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**THE RELATIONSHIP OF PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF  
EDUCATIONAL LEADERS ON THEIR INTERPRETATION OF POLICY AND  
DECISION MAKING REGARDING ZERO TOLERANCE WEAPONS  
VIOLATIONS IN K-12 ENVIRONMENTS**

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Educational Leadership

by

Laura Josie Moore

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The thesis of Laura Josie Moore was reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Jacqueline A. Stefkovich  
Professor of Education  
Head of the Department of Education Policy Studies  
Thesis Advisor  
Chair of Committee

Roger C. Shouse  
Associate Professor of Education

Gerald K. LeTendre  
Professor of Education

Edgar P. Yoder  
Professor of Extension Education

\*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.

## ABSTRACT

Litigation, educational literature and the popular press indicate that implementers of zero tolerance school policies have varied policy interpretations during their decision-making. One explanation for this observation was differences in the personality characteristics of the implementers of zero tolerance policies. Results of numerous investigations indicated that a relationship exists between decisions made by individuals and the personality variables of trait anxiety and locus of control. It was expected that these variables would account for a significant amount of variance in predicting an implementer's broad or strict interpretation of zero tolerance policy.

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between implementers' trait anxiety and locus of control, and the extent to which they experienced discomfort when no opportunity was provided for them to interpret a school zero tolerance discipline policy. And, to what degree the implementers, when given a choice, chose to interpret a school disciplinary policy strictly or broadly. This study surveyed fifty Pennsylvania State University Educational Leadership graduate students who completed three surveys, the *Spielberger State/Trait Anxiety Scale*, the *Rotter Locus of Control Scale* and the *Moore Zero Tolerance Administrative Interpretation and Decision Scale*.

The results of a Pearson-Product Moment correlation analysis determined that the predictor variables (trait anxiety and locus of control) individually did not account for a statistically significant amount of variance for either the implementer's comfort level

with a decision when required to implement the stated zero tolerance policy situation or for the implementer's broad or strict interpretation (decision) of zero tolerance policy. The results of the logistic regression analysis indicated that the combined effects of anxiety and locus of control did not predict the level of administrator comfort with the designated zero tolerance decision nor the level of strict or broad interpretation of the zero tolerance policy violation.

This study provided more discrete data of educational leaders' rationale for decisions such as "student intent" or "policy" to support the greater body of current zero-tolerance literature. These factors should be validated in larger scale studies as a basis to develop criteria for more effective hiring practices and training of administrators responsible for making decisions about students under their charge.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The consolidation of school districts has resulted in significantly larger student populations in an increasingly more complex society in the twenty-first century. In an attempt to increase order and consistency in schools as a result of these increased complexities in student populations, new federal, state and local laws have imposed school disciplinary policies surrounding specific types of school misconduct on educational leaders who are then required to implement these policies. This century's advent of federally mandated compulsory school attendance for students between the ages of eight and seventeen, and the institution of laws insuring the protection of student rights such as those instituted in the 1960s, has increased the requirement that provisions must be made by school officials to insure safe learning environments. Litigation at the local, state and federal levels has responded to the complexities of those issues surrounding the best interests of students, safety within the public schools and weapons violations, and have resulted in increased policy specificity in schools' responses to deviant youth.

The Gun Free School Act of 1994 interpreted by states, as in Pennsylvania's Safe School's Act of 1995, required local educational agencies to develop both a tracking system and response to student acts of violence and possession of either weapons or controlled substances by school personnel or students on school property. Intrinsic to

what have been identified as zero tolerance policies was the requirement of a one-year expulsion for weapons offenders and a required statement indicating superintendents' or administrative directors' prerogative to recommend modification to the expulsion on a case-by-case basis while acting in the best interests of students. If policy and procedure were followed, school personnel would be more protected from liability as stated in Pennsylvania's Civil Immunity and Municipal Tort Claims Act (Title 42, 2006) in order to provide a safe school environment for students who were required by state law to attend.

A number of court cases ensued as a result of controversy surrounding various administrative interpretations of this zero tolerance policy. These cases challenged the appropriateness of leaders' decisions considered to be either too strict or too discretionary in interpretation. Investigation into the causal factors for these discrepancies revealed that a relationship existed between decisions made by individuals and personality variables. Unanswered was the question regarding the relationship of specific personality characteristics such as trait anxiety and locus of control to both the types of decisions leaders choose, and the relationship of leaders' decisions and leaders' possible discomfort if they perceived that their discretionary interpretation was in conflict with the given educational zero tolerance policy.

The purpose of this study was to determine the degree to which the personality characteristics of trait-anxiety or locus of control influenced leaders' decisional patterns to favor strict, letter of the law policy interpretations versus broad discretionary

interpretations of student zero tolerance policy weapons violations. Did the combined effects of trait-anxiety and locus of control account for any significant amount of variance in the strict versus broad interpretations of zero tolerance policy? And, what was the degree of the leader's personal comfort or discomfort with their personal decision varying from the stated policy directives as a result of their trait anxiety or locus of control? Finally, did additional input from educational leaders explain their decisional preferences?

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As school districts have increased in size and as society has become more complex, school disciplinary policies associated with specific types of school misconduct, are now being imposed on the policy implementers by federal, state and local school organizations. Since this century's advent of federally mandated compulsory school attendance for students between the ages of 8 and 17, the requirement of school officials to provide a safe learning environment for their students and the continued protections of student rights since the 1960s, individual instances within schools and resulting litigation have increased the specificity of how schools respond to deviant youth.

Many of the school disciplinary policies have resulted from congressional and state legislation, which address zero tolerance. The Gun Free School Act of 1994 or 103-382 precipitated these policies. It required states receiving federal educational funds to

...have in effect a State law requiring local educational agencies to expel from school for a period of not less than one year a student who is determined to have brought a weapon to a school under the jurisdiction of local educational agencies in the State, except that such a law shall allow the chief administering officer of

such local educational agency to modify such expulsion requirement for a student on a case-by-case basis (No Child Left Behind, Act of 2000, 2006).

