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School transportation protocol and procedures related to students' safety and discipline: Reflective experiences of school bus drivers and school administrators

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School transportation protocol and procedures related to students' safety and discipline:

Reflective experiences of school bus drivers and school administrators

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of

Mississippi State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in Educational Leadership

in the Department of Educational Leadership

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Title of Study: School transportation protocol and procedures related to students' safety and discipline: Reflective experiences of school bus drivers and school administrators

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Candidate for Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

This dissertation deals with the protocol and procedures related to students' safety and discipline while on a school bus as experienced by school bus drivers' and school administrators' experiences as a guide for changes to the existing programs. The following was the overarching research question that guided the study: How do school bus drivers and school administrators describe their reflective experiences related to bus driver training and protocol and procedures associated with student safety and discipline?

A qualitative research design was selected for the study. A case study approach was used to collect and analyze data for the study.

Participants for the study included 30 bus drivers and 4 school administrators from 2 school districts. To collect data for the study, interviews were conducted through the use of focus groups.

The analysis of the data for the study yielded emergent themes in response to the secondary research questions. The emergent themes include ongoing professional development, addition of cameras and seat belts, bus monitors, creation of a handbook for school bus drivers and riders, and seating charts. Recommendations are presented for policy and protocol changes.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation research to my family. No one could have received more support, understanding, and help than I did from my wife and children. They have always been my biggest fans.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Frankie Williams for her unending assistance. Without her direction and encouragement, I am not sure that I would have completed this degree. Also, thank you to the members of my committee (Dr. Eric Moyen, Dr. Leigh Ann McMullen, and Dr. Stephanie King) who read, reviewed, and edited this research. The dedication of these professional educators is greatly appreciated.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Every day in the United States, 26 million children depend on school buses to take them to and from school (Bendici, 2016). According to the New York School Bus Contractors Association (NYSBCA; 2021), approximately 470,000 public school buses are used to cover more than 3.5 billion miles each year. Additionally, NYSBCA (2021) reported school buses comprise the largest mass transit program in the United States. School buses provide approximately 10 billion student trips per year (NYSBCA, 2021).

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT; 2018) pointed out that school buses, whether on isolated country roads or in congested city traffic, were among the safest mode of travel for students. According to NYSBCA (2021), “There is no safer way to transport a child than in a school bus” (p.1). AFT (2018) attributed bus safety to existing state and federal standards. Further, the existing rules and regulations that school bus drivers must adhere to while driving add to the safety of the school bus transportation system (AFT, 2018).

The AFT (2018) claimed a safe bus route happens when a bus driver can successfully manage student behavior. Goldin (2018) asserted that while school bus drivers are usually the only adult on a bus, they receive minimal training dealing with student behavior. Correspondingly, Poland (2010) insisted that schools expect too much from the bus drivers. Poland (2010) noted bus drivers must monitor and manage student behavior visible only through a rear-view mirror, watch for other traffic, and drive the bus.

Although school bus transportation has been a part of the American educational process since 1940, little has changed to make the ride safer for students and the bus drivers (Greene, 2019). The extant literature showed bus drivers were rarely included in the discussions of policy development and student safety and tended to receive minimal training or administrative support when student safety and student discipline issues were present (Bradshaw, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

While school buses were found to be the safest mode of transportation for students (AFT, 2018), the National Highway Traffic Safety Association (NHTSA; 2001) reported that motor vehicle-related injuries were found as the leading cause of death for children between the ages of 5 and 19 in the United States. One study identified three potential times when accidents could occur during routine school bus routes: (1) while loading the bus, (2) while riding the bus, and (3) while unloading the bus (Lartey, 2006). Smith (2018) found between 2007 and 2016, 98 pedestrians under the age of 18 were killed in school transportation accidents. On average, 128 students died in school bus-related accidents each year in the United States (NHTSA, 2001). According to Lartey (2006), most of these accidents and deaths could have been prevented.

Each year in the state of Mississippi approximately 410,000 public school students ride buses to school (School Bus Fleet, 2018). In Mississippi the average bus driver was 18 years old or older and held a commercial driver's license with a school bus and passenger endorsement (School Bus Fleet, 2018). In addition, a driver must not have a criminal record or a bad driving record, and must know the bus and its regulations (School Bus Fleet, 2018).

Although many school systems across the United States revealed higher criteria for school bus drivers than Mississippi, Poland (2010) agreed that school bus drivers need more than

the ability to drive the bus. Moreover, Poland (2010) asserted the driver needs the ability to handle 40 students with multiple personality traits, varying disabilities, and rampant emotions.

Generally, prior research studies suggested that school bus drivers were not adequately prepared for the role of student discipline (Lartey, 2006). Prior research showed Mississippi's bus drivers received no training in child management, conflict resolution, or procedure establishment (Division of Public Transportation, 2014). Instead, most bus drivers received instruction only on mechanical and safety issues (Division of Public Transportation, 2014). Poland (2010) suggested bus drivers must focus their attention on the behavior of students visible only through the rear-view mirror while driving.

From a broad perspective, a major study showed significant challenges facing school bus transportation. Burgoyne-Allen et al. (2019) presented the following as six key challenges facing the school transportation sector.

1. Regulatory landscape: The intersection of federal and state laws related to school transportation requires that districts and contractors operate in complex regulatory environments.
2. Funding: State funding for school transportation results from legislative appropriations and has frequently been stagnant, requiring school districts to offset costs by reducing service and delaying upgrades.
3. School choice: With the growth of school choice options and complex enrollment patterns, new demands on traditional transportation models built around neighborhood schools are changing as more students are crossing towns and cities to get to and from school.

4. Data use: School transportation systems typically have access to less and lower-quality data than other transit sectors thereby reducing their ability to provide service that is efficient and responsive.
5. Safety: While school buses are deemed the safest mode of student transportation, safety agencies and advocates believe buses should include seat belts, and students may face other risks related to traffic and personal safety.
6. Environmental impact: Diesel exhaust has negative effects on the environment and children's health, and districts are often slow to replace older buses and make technological upgrades that could mitigate harm.

Most importantly, along with the above items, improving student discipline in public schools, and particularly while being transported on school buses, continue as critical priorities for bus drivers and school administrators (Kennedy & King, 2019). Researchers suggested that while behavior analysts have made important contributions to school discipline practices focusing largely on strategic interventions, there is still need for improvement (Kennedy & King, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study included four objectives and was designed to examine the reflective experiences of school bus drivers and school administrators related to the training of school bus drivers, safety of students, and discipline of students while on school buses. First, the researcher inquired about training and professional development school bus drivers received associated with students' safety and discipline. Second, school bus drivers and administrators had the opportunity to share their reflective experiences related to unique issues and concerns

they encountered in selected school districts. Third, the intent of the study was to identify best practices regarding protocol and procedures related to students' safety and discipline while riding school buses, particularly practices that encouraged desired student behavior. Finally, school bus drivers and administrators were asked to give recommendations for improvements and policy changes related to students' safety and discipline. Drivers across two different school districts in central Mississippi were included in the study along with district and building level administrators.

Research Questions

The following was the overarching research question that guided the study: How do school bus drivers and school administrators describe their reflective experiences related to bus driver training and protocol and procedures associated with student safety and discipline?

Secondary research questions were also used to guide the study. The secondary research questions were presented during the focus group interviews.

A. Certification, Skills, and Training

1. What are the school bus drivers' certifications, skills, and training related to student safety required for employment by the school district?
2. What are the school bus drivers' certifications, skills, and training related to student discipline required for employment by the school district?
3. How do participants describe the content of professional development training required of bus drivers related to student safety before and after taking a bus driver's test?

4. How do participants describe the content and types of professional development training required of bus drivers related to student discipline before and after taking a bus driver's test?

B. Managing Student Safety and Discipline

1. How do participants describe their unfavorable experiences with specific protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student safety on school buses?
2. How do participants describe their unfavorable experiences with specific protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student discipline (behavior/misbehavior) on school buses?
3. How do participants describe their "best practices" experiences with specific protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student safety on school buses?
4. How do participants describe their "best practices" experiences with specific protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student discipline (behavior/misbehavior) on school buses?

C. Recommendations for Professional Development and policies and procedures

1. What are recommendations for content and types of professional development related to student safety needed for school bus drivers?
2. What are recommendations for content and types of professional development related to student discipline needed for school bus drivers?
3. What are recommendations for specific policies and procedures related to student safety for school bus drivers?

4. What are recommendations for specific policies and procedures related to student discipline for school bus drivers?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided for clarity. The terms are used throughout the study.

1. *Appropriate student behavior* refers to behavior by the students which allows the bus driver to operate the bus with no distractions (American Federation of Teachers, 2018). Inappropriate behavior on a school bus can have fatal consequences. Safe and appropriate behavior should be the expectation (American Federation of Teachers, 2018).
2. *Assertive discipline* refers to a technique which recognizes and supports good behavior on a consistent basis (Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, 2017).
3. *Professional development* refers to a wide variety of specialized training, formal education, or advanced professional learning intended to help administrators, teachers, and other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness (Professional Development, 2014).
4. *School bus driver* refers to a school vehicle driver who should be in good physical condition, of good character, skilled in the operation of their vehicles and in personal relationships with the children they carry (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2001).
5. *Student discipline* refers to the rules and strategies applied in school settings to manage student behavior and practices used to encourage self-discipline (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, 2011b).

6. *Student safety* is defined as all school-related activities established to protect students from violence, bullying, harassment, and substance abuse (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, 2011a).

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1 represents an illustration of the conceptual framework of the study. The illustration includes the reflective experiences of school bus drivers and administrators associated with the training of school bus drivers, the management of students on the school buses, and safety protocol for buses. The intent of the data analysis was to generate emergent themes relating to school bus drivers' training and credentials, student discipline, and student safety while riding the school buses, professional development needs of the bus drivers, and recommendations for policy and procedures related to student safety and student discipline.

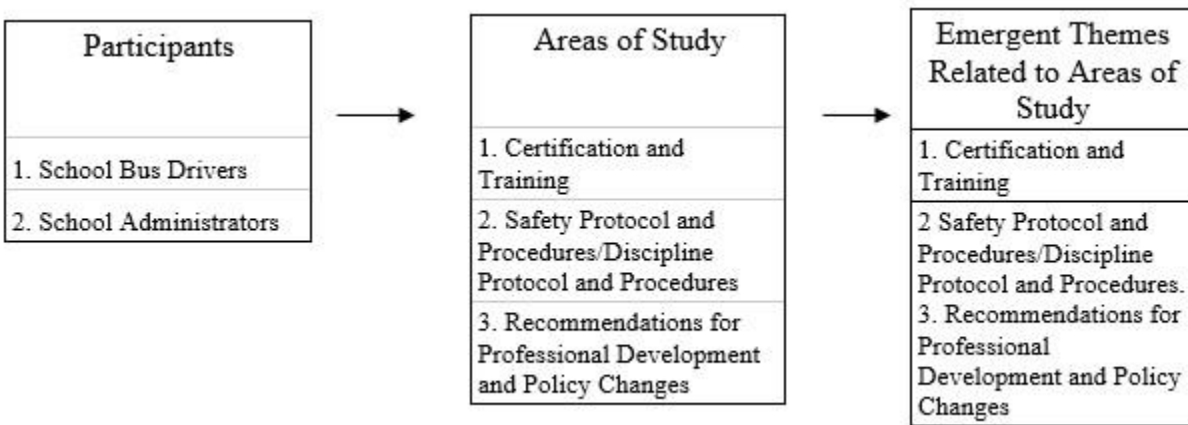


Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework of the Study.*

The areas of study (certification and training, safety and discipline protocols and procedures, and recommendations for professional development and policy changes) helped

frame the interview questions for the study. The goal of the study as shown in the conceptual framework was to bring in rich, thick descriptions with emergent themes resulting from the discussions during focus group sessions.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

To better understand the nature of school buses and their operators, a systems theory approach was selected to help explain the behaviors of the participants. Systems theory is based on the idea that behavior is influenced by a variety of factors that work together as a system (Walker, 2019). In the case of school transportation, the environment encompasses the social structure contributing to the education of students. Systems theory posits that these and other factors influence how individuals think and act, and therefore, includes the need to examine these social structures to find ways to correct ineffective parts or adapt for missing elements to positively impact behavior (Walker, 2019). According to Meadows (2008), a systems theory approach consists of three parts: elements, interconnections, and purpose. In this study, elements are the individual pieces that interact. These elements include students, school bus drivers, as well as the attitudes and ideas of both. For interconnections, this study examined the elements impacting the school bus driver, passengers, and administrators within the process of providing school transportation. Every system is made up of these elements and sub-elements and their interconnections, and all these parts interact to jointly serve an overarching purpose. For this study, the purpose was to understand the relationship between school bus drivers, the students, and the students' safety and discipline.

Assertive discipline is presented as a component of the theoretical framework for addressing student behavior while traveling on school buses. Assertive discipline is characterized

as a classroom technique for managing behavior on school buses whereby drivers express to their riders the expectations while on the buses (Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, 2017).

