electronically in this year was 14.9% (Wang et al., 2020, p. 164). This report identifies the level of cyberbullying that occurs within the Oklahoma public school system. The comparison between Oklahoma’s report and the nationwide report shows that Oklahoma is on the higher end of cyberbullying incidents.

(B) The second key concept analyzed in this chapter is Oklahoma’s Illegal Substance Prevention for public schools. The following data collected sources were uploaded to NVIVO and analyzed: Oklahoma State Department of Education, Annual School Incidents and Suspension Report; National Center of Educational Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences;

National Center of Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences. Once these data collected sources were uploaded and organized in NVIVO, there were two major themes that were identified. The two themes that are evaluated in this section for Illegal Substance Prevention are (1) Use, Possession, or Sale of an Illegal Substance on School Property and (2) Student Suspensions.

(1) The first theme for Illegal Substance Prevention is Use, Possession, or Sale of an Illegal Substance on school property. In order to analyze this code, the data collection source “Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2019” is used. The first measurement from this source is public school students in grades nine through twelve who reported using alcohol on school property. For the year 2017, 31.6% of students reported using alcohol anywhere, including school property (Wang et al., 2020, p. 181). This measurement includes additional properties with the school property count, but it still highlights the prominence of alcohol use by high school students. The nation’s average for this measure was 29.8%, therefore, Oklahoma students had higher alcohol use compared to other states.

Furthermore, this report also measured marijuana use of public school students in grades nine through twelve. Oklahoma students had a 15.9% use of marijuana on properties, including school property in 2017 (Wang et al., 2020, p. 182). This report also measured the national average of marijuana use of public school students. The national average in this measure was 19.8% (Wang et al., 2020, p. 182). Oklahoma measured below the national average and students were less likely to use marijuana compared nationwide during this reporting year.

Lastly, this report measured the percentage of public school students in grades nine through twelve who reported having illegal substances made available to them on school property. In this data, 22.5% of Oklahoma public school students reported that illegal drugs were

made available to them on school property (Wang et al., 2020, p. 189). Additionally, the national average for this measure was 19.8%, so Oklahoma students reported a higher percentage compared nationwide (Wang et al., 2020, p. 189). This measurement highlights that Oklahoma high school students are more susceptible to drug and alcohol use and distribution, and these students have more accessibility to illegal substances compared to students nationwide.

The second data collection source for the theme of Use, Possession, or Sale of an Illegal Substance on school property is from the Oklahoma State Department of Education's Annual School Incidents and Suspension Report. This report measures alcohol and illicit drug incidents across grades kindergarten through fifth grade, sixth grade through eighth grade, and ninth grade through twelfth grade in school year 2022-2023; tobacco is included in the original report, but it will be removed for this research and only count drug or alcohol related incidents. The alcohol and drug incidents are found in Table 6.

**Table 6**

| Grade Level                       | Alcohol Incidents | Illicit Drug Incidents |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Kindergarten-5 <sup>th</sup>      | 7 Incidents       | 186 Incidents          |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>  | 178 Incidents     | 2,039 Incidents        |
| 9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> | 215 Incidents     | 4,105 Incidents        |

Per this report, illicit drug incidents are far more common across all three grade levels compared to alcohol incidents (Oklahoma State Department of Public Education, 2024). Furthermore, in both measurements of alcohol and illicit drugs, high school age students had higher counts of possession, use or sale, while elementary aged students had the lowest.

(2) The second theme for Illegal Substance Prevention is Student Suspension. The data collection source used to analyze this code is from the Oklahoma State Department of Education’s Annual School Incidents and Suspension Report for school year 2022-2023. This data will measure the suspension counts of students across grades kindergarten through fifth grade, sixth grade through eighth grade, and ninth grade through twelfth grade who were in possession of, use of, or sale of alcohol or illicit drugs; tobacco is included in the report, but this research will not include on tobacco use. Table 7 highlights the suspension report statistics from alcohol or illicit drug incidents.

**Table 7**

| Grade Level                       | One or More Days of In-School Suspension | One or More Days of Out of School Suspension | Remainder of the Year Out of School Suspension |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Kindergarten-5 <sup>th</sup>      | 10 Suspensions                           | 121 Suspensions                              | 16 Suspensions                                 |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>  | 369 Suspensions                          | 1,731 Suspensions                            | 238 Suspensions                                |
| 9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> | 908 Suspensions                          | 3,186 Suspensions                            | 417 Suspensions                                |

Per this report, students in grades nine through twelve had far more suspensions compared to other grades, and this corresponds with this grade level’s incident amounts (Oklahoma State Department of Public Education, 2024). Furthermore, there were more out of school suspensions across all grades than any other form of suspension.