An example of Pennsylvania's interpretation of the federal zero tolerance policy is Act 26 of 1995 known as Pennsylvania's Safe School's Act, which requires public schools to, "report all incidents involving acts of violence, possession of a weapon, or the possession, use or sale of a controlled substance, alcohol or tobacco by any person on school property; at school-sponsored events; and on school transportation to and from school" (*School Violence Weapons Reporting System Training Handbook*, June 2004, p. 86). It also requires schools to maintain updated summary reports of all incidents of violence; incidents involving possession of a weapon; and convictions or adjudications for delinquency for acts committed on school property (SVWRSTH, 2004).

The Safe Schools Act, as amended, requires school districts and area vocational-technical schools to expel, for a period of not less than one year, any student who is determined to have brought onto, or is in possession of, any weapon on any school property; at a school-sponsored activity, or onto any public conveyance providing transportation to a school sponsored activity. The expulsion should be accomplished pursuant to applicable regulations in 24 Pa. Code, Chapters 12 and 14. Every school district and area vocational school should develop a written policy regarding expulsions for the possession of a weapon. Consistent with the federal legislation, the superintendent or administrative director may recommend to the board modifications of such expulsion requirements for students on a case-by-case basis.

In all of the policies associated with zero tolerance, the emphasis is placed on the importance of policy's implementer to act in the best interests of the student(s). The state policies emphasize the importance of school officials *acting in the best interests of the students* to reduce their civil liability. The Pennsylvania Civil Immunity Bill & Municipal Tort Claims Act states that school personnel will be more immune from liability if they: follow district policy; act in the best interest in the health, safety and welfare of the child; do not act in a capricious or arbitrary manner; do not display deliberate indifference; and do not slander a child (PA Municipal Torts Claims Act, 42PA). This law protects officers or employees from civil liability for reporting drug or alcohol abuse involving a student to another school employee or to the parent or legal guardian of that student (42 PA, 2006).

This Tort Claims Act protects employees from liability if they: acted on the knowledge to protect a child, followed school district policy, and consulted with their supervisor. Schools have a duty under state common or statutory law to protect students from foreseeable harm. If an employee has knowledge of a specific danger and neglects to take reasonable precautions to protect the student, and such neglect results from injury to the student, the school is at risk for liability (*Wood v. Strickland*, 1975).

These federal and state laws have required specific actions for instances of student misconduct, particularly in the area of weapon violations, substance abuse and threats of harm to others in order to provide safe schools. This legislation provides mandated directives specifically to those in leadership. Superintendents will have immunity from

liability if they consider three components of expulsion when making recommendations to the board. First, expulsion requirements for students should be considered on a case-by-case basis. Second, expulsion should follow district policy while implementers act in the best interests of the health, safety and welfare of students. Third, the board will consider expulsion of a student while not acting in a capricious or arbitrary manner, display deliberate indifference, or slander a student. Implicit in the definition of the law is that those in administrative authority intend to respond in the best interests of students (Schill, 1993).

#### Local Policy Interpretation

School board policy interprets federal and state directives at the local level. For example, *Pemboke Three Rivers School Handbook* specifies those offenses that result in out-of-school suspensions for up to 10 days for serious rule violations. Examples of those serious offenses listed in the handbook included possession of a weapon, use or under the influence of drugs or alcohol, possession of drugs or alcohol, smoking or possession of tobacco in school or on school grounds (per state law) and use of lighter, matches or lighting a fire (Three Rivers School, 2005, p 4). Their weapons policy states:

Weapons [such as but not limited to firearms, explosives, incendiaries, martial arts weapons (as defined by RSA 159:24), electronic defense weapons (as defined by RSA 159:20), clubs, billies, metallic knuckles, or containers containing



chemicals such as pepper gas or mace] or other items used as weapons are not permitted on school property, on school buses or at school sponsored activities. Student violations of this policy will result in both school disciplinary action and notification of the local police. Suspension or expulsion could result. In addition, any student who is determined to have brought a firearm (as defined by 18 US 921) to school will be expelled for not less than one year (365 days). This expulsion may be modified by the Superintendent upon review of the specific case in accordance with other applicable law. Pursuant to RSA 193:13, IV, the Superintendent may, upon written application of an expelled pupil, recommend to the Board modification to the expulsion. Prior to the School Board's consenting to such a modification, the pupil shall be required to submit to the Superintendent sufficient evidence in the form of letters, work history or other documents or testimony demonstrating that it is in the school's best interest and the pupil's best interest to allow a modification. In making such a decision, due regard will be given to other pupils and staff whose safety and well-being shall be of paramount importance. Weapons under control of law enforcement personnel are permitted. All students will receive written notice of this policy once a year (Three Rivers School, 2005, pp. 15, 16).

While most organizationally determined discipline policies provide for some latitude in the interpretation of policies being implemented, in order to provide for the best interests of students and for the student body as a whole, it is likely that some

implementers (administrators) of the policy are stricter than others in their interpretation of the policy. Ackerman (2003) found that marked differences existed for both teachers and administrators in the degree to which they interpreted zero tolerance. The high degree of restrictive interpretation of a policy by some implementers is evident by the remark of Mark Schultz, a supervisor of public safety for Livonia schools, “You bring a weapon to school, and we are going to take a hard line” (Farhat, 2001). Other school officials have expressed concern about the restrictive nature of some policies. Heaney and Michela (1999) report that principals battle the federal and state zero-tolerance policies and police involvement, which remove them as key decision makers regarding student outcomes.

### Reported Discipline Cases

A number of reported school discipline cases support the conclusion that not all implementers interpret discipline policies in a way that provides for the best interests of students. A study of urban school principals in Michigan indicated, “the disparate interpretation of zero tolerance policy among school leaders and its implementation negatively affected the educational experience of urban students” (Dunbar & Villarruel, 2002, pp 82-104). For instance, on April 13, 1999, inflexible application of the zero tolerance policy was applied to Lisa Smith, an outstanding Lakeview 8<sup>th</sup> grade student who had no prior offenses. She was sent to five months of military-style boot camp for violating the school’s zero tolerance policy by bringing a 20 oz bottle of cherry 7-up

mixed with a few drops of grain alcohol to school (*USA Today*, 1999). In this article the principal stated that his opinions were inconsequential and Lisa Smith was expelled because of the specifications of the school board policies (1999).