Overview of Research Methodology

A qualitative research design was selected for the study. A case study approach was used to collect and analyze data for the study. Case study research provides holistic and in-depth explanations of the social and behavioral problems in question (Trellis, 1997). Through case study methods, a researcher is able to go beyond the quantitative statistical results and understand the behavioral conditions through participants' perspectives (Trellis, 1997). Case study research helps to explain both the process and outcome of a phenomenon through complete observation, reconstruction and analysis of the cases under investigation (Trellis, 1997).

Participants for the study included bus drivers and school administrators from two school districts. To collect data for the study, interviews were conducted through the use of focus groups. Focus groups are used in qualitative research to add participants' perspectives to existing data to form a new solution (Calderon, 2000).

The analysis of the data for the study yielded emergent themes addressing the overarching research question as well as the secondary research questions. Recommendations are presented for policy and protocol changes.

Delimitations of the Study

The study was conducted with participants confined to central Mississippi from two neighboring school districts during the 2020-21 school year. Only certified regular route bus drivers were recruited to participate in the study. Likewise, building-level administrators from the two school districts were selected to participate in the study.

Significance of the Study

This study explored ways to improve the safety of public-school transportation for students. Through discussions with school bus drivers and school administrators, the study addressed school bus drivers' certification and training, methods of dealing with student behavior while on the school buses, and innovations that may be added to improve student safety. The study provided school bus drivers and administrators opportunities to make recommendations related to school bus safety, student discipline, and professional development needs.

Organization of the Study

The study includes five chapters. Chapter one introduced the topic, discussed the need for the study, and presented the significance of the topic. Following the review of existing literature in Chapter two, Chapter three discusses the qualitative research design and methodology used in the study. Chapter four presents the findings of the study, and Chapter five includes a summary of the study, discussion of the findings with existing literature, and offers recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this Chapter is to present a review and analysis of the extant literature related to school bus safety and discipline of students. The literature review begins with historical reviews of the development of school bus transportation and advances through current issues with busing including the use of technology. The literature review includes a discussion of the significance of maintaining discipline on the school bus, training of the school bus drivers, and establishing safety protocols. Also, the literature review includes a discussion of professional development for school bus drivers.

Historical Review of School Transportation

The first school buses in America came in all shapes and colors from motorized covered wagons to purple buses (White, 1999). Burgoyne-Allan et al. (2019) reported that approximately a third of the students attending school rely on school bus transportation. According to White (1999), in 1937, Frank W. Cyr, a young professor of rural education at Teachers College, Columbia University, conducted a first-of-its-kind survey of how students across the United States were transported to schools. White (1999) reported that Cyr found most students walked, but students also commuted in any type of available vehicle. Moreover, White (1999) noted Cyr worried about the safety of students and organized the first national benchmarks for school transportation at a convention in New York City. At the convention, the yellow color was

selected for school buses for its visibility as were 43 other standards on size and engine specifications of buses (White, 1999).

The literature showed that safety of student passengers was a major issue, and early school buses only reached speeds of 20 miles per hour (White, 1999). Smith (2018) emphasized that according to the American School Bus Council, school buses were deemed as the safest method of transporting students to school. Researchers noted the number of school buses in America was twice the amount of rail systems, commercial airlines, motor coaches, and mass transit combined (Burgoyne-Allen et al., 2019).

The average recommended replacement age for a school bus was found to be 10 to 12 years (Bendici, 2016). However, because corrosive road salt is not used on roads in the South, school buses operating in the South may last 15 or more years (Lacey, 2014). For example, during the 2007 legislative session, South Carolina's legislation called for the immediate upgrade of school buses where officials cited some buses were being used for 23 years ("New buses in South Carolina," 2007). South Carolina's State Superintendent of Education stated this upgrade would remove the state's stigma of having the United States' oldest school bus fleet ("New buses in South Carolina," 2007). In accordance with addressing the replacement of buses, officials with the South Carolina State Department of Education announced on April 22, 2021, that a \$480,000 grant from the United States Environmental Protection Agency would be used to replace 24 buses from 10 districts across South Carolina (Kinnard, 2021).

Safety Features

The United States Department of Transportation reported between 2007 and 2016, 1,282 persons were killed in school-transportation-related crashes which averaged 128 deaths per year (National Center for Statistics and Analysis, 2018). With the increase of traffic and faster

vehicles on America's roads, administrators and bus drivers continue to worry most about safety issues and features on the buses (Smith, 2018).

Safety features on school buses have basically not changed since 1927 (Hollins, 2007). School buses are designed with special safety features to reduce or prevent injuries, such as high-backed (20-inch), shock-absorbing seats that are spaced close together (Smith, 2018). However, Smith (2018) noted these features have not stopped accidents from occurring.

Many school districts across states have debated the addition of seat belts to school buses ("More stringent regulations sought," 2008). For instance, Texas passed a law in 2010 stating all new buses must have 3-point seat belts and 24-inch seat backs ("More stringent regulations sought," 2008). Three-point seat belts include a shoulder belt as well as a lap belt ("More stringent regulations sought," 2008). These seat belts are especially desired on smaller buses which have fewer seats and less compartmentalization (Cook & Shinkle, 2012). New Jersey has required seat belts since 1995 and agreed that administrators could suspend students who failed to comply with policies of properly wearing seat belts on the buses (National Campaign, 1999). Currently eight states in the United States have passed a seat belt law for school buses (Smith, 2018). These states include California, Nevada, Texas, Louisiana, Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, and Arkansas. However, most new regulations only covered new buses and make the law contingent on available funding (Smith, 2018). In 2015, the National Highway Transportation Safety Association recommended every child on every school bus have a 3-point seat belt, but they did not make this a law (Burgoyne-Allan et al., 2019).

Some school districts have begun to add Global Positioning Systems (GPS) tracking features on buses to allow the districts to follow the journey of the buses (Magic Bus, 2006). The

GPS system can notify district officials of accidents, check the speed of the bus, alert officials if the bus leaves the established route, and identify passengers aboard the bus (Hann, 2007).

Notably, since 9/11 more security systems have gone into effect across the United States (Hann, 2007). Hann (2007) argued that school buses must be equipped to handle gun-wielding students, hijackers, or disgruntled parents. In February 2020, a parent boarded a local school bus in Missouri and pulled a gun on a student for allegedly bullying his child (Hannon, 2020). In Huntersville, North Carolina, a 7-year-old boy brought a loaded 9mm handgun onto his school bus (Dailey, 2020). Both scenarios illustrate situations that occurred across the United States. Nonetheless, in both situations, school officials argued that all safety precautions were being used (Hannon, 2020).

Other safety features include adding cameras on buses' stop-sign arms. During 2018, cameras were added in 11 states: Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Rhode Island, Illinois, Wyoming, Utah, and Washington (Smith, 2018). Fottrell (2015) estimated 50,000 drivers illegally pass stopped school buses in New York daily. In an advertised 1-day law enforcement and school safety initiative, New York state troopers issued 1,186 tickets for illegally passing stopped school buses (Fottrell, 2015). The cameras on stop-sign arms record violations, but unfortunately, not all states allow citations to be issued based on photo images (Fottrell, 2015).

Cameras placed in the interior of buses aid with students' discipline behavior ("Take my picture," 1998). Notably, Mississippi was listed as only 1 of 12 states that allows cameras inside the buses (Smith, 2017). With cameras recording events that occur while the students are aboard, school district supervisors are able to see what actually occurs on the buses (Lacey, 2014). Lacey (2014) wrote that often parents refuse to believe their children might misbehave or act as bullies

on the school buses. Further, Lacey (2014) noted in some instances district supervisors may not accept the idea that their drivers were at fault. School-related professionals (SRPs) in New York reported a significant behavior change for the better when students knew their actions were being filmed on cameras (Fottrell, 2015).

School Bus Drivers' Training and Staffing

School bus drivers have the first direct contact with students (Hannon, 2019). Conditions affecting the selection, instruction, and supervision of school bus drivers vary from state to state, but no school system can afford to operate a transportation system without a qualified staff (NHTSA, 2001). Training and staffing are essential elements for the operation of school bus transportation. Training bus drivers to positively react with students sets the tone for positive interaction both on the bus and in the classroom (Hannon, 2019).

Training of School Bus Drivers

The need for trained, qualified bus drivers has been very apparent, and in 1998, the NHTSA released a series of modules, including lesson plans and teaching materials, for use with in-service training for bus drivers (NHTSA, 2001). Subsequently, NHTSA (2001) found that the materials were not used in the manner they had anticipated. Training was more concerned with maintenance and mechanical issues, and drivers basically experienced training sessions on empty school buses (NHTSA, 2001)

Further, according to NHTSA (2001), the minimum requirements for becoming a school bus driver is a high school diploma and a Commercial Driver's License (CDL). Many federal laws that apply to CDL holders do not apply to school bus drivers because school bus drivers do not cross state lines (Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, 2019). As cited by Rock

(2017), Steve Gurstein, a transportation attorney, stated, “Truck drivers who are driving heads of lettuce or television sets actually have to meet higher safety standards than the people who drive our children on school buses” (p. 1). The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (2019) proposed national training standards for anyone wanting to hold a CDL license. The national training standards would require training consisting of 15 hours of behind-the-wheel training with another seven hours of practice range driving and would be consistent in all states (Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, 2019).

All states are required by federal laws to have minimum standards for the licensing of commercial drivers (“Commercial Driver’s License Program,” 2019). In Mississippi, persons desiring to drive a school bus must hold a CDL with an additional passenger and school bus endorsement (Mississippi Department of Transportation, 2019). The passenger (P) endorsement allows a driver to transport passengers (Mississippi Department of Transportation, 2019). The school bus (S) endorsement gives authorization to drivers of school buses being operated for the purpose of transporting pupils to and from school or to school-related functions (Mississippi Department of Transportation, 2019). The cost of the license is \$184 in Mississippi (Mississippi Department of Transportation, 2019). Prospective drivers must attend a school bus driver training and certification program as well as pass a knowledge test consisting of content in the mechanical aspects and demonstrate basic vehicle control in various situations (Mississippi Department of Transportation, 2019).

Realizing the impact of hiring qualified bus drivers, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration implemented higher standards across the United States, including Mississippi, effective February 7, 2020 (FMSCA, 2019). The primary change in the regulations was the requirement of all prospective drivers to complete both a theoretical knowledge learning

program, as well as a behind-the-wheel training program (FMSCA, 2019). Critics of FMSCA's (2019) program named several weak areas, including no established curriculum, online training, and no mandatory required minimum hours of training (FMSCA, 2019). Each school district is held responsible for the school bus drivers that it certifies (Maestros, 2018).

Training for school bus drivers remains critical. According to Poland (2010), changes to training of bus drivers must stress building relationships with students, recognizing warning signs of youth violence, dealing with crisis situations, and maintaining appropriate discipline on the school bus.

Staffing

According to Rosales (2019), driving a school bus was considered by most school districts as part-time work, which removes many benefits that full-time employees receive. Darden (2012) emphasized the importance of school bus drivers to school districts by stating, "No job title connected to schools is inconsequential. Each has its challenges, and each contributes to the greater good of providing a quality education to students" (p. 66).

The National Association for Pupil Transportation (2016) conducted surveys across the United States to track school bus drivers. Approximately 70% of school districts believed the trend of having a shortage of bus drivers was getting a little worse to much worse (National Association for Pupil Transportation, 2016).

Researchers found the shortage of bus drivers was partly caused by irregular, split shifts in the job and the monitoring of students (Maestros, 2020). Burgoyne-Allen et al. (2019) claimed the licensure and training requirements of school bus drivers along with relatively low pay made school bus driving less appealing than other jobs requiring a CDL license. Subsequently, many school districts resorted to using school administrators, janitors, bus mechanics and even student

drivers to fill the shortages (Maestros, 2020). Another cause of the school bus driver shortage was the negative public perception of driving buses complemented with an increase in the minimum wage in other jobs (DeNisco, 2015). Many school districts offered a signing bonus of \$1000 to new hires (DeNisco, 2015). DeNisco (2015) found school bus drivers were more willing to stay on the job when school administrators made the drivers feel more valued.

Lacey (2014) found that some school districts use bus monitors who ride the routes and supervise students. Moreover, Lacey's (2014) study showed Santa Rosa County School District in Florida required strenuous training and requirements from their bus monitors. School bus monitors were required to attend 208 hours of training classes along with a third-party background check and a drug screen assessment (Lacey, 2014).

Student Discipline on the School Bus

Although school bus accidents can occur due to negligence of other drivers, the United States Department of Transportation found that too often school bus accidents had a direct correlation to driver inattentiveness (United Educators, 2016). These distractions were found similar to those of any other vehicle driver with talking to passengers a leading distracter (United Educators, 2016). For school bus drivers, with 30 to 100 passengers, the potential for distractions was extremely high (United Educators, 2016). According to a 2012 study by the NHTSA, distractions came from both inside and outside the vehicle (United Educators, 2016). Notably, the study named reaching for items as the number one distracter (United Educators, 2016). For example, a school bus driver reached for a dropped item and ran into the rear of a parked, loaded asphalt truck (United Educators, 2016). One student and a construction worker were killed, and 32 other students were injured (United Educators 2016).