The second data source used for Student Suspension is from “Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools in 2019–20.” This report does not include state specific data, and instead, it only includes region specific data; Oklahoma is included in the “South” region of the report. This report measures the percentage of schools that took serious

disciplinary action of use, distribution or possession of illegal drugs or alcohol. For illegal drugs, the report shows the south region measured at 21.8% which is almost 2% higher than the national average (Wang et al., 2022, p. 12). This shows that southern regions took more serious action compared nationwide. In addition to this, the serious alcohol disciplinary action was measured at 10.3% which is 2.3% higher than the national average (Wang et al., 2022, p. 12). This data measure highlights that alcohol incidents in public schools in the south received more serious disciplinary measures compared to other regions.

(C) The third and final key concept analyzed in this chapter is Dangerous Weapons Restriction for Oklahoma public schools. The following data collected sources were uploaded to NVIVO and analyzed: National Center of Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences; Oklahoma State Department of Education, Annual School Incidents and Suspension Report; National Center of Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences. Through the facilitation of NVIVO, there are three codes that are identified and evaluated from the data collection sources. The three codes are (1) Use, Possession, or Sale on School Property, (2) Resulting Injury of Weapons, and (3) Student Suspension.

(1) The first theme in Dangerous Weapons Restriction is Use, Possession, or Sale of a Weapon on School Property. The first data collection source used to analyze this code is from the Oklahoma State Department of Education's Annual School Incidents and Suspension Report for school year 2022-2023. This report includes weapon related incidents, such as toy guns, cap guns, BB guns, pellet guns, knives, or the use of other weapons like razor blades or pencils. Across Kindergarten through fifth grade, there were 477 weapon related incidents, 674 weapon related incidents for sixth grade through eighth grade, and 435 weapon related incidents for ninth grade through twelfth grade (Oklahoma State Department of Public Education, 2024). This

measure shows that sixth through eighth graders had the highest weapon related incidents. Additionally knife incidents were the highest among all grade levels, and other weapons- like razor blades or pencils-reported the second highest.

The second data collection source for Use, Possession or Sale of Weapons in this section is from the “Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2019” report. Two measurements will be evaluated from this report. The first measurement is the percentage of ninth through twelfth grade public school students who reported carrying a weapon on school property at least one time in the last 30 days. In this report from 2017, Oklahoma students reported that 6.4% had carried a weapon on school property in the last 30 days (Wang et al., 2020, p. 174). This statistic is higher than the national average. Nationwide, students reported carrying a weapon on school property at 3.8% (Wang et al., 2020, p. 174). Oklahoma public high school students had higher response rates to weapon possession on school property compared nationwide.

In addition to this measure, the number of Oklahoma public school students who possessed firearms at school in the school year 2017-2018 was evaluated. In this measure, Oklahoma reported that 51 students brought firearms on school property (Wang et al., 2020, p. 176). In the school year measured, only 18 states ranked higher than Oklahoma in this category. Both of these measures from this report highlight that weapons on school property is still an ongoing issue in the state, but also across the country.

(2) The second theme identified is Resulting Injury from a Weapon. Two data collection sources will be evaluated for this code. The first source is from the Oklahoma State Department of Education’s Annual School Incidents and Suspension Report for school year 2022-2023. This report measures weapon related injuries, such as toy guns, cap guns, BB guns, pellet guns, knives, or the use of other weapons like razor blades or pencils. The report assesses students in

grades kindergarten through fifth grade, sixth grade through eighth grade, and ninth grade through twelfth grade. The results are shown in Table 8.