Shanon, a 10-year-old honor's student at Twin Peaks Charter Academy in Colorado, was expelled because her mother had put a small knife in her lunchbox to cut an apple. When Shanon realized the knife might violate the school's zero-tolerance policy, she turned it in to the teacher, who told her she had done the right thing. The child was expelled. "The biggest lesson we learned is that these policies don't work when the message to principals and school administrators is you have no choice," said the Assistant Superintendent (*Orlando Sentinel*, 1998, A18). After Shanon's testimony at a state legislative hearing, the Colorado Legislature changed the law to give school administrators more discretion (*Orlando Sentinel*, 1998).

In September 29, 2000, a Cobb County school principal suspended a 6<sup>th</sup> grade girl for bringing to school a 10 inch long chain attached to a Tweety bird wallet saying the trinket chain fell in the same category as swords and nunchaku violated the weapon's policy. The School Board Chairman Lindsey Tippins said, "I thought, when I first heard about [the suspension] ...give me a break, it makes us look stupid" (Rodriguez, 2000).

Other reports continue the history of debate over the interpretation of student actions and the appropriate resulting discipline. Zirkel (1997) reports that a twelve-year-old boy who was an A student, was expelled for one year after his teacher observed him filing his nails with a miniature Swiss Army knife. This court case, *Colvin v. Lowndes*

*County* (1999), resulted in the disagreement over the administrative response to the student who was expelled for bringing an Army knife to school.

The strict versus broad discretionary interpretation of weapons' violations was again publicized when two Waupon fifth graders were suspended for bringing an orange fluorescent toy gun onto the school bus (*Milwaukee J. Sentinel*, 1998). In Georgia, a young man who was an honors student, was suspended for ten days, and then sent to an alternative school when school officials found in his car an ax, a pocketknife used for Boy Scout activities, and a cell phone his father had given to him for safety (*Atlanta Journal & Const*, 2000). The suspension resulted in this student missing a band trip to perform at the White House and a chance to study in a summer honors program (*Atlanta Journal & Const.*, 2000). In other instances, the cases are not debated (*Intelligencer*, 2006, A3). In one case, a 13-year-old seventh grader carrying a replica of an AK-47 fired shots in the ceiling of the school building after first pointing the weapon at two students and a teacher. Also found in his possession was a backpack with a note indicating he had planted an explosive in the school and held military manuals, and instructions on assembling explosive devices with detailed drawings of the school.

The Mukuria study (as cited by Christle et al., 2004) indicated that principals' attitudes toward disciplinary practices significantly impacted the number of student suspensions. He found that principals of schools with low suspension rates, "viewed district policy as a guide rather than a rigid document, while using alternative strategies to suspension" (Christle et. al., 2004, p. 3). The findings of a Maimi-Dade County study

demonstrated a relationship between low suspension rates and principals who used alternative strategies in place of suspension (Christle, 2004).

### Court Cases

A number of federal court cases further illustrate the inconsistency that exists among both legislators and educators in interpretation and implementation of zero tolerance policies in schools. In an unpublished opinion, *Ratner v. Loudoun County Public Schools* (2001), a United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit case, describes a 13 year-old eighth grade student, Ratner who, fearing for the safety of a suicidal peer, takes the knife from his friend who inadvertently brought it to school and placed it in her binder. Ratner stated that his intent was to keep the knife in his locker and tell his parents about the incident after school. As a result, Ratner was suspended for 10 days and following an administrative hearing was suspended for the remainder of the school term. The conflict in interpretation focuses on Ratner's intent to act in the best interests of his friend while at no time posing a threat to harm anyone with the knife.

Writing on his own, Judge Hamilton, noted:

I write separately to express my compassion for Ratner, his family, and common sense....No doubt exists that in adopting these zero-tolerance/automatic suspension policies, school officials had the noble intention of protecting the health and safety of our nation's school children and those adults charged with the

profound responsibility of educating them....Such a [zero tolerance] policy has stripped away judgment and discretion on the part of those administering it; refuting the well established precept that judgment is the better part of wisdom (*Ratner v Loudoun*, 2001).

*Seal v. Morgan* (2000) dealt with the controversy surrounding the decision to expel Seal from high school. As the case asserts, Seal claims that he did not have knowledge that the knife, which belonged to his friend, was placed in the glove compartment of his mother's car that he drove to school. Two issues surfaced in this case. First, some school officials argued that knowledge of the presence of the weapon had no effect on the literal interpretation of the zero tolerance policy of weapon possession on school grounds. The school board member rendering the decision to expel Seal suggested at the expulsion hearing that: the message would be confusing if Seal was not expelled, regardless of Seal's knowledge of the knife in his car. Second, court arguments surrounding this case debated the degree to which student knowledge of the presence of another person's knife in the car and student neglect to report the location of the knife was, by definition, a student's potential intent to harm. In both instances, those in authority to interpret and implement zero tolerance policies differ in the literal or strict interpretation of the law versus the broader interpretation of the law that considers student intent and circumstances surrounding the situation.

Again, *S.G. v. Sayreville* (2003) exemplifies the conflict that ensues by the variation in strict (literal) versus broad (consideration of mitigating circumstances) interpretation and implementation of zero tolerance policy by those educators in authority. This case involved a five-year-old kindergarten student in New Jersey who was suspended from school after he uttered the statement, "I'm going to shoot you" to his friends while they were playing at recess (2003, p. 5). When the principal asked the children what had occurred, they told her that they were "playing guns" (2003, p. 5). The court noted that: "...any analysis of student's rights to expression on the one hand, and of the school's need to control behavior and foster an environment conducive to learning on the other, must necessarily take into account the age and maturity of the student" (2003, p. 5). LaFave's article cited in Hanson's (2004) study noted that, "under common law, children under the age of seven are conclusively presumed to be without criminal capacity, those who have reached the age of fourteen are treated as fully responsible, while those between the ages of seven and fourteen there is a rebuttal presumption of criminal incapacity" (Hanson, 2004, p 35).