Managing students in the classroom is a challenge, and that challenge is tripled when driving a bus (United Educators, 2016). In addition, United Educators (2016) stressed that school bus drivers were seldom trained to handle disciplinary actions. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (2017) stated the key to maintaining a safe bus is assertive discipline of students on the buses.

Numerous examples of assertive discipline were cited in the literature as a means of addressing discipline on school buses (Atkinson, 2009; Brown, 2003; Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, 2017; Rewards, 2014). Assertive discipline was designed as a classroom technique for managing behavior which allowed school bus drivers to express to their riders the expectations for his/her passengers (Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, 2017).

Assertive discipline was defined as a combination of setting limits for the students balanced with praise for positive behavior (Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, 2017). Milford, Massachusetts Public Schools, using similar assertive discipline techniques, created a “School Bus of the Month” program that provided incentives and prizes for good behavior (Atkinson, 2009). Thames Elementary School in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, saw disciplinary referrals from school bus drivers drop from 169 to 29 in one year due to positive behavior incentives (Rewards, 2014). John T. Waugh Elementary School in Angola, New York, assigned “bus buddies” who monitored problems among students and provided special lunch rewards and certificates to students for positive behavior (Atkinson, 2009). In Fayette County, Kentucky, officials added a student-retrieval program for disruptive students (Brown, 2003). When a student became unruly, the school bus driver pulled over, called for another bus, and waited. The disruptive student was then removed from the school bus and taken to the district’s transportation office where parents were called for the student (Brown, 2003).

Several researchers looked at the diversity of students attending various schools and riding school buses as a factor in increased discipline referrals (King, 2019; Smith, 2017). Scholars found that as the diversity of classrooms changed (particularly resulting from the opportunity to ride school buses), so did the diversity of students riding the school buses (King, 2019). Emamdjomeh et al. (2019) found 66% of all public school students attended schools in diverse districts, an increase from 45% in 1995. According to Smith (2017), students who attended diverse school districts felt “safer, less bullied, and less lonely,” (p. 2).

Student Learning

In addition to safety benefits, maintaining discipline on the school bus affects a student’s learning (Lipscomb, 1997). Michelle Wallace of Durham Student Transportation stated, “Studies have shown that children who are involved in a discipline problem on the bus have a distinct learning disadvantage for the rest of the day” (as cited in Lipscomb, 1997, p. 212). Further, teachers reported confrontations between students on school buses often moved into the classroom, disrupting learning (Putnam, 2003).

While studies showed that teachers who greeted students in a positive manner at the classroom door improved students’ attention throughout lessons, this also worked for school bus drivers who set the mood on the bus by greeting students (Meals, 2018). According to Meals (2018), greeting a student at the door with his or her name and a brief, genuine pleasantry had a significant positive reaction and the reaction in turn affected attendance. Remarkably, a study focused on kindergarten students showed that students who rode the school bus to school had fewer absences than students who were transported to school by other means (Gottfried, 2017). Collins and Ryan (2016) agreed that promoting positive behavior in a school bus setting had a major effect on students, especially those at risk of school failure. Trends in positive assertive

behavior techniques were found to improve both the behavior of students on the school bus and in the classroom (King, 2019). However, the researcher suggested more studies are needed to fill the gap regarding the relationship between behavior on the school bus and learning (King, 2019).

Professional Development of School Bus Drivers

As early as 1984, there were calls for professional development for school bus drivers; however, current literature shows a lack of studies relating to professional development for school bus drivers (Weaver, 2018). Copas and Gibbons (1984) stated more professional development was needed for school bus drivers regarding their relationships with students and their safety than on the mechanical needs of the school bus. Robert Calcavechia (as cited in Lipscomb, 1997), a Boston school bus driver stated: “I was hired, handed the keys and told to drive to the nearest police station if students gave me trouble on the bus” (p. 212). Calcavechia (as cited in Lipscomb, 1997) continued, “Driving a school bus is ‘the most difficult job you can have, and most drivers have little education and training other than how to drive a school bus. They are driving 60 kids with their backs turned to them. We train teachers. They face 25 kids and still have trouble’ ” (p. 212).

Weaver (2018) pointed to improvements in Madison County, Virginia, Public Schools after initiatives were put in place to address discipline issues. Weaver (2018) found that after administrators analyzed data, they found fewer discipline referrals in the classroom but more discipline referrals on the school buses. To incorporate school bus drivers into the professional development of the school, school bus drivers were invited to join the multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and develop rules that would be consistently managed by bus drivers (Weaver, 2018). After receiving training, Weaver (2018) found school bus drivers became “behavioral intervention decision-makers” (p. 1) and discipline referrals decreased.

Significant Policies Related to School Transportation for Special Student Populations

In particular, the importance of school bus transportation is evidenced in federal laws that require school districts to provide transportation to special student populations. In a report conducted by Bellwether Education Partners (Burgoyne-Allen et al., 2019) the following federal laws were included.

1. **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):** The IDEA governs the provision of transportation for students with disabilities. Districts must ensure that transportation services in students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are provided at public expense and at no cost to families. Transportation services include travel to and from school; travel in and around school buildings; and the use of specialized equipment such as special or adapted buses, lifts, and ramps. It is critically important to provide these student populations with transportation and doing so can be a significant logistical and funding challenge for districts.
2. **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA):** The ESSA governs the provision of transportation for students in foster care. Districts receiving Title I funds must collaborate with the state or local child welfare agencies to ensure that transportation to schools of origin for children in foster care is provided, arranged, and funded. Because the current guidance from ED and HHS is non-regulatory, the requirements were found difficult to enforce.
3. **The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act:** This Act governs the provision of transportation for homeless students. Districts must provide these students with transportation to and from their "school of origin," (p. 28) either the last school a student attended, or the school attended when a student was last permanently housed.

Homeless children and youth are defined as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and nighttime residence.

The Role of School Administrators

Peer-reviewed scholarly articles that focused on school administrators and their responsibilities and interactions with school bus drivers were not available in abundance. Durick (2010) pointed out the variety of transportation issues that school administrators face: student misbehaviors, transportation laws, and student safety. These issues are often grouped with school problems and not studied individually.

In response to the issues, the Illinois State Board of Education produced a manual that addressed the roles of both the school bus driver and the school administrator (Illinois, n.d.). According to the manual, each school district must conduct training programs for school bus drivers inclusive of the policies of the school district as well as the establishment of rules and regulations on the school bus (Illinois, n.d.).

Prior to 2018 much of the literature review focused on the amount of money spent on school buses (Nadel, 2018). Nadel (2018) pointed out that following buildings, salaries and benefits, school buses were the biggest expense for most school districts. Nadel (2018) added that a school district could easily spend up to 10% of its total budget on transportation. Therefore, the role of school administrators dealt more with strategies to reduce costs related to school buses than with relationships with bus drivers (Nadel, 2018).

Lacey (2014) argued that one reason school buses have not changed significantly was cost. According to Burgoyne-Allan et al. (2019), funding for school transportation was in direct correlation with legislative appropriations, which are often nonexistent. A full-sized, 66-passenger bus can cost more than \$100,000 (Bendici, 2016). The cost of the bus is not the only

financial obligation a district faces. Fuel, maintenance of the bus, insurance, salary of the bus drivers, and additional safety features must be factored into the cost (Lacey, 2014).

Notwithstanding, finances play a major role in adding GPS systems. Hann (2007) stated that districts must not only purchase the initial software, but in addition, pay for cellular transmission.

Filling the driver's seat on school buses has become harder and harder (DeNisco, 2015). DeNisco (2015) stated that only 6% of school bus contracting companies nationally had enough drivers, compared to 15% with no shortages in 2014. McMahon (2015) pointed out that approximately two-fifths of school districts nationally were providing more transportation but were hampered by a driver shortage. McMahon (2015) added that 66% of schools nationally were claiming to experience a mild or moderate shortage while 26% were claiming to have a severe to desperate shortage. McMahon (2015) contributed low salaries to this shortage.

Chapter Summary

Historically, buses have come in many shapes and sizes (White, 1999). The addition of standards in size, shape, and color added to the safety of buses. Other safety features, such as a standardized seat height, GPS tracking, seat belts, and cameras, improved buses (Fottrell, 2015).

The bus driver is often not considered a part of the school faculty. The existing literature showed that bus drivers were trained more on the mechanical needs of the buses rather than the needs of the students riding the buses (Poland, 2010). Whereas teachers receive professional development on new techniques to manage student behavior, to safeguard students, and to recognize possible alarms, bus drivers receive none (Rock, 2017).

There was a dearth of literature related to specific school transportation issues and school administration. Burgoyne et al. (2019) stated school transportation was one of the least studied issues in education. The literature showed school administrators were mostly concerned with the

staffing and financial aspects of transportation (Nadel, 2018). However, some states were beginning to understand the essential role of the school bus driver and provide more training (Illinois, n.d.). Scholars repeatedly suggested the need for more research concerning the inclusion of bus drivers into the school setting (Rock, 2017). Professional development on behavior management, possible terrorist attacks, armed assailants, and the day-to-day routines of the school are needed for bus drivers (Rock, 2017). In summary, stakeholders are concerned with providing students with safe, public modes of transportation to school (Smith, 2017).

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to present the research design, data collection, and data analysis procedures employed in this study. The chapter begins with a discussion of the selected qualitative research design. Other topics include the following: the research questions, description of the case, selection of participants, and role of the researcher. The chapter concludes with a description of the sources of data collected, data analysis, validation of findings, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

A qualitative, descriptive single case study research design was selected for the study. Creswell (2007), Merriam (1998), and Yin (2014) suggested that qualitative case study research provided intensive descriptions, empowered individuals to share their stories, and let the participants' voices be heard. In this qualitative, descriptive single case study, the intent of the researcher was to have school bus drivers from two different school districts share their stories related to their training, student safety, and managing student behavior.

Yin (2014) defined case study research as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). For this study, the researcher sought to investigate the challenges associated with driving a school bus and ways to make the time on a school bus safer for the riders and the driver.

The purpose of this case study was to learn about the reflective experiences of a group of bus drivers from two separate school districts because of their unique experiences and insights. Data were garnered from their shared experiences about their training, ensuring safety for students, and maintaining discipline. In this study, the researcher explored the school bus drivers' and school administrators' experiences by conducting a demographic survey, conducting focus groups, and collecting artifacts for additional evidence. The data were collected, recorded, analyzed for meaning in terms of emerging themes, and presented in a narrative format.

Research Questions

The central, overarching question that guided this research study was as follows: How do school bus drivers and school administrators describe their reflective experiences related to bus driver training and protocol and procedures associated with student safety and discipline?

The following secondary research questions were used to guide the structured focus group sessions. The focus group sessions were conducted via telephone conferencing.

A. School Bus Driver Certification, Skills, and Training and Student Safety

1. What are the school bus driver's certifications, skills, and training related to student safety required for employment by the school district?
2. What are the school bus driver's certifications, skills, and training related to student discipline required for employment by the school district?
3. How do participants describe the content and types of professional development training required of bus drivers related to student safety before and after taking a school bus driver's test?

4. How do participants describe the content and types of professional development training required of bus drivers related to student discipline before and after taking a school bus driver's test?

B. Managing Student Discipline and Safety

1. How do participants describe their unfavorable experiences with specific protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student safety on school buses?
2. How do participants describe their unfavorable experiences with specified protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student discipline (behavior/misbehavior) on school buses?
3. How do participants describe their "best practices" experiences with specific protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student safety on school buses?
4. How do participants describe their "best practices" experiences with specified protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student discipline (behavior/misbehavior) on school buses?

C. Recommendations for School Bus Drivers Related to Student Safety and Student Discipline

1. What are recommendations for content and types of professional development related to student safety needed for school bus drivers?
2. What are recommendations for content and types of professional development related to student discipline needed for school bus drivers?

3. What are recommendations for specific policies and procedures related to student safety for school bus drivers?
4. What are recommendations for specific policies and procedures related to student discipline for school bus drivers?

Participants

The participants for the study included school bus drivers and school administrators from two different school districts in Mississippi. Both districts were similar in size and rural location. Both were close together making access easy. In addition, the participants had first-hand experiences with practices related to student behavior, bus safety, and road driving experience. All full-time school bus drivers and administrators in both districts were invited to join via e-mail. Each district had 15 full-time school bus drivers who agreed to participate. There were four school administrators included in the study.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

After approval of the dissertation proposal, the researcher submitted an application to conduct the research study to the University's IRB. The IRB reviewed the application to ensure it met the institution's expectations for appropriate research protocols and ethical research. After approval of the IRB application (as shown in Appendix A), data were collected and analyzed by the researcher.

Role of the Researcher

Merriam (2009) described the researcher as "the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data" (p. 20). Merriam (2009) pointed out that the researcher must be cognizant of personal biases and minimize the influences one's biases may have on the study. For the study,

the researcher had first-hand knowledge and experience of the subject being studied and facilitated the collection of the data via the focus groups.