**Table 8**

| Grade Level                       | Toy Guns, Cap Guns, BB guns, and Pellet Gun Injuries | Knife Related Injuries | Other Weapons Injuries, like Razor Blades or Pencils |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Kindergarten-5 <sup>th</sup>      | 4 Injuries                                           | 1 Injury               | 15 Injuries                                          |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>  | 3 Injuries                                           | 4 Injuries             | 14 Injuries                                          |
| 9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> | 3 Injuries                                           | 4 Injuries             | 16 Injuries                                          |

From this report, it can be concluded that weapon related injuries were less common in this school year, especially compared to bullying related injuries as previously shown (Oklahoma State Department of Public Education, 2024). However, the category of other weapon injuries- such as razor blades and pencils- reported higher injuries compared to the other categories. Per Oklahoma’s Dangerous Weapons laws on school property, pencils are not deemed to be a dangerous weapons. Overall, the total injuries compared to the weapon related incidents were low which shows that weapon related injuries occur less frequently given the number of incidents.

The second data source is from the “Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2019” report. This report measured the percentage of ninth through twelfth grade public school students who reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property. The report does not separate the results into threats and injuries, so this will be a combined statistic. The result for Oklahoma shows that 4.8% of these students reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property in 2017 (Wang et al., 2020, p. 139). This statistic was in a decline from the

previous reports. Furthermore, the nationwide average was 6%, so Oklahoma was below the national average in this category (Wang et al., 2020, p. 139). Both reports highlight that weapon related injuries are on the lower end nationwide, and that less students in Oklahoma are experiencing injuries compared to the high amount of weapon incidents.

(3) The last theme is Student Suspension resulting from weapon related incidents. Two sources from the data collection will be evaluated. The first source is from the Oklahoma State Department of Education's Annual School Incidents and Suspension Report for school year 2022-2023 for students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade, sixth grade through eighth grade, and ninth grade through twelfth grade. This report measures weapon related suspension counts across kindergarten through twelfth grade; weapons include toy guns, cap guns, BB guns, and pellet guns, knives, and other weapons like razor blades and pencils. This data is reported in Table 9.

**Table 9**

| Grade Level                       | One or More Days of In-School Suspension | One or More Days of Out of School Suspension | Remainder of the Year Out of School Suspension |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Kindergarten-5 <sup>th</sup>      | 91 Suspensions                           | 293 Suspensions                              | 21 Suspensions                                 |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>  | 110 Suspensions                          | 395 Suspensions                              | 70 Suspensions                                 |
| 9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> | 61 Suspensions                           | 247 Suspensions                              | 69 Suspensions                                 |

Per this report, students in grades six through eight had the most suspensions counts across all three types of suspensions (Oklahoma State Department of Public Education, 2024). Since there were high levels of weapon related incidents, the high amount of suspensions counts correspond with the incident reports.

The second set of data used to measure Disciplinary Action resulting from weapon related incidents is from “Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools in 2019–20.” This report does not include state specific data, and instead only includes region specific data; Oklahoma is included in the “South” region of the report. This report measures the percentage of schools that took serious disciplinary action with use or possession of a firearm or explosive, or any other weapon. For the south, 3.4% of schools took serious disciplinary action for a firearm or explosive, and 9.8% took serious disciplinary action for other weapons (Wang et al., 2022, p. 12). Furthermore, this report compared these percentages to other regions across the nation. For firearms or explosives, the south region had a higher report compared to the other regions, but the south had a lower percentage rate compared to the Midwest and the west in the other weapons category (Wang et al., 2022, p. 12). This report shows that firearms or explosive devices are taken more seriously compared to other weapons that may be used on school property or are in possession of while on school property.

### **Analysis**

The findings of this chapter evaluated the presence of bullying, illegal substances, and dangerous weapons at Oklahoma public schools. The data helps understand that although there are Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restriction laws in place, Oklahoma public schools are still experiencing these safety issues. These three areas are impacting public school safety since injuries are occurring from bullying and weapons, many students have reported being threatened, and that other students have easy access to illegal substances.

Based on the comparisons of Oklahoma’s statistics with other states across the nation, there are areas that Oklahoma performs better in and other areas that Oklahoma performs worse

in. For example, in the area of bullying on school property, 21.3% of Oklahoma students reported having been bullied on school property compared to the national average at 19% (Wang et al., 2020, p. 164). Similarly, students being bullied electronically in Oklahoma was higher than the national average at 16.1% for Oklahoma students and 14.9% nationally. (Wang et al., 2020, p. 164). Additionally, illegal substances can be compared nationally. In the area alcohol use on school property, 31.6% of Oklahoma students reported using alcohol compared to 29.8% nationally (Wang et al., 2020, p. 181). Similar to this is illegal drugs being made available to students on school property. 22.5% of Oklahoma public school students reported that illegal drugs were made available to them on school property compared to 19.8% nationally. (Wang et al., 2020, p. 189). However, in the area of marijuana use on school property, Oklahoma students measured lower. The results of this were Oklahoma students at 15.9% and the national average at 19.8%. Lastly for dangerous weapons, Oklahoma reported higher in most areas. For example, in the area of carrying a weapon on school property, Oklahoma students reported that 6.4% had carried a weapon on school property compared to 3.8% of students nationally. (Wang et al., 2020, p. 174). These findings indicate the Oklahoma ranks higher in bullying, illegal substance, and weapon related incidents in public schools compared to the national average.