A myriad of cases have been argued at both the state and federal judicial levels surrounding the administrative interpretation (strict versus broad) of zero tolerance policies. *Bumdick v. Bay City Independent School District* (2001) argued the claim that the student, Bundick, did not know that a machete was in the toolbox in the truck of his car. *Doe v. Pulaski County Special School District* (2002) involved an eighth grade student's intent to harm in a letter describing how he would rape and murder a classmate

which was interpreted to be perceived as threatening from a reasonable recipient. The court ruled the expulsion did not violate the First Amendment. *LaVine v. Blaine School District (2002)* focused on the disagreement over an interpretation of a poem written by LaVine, an eleventh grade columnist. The poem expressed LaVine's feelings about recent school shootings. The poem described the feelings of a person who shot and killed twenty-eight people at a school two years before and then decided to kill himself because of his fear of killing again. The teacher to whom the poem was submitted for review was concerned, and shared it with the counselor and vice-principal who decided to call the police. The principal, upon review of LaVine's history, consulted with his personnel. The principal was informed that police were involved and were not pressing charges. Even though police charges were not filed, LaVine was expelled because the principal and those he consulted interpreted the poem as threatening with intent to kill. The school board affirmed the expulsion. The debate surrounded if LaVine should have been punished for what he said in his poem.

In *Escatel v. Atherton (1997)* an Illinois court decided against Rumaldo, a tenth grade student, who was suspended then expelled for making and possessing a knife he made in technology class. The making of the knife was not authorized. He then exhibited the knife to other students in the cafeteria and another student took the knife and threw it across the floor. In *Butler v Rio Rancho Public Sch. Bd of Ed., (2003)* a 10<sup>th</sup> circuit court ruled in favor of the school and upheld the one year suspension of a New Mexico high school student who drove to school in a borrowed car that contained his



brother's knife, gun, ammunition and drug paraphernalia. While noticing that the car did not have a permit, the security guard saw the butt end of the knife exposed from between the crack in the seat on the passenger's side of the car. Although the student claimed that he did not know of the car's contents, the court said the student should have known and that the school had a right to uphold its safety standards (2003, p. 5).

Although not explicitly defined by courts, "the best interests of students" may be considered in the case of *Goss v. Lopez* (1975). The United States Supreme Court ruled that students have an entitlement to public education as a property interest protected under the Due Process Clause which includes students that have, "a liberty interest in protecting their 'good name, reputation, honor or integrity.'" Thus, states must provide procedural safeguards when suspending or expelling students due to misconduct (1975).

Insley's (2001) review of zero tolerance policies concludes that, "The Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court found that the school exceeded its authority by adopting a zero tolerance policy that failed to include discretionary review . . ." (p. 9). Numerous cases such as a young girl being expelled for telling her teacher she had her mother's lunch box which contained a paring knife, to a 1998 incident of two elementary boys suspended for playing with a bright orange plastic toy gun, indicate the wide range of zero tolerance policy interpretation by administrators who either more strictly (rigidly) or more broadly (considering mitigating circumstances) apply their administrative discretion. Insley (2001) states, "A review of the evidence will reveal that disciplining

children through these questionably effective [zero tolerance] policies lacks the logic and the reasonableness that should be the basis for initiatives addressing school discipline” (p. 9).

The 1999 case of *Lyons v. Penn Hills School District* (1999), Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court found that zero tolerance policy interpretation of the superintendent’s and school board’s understanding of the zero tolerance policy which resulted in the expulsion of a seventh grade student who was “filing his nails with a small pen-knife” exceeded its authority and “failed to include discretionary review” of the circumstances that surrounded the case. Key concepts in the interpretation and implementation of these laws include “best interests of students”, “intent to harm” and “disruption to the learning environment.” The *Board of Trustees v. T.H.* (1996) decision reinforces administrators’ ability to exercise leniency and flexibility in zero tolerance policy interpretation. Although the law states, “best interests of students,” the Supreme Court defers to the comprehensive authority of state and school officials to maintain control of student conduct. *Hammock v Keys* (2000) affirms that the federal courts are not to intervene and change decisions of school administrators even if the court may view these administrative decisions as lacking a basis in wisdom or compassion or being too strictly interpreted.

## Decision Making

Hanson's (2005) summary of the history of zero tolerance policies in education identifies two critical elements that effect implementer interpretation of zero tolerance policies while acting in the best interest of students. Hanson (2005) states, "Ironically, when [students] who commit violent acts in the school context are tried as adults, [student] intent becomes a relevant element to be proven by the state 'beyond a reasonable doubt'" (p. 9). Conversely, if students are evaluated for the act of violence in the school context with the ensuing suspension or expulsion under the strict liability of zero tolerance policy, then the student's intent is neither a subject to be proven by authorities nor are students required to have knowledge of the act for which they are punished" (Hanson, 2005, p. 9). Thus, the absence of school authorities' need to determine student "intent" implies administrative "blind administration of zero tolerance policies" with their abdication of responsibility due to "administrative constraints" (Hanson, 2005, p. 10).

Wasser (1999) identifies six reasons why school administrators choose to strictly interpret zero tolerance policy for student infractions that result in suspension or expulsion, even when mitigating circumstances seem to warrant administrative leniency or the more broad interpretation of such cases. Wasser stated, these administrators: (1) believe zero tolerance policies abolish their discretion or considerations mitigate against leniency under any circumstances; (2) do not realize they have discretion as a choice, regardless of the circumstances and punish students more severely than is justified by

their conduct; (3) understand their options but choose to rigidly adhere to zero tolerance prescriptions justifying their decision because they want to send a clear message to all students, or because they want to maintain an ongoing positive relationship with school boards who review their decision; (4) maintain that uniformly treating students who break a school rule ensures fairness and using discretion will favor students who get good grades versus those who struggle academically; (5) fear of litigation despite risk of media embarrassment for punishing minor offenses and seeming silly; and (6) believe they are ensuring school safety.

Why do some implementers of organizationally determined school discipline policies tend to be less restrictive than others in their interpretation? It may be reasoned that some people are motivated to explore the range of interpretations of a policy in their effort to provide for the best interests of students. Their failure to do so would create a tremendous dilemma for that implementer of the policy. Conversely, implementers who are more restrictive in their interpretation of these policies may experience a greater degree of comfort when strictly applying the rules and potentially more discomfort when required to increase their range of interpretation of the policies.