In the case of this study, the researcher served as a school administrator in the role of transportation director for one of the school districts. The researcher held a valid school bus driver's license and had driven a school bus before. Furthermore, the researcher had rapport with the drivers and possessed the necessary skills to ask questions, listen to their responses, and adapt to unfavorable situations.

Given the researcher's role as an administrator in one of the districts, the researcher designed the study and reported the findings with minimal bias. Throughout the study, the researcher attempted to maintain the focus of the study on the participants' reflective experiences as well as tried to be cognizant of any bias.

Data Collection

A survey was administered at the beginning of each focus session to collect demographic information. The researcher collected the other data through the use of focus groups and historical documents, such as referrals written, driving history, and complaints. Focus groups provide a means to gain understanding and insight into practices of individuals (Basch, 1987). Focus groups serve as a valuable methodology to investigate the needs, language, and beliefs of the target population and have advantages over individual interviews, which may be time consuming, expensive, and typically limited (Basch, 1987). Focus groups typically yield data responses that can generate detailed description of experiences or opinions.

The data collection for the study was based on Yin's (2014) three principles for collecting case study data: (a) use multiple sources of evidence, (b) create a case study database, and (c) maintain a chain of evidence. Yin discussed six sources of evidence: documentation, archival

records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. The sources of data collection for the study included the following.

1. Documents and artifacts were collected from the Mississippi Department of Education concerning the basic requirements to be a bus driver in Mississippi.
2. Documents and artifacts were collected from the local school districts. These included copies of licenses, referrals, and driving records.
3. Demographic characteristics of the group were collected at the beginning of each focus group session.
4. The secondary research questions were used as structured interview questions during focus group sessions.
5. Field notes were taken by the researcher as the focus groups were being conducted.

Once the 34 participants were named, the demographic characteristics of the groups was obtained through a handout at the first focus meeting. The handout consisted of seven Likert-type questions to gather the demographics and other personal information. The questions included information related to age, number of years of experience, and education, along with other characteristics. The questions were administered at the beginning of the focus group sessions. Space was provided for participants to expand their answers by including additional data. No names were included on the handouts.

Two focus groups were held for each district via Zoom conference calls on December 2, 2020, and on December 3, 2020. One call was for administrators and the second call was for bus drivers. The procedure was repeated the following day for the other district. Zoom meetings for the school bus drivers and the school administrators were strategically done to assist with travel issues relating to Covid. The groups were asked to respond to the secondary research questions.

Each of the two Zoom sessions lasted approximately one hour. The researcher served as facilitator which included asking the questions, leading the discussion, and keeping the discussions on topic. All responses during the focus groups were electronically recorded.

Documents and Artifacts Related to Licensure, Certification, and Training Focused on Student Safety and Discipline

Documents reviewed related to the school bus drivers' certification, skills, and training included bus drivers' recorded certification as well as training done by the school districts through professional development. Human resources personnel verified that all 30 certified drivers had valid copies of their bus drivers' licenses with passenger endorsements on file. The four administrators also had valid copies of their bus drivers' licenses on file. The 32 participants who were administrators or certified faculty also had current teaching licenses on file. In addition, all 34 participants had on file a certificate for the completion of a required course by the Mississippi Department of Education for administrators, certified and non-certified staff on suicide prevention of teenagers.

Data Analysis

After collection of the data, the recordings were transcribed for review, coding, and analysis by the researcher using NVivo 11. Once the transcriptions were reviewed, recurring ideas were identified. The process, referred to as coding, identified similar words, phrases, or ideas yielding themes. Not only did NVivo 11 allow the researcher to govern the inclusion or exclusion of data, but it also showed themes illustrated by quotations and examples from the transcriptions. Major themes were developed based on the guiding research questions. These themes were then discussed in a narrative format.

The data for the study were electronically recorded, transcribed, coded, analyzed, summarized, and organized based on the components of the conceptual framework and the secondary research questions. A rich, thick descriptive analysis was provided to allow the reader to obtain a detailed description of the case. Triangulation included synthesizing the data from multiple sources (focus group responses from participants, historical documents, and survey responses) to illuminate emergent themes.

The descriptive analysis allowed the researcher to draw conclusions about the transferability of the research findings into emergent themes. Even though the researcher had firsthand knowledge of the responsibilities of the participants as school bus drivers prior to the study, the researcher attempted to base the findings from the study solely on information from the responses collected during the study.

Ethical Considerations

To comply with ethical considerations in conducting research, all participants provided verbal consent to be interviewed and to participate in the research. The participants, therefore, willingly participated in the study after being approached by the researcher.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the research procedures used in the study. A qualitative, descriptive single case study research design was selected for the research study. The central, overarching research question that guided this study was as follows: How do school bus drivers and school administrators describe their experiences related to school bus driver's training, protocol and procedures related to student safety, and student discipline?

The secondary research questions were used to guide the structured focus group sessions. Focus groups were completed with participants from two school districts. The findings from the focus groups were electronically recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Summaries of the responses and emergent themes addressing each secondary research question were generated during the data analysis.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction/Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize and report the findings from this study of school bus drivers and administrators. The study was designed to examine the reflective experiences of school bus drivers and school administrators related to the training of school bus drivers, safety of students, and discipline of students while riding on school buses. First, the researcher inquired about training and professional development school bus drivers had received associated with students' safety and discipline. Second, school bus drivers and administrators had the opportunity to share their reflective experiences related to unique issues and concerns they encountered in the selected school districts. Third, the intent of the study was to identify best practices regarding protocol and procedures related to students' safety and discipline, particularly practices that encourage desired student behavior. Finally, school bus drivers and administrators were asked to give recommendations for improvements and policy changes related to students' safety and discipline.

The central overarching question that guided this research study was as follows: How do school bus drivers and school administrators describe their reflective experiences related to bus driver training and protocol and procedures associated with student safety and discipline?

In addition to the overarching research question, secondary research questions were used to help guide the study. The secondary research questions were used for structured focus group interview sessions with the participants.

A. Bus Certification, Skills, and Training and Student Safety

1. What are the school bus drivers' certifications, skills, and training related to student safety required for employment by the school district?
2. What are the school bus drivers' certifications, skills, and training related to student discipline required for employment by the school district?
3. How do participants describe the content of professional development training required of bus drivers related to student safety before and after taking a bus driver's test?
4. How do participants describe the content and types of professional development training required of bus drivers related to student discipline before and after taking a bus driver's test?

B. Managing Student Discipline and Safety

1. How do participants describe their unfavorable experiences with specific protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student safety on school buses?
2. How do participants describe their unfavorable experiences with specific protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student discipline (behavior/misbehavior) on school buses?

3. How do participants describe their “best practices” experiences with specific protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student safety on school buses?
 4. How do participants describe their “best practices” experiences with specific protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student discipline (behavior/misbehavior) on school buses?
- C. Recommendations for School Bus Drivers Related to Student Safety and Student Discipline
1. What are recommendations for content and types of professional development related to student safety needed for school bus drivers?
 2. What are recommendations for content and types of professional development related to student discipline needed for school bus drivers?
 3. What are recommendations for specific policies and procedures related to student safety for school bus drivers?
 4. What are recommendations for specific policies and procedures related to student discipline for school bus drivers?

Case Study Analysis of School Bus Drivers and Administrators

The analysis of the data was completed using the collected data from focus group interviews, demographic survey responses, summary notes, and artifacts collected during the study. The participants completed questionnaires related to their demographic characteristics prior to the focus group interviews.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants in the Study

Four building level administrators and thirty school bus drivers from public schools of two rural school districts in Central Mississippi were selected and participated in the study. Demographic information of the participants during the 2019-2020 school year (age ranges, gender, race, education level, and years of experience) are included in the findings.

Table 1 provides a display of the age ranges of the participants. Frequencies and percentages are provided.

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of School Bus Drivers (N=30) and School Administrators (N=4) by Age Range

<i>Age Range</i>	<i>School Bus Drivers</i>		<i>School Administrators</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
21 to 25	0	0	0	0
26 to 35	7	23	0	0
36 to 50	15	50	3	75
Over 50	8	27	1	25
Total	30	100	4	100

The results in Table 1 show the majority of the school bus drivers (50%, $n= 15$) were in the 36 to 50 years age range. The results show 27% ($n= 8$) of the bus drivers were over 50 years of age. Only 23% ($n=7$) of the bus drivers were in the 26 to 35 age group. Table 1 shows the majority of the school administrators (75%, $n=3$) were 36 to 50 years of age. The remaining administrator was over 50 (25%, $n=1$).

Table 2 provides a display of the gender and race of the school bus drivers and administrators. Frequencies and percentages of the participants are provided.

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentages of School Bus Driver (N=30) and Administrator Participants (N=4) by Gender and Race

<i>Description</i>	<i>School Bus Drivers</i>		<i>School Administrators</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
African American Female	10	33	1	25
African American Male	8	27	0	0
Caucasian Female	9	30	0	0
Caucasian Male	3	10	3	75
Total	30	100	4	100

The majority of the school bus driver participants were females (63%; $n=19$). Of the 19 female drivers, 10 (52%) were African American and 9 (48%) were Caucasian. There were 11 (36%) male drivers. The majority of the male bus drivers were African American ($n=8$, 73%). Of the 11 male bus drivers, there were 3 (27%) Caucasian male bus drivers. In general, the majority of the bus drivers were African American (60%, $n=18$). Caucasian bus drivers represented 40% ($n=12$) of the total drivers. Three of the school administrators (75%, $n=3$) were Caucasian males and one administrator (25%, $n=1$) was an African American female.

While many bus drivers work as part-time employees, the findings for the study showed most participants in this study were employed by the school district where they were teaching or serving as administrators. Table 3 shows the employment status of the school bus drivers.

Table 3

Frequencies and Percentages of Employment Status of School Bus Driver (N=30) and

Administrator Participants (N= 4)

<i>Employment Status</i>	<i>School Bus Drivers</i>		<i>School Administrators</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Full-time as Teacher/Staff/Administrator	26	87	4	100
Part-time as Bus Driver	4	13	0	0
Total	30	100	4	100

Out of the 34 participants, 30 were full time employees of the school districts (88%, $n=30$). The majority of the 30 school bus drivers worked as teachers or held staff positions at the schools (87%, $n=26$). The other four (13%) bus drivers indicated that they worked part-time. Although the four (100%) administrators did not drive buses on a regular schedule, all four were full-time employees of the school districts. Those who were teachers and staff received additional pay for serving as bus drivers. One administrator noted that he liked to use existing faculty members for bus drivers. The administrator stated, “It helps in numerous ways.” Further, the administrator said, “I have an ample supply of possible replacement drivers, plus the drivers already know the students.” The bus drivers agreed. One driver commented, “I enjoy the extra supplement to my paycheck.” Another driver added, “It helps me start and finish my day to run my route.” Administrators and bus drivers agreed that the use of teachers as bus drivers made availability of drivers more accessible and provided teachers with additional income.

Participants had an opportunity to indicate their educational attainment on the demographic survey. Table 4 provides a display of educational credentials of the school bus drivers. Frequencies and percentages are provided for each educational level.

Table 4

Frequencies and Percentages of the Educational Credentials of School Bus Driver (N=30) and Administrator Participants (N= 4)

<i>Educational Credentials</i>	<i>School Bus Drivers</i>		<i>School Administrators</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
High School Diploma	2	7	0	0
Bachelor’s Degree	13	43	0	0
Master’s Degree	15	50	2	50
Higher than Master’s Degree	0	0	2	50
Total	30	100	4	100

Table 4 shows the majority of bus drivers held college degrees (93%, $n=28$) with 15 (50%) holding master’s degrees or higher. The other two bus drivers held high school diplomas. The administrators all held college degrees with 50% ($n=2$) holding master’s degrees and 50% ($n=2$) holding degrees higher than a master’s degree.

Summary of Demographic Characteristics

There were 34 participants in this study. Of the 34 participants, 30 were school bus drivers and four were building level administrators. The participants ranged in age from 26 – 50 years and the majority ($n= 19, 57\%$) were African Americans. There were 14 participants (43%) who identified themselves as Caucasian. The majority of the participants were females ($n=19, 57\%$). Of the 30 school bus drivers, the overwhelming majority worked as teachers or held staff

positions at the schools (87%, $n=26$). The remaining four worked only part-time for the school districts as school bus drivers. All 34 participants held at least a high school diploma and 50% ($n=17$) held a master's degree or higher.

Secondary Research Question A

School Bus Driver Certification, Skills, and Training Related to Student Safety and Discipline

This section of the research findings includes a narrative on participants' certification, skills and training as it relates to student safety and discipline. The following secondary research questions related to school bus drivers' certification, skills and training focused on student safety and discipline helped to guide the study.

1. What are the school bus drivers' certifications, skills, and training related to student safety required for employment by the school district?
2. What are the school bus drivers' certifications, skills, and training related to student discipline required for employment by the school district?
3. How do participants describe the content and types of professional development training required of bus drivers related to student safety before and after taking a school bus driver's test?
4. How do participants describe the content and types of professional development training required of bus drivers related to student discipline before and after taking a school bus driver's test?

