

Title: Middle School Principals' Beliefs and Practices in Developing a Violence Prevention Program: Applying the Frameworks of Systems Thinking and the Essential Elements of Middle Schools

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The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between principals' procedures and strategies in creating violence prevention programs and how their approaches did or did not reflect the use of systems thinking through 13 systemic change indicators and youth developmental needs through the 10 essential elements of middle schools. A qualitative cross-case research design was used to analyze participants' perceptions of the process strategies employed in developing a violence prevention program. A grand tour question with three subquestions provided the guiding focus for this study. Three focus groups with three particular principals, and analysis of archival documents provided the study area.

Data were analyzed from two perspectives. First, the analysis of narrative data and emergent themes occurred. Second, the comparative structures of the 13 system change indicators and of the 10 essential elements of middle schools were analyzed along with an examination of whether or not the principals utilized new leadership skills which develop systems thinking in their staffs.

From the first perspective analysis, this study evaluated the relative dominance of the following themes: vision, communication, related systems, the school system, youth consideration, trust, and time. Vision, communication, trust, and time enabled the processes to evolve. Related systems, the school system and youth consideration themes revealed the wide

spectrum included in the violence prevention process. From the comparative structure analysis, the findings revealed the principals' violence prevention processes included the 13 systemic indicators, which revealed whether or not a system approach is being used, in varying degrees. Six indicators revealed strong support. Three indicators showed some support and one indicator, little support. Three indicators had a mixed support result. The data revealed the 10 essential elements of middle schools, which correspond to meeting the needs of young adolescents, influenced the violence prevention process. Six elements revealed a strong influence, two revealed some influence, and mixed results occurred for two elements. These data also indicated that the principals were taking on the new roles of leadership which include designer, steward, and teacher.