Mattison's (1994) survey of New York State Social Workers addressed the issue of dilemma experienced by implementers of organizationally determined policies. While most respondents to the dilemmas concerned themselves with the legal mandates, results indicated that some respondents were more inclined to routinely select actions, which were consistent with the legal obligation. Others more consistently relied on the

individual circumstances of the case and exercised “discretionary latitude or judgment in resolving dilemmas of the law.” Her study ruled out the significant relationship of gender and years of experience on decision-maker’s choices of action, but found that the rule-oriented vs. discretionary tendencies of respondents may predispose workers to select certain types of solutions to dilemmas (Mattison, 1994). If implementers are predisposed to either rule-oriented or discretionary tendencies during situations that may elicit a sense of dilemma, then this relationship implies that those implementers who are most restrictive in their implementation appear to be more rule oriented in policy interpretation than those who tend to interpret the discipline policies more broadly, using them as a guide rather than a rule for disciplinary decisions.

Canto-Sperber (as cited in Langlois, 2004) maintains that in order for people to act ethically, they must demonstrate more than good intentions and the desire to act righteously; they must use precise knowledge, rationale and procedures when problem-solving. The Langlois (2004) study looked at the decision processes superintendents use to solve complex problems and found that administrative and legal aspects did not constitute the overriding element that allowed these superintendents to justify their decision. Consideration of these elements represented an important stage [in decision-making], but the legalities did not ultimately represent the justification for the decision. Instead, administrators would appeal to their personal and professional judgments of what they consider to be “good” or “bad” (Langolis, 2004, p. 85). For these zero tolerance policy implementers, it is likely that their failure to provide for the best interests of the

students is neither a purposeful disregard for the best interests of the students by their strict or more rigid interpretation of school policy nor is it necessarily their knowledge of the students' needs. Rather, their restrictive or broad interpretation of the discipline policy probably is a reflection of their own predispositions or personality (Langolis, 2004).

### Personality Characteristics

An explanation for the variation in the extent of comfort (dilemma) observed between broad versus strict interpreters of zero tolerance policy, under conditions where both are required to implement a strict interpretation of the policy, may be due to differences in selected personal characteristics of the implementers of the policies. Although several personal characteristics of policy implementers may be considered, the two in particular, which seem most relevant are anxiety and locus of control. Larson et al. (1990) identified locus of control as a significant predictor of problem-solving appraisal. He recommended further study of internal versus external locus of control and the effects of anxiety on problem-solving appraisal (Larson, 1990). Locus of control is included as a predictor variable because research has demonstrated a relationship between locus of control (internal and external) and the person's perceived discretion in decision-making (Carpenter & Golden, 1997). In particular, Meyer finds that externally oriented people tend to attribute their success or failure to chance or powerful others

while internally oriented people assume responsibility for their decisions (Meyer, et al., 2002).

Anxiety is the second personal characteristic, which has been shown to cause people to interpret situations differently (Spielberger, 1983). Trait anxiety is the predisposition of an individual to respond anxiously. State anxiety is the response an individual makes to a specific situation. Because anxiety correlates with many other personality factors such as impulsivity, aggression, dominance, and social recognition (Spielberger, 1983), it may be reasoned that anxiety, unlike other individual personality measures, may account for a significant amount of variance in predicting the behavior of zero tolerance policy implementers.

### *Trait Anxiety*

Early 1960s research by Campbell and Atkinson investigated a general personal characteristic called trait anxiety. Trait anxiety may be defined as the predisposition of an individual to respond anxiously. This definition was further developed by Spielberger (1970), Land and Cuthberth (1984) and Mogg (1989). These researchers defined trait anxiety (A-trait) as a relatively stable anxiety proneness that is part of *an* individual's behavioral disposition, which effects a person's response to a wide range of future-oriented situations that are perceived by that individual as dangerous or threatening. This quality is also described as hypervigilance to threat-related information (Matthews & MacLeod, 1994). There are basically two theoretical approaches explaining the nature of

trait anxiety: neurophysiological and cognitive. Neurophysiological theories of trait anxiety have tried to substantiate its biological nature in terms of constitutional characteristics in the functioning of the central nervous system. Susceptibility to anxiety would depend on a greater reactivity of the behavioral inhibition system, which mainly consists of the septo hippocampal system; this reactivity makes high-anxiety individuals especially sensitive to signals of punishment, non-reward, and novelty. In a further extension of this approach, neuro-chemical research has identified neurotransmitters such as norepinephrine, serotonin, and gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), acting on the above-mentioned and related brain areas, which may mediate the sensitivity to signals of punishment in high-anxiety individuals (Pi et al., 1994).

Trait anxiety known as A-Trait is different from state anxiety. Unlike trait anxiety that is a general personal characteristic, state anxiety is the response that individuals make to a *specific situation*. Both A-trait individuals and individuals who feel specific situational anxiety will experience similar affect in subjective, emotional reactions such as apprehension, worry, affective or behavioral conflicts, and altered approach/avoidance behaviors (Kelly, 2004; Paulus, 2004). However, A-trait individuals will have an increased propensity to experience those situationally triggered emotions. A number of investigators have demonstrated the effect of anxiety on individuals making decisions. In particular, Popper et al. (2004) have identified anxiety as one of the most discriminant variables influencing a leader's decision making (Loevinger & Knoll, 1983).



Research suggests that highly anxious implementers of zero tolerance school policy are likely to interpret zero tolerance school policy more strictly by limiting their decisions to the letter of the institution's policy or persons in higher authority rather than risk the anxiety producing emotions and personal threat in which their more flexible decision may result. A number of studies provide support for this observation. Lazarus & Averill (1972) found that high trait-anxiety people experience existential emotion while interpreting situations with apprehension or threat, particularly those situations which appear to have uncertain consequences. Klein (1999) identifies uncertainty as a key factor which effects situational decision-making. He concurs with Lipshitz and Shaul's (1997) definition of uncertainty described as doubt that threatens to block action. The research observations of Hibbert (1984), McNally (1990), and Spielberger, Gorsuch & Lushene (1970) state that anxious persons, more than others, are faced with threats to their personal inadequacy. Trait anxiety people interpret ambiguous stimuli in a more threat-relevant manner (Mac Cloud & Cohen, 1993). This follows Matthew and Butler's (1987) research that found more anxious subjects gave lower probabilities for good events (low utility) and higher probabilities for bad events (Eisenberg, Baron & Seligman, 2005).