Certifications, Skills, and Training Related to Student Safety and Student Discipline

Participants were asked to indicate their licensure credentials. Table 5 provides a display of the certifications and licensure of the participants. Frequencies and percentages are provided in the display.

Table 5

Frequencies and Percentages Regarding Certifications and Licensure of School Bus Drivers (N=30) and Administrator Participants (N= 4)

<i>Certifications</i>	<i>School Bus Drivers</i>		<i>School Administrators</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Commercial Driver’s License	0	0	4	100
Commercial Driver’s License with Passenger Endorsement	30	100	0	0
Total	30	100	4	100

Table 5 shows that 100% ($n=30$) of the bus driver participants held valid CDL certification with passenger endorsement. All four of the administrators held CDL certification. When administrators were questioned about their lack of passenger endorsement, all four stated they needed to add the endorsement, but it had not become a problem. The four administrators agreed that customarily they would move a bus or take a new bus to a driver whose bus had to be replaced; however, they were not driving buses on a daily basis. One administrator stated, “I may drive a bus to the bus barn or to a bus driver’s home, but I do not drive when students are present.” When discussed in focus group sessions with both bus drivers and administrators, all agreed that the licensure of participants was always in order.

In general, all participants held the appropriate licensure required for transporting students on school buses. School bus drivers had the proper endorsements for transporting students which included CDL certification with passenger endorsement. The majority of the school bus drivers were employed full-time at the schools. While the administrators held CDL certification, they did not hold CDL with passenger endorsement. The administrators did not generally serve as drivers for daily transporting students.

School Bus Driver Training Focused on Student Safety Before and After Employment

During the focus sessions the participants were asked about required school bus training focused on the safety of students before and after certification/licensure. Each participant was asked to describe the amount of training he/she had received as no training, very little training, some training, or excessive training. Table 6 provides a display of the training focused on student safety of the school bus drivers. Frequencies and percentages are provided.

Table 6

Frequencies and Percentages Regarding Training of School Bus Driver (N=30) and Administrator Participants (N= 4) Related to Student Safety and/or Student Discipline

<i>Training</i>	<i>School Bus Drivers</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
No Training	19	56
Very Little Training (1 – 2 times)	4	13
Some Training (3 – 6 times)	11	31
Excessive Training (6 or more)	0	0
Total	34	100

All 30 of the bus drivers and the four administrators were included in the discussion of questions concerning training provided to bus drivers. The majority of the participants ($n=19$, 56%) agreed there was no specific training required related to student safety on the bus. Table 6 shows that while all the school bus drivers held the CDL certification, only 31% ($n=11$) stated they had received any special training related to student safety as a school bus driver. Of that training, all of the participants indicated this special training was held during the school's professional development sessions and they attended in their roles as teachers and staff. The referenced professional development focused on positive behavior, bullying, and/or suicide prevention.

One bus driver complained that all the assistance he had gotten had come from fellow bus drivers. The bus driver stated, "I usually ask around to see if the other drivers are having the same problems. I like to hear what they are doing, and sometimes I give their suggestions a try." Another bus driver added, "It would be nice if someone monitored our buses and helped us with

problems.” A third driver complained, “There is no time at my school to talk to other drivers or to seek help with problems that do arise.”

One driver stated that everyone in the district had completed the suicide prevention program but that it had little to do with him as a bus driver. The driver added that the video addressed signs of a depressed child, but he was unable to have that type of conversation or relationship with the students as riders. When told what bus drivers had said, administrators agreed, and one added, “All information provided was at an introductory level and not directly steered toward school bus drivers.”

Another bus driver pointed to social distancing that was required by his district. The driver stated, “There is no way that my students remain at the correct social distance when they get up and down from their seats.” Administrators were alarmed by these comments when they were shared. One administrator stated, “The students must stay in a seating arrangement if the school correctly monitors contact with others during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

School Bus Driver Training Focused on Student Discipline Before and After Employment

In terms of specific training related to student discipline, the general response was that no training related to student discipline was required for employment as a school bus driver. Student discipline was the sole responsibility of the school bus driver. One driver stated, “No one really cares what happens on the bus as long as I get them to school and back home.” Another bus driver noted, “I only talk to the administrator when I have a referral, and I don’t have many.”

While bus drivers noted the lack of specific professional development training focused on student discipline before becoming a bus driver, most drivers agreed that it would be good to have purposeful professional development on specific rules and procedures established by the school district for passengers. In addition, the school bus drivers asserted that while specific

professional development related to student safety for bus drivers did not exist in either of the school districts studied, they agreed that such training should be done. When administrators were told that drivers would like to have specific training related to student safety before driving a bus, the district administrators showed interest. One administrator commented, “I never realized the need for this, but it can be done.”

For the most part, training related to student discipline required for employment by the school district as a school bus driver was critically missing. Participants shared they had participated in only professional development on suicide prevention. The participants noted the difficulty in getting students to practice social distancing and how they were able to share among themselves strategies in dealing with student discipline. When discussed, administrators agreed to assist bus drivers by providing specific professional development on handling student discipline. Participants expressed the desire for specific professional development on rules and procedures established by the school district for passengers.

Emergent Themes: School Bus Drivers’ Certification, Skills, and Training Related to Student Safety and Discipline

After analyzing participants’ responses concerning drivers’ certifications, skills, and training related to student safety and student discipline, emergent themes were formed. Tables 7, 8, and 9 provide displays of emergent themes related to the drivers’ certifications, skills, and training and specific training focused on student safety and student discipline.

Table 7

Emergent Themes Related to Participants' Certifications, Skills, and Training

Related Secondary Research Question	Summary of Participants' Responses	Emergent Theme
Certification, Training, and Skills Related to Student Safety	Majority of participants held college degrees	Drivers and administrators held appropriate licensure credentials—CDL and CDL with passenger endorsement Majority of drivers held college degrees and were full-time employees as teachers and administrators in the respective districts
	All bus drivers and administrators held CDL credentials	
	All bus drivers held the CDL credentials with passenger endorsement	
Certification, Training, and Skills Related to Student Discipline	Majority of participants held college degrees	Drivers and administrators held appropriate licensure credentials—CDL and CDL with passenger endorsement Drivers and administrators were full-time employed as teachers and administrators
	All bus drivers and administrators held CDL credentials	
	All bus drivers held the CDL credentials with passenger endorsement	
	Majority of drivers were teachers and administrators within the school districts	

Table 8

Emergent Themes Related to Participants Specific Training/Professional Development Focused on Student Safety Before and After Being Hired

Related Secondary Research Question	Summary of Participants Responses	Emergent Theme
Specific Professional Development Before and After Being Hired-- Student Safety	No bus drivers received any specific professional development related to student safety prior to being hired and after being hired	Little or no training required or available via professional development related to student safety before and after being hired as a school bus driver
	Drivers shared they received information from others	Peer interaction among drivers regarding information related to student safety
	Drivers expressed the need for specific training related to student safety	Drivers expressed need for training related to student safety
	Drivers expressed difficulty in getting students to practice social distancing	Drivers had difficulty in getting students to practice social distancing
	Administrators showed interest in providing specific training for drivers indicating it could be done	Administrators showed interest in providing training related to safety

Table 9

Emergent Themes Related to Participants Specific Training/Professional Development Focused on Student Discipline Before and After Being Hired

Related Secondary Research Question	Summary of Participants Responses	Emergent Theme
Specific Professional Development Before or after Being Hired-- Student Discipline	No specific training required before and after being hired	No specific training required or available via professional development related to student discipline before or after being hired as a school bus driver
	Bus drivers did not receive any specific professional development related to student discipline before and being hired	All staff received training on suicide prevention
	Participated in professional development focused on suicide prevention	Peer interaction practiced among drivers regarding sharing information related to student discipline
	Some drivers talked to other drivers to seek help	

The following include the emergent themes for the first set of secondary research questions regarding school bus drivers’ certifications, licensure, and training required before and after employment focused on student safety and student discipline. The emergent themes are organized and presented as they appeared in the summary tables.

1. Credentials of School Bus Drivers:

- A. Drivers and administrators held appropriate licensure credentials—All drivers held CDL with passenger endorsement; all administrators held CDL.
- B. Majority of drivers held college degrees and were full-time employees as teachers and administrators in the respective schools.

2. Training/Professional Development Related to Student Safety:

- A. Drivers had little or no training required or available via professional development related to student safety before and after being hired as a school bus driver.
 - B. Peer interaction among drivers existed regarding information related to student safety.
 - C. Drivers expressed need for training related to student safety.
 - D. Drivers had difficulty in getting students to practice social distancing during the pandemic.
 - E. Administrators showed interest in providing training related to safety.
3. Training/Professional Development Related to Student Discipline
- A. No specific training required or available via professional development related to student discipline before or after being hired as a school bus driver.
 - B. All staff including bus drivers received training on suicide prevention.
 - C. Peer interactions practiced among drivers regarding sharing information related to student discipline.

Secondary Research Questions B:

Managing Student Discipline and Safety

1. How do participants describe their unfavorable experiences with specific protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student safety on school buses?
2. How do participants describe their unfavorable experiences with specific protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student discipline (behavior/misbehavior) on school buses?
3. How do participants describe their “best practices” experiences with specific protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student safety on school buses?

4. How do participants describe their “best practices” experiences with specified protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student discipline (behavior/misbehavior) on school buses?

School Bus Drivers Unfavorable Experiences—Student Safety

During the focus group sessions, the participants were asked to describe unfavorable experiences related to student safety. One transportation director (administrator) stated, “I have had only one major incident with a school bus. On the way to a football game, a speeding car struck the cheerleader’s bus at the rear axle causing the school bus to leave the road and turn over. All students were taken to the local hospital to be checked, but only minor injuries were sustained.” The administrator noted the response from the driver of that bus. The driver asserted, “It happened so quickly. The students with injuries were not seated properly or were standing, and students were thrown across the bus as it rolled over.” The administrator tried to explain that in this incident, there were several adult chaperones on the bus and all students should have been in their seats. When asked what was the procedure for handling students out of their seats, the administrator stated, “Tell them to sit down.” The driver laughed and stated, “Tell that to 20 cheerleaders.”

Several bus drivers voiced their desire for seat belts. One driver stated, “Adding seat belts would be a start to keeping students in the correct spot.” Another driver added, “An alarm, similar to the alarm in cars, could actually help us know that all students were seated and buckled.”

The addition of seat belts was brought to the attention of the administrators. One administrator thought seat belts were a good idea. The administrator stated, “Adding seat belts to the high seats would offer another means of safety to the school buses.”

School Bus Drivers Unfavorable Experiences—Student Discipline

Although only a couple of the participants stated they had discipline infractions on their buses that required serious consequences, school bus drivers were in complete agreement that their buses were the safest means of transportation. One driver pointed out that he could not see what was happening as he was driving the bus. The driver described a situation where he knew students were involved in something but could not see what was happening. The driver stated, “By the time I reached a place where I could safely pull my bus over, four students had consumed a bottle of vodka.” Other drivers reported similar situations. When questioned about a possible solution, bus drivers stated an additional adult on the bus to regulate student discipline would be the answer.

Another bus driver suggested, “Students know what is right and wrong, but if they think they can’t get caught on the bus, they will try anything.” Further, one driver said he seldom heard bullying comments made by students, but the students often reported another child as harassing him/her. The driver stated, “I can’t hear every conversation or watch every child.”

During the focus group session, the administrators were asked about hiring additional monitors for the buses. An administrator stated, “That’s not possible. It would double our budget.” The other administrators agreed.

Generally, the main unfavorable experiences faced by school bus drivers related to student discipline dealt with incidents involving students not being seated and freely moving about the buses. Several of the bus driver participants were in favor of adding seat belts to existing buses. Bus monitors, as well as a better means of exerting rules and policies toward those students who did not stay in their seats were discussed.

As a whole, several bus drivers had unfavorable experiences with managing student discipline. Both school bus drivers and administrators agreed that the addition of cameras on the buses could be a leading aid to monitoring student discipline. The use of bus monitors along with exerting rules and policies could encourage positive student behavior on the buses.

School Bus Drivers Best Practices Experiences—Student Safety

Bus drivers were asked to describe "best practices" they had used to insure student safety. Different drivers had different ideas. One driver stated, "I always tell my students to not come near the bus until it has completely stopped." Another driver agreed that this was a wonderful idea. The driver stated, "My students think if they aren't ready to hop on the moment, I stop that I will leave them. I have to reassure my students that I will not leave them." One driver stated, "I have more problems getting the students to sit when they get on the bus." The driver continued by stating that his students wanted to get to school early enough to spend some social time with their peers. One driver exclaimed, "I refuse to drive off until everyone is securely in a seat, and it has really helped. The other students will remind each other to sit down." Another driver stated, "I always cut the engine on my bus off when I get to school." The driver claimed an elderly, retired bus driver gave him that piece of advice. The driver explained, "I can always restart the bus, but if it is off and in park, I do not have to worry about accidentally rolling into a child."