Furthermore, this data can address the research question of how are Oklahoma's laws and policies effective in promoting school safety in the areas of Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restriction laws? Although there are laws and policies in place to address these three areas, these issues continue to be ever-present in Oklahoma public schools and the data reveals stark comparisons with other states across the nation.

## **Chapter 5: Implications**

This study used the following research question to guide the research: Are Oklahoma's Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restriction laws effective in promoting school safety in public schools? By applying this question to the study, the research is able to identify if the current laws and policies stated in the literature review are effective and mitigating the amount of bullying, illegal substance, and dangerous weapon incidents in public schools. This chapter identifies the implications of this study and recommendations for future research and to enhance safety in Oklahoma public schools

### **Implications**

The purpose of this research study is to identify if the current Oklahoma laws and policies for school safety are effective. Since Oklahoma ranks in the bottom of education and school safety influences this ranking, this research is significant to identify if Oklahoma's public school safety measures impact Oklahoma's ranking and the public education system. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, this research was able to collect various data sources to examine. By doing so, these data resources helped understand the impact of bullying, illegal substances, and dangerous weapon incidents that take place within Oklahoma public schools, and the levels of student disciplinary actions that followed the incidents.

For Bullying Prevention, previous research of the Oklahoma Bullying Prevention laws suggests that there should be prevention practices in place at school sites to prevent any forms of bullying. Furthermore, it includes that school sites must develop bullying prevention policies and committees to develop prevention strategies (School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 2022).

Although this is in place, based on the findings of this study, bullying -including cyberbullying- continues to be prevalent in public schools. Moreover, Oklahoma had higher rates of bullying at school compared nationally. For example, 21.3% of Oklahoma students reported being bullied at school, while the national rate was 19% for the year 2017 (Wang et al., 2020, p. 164).

In addition to this is the level of disciplinary action and suspensions as a result of bullying. Current law suggests that each school must adopt a discipline policy to address bullying (School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 2022). Through this, schools are required to report bullying and conduct an investigation, but it does not state what disciplinary actions should be taken in the case of a bullying incident. Based on the bullying suspension findings, over 2,700 suspensions were reported in school year 2022-2023 (Oklahoma State Department of Public Education, 2024). What is not revealed, however, is if other forms of disciplinary action took place, or if these suspension counts included the same students doing the bullying. This is significant because students can be repeated bullying offenders with chronic suspensions, but they are not receiving any other forms of intervention to prevent them from bullying. Therefore, they will continue to repeat their actions and harming other students, teachers and staff, and their own academic experiences.

Next, for Illegal Substance Prevention, the Drug Abuse Prevention and Life Skills Education Act is in place. The main purpose of this is to provide drug and alcohol abuse curricula in schools (Oklahoma Alcohol and Drug Abuse, 1972). Within this act, schools are required to develop their own curriculum to inform students, but also the Oklahoma State Department of Education is required to report their findings of reported alcohol and drug abuse in schools (Oklahoma Alcohol and Drug Abuse, 1972). Using the findings of illegal substances,

the research can identify if the current laws are effective in preventing the use or possession of in public schools. Oklahoma public school students measured higher in alcohol use and higher for having illegal substances made available to them at school compared nationally at 31.6% to 29.8% for alcohol and 22.5% and 19.8% for illegal substances (Wang et al., 2020, p. 181 and 189). These findings reveal that the current laws in place are not satisfactory in properly educating students on the impacts of substance abuse, and it does not prevent students from using alcohol or drugs on school campuses.