People may have a lack of mental order and clarity that often results from their heightened emotional reaction to a situation that is subjectively perceived as threatening, or their fear of incorrectly interpreting the events. The mental confusion associated with this threatening situation may require those implementers of policy to seek to adhere to

the letter of the zero tolerance policy or “strictly interpret” rather than risk adverse consequences. Anxiety has been shown to cause people to cognitively interpret situations differently (Spielberger, 1983). The effects of high trait anxiety on individuals may range from processing the situational information less systematically, producing errors during conflict processing such as being overly focused on less significant facts, and avoidance of making a decision.

Further support for the effects of trait anxiety on decision-making is provided by Eyesenk (1992) who notes that, “individuals high in trait anxiety tend to differ in their attention functioning than less anxious individuals; and, “... implicitly, anxiety narrows attention... and interferes with judgment and decision making such that the individual processes information less systematically” (Halbern, 2004, p. 8).

Carter et al. (1988), Jones et al. (2002), and Paulus (2004) identified levels of trait anxiety in individual error and conflict processing, particularly correlated to tasks that required low-error-rate conditions. Mann and his investigators describe this condition as hypervigilance which is a state characterized by high stress, a marked deterioration in thinking and judgment, and of most interest, a narrowing in perception of options and an incomplete and haphazard search for information (Janis & Mann, 1977).

Research indicates that the relationship of an individual’s heightened emotional response to uncertain situations with uncertain outcomes will cause these individuals to be distracted from making accurate decisions. Their anxiety will likely increase if they are required to interpret policy more broadly than the stated literal policy when they feel

personally threatened by the perceived consequences of their decisions given the unknown impact on all students and administrative personnel involved. “The presence of anxiety suggests that an existential threat has not been successfully controlled by emotion-focused (cognitive) coping activity; if it were controlled, the anxiety would be short-circuited” (Lazarus, 1991, p. 238). Snizek et al. (2004) indicate that, “There are many sources of uncertainty for those who attempt to influence the events of a crisis, the cause of the problem and its extent or duration may be unknown, or unknowable at the time of the event....While some of the uncertainty results from the rapid onset of the crisis, some of it is due to the inherent complexity and unpredictability of the events comprising the crisis” (p. 1). “To be effective, crisis management involves making good decisions under severe time pressure and uncertainty” (Snizek, 2004, p. 2). Thus, zero tolerance policy implementers’ high trait anxiety may influence their decisions and their ability to act in the best interests of the students when the implementer is under conditions of uncertainty or under conditions where policy interpretation requires a broader interpretation.

Individuals prone to trait anxiety are more likely to struggle with decisions during high stress, uncertain situations in which the individual is expending great energy controlling for their emotions rather than focusing on the solution to the situations. Due to the fact that decision makers, as do all individuals, desire to avoid the unpleasant emotions elicited by their anxiety, they are more likely, if feeling this emotion, to attempt to use any option to decrease their anxiety. The summary of research by Janis & Mann

(1977) provides additional support for the expectation that high anxious implementers of a zero tolerance school policy will tend to be oriented towards rules, structure or opinions generated by others they believe to be important or in authority than individuals who are less anxious. Mann addresses Lewin's 1935 conflict theory which notes that people tend to withdraw from stressful conflict situations if negative consequences will ensue from any choice that will be made (Janis & Mann, 1977). The decision maker may participate in defensive-avoidance in which case the person evades the conflict by shifting responsibility for making the decision to someone else (1977).

Eisenberg, Baron & Seligman (2005) found a high correlation of anxiety and risk aversion or one's tendency to avoid options associated with uncertain outcomes that differ in their desirability adding to Barron's (1994) research. If a zero-tolerance policy implementer has, "...an illusion of no real choice, or the reality of a severely limited choice, [it results in] a rapid termination of a decisional conflict. It allows the decision maker to suppress worry and take a passive role in decision making since there seems to be nothing else he can do" (Janis & Mann, 1977, p. 225). An "illusion of no real choice" means that the decision-maker perceives himself as helpless, unable to control the events of one's own life, and thus, is unable to cope with the anticipated danger or situation" (Barlow, 2000, p. 4).

If social pressure is influential enough to make an immediate decision, the decision maker's fears of the unknown consequences may cause him to participate in anticipatory regret or postpone commitment to what he has already decided is the best

course of action (Janis & Mann, 1977). Thus, it is probable that the highly anxious decision-maker will acquiesce to the more strictly (letter of the policy) defined rules of the institution or the social pressures of those in authority.

Unlike the highly anxious implementer of zero tolerance school policy, research suggests that low anxious implementers will interpret zero tolerance school policy more broadly by not being limited by the letter of the institution's policy. Larson's (1989) research indicates that low trait anxiety leads to better performance in stressful situations. Westman (1990) states that what he terms "hardy individuals" tend to interpret events as less stressful. These less anxious people do not perceive the situation as any less challenging; instead the hardy individuals view themselves as possessing adequate resources to cope with the situation. Westman (1990) continues by stating that these individuals tend to perceive and interpret a situation in more benign terms. Low-anxious individuals, therefore, experience less emotional upheaval, and in turn, their coping efforts are directed less toward assuaging disruptive emotion and thought, and more toward solving the problems of the different stressful demands (Westman, 1990). Baron (1994) notes that rational decision makers consider the utility of the situation and the probability that the risky option will result in the better outcome. Research on effective leaders demonstrated that commanders were able to overcome uncertainty during stressful situations by not being paralyzed by fear and doubt and instead, acting with decisiveness and prudence (Klein, 1999).

As the anxiety research has demonstrated, high trait anxious people tend to experience existential emotion while interpreting situations with apprehension or threat, particularly those situations which appear to have uncertain consequences. The effects of high trait anxiety on individuals may range from processing the situational information less systematically, producing increased errors during conflict processing, avoiding making a decision, responding helplessly or passively and deferring to those in authority or shifting the responsibility for the decision to others.