One of the school administrators stated, "Last year, we had a special education student who was fascinated with rocks. Thankfully, a teacher saw the child crawl under a cranked bus after a particular rock. Since then, we have assigned additional people to be on bus duty to make sure that there are no students around the buses when it is time for them to start moving." One of the bus drivers chided, "This makes me feel better. I have extra eyes on the perimeter of my bus." A bus driver from another school stated, "We do something similar. We have someone

who is far enough away to see under the buses. When we are loaded and ready, that person scans the area and then waves us forward.”

School Bus Drivers Best Practices and Experiences—Student Discipline

Administrators discussed best practices related to student discipline such as having a student bus monitor, seating charts, and high expectations for students. Administrators also stated that bus drivers who used established rules and procedures on a regular basis had fewer referrals than those bus drivers who did not have any rules and procedures in place. According to administrators who were interviewed, the bus driver is responsible for establishing discipline protocols and procedures for his/her bus in much the same way as a teacher is responsible for his/her classroom. The administrators also suggested that student monitors could be used.

The bus drivers were not accepting of the administrators’ ideas. “Using a student as a school bus monitor makes one student out as a snitch,” exclaimed one driver. Another school bus driver stated, “I have trouble enough counting to see that everyone gets on without checking a seating chart.”

The focus group of participants agreed that before school started, all bus drivers could receive assistance in preparing a uniform set of rules and procedures as part of professional development. One administrator stated, “A committee of teachers, administrators, and bus drivers could easily complete this task.” Another bus driver remarked, “I never really thought about who was responsible in creating the rules and procedures used on the buses.” An administrator added, “If the bus drivers all use the same rules and procedures, the classroom teachers could help teach them to the children.” One school bus driver who was also a teacher stated, “Let’s use the same list in the classroom and on the bus.”

The bus drivers were also quick to add that any disruption while the bus is moving is a safety issue because the driver must take his/her eyes off the road to look at students in a rear-view mirror. Recurring discussion ensued on methods of keeping students calm and in their seats. Such issues as adding a school bus monitor, daily review of camera footage, and posting of rules and regulations were mentioned.

During the focus group session, participants were asked if they have rules/policies and procedures that they used consistently on their buses. The group seemed to be divided on the issue. Table 10 shows the number of school bus drivers who indicated they had established rules and procedures for their buses.

Table 10

Frequencies and Percentages of School Bus Drivers with Rules and Procedures Focused on Student Safety and/or Student Discipline (N= 30)

<i>Rules and Procedures</i>	<i>School Bus Drivers</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	17	57
No	13	43
Total	30	100

Only 17 (57%) of the school bus driver participants indicated they had established rules and procedures while driving their buses. The drivers who did post rules and procedures stated that they also did so in their classrooms (keeping in mind the majority of the school bus drivers were teachers/staff in the schools). One driver said, “It worked in my classroom, so I brought the idea to the bus. Students like knowing what I will or will not allow.”

Notably, almost half of the participants (43%, $n= 13$) said they did not have rules or procedures related to student safety and/or student discipline posted on their buses. One of the drivers who did not have established rules and procedures added, “I never thought about it in those terms. Perhaps, I could just adapt my classroom rules to the bus.”

Table 11 shows the frequency the school bus driver participants had discussions with students concerning their respective rules and procedures on the buses. Responses are shown for those who indicated they had rules and procedures.

Table 11

Frequencies and Percentages of Bus Driver Participants Review of Rules and Procedures with Students (N= 17)

<i>Student Review of Rules & Procedures</i>	<i>School Bus Drivers</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
At the Start of School	8	59
Weekly	0	0
Every 9 Weeks	3	17
Never	4	24
Total	17	100

Of the 17 school bus drivers who had rules and procedures for their buses, 24% ($n=4$) never discussed the rules/procedures with students and 59% ($n=10$) did so only at the start of the school year. All of the drivers agreed that the rules and procedures were not taught to the students. All bus drivers agreed that teaching the students the right procedures for riding the buses would increase safety and improve discipline. One school bus driver pointed out how easy it would be to use the same set of policies and procedures in the classroom and on the bus. The

school bus driver stated, “Good policies and procedures help to maintain control in any situation.”

Further, during the discussion of best practices, all of the bus drivers agreed that they should begin with a warning to the students when handling student discipline. The participants indicated great discrepancy in the number of warnings. Several of the participants said giving two warnings was acceptable and other participants said giving five warnings was acceptable. The stricter drivers stated one warning was enough. One driver added, “That is the job for the administrators.”

Some of the drivers described handing out candy to students who behaved well on the buses, especially the younger students. A driver stated, “This worked until I realized how much I was spending on candy. I drive the bus to supplement my income.” Another bus driver stated, “I try to contact parents, especially when I see them outside at the pickup or drop off times. I think it helps to say good and bad comments in front of the students.” Other bus drivers also commented that knowing the parents as well as the children was a key to having good discipline on the bus.

Administrators added best practice strategies should be utilized by all the drivers. These include greeting students in a positive manner as they get on the bus and congratulating students on jobs well done, such as a previous night’s ball game or making honor roll. These greetings may also relate to students’ hobbies or interests such as fishing or hunting.

A unique idea was discussed by one bus driver. The driver stated, “On the first day of school, my wife cooks brownies and individually wraps them. I hand them out for each rider.” He explained that the brownies were to be eaten during the day when the students felt uneasy or

lonely. Further, the driver stated, “I always remind the students that I will be back in the afternoon to take them home. It seems to calm the younger children.”

Another idea to promote good discipline on the bus came from another bus driver. The driver stated, “When my bus gets rowdy or I realize something is happening on the bus, I look for a safe place to pull over – usually a parking lot. I pull over and wait for the bus to quiet down before moving.” The driver laughed and added, “This really does work well, especially on Fridays.”

Review of Documents/Artifacts Related to Unfavorable Experiences and Best Practices of School Bus Drivers

Copies of discipline referrals and accident reports were reviewed by the researcher. Documents revealed only two serious accidents with minor injuries occurring in one of the two accidents during the past three years. However, discipline referrals were issued for multiple reasons from gum chewing to fighting. Discipline referrals for one school year were reviewed and totaled 460 school bus incidents.

Emergent Themes—Secondary Research Questions—Managing Student Safety and Student Discipline

After reviewing the responses from the participants about their reflective experiences related to unfavorable scenarios and best practices, the majority of the drivers were overwhelmingly welcoming to best practices and willing to try ideas given by fellow drivers. Tables 12 and 13 provide displays of the emergent themes focused on the participants reflective experiences related to unfavorable scenarios.

Table 12

Emergent Themes Related to Participants Reflective Experiences on Unfavorable Scenarios

Managing Student Safety

Related Secondary Research Question	Summary of Participants' Responses	Emergent Theme
Unfavorable Experiences—Managing Student Safety --	Speeding car struck cheerleaders' bus—minor injuries	Two accidents (one involving a speeding car which struck a school bus)—students had minor injuries
	Students not seated properly were thrown around on bus	Good defensive driving skills exhibited by the school bus driver resulted in only few minor injuries
	Difficulty in monitoring 20 students—keeping them seated	Difficult to monitor 20 students alone while driving
	Seat belts, monitors, and cameras needed on buses.	Seat belts, adult monitors and cameras on buses needed for safety
	Seatbelts would keep students in a more stable position.	

Table 13

Emergent Themes Related to Participants Reflective Experiences on Unfavorable Scenarios

Managing Student Discipline

Related Secondary Research Question	Summary of Participants' Responses	Emergent Theme
Unfavorable Experiences— Managing Student Discipline	460 discipline infractions on buses over 3-years	Minor discipline infractions
	Few major discipline infractions on buses	Few major discipline infractions
	Drivers inability to see what is happening on the bus while driving	Drivers unable to view student behavior such as bullying or harassing
	Bullying by students or students harassing other students	Adult monitors on buses needed to assist in stopping bullying or harassing of students.
	Cameras on buses needed to detect discipline issues.	Cameras on buses needed
	Concern regarding hiring Monitors on buses—additional costs	Administrators concerned over cost of adding bus monitors

Table 14 provides a display of the emergent themes related to participants reflective experiences on best practices managing student safety. Bus drivers and administrators expressed the utmost concern and desire to ensure student safety.

Table 14

Emergent Themes Related to Participants Reflective Experiences on Best Practices Managing

Student Safety

Related Secondary Research Question	Summary of Participants' Responses	Emergent Theme
Best Practices—Managing Student Safety	Advise students to not come near the bus until completely stopped	Establish safety protocols for students while riding buses, loading buses, and unloading buses
	Ensuring everyone is seated before driving	Ensure all students are seating while driving
	Turn the engine completely off once arrived at the school	Stress the importance that discipline infractions present safety issues
	Assign additional persons the responsibility of bus duty	Include bus monitors
	Ensure someone monitors bus from afar—scans area and waves drivers forward	

Table 15 provides a display of the emergent themes related to participants reflective experiences on best practices managing student discipline. Bus drivers and administrators were excited about ideas to help with managing student discipline.

Table 15

Emergent Themes Related to Participants Reflective Experiences on Best Practices Managing

Student Discipline

Related Secondary Research Question	Summary of Participants Responses	Emergent Theme
Best Practices—Managing Student Discipline	Bus drivers establish discipline protocols and procedures for his or her bus as teachers do for classroom	Provide assistance to drivers to establish rules and procedures in regard to transporting students on the school bus
	Including student bus monitors	Develop a committee of stakeholders to create a unified set of rules and procedures related to discipline on the bus similar to rules created for classroom teachers
	Use seating charts and/or counting students	Use school bus monitors to assist bus drivers
	Provide assistance to drivers in preparing a uniform set of rules and procedures	Creation of seating charts to account for students Remind students to stay calm and in their seats
	Use a committee of teachers, administrators, and bus drivers to develop rules and procedures to decrease discipline infractions	Post rules and procedures on the bus and also review routinely
	Use of standard set of rules and procedures by bus drivers; classroom teachers could teach the rules to students	Monitor videos routinely
	Keep students calm and in their seats	Positive feedback to parents and students for favorable student behavior
	Daily review of camera footage	Students respond positively to drivers who practice positive protocols.

Table 15 (continued)

Related Secondary Research Question	Summary of Participants Responses	Emergent Theme
	Posting rules and procedures on the buses; Adapt classroom rules to school bus rules	Establish a warning system for students
	Students respond positively to drivers who practice positive protocols.	Give rewards for good behavior
	Teach students rules and procedures and review rules with students frequently	
	Use a system of “warning” with students—determine number of appropriate warnings	
	Reward students for good behaviors, i.e., candy	
	Communicating with parents Knowing parents and students by name	
	Greeting students with personal comments in a positive manner	

For the most part, there were not many unfavorable experiences related to student safety. There were reflective experiences of the participants dealing with discipline infractions. Best practices were discussed with a somewhat high level of enthusiasm from both the school bus drivers and the administrators. The summary of emergent themes includes the following.

1. Unfavorable Experiences--Student Safety:

- A. Two accidents (one involving a speeding car which struck a school bus)—students had minor injuries
- B. Good defensive driving skills exhibited by the school bus driver resulted in only few minor injuries
- C. Difficult to monitor 20 students alone while driving
- D. Seat belts, adult monitors and cameras on buses needed for safety

2. Unfavorable Experiences—Student Discipline

- A. Minor discipline infractions
- B. Few major discipline infractions
- C. Drivers unable to view student behavior such as bullying or harassing
- D. Adult monitors on buses needed to assist in stopping bullying or harassing of students.
- E. Cameras on buses needed
- F. Administrators concerned over cost of adding bus monitors

3. Best Practices—Student Safety:

- A. Establish safety protocols for students while riding buses, loading buses, and unloading buses
- B. Ensure all students are seating while driving
- C. Stress the importance that discipline infractions present safety issues
- D. Include bus monitors

4. Best Practices—Student Discipline:

- A. Provide assistance to drivers to establish rules and procedures in regard to transporting students on the school bus
- B. Develop a committee of stakeholders to create a unified set of rules and procedures related to discipline on the bus similar to rules created for classroom teachers

- C. Use school bus monitors to assist bus drivers
- D. Creation of seating charts to account for students
- E. Remind students to stay calm and, in their seats
- F. Post rules and procedures on the bus and also review routinely
- G. Monitor videos routinely
- H. Positive feedback to parents and students for favorable student behavior
- I. Students respond positively to drivers who practice positive protocols.
- J. Establish a warning system for students
- K. Give rewards for good behavior

Secondary Research Questions C

Recommendations for School Bus Drivers Related to Student Safety and Student Discipline

1. What are recommendations for content and types of professional development related to student safety needed for school bus drivers?
2. What are recommendations for content and types of professional development related to student discipline needed for school bus drivers?
3. What are recommendations for specific policies and procedures related to student safety for school bus drivers?
4. What are recommendations for specific policies and procedures related to student discipline for school bus drivers?

Professional Development Recommendations—Student Safety

The bus drivers and the administrators were given the opportunity to offer recommendations for content and types of professional development related to student safety and

student discipline. When questioned about specific professional development to aid student safety, several ideas were presented. The first recommendation was assistance in establishing a list of rules and regulations for the school bus. Drivers asked if other classroom teachers could help drivers teach these rules and procedures to students. Administrators agreed that this was possible.