In the school year 2022-2023, over 6,300 drug incidents were reported, and over 400 alcohol incidents were reported (Oklahoma State Department of Public Education, 2024). The suspension counts for both incidents were also reported. In this school year for illegal substances, there were over 6,900 reported suspensions (Oklahoma State Department of Public Education, 2024). The report does not reveal if any other disciplinary measures were taken other than the three forms of suspensions, and it does not report if some of the suspensions were repeated students. Without clear guidance on disciplinary action and drug and alcohol abuse education from the state, this can lead schools and districts to adopt their own policies and curriculum. Therefore, some may take illegal substances and the curricula more seriously than others. Furthermore, the high amount of substances in Oklahoma public schools discloses that the current laws are not effective in preventing students from using or possessing illegal substances at school.

Lastly, Dangerous Weapons Restrictions laws are in place to prevent weapons on school campuses, and to also determine what disciplinary actions take place if weapons are found. Under current Possession of Firearms on School Property laws, it is unlawful for individuals to possess firearms or explosive devices on school property (Possession of Firearm on School

Property, 1992). As previously mentioned in Chapter Two, there are instances where firearms- such as for hunting or team shooting programs- are allowed. When assessing the findings from Chapter Four, dangerous weapon incidents and possession on school property were common. For the 2022-2023 school year, there were over 1,500 weapon related incidents reported in Oklahoma public schools (Oklahoma State Department of Public Education, 2024). Although injuries resulting from dangerous weapon incidents were low compared to the amount of incidents, suspensions for dangerous weapons were high. For the 2022-2023 school year, over 1,357 suspensions were reported (Oklahoma State Department of Public Education, 2024). Similarly to Bullying Prevention and Illegal Substances, it is unclear if other disciplinary actions took place but were not reported, and if the suspension counts include repeating student offenders.

In addition to this, Oklahoma public schools measured higher in students carrying weapons on campus compared nationally, and were 19<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states in students bring firearms on campus (Wang et al., 2020, p. 174-176). However, Oklahoma measured lower than the national average in students being threatened or injured with a weapon. The Dangerous Weapon laws are unclear about the use or possession of sharp objects, such as knives. Knives, razor blades, and pencils had the most incidents and injuries compared to firearms. Pencil and razor blades had over 400 incidents, knives had close to 900 incidents, meanwhile firearms had slightly over 300 (Oklahoma State Department of Public Education, 2024). Although weapon related incidents are high among Oklahoma public schools, sharp objects measure the highest compared to firearms. Oklahoma Dangerous Weapon laws, however, are unclear about different sharp objects used as weapons, especially with pencils.

Based on the overall research, it is concluded that bullying, illegal substance, and dangerous weapon incidents are prominent in Oklahoma public schools. When comparing these three areas to other states across the nation, Oklahoma has higher bullying, illegal substances, and dangerous weapon related incidents. Although there are some areas that Oklahoma performs better in, the comprehensive findings show that Oklahoma performs worst compared nationally.

Moreover, the laws lack clarity and definitive justification in the three research areas. A common trend in all three areas was that the laws do not clearly define what disciplinary actions to take in the case of bullying, illegal substance, or weapon incidents. In addition to this, there are not clearly defined reporting requirements for either the school districts or the Oklahoma State Department of Education. Lastly, there are undefined accountability requirements for both the Oklahoma State Department of Education and for school districts. Although there are laws and policies in place for schools and districts to follow, there are undefined accountability measures. The laws do not clarify where or to whom schools must report their data to, nor do the laws clearly define that these reports be made to the public. Also, the laws do not clearly define what the schools or districts are in jeopardy of if they fail to report, form committees, or implement programs for these three core areas. As for the Oklahoma State Department of Education, there is an extreme lack of reports and data that is published on their website for the three areas. This is important because Oklahoma citizens, students, parents, school staff and faculty, and others should be able to access public information. Therefore, there is a lack of accountability mechanisms in place for the OSDE to publish this information.

## **Recommendations**

Since Oklahoma education ranks 49<sup>th</sup> nationally, there are several recommendations made in order to develop a safer learning environment (Rankings, 2024). One recommendation of this

research is that it can be used to review the current laws that impact school safety. In terms of Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substances Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restrictions, these have a direct impact on school safety. State and school leaders, teachers, parents, and community members can use this research to better understand how these issues impact the safety of public schools and determine more effective measures or programs in their schools.

Secondly, this research can be used to reevaluate the current laws and policies of Bullying Prevention, Illegal Substance Prevention, and Dangerous Weapons Restriction within Oklahoma public schools. Areas such as disciplinary action, safety curriculum, committee membership, and reporting requirements need to be reevaluated and updated to be made clearer for school districts to follow.