Conversely, the low trait anxious people appear to experience more benign emotions during situations in which decisions are required and are able to focus on the solution. These individuals seem to understand the risks but infer positive outcomes. It may be reasoned that for low anxious implementers, the tension between the need to adhere to a restrictive definition of the policy and the desire to provide for the best interest of the student, may have less effect on them, which in turn allows the low-trait anxious implementer to interpret the zero tolerance policy more broadly.

### *Locus of Control*

Rotter's (1966) research developed the early social learning theorists' definition of locus of control as one's perceived control is the expectancy for internal versus external control of reinforcements.

The generalized expectancy of internal control, refers to the perception of events, whether positive or negative, as being a consequence of one's own actions and thereby potentially under personal control. The generalized expectancy of external control, on the other hand, refers to the perception of positive or negative events as being unrelated to one's own behavior and therefore beyond personal control (Lefcourt, 1982, p. 48).

Internal locus-of-control people see the relationship between actions and outcomes whereas external locus-of-control people do not perceive such contingencies (Lefcourt, 1982, p. 37). Lefcourt (1982) cites the Crown and Liverant (1963) study which indicated,

that when the stakes of success are of some value to the individual, persons characterized as internals are more trusting of their own judgments than are externals. The difference between the groups was apparently due to the fact that externals have more confidence in the consensual judgments of others than they do in their own independent judgments. (p. 48)

Weiss and Adler (1984) indicate that situations which allow various interpretations and responses to identical issues will be more likely influenced by individual personality difference that influence decision making behaviors (Weiss & Adler, 1984). External locus-of-control people identify changes due to events beyond individual or personal

behavior. Hwang (2000) also notes that people who have a strong external locus of control are not likely to participate in activities to bring about change. Internal locus of control people expect that their actions do affect change and are more likely to act to affect change (Sia et al., 1985, Sivek & Hungerford, 1989 cited by Hwang, 2000).

Seeman (1963) found that internals make better use of information than externals given that they are provided with the same sources of information (Lefcourt, 1982). Lefcourt and Wine (1969) found that internals were more likely to attend to the situational cues that resolve uncertainties.

In a 1964 study of problem solving versus emotional reactions, Kahn and his colleagues observed that externals used fewer problem-solving strategies and more emotion-directed devices such as withdrawal than internals; and, externals were found to perceive situations to be more stressful (Lefcourt, 1982). Manuck et al.'s research (as cited in Lefcourt, 1982) found that externals felt more anxious than internals in the absence of stressful events. Midlarski's 1971 study found, "that internals were more likely to help another individual than were externals despite the fact that they were penalized for doing so....[and] that internals are more tolerant of discomfort in doing what they consider to be correct than externals" (Lefcourt, 1982, p. 57).

In addition, Alker and Poppin (1973) found that those who were internals were more likely to be at the level of moral principled reasoning on Kohlberg's moral judgment development scale than were those who were externals. The people who used principled reasoning had the perspective that,



...rational individuals are aware of values and rights prior to social attachments and contracts and [are able to] integrate perspectives by formal mechanisms of agreement, contract, objective impartiality, and due process. [They] consider moral and legal points of view, and recognize that they sometimes conflict and find it difficult to integrate them” (Colby et al., 1987, p. 19).

These individuals are able to rationally calculate the overall utility of the “greatest good for the greatest number” and understand that certain overriding principles such as life and liberty “... must be upheld in any society, regardless of majority opinion” (Colby et al., p. 19). Principled reasoning differs from the previous conventional stage in that conventional individuals perceive situations in that, “laws are to be upheld except in extreme cases where they conflict with other fixed social duties....and takes the point of view of the system that defines roles and rules” (Colby et al., p. 19). One can infer from this research that principled reasoning people are most likely to be internals and, thus, are more inclined to interpret zero tolerance policy more broadly.

Milgram (1965) found that externals were more likely to harm others when socially pressured than internals. The Milgram experiment required subjects to administer a series of increasingly strong electric shocks to the hand of a respectable looking middle-aged man. The subjects were given the impression that they were shocking the victim and inflicting pain, even though no actual shocks were delivered to

this man. The results of this study indicated that at that time, “A substantial proportion of people do what they are told to do, irrespective of the content of the act and without limitations of conscience, so long as they perceive that the command comes from a legitimate authority” (Lefcourt, 1982, p. 44). His research also supported previous research that, “internal locus of control can operate as a bulwark against the unquestioning submission to authority” (Lefcourt, 1982, p. 58). As noted by Kelman and Lawrence (1972):

An individual who is normatively integrated is bound to the system by virtue of the fact that he accepts the system’s right to set the behavior of its members within a prescribed domain...in which the question of personal values and roles has become irrelevant....[this person] regards compliance with the system as a highly proper and valued orientation. When he is faced with demands to support the system he is likely to comply without question, since he regards it as his obligation to do so (pp. 204-205).

For instance, Johnson et al.’s (1968) research results found that people who were identified to have an internal-locus-of-control orientation were more likely to resist pressures to commit immoral acts and suffer ostracism, tolerate pain for doing what they considered to be right and were willing to risk social rejection for what they considered proper behavior (Lefcourt, 1982, p. 57).

Thus, resistance to orders and the acceptance of responsibility when one is compliant to them is said to derive from the person's maintenance of a framework of personal causation, and the ability to differentiate or assess the quality of demands made upon him.... [and] the locus of control dimension describes the manner in which one commonly ascribes responsibility for one's experiences. Persons who perceive themselves as the active determiners of their fates should more readily accept responsibility for their outcomes and, therefore, should be more discriminating about what they will and will not do in obedience to others (Lefcourt, 1982, p. 46).

These studies suggest that implementers of zero-tolerance discipline policy who experience little ethical dilemma while compliant to externally governed laws may be unaware that their decision may be inappropriate for that student. Buck (2003) notes that the stressful nature of the situation is the result of the extent to which the person sees the situation as a challenge, feels committed to solving the problem, and feels they can control the situation. Successful managers of critical situations are often characterized by personality traits of open-mindedness and flexibility (Buck, et. al., 1994). Kelly's Personal Construct Theory notes a continuum of skills. It characterized individuals by their rigid evaluations of information, their rejection of information they perceived to be dissonant, and their degree of submissiveness to authority (Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977).