Another suggestion for professional development for the bus drivers was aimed at keeping students safe while on the buses which included more education for students. When asked what this would encompass, one driver stated, “Students don’t think anything will happen to them.” The bus drivers suggested showing videos of what could happen if students did not follow the rules and procedures for safety. A female driver stated, “I am afraid to try to stop a fight.” Others agreed with her and suggested professional development should focus on what to do if there is a fight on the bus. This would also need to be on the rules and procedures sheets that all students were given.

Administrators agreed that conflict resolution would be a good professional development topic for the bus drivers. However, both groups preferred professional development that would assist in settling disputes before they reached the fight stage. Professional development on recognizing potential problems and diffusing situations were also mentioned as possible topics for future professional development

School bus drivers reported that all buses were not equipped with cameras at all times. Suggestions were made to install cameras on buses and provide training on the use of the cameras. The drivers agreed that not having cameras on all buses was a problem. Students realize when cameras are not active, and they know their actions will not be recorded. Drivers agreed cameras should be on all buses on every route or school trip. Videos from the cameras should be

monitored by transportation directors to ensure policies and procedures are followed to keep students safe on the buses. However, one administrator complained that the time to watch video recordings was not possible. Suggestions by bus drivers included hiring extra personnel to watch bus recordings.

Bus drivers asked if they could be given a list of phone numbers for each student so they could call parents when problems occurred. The administrators were against providing telephone numbers of parents. The administrators suggested that bus drivers use school lines with an administrator present to avoid any problems with complaints from parents. Since the majority of the school bus drivers were teachers, one administrator discussed the use of an existing program in his district that monitored calls. The administrators also suggested a good professional development topic for bus drivers could be dealing with parents.

Professional Development Recommendations—Student Discipline

The bus drivers expressed the desire for professional development related to student discipline to be delivered in much the same method as their professional development for the classrooms. One driver stated, “In the classroom, we as teachers discuss areas of weakness and the district provides us with training to correct our weakness. Why can’t that work for bus drivers?” All of the bus drivers seemed to agree with this method. One driver suggested, “Perhaps we could complete a survey or check topics we need to know more about.” A driver added, “This must be ongoing professional development. It can’t be something done once and forgotten. We need to constantly amend and improve.” Another driver was quick to interject, “And it needs to be on our issues – not something that doesn’t apply to us.”

One recommendation included creating a concise, unified set of student discipline rules and regulations that all school bus drivers, students, administrators and parents would adhere to

being carried out. Another bus driver asked for a curriculum for students so that students will better understand the need for stricter bus regulations.

Policies and Procedures Recommendations—Student Safety

During the focus group sessions, the drivers and administrators were asked to share recommendations related to policies and procedures focused on student safety while riding the buses. One driver referred to a statement made earlier by another driver and asked, “How far from the bus should students stop and wait for the bus to stop?” After several minutes of discussion among the drivers about the correct answer, one driver stated, “The basic safety regulations for students would be a wonderful start for us. We need a list of basic safety steps.” Another driver stated, “It’s hard to enforce safety procedures when the drivers don’t know them either.” The drivers agreed that basic safety policies should be developed and reviewed with drivers and students at regular intervals throughout the school year.

Policies and Procedures Recommendations—Student Discipline

Throughout the time during the focus groups, the school bus drivers voiced the need for a concise, unified set of rules and procedures that all school bus drivers and school administrators could use as well as parents and students. “Perhaps,” inserted one school bus driver, “we could have a handbook for bus riders.”

The bus drivers were in agreement that rules and procedures should be reviewed at regular intervals and amended if needed. As professional development was discussed, the bus drivers recommended topics and sessions should include recognizing signs of troubled youth, dissolving disruptive behaviors, and talking to parents. The participants felt these were all areas where school bus drivers felt a weakness.

Drivers also made several other recommendations including the addition of seat belts. Not only would seat belts keep students in assigned seating, but seat belts would also deter common discipline problems such as bullying on the bus. As one driver pointed out, “If you know John is bullying a younger student, you can separate them and keep them separated if you had seat belts.” Most drivers also wanted another set of eyes on the bus. The driver stated, “These eyes could be in the form of cameras that could be replayed or in the form of a bus monitor who would assist with discipline.”

Review of Documents and Artifacts Related to Recommendations for Professional Development and Policies/Procedures

All policies and procedures given to drivers, students, or parents by the school districts were evaluated. These documents included student handbooks and personnel handbooks. All personnel in both districts received a personnel handbook. Student handbooks were similar for both districts. Student handbooks stated that all students riding school buses should adhere to policies and procedures; yet no specific policies and procedures were given.

Discipline referral forms were reviewed. However, referrals were generic and did not list any specific items related to school buses.

Emergent Themes-- Recommendations for Professional Development and Policies/Procedures Related to Student Safety and Student Discipline

Tables 16 and 17 provide displays of the summary or responses and emergent themes from the participants regarding recommendations for professional development. The recommendations are specifically focused on student safety and discipline while riding the school buses.

Table 16

Emergent Themes Related to Participants Recommendations for Professional Development

Focused on Student Safety

Related Secondary Research Question	Summary of Participants' Responses	Emergent Themes
Recommendations for Professional Development –Student Safety	A written, school-district approved list of rules and procedures should be established for all bus riders.	Provide a district-wide set of policies and procedures for riding the school bus.
	Classroom teachers to educate students on the importance of following safety rules on the bus.	Addition of instructions including videos for students on bus safety by classroom teachers
	Students don't believe accidents will happen to them, show videos	
	Bus drivers afraid to stop conflicts	Provide professional development on conflict resolution training
	Training or PD on conflict resolution	
	Cameras on all buses.	Install cameras On all buses and providing training for drivers
	Cameras need to be maintained and monitored daily.	
	Administrators complained of the money necessary to pay someone to monitor cameras. Bus drivers were adamant that daily monitoring could stop issues from developing on the bus.	Provide professional Development on dealing with parents
	The drivers pointed out that they could not see or hear all that was going on aboard the bus. Bus drivers often realize that a scuffle has occurred aboard the bus but are not in the situation to stop the incident.	Administrators concerned over additional costs for camera monitors and adult monitors on buses.
	Training on the use of maintaining and monitoring cameras	

Table 16 (continued)

Related Secondary Research Question	Summary of Participants' Responses	Emergent Themes
	Administrators complaint of lack of personnel to monitor cameras	
	Training on dealing with parents	

Table 17

Emergent Themes Related to Participants Recommendations for Professional Development

Focused on Student Discipline

Related Secondary Research Question	Summary of Participants Responses	Emergent Theme
Recommendations for Professional Development— Student Discipline	Establishment of ongoing, relevant professional development based on needs of drivers	Provide specific ongoing Professional Development dealing with issues faced by bus drivers
	Not done once and forgotten	Provide training on established rules and procedures for maintaining student safety
	Set of rules and procedures for maintaining student safety	Provide training on dealing with disruptive/violent students

The emergent themes from the data on the participants recommendations for policies and procedures focused on student safety are provided in Table 18. The emergent themes from the data on the participants' recommendation for policies and procedures focused on student discipline are provided in Table 19.

Table 18

Emergent Themes Related to Participants Recommendations for Policies and Procedures

Focused on Student Safety

Related to Secondary Research Question	Summary of Participants' Responses	Emergent Theme
Recommendations for Policies and Procedures— Student Safety	Establishment of basic safety rules and regulations handbook that is reviewed regularly	Develop a list of basic safety steps
	Require cameras on all school buses	Establishment of safety rules and regulations handbook that is reviewed regularly
		Require cameras for monitoring safety and discipline

Table 19

Emergent Themes Related to Participants Recommendations for Policies and Procedures

Focused on Student Discipline

Related to Secondary Research Question	Summary of Participants Responses	Emergent Theme
Recommendations for Policies and Procedures— Student Discipline	Establish rules and procedures in regard to transporting students on the school bus	Establish rules and procedures in regard to transporting students on the school bus.
	Provide ongoing professional development based on areas of concern by drivers such as recognizing signs of troubled youths, dissolving disruptive behavior, and talking to parents.	Establishment of ongoing, relevant, professional development based on needs of drivers.

The following were emergent themes resulting from the participants' responses related to recommendations for professional development focused on student safety and student discipline and recommendations related to policies and procedures focused on student safety and student discipline.

1. Recommendations for Professional Development—Student Safety:

- A. Provide a district-wide set of policies and procedures for riding the school bus.
- B. Addition of instructions including videos for students on bus safety by classroom teachers
- C. Provide professional development on conflict resolution training
- D. Install cameras on all buses and provide training for drivers
- E. Provide professional Development on dealing with parents
- F. Administrators concerned over additional costs for camera monitors and adult monitors on buses.

2. Recommendations for Professional Development -Student Discipline:

- A. Provide specific ongoing Professional Development dealing with issues faced by bus drivers
- B. Provide training on established rules and procedures for maintaining student safety
- C. Provide training on dealing with disruptive/violent students

3. Recommendations for Policies/Procedures—Student Safety:

- A. Develop a list of basic safety steps
- B. Establishment of safety rules and regulations handbook that is reviewed regularly

- C. Require cameras for monitoring safety and discipline One emerging theme was the establishment of safety rules and regulation handbook that was reviewed regularly.

4. Recommendations for Policies/Procedures—Student Discipline:

- A. Establish rules and procedures in regard to transporting students on the school bus.
- B. Establishment of ongoing, relevant, professional development based on needs of drivers.

In general, drivers would like an ongoing professional development plan to be scheduled into their contracts similar to that of regular classroom teachers. Drivers desire professional development aimed at meeting their needs. Drivers expressed tremendous desire for a list of rules and procedures established by a committee that could be reviewed with students and parents. These rules and procedures could be evaluated annually. Cameras on all buses was imperative.

Chapter Summary

A total of 34 participants were included in this study. The majority of the participants were school bus drivers ($n=30$) and four were building level administrators. Participants ranged in age from 26 – 50 years old. Slightly more than half of the participants were African American ($n = 19, 57%$) and 14 were Caucasian. The majority of the participants ($n=20, 59%$) were females. Of the 30 school bus drivers, all but four were employed full-time by the school districts. The four employees worked part time for the school districts as school bus drivers. All 34 participants held high school diplomas. The majority of the participants held a master's degree or higher.

For the second set of secondary research questions, participants shared unfavorable experiences related to student safety and discipline while driving buses. While there were not

many serious accidents reported, safety of students was deemed as the priority. The best practices included using school bus monitors to assist bus drivers, creating seating charts, reminding students to stay calm, posting rules, using videos, using warning systems and giving rewards for good behavior.

Participants shared their reflective experiences from their daily duties as bus drivers in response to the third set of secondary research questions related to recommendations for professional development and changes for policies and procedures. Bus drivers felt the establishment of a school-wide list of policies and procedures for the buses would promote a more favorable, manageable, and safer group of riders. Drivers were in consensus that a set of policies and procedures should be established by a group of administrators, teachers, and bus drivers to develop a concise document. These policies and procedures must be known to all drivers, riders, parents, and administrators. They should be reviewed at regular intervals.

Another emergent theme dealt with the establishment of a safety rules handbook that could be issued to students. This handbook would discuss basic safety issues concerning students boarding and departing the bus and staying seated. Bus drivers also expressed a desire to have professional development training relating to recognizing signs of troubled youth, dissolving disruptive behaviors, and talking to parents. Professional development should also include how to diffuse difficult incidents.

The addition of cameras to all bus routes was imperative. Along with the addition of cameras, bus drivers also need training on maintaining and monitoring cameras. In addition to cameras on routes, bus drivers consistently discussed adding adult monitors to routes. This theme was met with concern for funding by administrators.

The addition of seat belts was a definite theme among the drivers. Bus drivers considered the addition of seat belts an opportunity to improve both student safety and student discipline.

Knowing the students on the route was also a key to safe, well-disciplined students as they were being transported to school. By greeting and talking to students individually, the bus driver could establish a sense of unity among his/her riders. In addition to this idea, bus drivers also wanted to reward students for good behavior.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the research study, a discussion of major findings, limitations, recommendations for practitioners and policymakers, and recommendations for future research. This qualitative research study examined the lived experiences of school bus drivers and administrators related to school transportation protocols and procedures focused on students' safety and discipline.

Summary

The following was the overarching research question for the study: How do school bus drivers and school administrators describe their experiences related to specific driver training and protocol and procedures related to student safety and student discipline?

In addition to the overarching research question, secondary research questions were also used to guide the study. The secondary research questions were presented during the focus group interviews.

A. Bus Certification, Skills, and Training and Student Safety

1. What are the school bus drivers' certifications, skills, and training related to student safety required for employment by the school district?
2. What are the school bus drivers' certifications, skills, and training related to student discipline required for employment by the school district?

3. How do participants describe the content of professional development training required of bus drivers related to student safety before and after taking a bus driver's test?
4. How do participants describe the content and types of professional development training required of bus drivers related to student discipline before and after taking a bus driver's test?