Thirdly, there should be in implementation of clear accountability procedures in place for schools, school districts, and the Oklahoma Department of Education to ensure that school safety measures and procedures are not only being implemented, but that school safety reports are being made available to the public.

## References

- Babalola, S. S., Nwanzu, C. L. (2021). The current phase of social sciences research: A thematic overview of the literature. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 7(1).  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2021.1892263>
- Bullying Prevention*. (2024.). Oklahoma State Department of Education.  
<https://sde.ok.gov/bullying-prevention>
- Content Analysis: Columbia Public Health*. Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. (2023, March 30). <https://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/research/population-health-methods/content-analysis>
- Drug Abuse Education Act of 1972, 70 O.S. § 1210 et seq. (1972).
- Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(1), 107–115. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04569.x>
- Find Resources to Create a Safer School | School Safety Topics*. SchoolSafety.gov. (2024).  
<https://www.schoolsafety.gov/>
- Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction & Resilience in the Education Sector. (2022). *Comprehensive School Safety Framework 2022-2030*. Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies. <https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/The-Comprehensive-School-Safety-Framework-2022-2030-for-Child-Rights-and-Resilience-in-the-Education-Sector.pdf>

Kosciw, Gretak, Giga, Villenas, Danischewski, National Center for Education Statistics, Bureau of Justice Statistics, & Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). *Comparing Civil Rights Data Collection Sexual Victimization and Bullying Data with External Sources: Considerations for Public Users*. <https://nces.ed.gov/admindata/crdc/pdf/AIR-CRDC-Ext-Sources-Brief-508-Dec-2020.pdf>

Mayer, M. J., Nickerson, A. B., & Jimerson, S. R. (2021). Preventing School Violence and Promoting School Safety: Contemporary Scholarship Advancing Science, Practice, and Policy. *School Psychology Review*, 50(2–3), 131–142. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/10.1080/2372966X.2021.1949933>

McCann, A. (2024, July 22). *States with the Best & Worst School Systems in 2024*. WalletHub. <https://wallethub.com/edu/e/states-with-the-best-schools/5335>

*Office of School Safety and Security | Oklahoma State Department of Education*. (2024). Oklahoma State Department of Education. <https://sde.ok.gov/school-safety-and-security>

Oklahoma Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Life Skills Education Act, O.S. § 1210 et seq. (1972).

Oklahoma State Department of Public Education. (2024). Statewide incident counts for school year 2022-2023. In *Annual School Incidents Report* (pp. 1–2). <https://sde.ok.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/22-23%20Statwide%20Incident%20Report.pdf>

Out of School Suspensions-Right to Appeal, 70 O.S. § 24-101.3. (1997).

Possession of Firearm on School Property, O.S. § 21-1280.1. (1992).

*Public School Rankings by State*. World Population Review. (2024).

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/public-school-rankings-by-state>

Pupils- Dangerous Weapons- Dangerous Substances, 70 O.S. § 24-102. (1971).

*Rankings: Education - States with the Best Education*. U.S. News. (2024).

<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/rankings/education>

*Safety | National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE)*. (2024).

<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/safety>

School Safety and Bullying Prevention Act, 70 O.S. § 24 et seq. (2022).

Sylvester, M., Oklahoma State Department of Health, and Maternal and Child Health Services.

(n.d.). Bullying Prevention Resource Guide.

<https://oklahoma.gov/content/dam/ok/en/health/health2/aem-documents/family-health/maternal-and-child-health/child-adolescent-health/school-health/Bullying%20Prevention%20Online%20Resources2021.pdf>

*Title IV Annual Incident Report Definitions*. (2021). <https://sde.ok.gov/sites/ok.gov.sde/files/Prev-IncidentRepDef.pdf>

U.S. Congress: (1968). United States Code: Firearms, 18 U.S.C. §§ 921-928.

Wang, K., Chen, Y., Zhang, J., and Oudekerk, B.A. (2020). *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2019* (NCES 2020-063/NCJ 254485). National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020063.pdf>

Wang, K., Kemp, J., and Burr, R. (2022). Crime, Violence, Discipline, and Safety in U.S. Public Schools in 2019–20: Findings From the School Survey on Crime and Safety (NCES 2022-029). U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics.  
<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2022/2022029.pdf>