B. Managing Student Discipline and Safety

1. How do participants describe their unfavorable experiences with specific protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student safety on school buses?
2. How do participants describe their unfavorable experiences with specific protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student discipline (behavior/misbehavior) on school buses?
3. How do participants describe their "best practices" experiences with specific protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student safety on school buses?
4. How do participants describe their "best practices" experiences with specific protocols and procedures including major incidents related to student discipline (behavior/misbehavior) on school buses?

C. Recommendations for School Bus Drivers Related to Student Safety and Student Discipline

1. What are recommendations for content and types of professional development related to student safety needed for school bus drivers?

2. What are recommendations for content and types of professional development related to student discipline needed for school bus drivers?
3. What are recommendations for specific policies and procedures related to student safety for school bus drivers?
4. What are recommendations for specific policies and procedures related to student discipline for school bus drivers?

This study was an exploratory, descriptive case study. Surveys were completed by the bus drivers and administrators from two rural Mississippi school districts. Focus groups were held via Zoom meetings to address the secondary research questions. Data from the surveys, collected data from school districts, and data from the focus groups were analyzed using NVivo software.

There were 34 participants in this study. Of the 34 participants, 30 were school bus drivers and 4 were building level administrators. The participants ranged in age from 26 – 50 years and the majority ($n= 19, 57\%$) were African American. There were 14 participants (43%) who identified themselves as Caucasian. The majority of the participants were females ($n=19, 57\%$). Of the 30 school bus drivers, the overwhelming majority worked as teachers or held staff positions at the schools (87%, $n=26$). The remaining four worked only part-time for the school districts as school bus drivers. All 34 participants held at least a high school diploma and 50% ($n=17$) held a master's degree or higher. By conducting focus groups and analyzing data from surveys, the study achieved its objectives and presented the following emergent themes.

The emergent themes for the first set of secondary research questions regarding school bus drivers' certifications, licensure, and training required before and after employment focused

on student safety and student discipline were organized and presented as they appeared in the summary tables. The emergent themes included the following.

1. Credentials of School Bus Drivers:

- A. Drivers and administrators held appropriate licensure credentials—All drivers held CDL with passenger endorsement; all administrators held CDL.
- B. Majority of drivers held college degrees and were full-time employees as teachers and administrators in the respective schools.

2. Training/Professional Development Related to Student Safety:

- A. Drivers had little or no training required or available via professional development related to student safety before and after being hired as a school bus driver.
- B. Peer interaction among drivers existed regarding information related to student safety.
- C. Drivers expressed need for training related to student safety.
- D. Drivers had difficulty in getting students to practice social distancing during the Pandemic.
- E. Administrators showed interest in providing training related to safety.

3. Training/Professional Development Related to Student Discipline:

- A. No specific training required or available via professional development related to student discipline before or after being hired as a school bus driver.
- B. All staff including bus drivers received training on suicide prevention.
- C. Peer interactions practiced among drivers regarding sharing information related to student discipline.

The summary of emergent themes from the second set of secondary research questions focused on unfavorable experiences while transporting students and best practices of the drivers. The emergent themes included the following in regard to student safety and student discipline.

1. Unfavorable Experiences--Student Safety:

- A. Two accidents (one involving a speeding car which struck a school bus)—students had minor injuries.
- B. Good defensive driving skills exhibited by the school bus driver resulted in only few minor injuries.
- C. Difficult to monitor 20 students alone while driving.
- D. Seat belts, adult monitors and cameras on buses needed for safety.

2. Unfavorable Experiences—Student Discipline

- A. Minor discipline infractions.
- B. Few major discipline infractions.
- C. Drivers unable to view student behavior such as bullying or harassing.
- D. Adult monitors on buses needed to assist in stopping bullying or harassing of students.
- E. Cameras on buses needed.
- F. Administrators concerned over cost of adding bus monitors.

3. Best Practices—Student Safety:

- A. Establish safety protocols for students while riding buses, loading buses, and unloading buses.
- B. Ensure all students are seating while driving.
- C. Stress the importance that discipline infractions present safety issues.

D. Include bus monitors.

4. Best Practices—Student Discipline:

- A. Provide assistance to drivers to establish rules and procedures in regard to transporting students on the school bus.
- B. Develop a committee of stakeholders to create a unified set of rules and procedures related to discipline on the bus similar to rules created for classroom teachers.
- C. Use school bus monitors to assist bus drivers.
- D. Creation of seating charts to account for students.
- E. Remind students to stay calm and in their seats.
- F. Post rules and procedures on the bus and also review routinely.
- G. Monitor videos routinely.
- H. Positive feedback to parents and students for favorable student behavior.
- I. Students respond positively to drivers who practice positive protocols.
- J. Establish a warning system for students.
- K. Give rewards for good behavior.

For the third set of secondary research questions, the participants were asked to give recommendations for professional development and policy/procedures. The following were the emergent themes.

1. Recommendations for Professional Development—Student Safety:

- G. Provide a district-wide set of policies and procedures for riding the school bus.
- H. Addition of instructions including videos for students on bus safety by classroom teachers

- I. Provide professional development on conflict resolution training
 - J. Install cameras on all buses and provide training for drivers
 - K. Provide professional Development on dealing with parents
 - L. Administrators concerned over additional costs for camera monitors and adult monitors on buses.
2. Recommendations for Professional Development -Student Discipline:
- D. Provide specific ongoing Professional Development dealing with issues faced by bus drivers
 - E. Provide training on established rules and procedures for maintaining student safety
 - F. Provide training on dealing with disruptive/violent students
3. Recommendations for Policies/Procedures—Student Safety:
- D. Develop a list of basic safety steps
 - E. Establishment of safety rules and regulations handbook that is reviewed regularly
 - F. Require cameras for monitoring safety and discipline One emerging theme was the establishment of safety rules and regulation handbook that was reviewed regularly.
4. Recommendations for Policies/Procedures—Student Discipline:
- C. Establish rules and procedures in regard to transporting students on the school bus.
 - D. Establishment of ongoing, relevant, professional development based on needs of drivers.

Discussion

The findings from the study show that all of the school bus drivers and administrators held the required CDL licensure. This follows recommendations made by the NHTSA (2001) which stated that a trained, qualified transportation staff was imperative to the success of any

transportation department. As noted in the review of the literature, the FMSCA (2016) tried to establish more requirements. The training set by FMSCA (2016), however, lacked an established curriculum, used no online training, and had no mandatory training hours. The existing established curriculum, online training, and mandated training hours are necessary for school bus drivers to obtain adequate certification, training and skills.

In terms of professional development focused on student safety and student discipline prior to being hired, the participants responded they mostly had none. Whereas classroom teachers receive regular professional development to keep abreast of new and innovative ideas, Weaver (2018) pointed out the lack of professional development designed for school bus drivers. The findings showed that teachers relied on content/skill from their roles as teachers in many instances to help them deal with discipline issues. The participants overwhelmingly agreed no specific training was required or available via professional development related to student discipline before being hired as a school bus driver. In general, this study found teachers as school bus drivers relied heavily on their training and experiences as classroom teachers and expanded on that knowledge to address both student safety and discipline on the school buses.

Bus drivers were adamant that some form of rules and regulations must be on the bus for better handling of student safety and student discipline. Copas and Gibbons (1984) stated more professional development was needed for school bus drivers regarding the relationships with students and their safety than on the mechanical needs of the school buses. During the focus groups, both administrators and bus drivers agreed that this was an area that needed more attention.

The addition of seat belts was discussed. Many of the drivers felt that the addition of seat belts would benefit student safety by stopping students from being able to move about the bus

freely. Seat belts would also aid in the ability to social distance as was required during the past school year while experiencing the COVID 19 pandemic. With students secured in place, discipline on buses would also improve as students lost the ability to join with others in fights, arguments or harassment of others. The participants' views were consistent with the literature reviewed in that positive consequences resulted with the addition of seat belts. Yet, few states have added seat belts as a requirement, due to cost.

The addition of cameras to outside warning arms on school buses was found as an improvement in some states, including Mississippi. The literature also pointed out that inside cameras on school buses improved student discipline and student safety. The participants were extremely favorable with adding cameras; however, administrators felt costs might prohibit wide use of cameras along with time spent viewing recordings from the cameras.

School bus drivers were in favor of bus monitors to ride the routes and keep order on the school buses. However, the cost of adding an additional person to bus routes seemed to be the main deterrent. School administrators were adamant that adding an additional person to bus routes would double the transportation budget. Burgoyne-Allan et al. (2020) noted funding for transportation needs is often a state allocation and is often the first section of the budget to be cut.

Limitations of the Study

The majority of the bus drivers who participated in this study were also school teachers. Many of the school bus drivers who were teachers used training obtained through teacher professional development and their degrees to supplement safety and discipline needs they encountered as bus drivers. Although focus groups were led by an outside person, some of the participants could have felt uncomfortable to talk openly since I am the Superintendent of one

school district and have a long time working relationship with the superintendent of the other district.

Implications for School Leaders, Administrators, and Policymakers

Federal agencies have made recommendations for training for school bus drivers. As school transportation involves more people and more vehicles, the need for training of school bus drivers has grown also. However, the federal government has only made recommendations. Whereas some states try to meet these recommendations, most do not. Until recommendations become regulations, few, if any, major changes will take place.

General Recommendations

The following are general recommendations for school principals, district offices, bus drivers and Education Leadership departments as a result of this study. The recommendations will contribute to the safety of students as they are transported on school buses.

1. School districts should provide cameras on all buses, including the inside and outside. This will aid both school safety and student discipline. Someone should monitor recordings from the cameras on a regular basis.
2. Policies that detail the rules and procedures for student actions should be developed and provided for students, drivers, and parents. Methods to regularly update and adapt rules and policies must also be in place.
3. Regular, ongoing professional development should be provided to school bus drivers to assist with areas of weaknesses as done with classroom teachers. A suggested area for this professional development includes maintaining discipline on the buses. Other topics for professional development should be provided as expressed by the bus drivers.

4. School bus monitors should be considered. School bus monitors could help stop discipline problems as well as maintain safety on the buses. Extra personnel can also be used to monitor bus areas before the buses leave the schools to ensure all students are away from moving buses.
5. A safety manual should be created to assist students with basic safety protocols while around the bus. This should include waiting for the buses, stopping in front of the buses, getting on the buses and actually riding the buses.

Recommendations for Future Studies

The following are recommendations for future research studies. Qualitative and quantitative research studies may be conducted to contribute to the safe transportation of students on school buses.

1. A study on the types of professional development and topics for professional development by school bus drivers should be conducted to determine the needs of school bus drivers.
2. A study to compare the number of discipline referrals before and after the installation of seat belts and/or cameras would be useful in determining the effects for student safety and promoting favorable student discipline.
3. A study of the effects of the use of seat belts associated with actual accidents on school buses versus those without seat belts would be helpful in getting more requirements on seat belts on buses.
4. A study of the experiences of school bus drivers from other states to determine their certification requirements, professional development before and after hiring, unfavorable experiences, and best practices would be useful.

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APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL LETTER



NOTICE OF DETERMINATION FROM THE HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM

DATE: August 25, 2020
TO: Frankie Williams, PhD, Educational Leadership, Eric Moyen; Leigh Ann McMullan; Stephanie King
Eric Moyen, Educational Leadership, Franklin Luke, Educational Leadership, Leigh Ann McMullan, Educational Leadership, Stephanie King, Educational Leadership
PROTOCOL TITLE: School Transportation Protocol and Procedures Related to Students' Safety and Discipline: Experiences of School Bus Drivers and School Administrators
FUNDING SOURCE:
PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-20-307
Approval Date: August 25, 2020
Expiration Date: August 24, 2025

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

The review of your research study referenced above has been completed. The HRPP had made an Exemption Determination as defined by 45 CFR 46.101(b)2. Based on this determination, and in accordance with Federal Regulations, your research does not require further oversight by the HRPP.

Employing best practices for Exempt studies is strongly encouraged such as adherence to the ethical principles articulated in the Belmont Report, found at www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/# as well as the MSU HRPP Operations Manual, found at www.orc.msstate.edu/humansubjects. As part of best practices in research, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that personnel added after this Exemption Determination notice have completed IRB training prior to their involvement in the research study. Additionally, to protect the confidentiality of research participants, we encourage you to destroy private information which can be linked to the identities of individuals as soon as it is reasonable to do so.

Based on this determination, this study has been inactivated in our system. This means that recruitment, enrollment, data collection, and/or data analysis CAN continue, yet personnel and procedural amendments to this study are no longer required. If at any point, however, the risk to participants increases, you must contact the HRPP immediately. If you are unsure if your proposed change would increase the risk, please call the HRPP office and they can guide you.

If this research is for a thesis or dissertation, this notification is your official documentation that the HRPP has made this determination.

If you have any questions relating to the protection of human research participants, please contact the HRPP Office at irb@research.msstate.edu. We wish you success in carrying out your research project.

Review Type: EXEMPT
IRB Number: IORG0000467