The relationship between locus of control and conformity to social influence techniques has also received attention. A wide range of studies reported that externals are more likely than internals to conform to group judgment (Crowne & Liverant, 1963) and to change their attitude to conform to authority (Ryckman et al., 1972). “Internals, on the other hand, are more likely to resist external influence techniques” (Ryckman, 1972, p.198). They prefer a preference for personal control, and compared to externals demonstrate a greater willingness to abdicate control (Julian & Katz, 1968).

Furthermore, internals have been found to respond more negatively than externals to attempts by others to influence their attitudes or behaviors (Biondo & MacDonald, 1971; Doctor, 1971). Externals on the other hand, are readily responsive to prestigious sources of influence (Getter, 1966; Lecourt, 1976; Ritchie & Phares, 1969); however, they appear to be less effective than internals in the use of skills involved in self-control behavior (Bellack, 1975; Heaton & Duerfeldt, 1973). This is often descriptive of people with external locus of control. Lefcourt’s (1983) analysis of these relationships leads him to conclude that if individuals believe they are the responsible agents or sources of their own life’s fortunes, they will resist influence attempts that aim to bypass his own sense of moral justice, and will only respond to those appeals that address themselves to their own beliefs and values. In effect, this research suggests the internals may demonstrate negative response to situations in which they are required to implement zero tolerance policies that do not permit the internals to take into

consideration the mitigating circumstances that will ensure consideration of the best interests of students.

A number of investigators allude to the concept of locus of control when they discuss the characteristics of decision-makers. People who are more complexly skilled individuals are shown to exhibit flexible and open cognitive systems, a search for novelty and further information and the ability to consider multiple points of view simultaneously (Buck, 2003). Dixon's (1976) study highlighted characteristics that differentiate the effective or ineffective decision makers. He found that field dependency was related to aspects of people's perception to the extent to which the individuals could ignore irrelevant impressions when these conflict with other sources of sensory information, and the degree to which people can respond analytically rather than globally to the mass of information reaching them. These field dependent people tended to be more passive, conforming and authoritarian (Buck, 2003).

Kobasa (1979) would define a hardy person as one who can encompass commitment, control and challenge. Committed people have belief systems that are distinct, with goals and priorities that allow the person to handle any given stressful life situation. Kobasa's definition of control of one's own behavior or the hardy person, is very similar to Rotter's definition of internal locus of control. Control is defined as individuals' beliefs that they can control or influence the events in their experience. Individuals in control of their own responses, according to Kobasa anticipate change as a

challenge and are well practiced at responding to the unexpected (Buck, 2003). As Suedfeld & Tetlock (1977) would purport,

integrative complexity is seen as a mental state dependent on the interaction between environmental characteristics and an individual's capabilities. Low integrative complexity is characterized by rigidity, gross distinctions, simple responses and restricted information usage. High complexity uses flexibility, fine distinctions, complexity and extensive information search and usage (pp.169-184).

Internals are believed to create their own performance criteria, whereas externals depend on externally produced criteria, especially when contingency conditions are ambiguous (Bellack, 1972). "Internals also avail themselves of cues from multiple sources [that is], external feedback and task attributes- making self-reinforcement decisions" (Bellack, 1972, p. 198).

### Summary of Literature Review

A review of the literature indicates that internals who believe that they are in control of their own behavior and decisions, often create their own decision making criteria; sort irrelevant environmental information or cues; use complex, flexible and researched responses to unexpected situations; and anticipate change. The research also indicates that internals are less likely to conform to group judgment and less likely to

conform to authority. They are willing to help individuals and face punitive consequences, being able to tolerate discomfort to maintain their convictions. Additional research has indicated that internals are more open-minded and flexible because they perceive that they can be in control of both their own behavior and the events presented to them, which, therefore, allows them to see a difficult situation as a challenge, and focus on the problem to be solved. This more flexible, non-conforming characteristic of the internal-locus-of-control person may predispose them to interpret zero tolerance policy more broadly if needed, and to act in what they perceive as the best interests of the children, without conforming to the institutional precedence in policy implementation.

Conversely, a summary of the literature indicates a pattern where externals tend to perceive events outside of their own control and unrelated to their own behavior. Because they do not believe that their actions influence change, their decisions concerning situations tend to be more influenced by environmental stressors and pressures and by the opinions and judgments of peers.

Researchers also see a pattern in the extent to which externally oriented people use less complex thinking, use less of the provided information which may be distorted and the criteria for their decision may be determined by others, such as policy or those in authority. Apparently, externals are more willing to abdicate control or responsibility to a higher authority, especially those of prestigious influence, or interpret events using more rigid “rules or policies”, particularly in uncertain situations with uncertain consequences or both. They appear to be less capable of being in control of their own behavior, and

tend to display discomfort in approaching a decision that would not conform to the status quo, acquiescing to social pressure, even if it may harm those involved. It may be reasoned that externals, socially influenced, rely on pre-established institutional zero tolerance policy and thus strictly interpret zero tolerance policy while perceiving that they are acting in the best interests of the students.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### Introduction

Federal court cases and individual press accounts indicate that zero tolerance policy implementers' interpretations vary during individual decision-making. One explanation for this observation involves differences in the selected personality characteristics of the implementers of zero tolerance policies. The results of numerous investigations indicate that a relationship exists between decisions made by individuals and the personality variables of trait anxiety and locus of control. It follows that these variables would account for a significant amount of variance in predicting the broad or strict interpretation of zero tolerance policy by the implementer.

Thus, this investigation has two major purposes. First, this study attempts to determine the relationship between implementers' personal characteristics of anxiety and locus of control and the degree of comfort or discomfort they experience when no opportunity is provided for them to interpret a school zero tolerance discipline policy. Second, this study attempts to determine the relationship between the school policy interpreters' personal characteristics of trait-anxiety, and locus of control (internal or external), and the degree to which the implementers, when given a choice, would choose to interpret an organizationally determined discipline school policy either strictly or broadly. Lefcourt's research supports this concept in that people who demonstrate

internal locus of control can operate as a bulwark against unquestioning submission to authority. Crowne & Liverant's (1963) and Ritchie's et al. (1969) studies also support this "submission" premise and, thus, suggest that externals are more prone than internals to conform to group judgment and change their personal attitudes to conform to those in authority during situations that involve decision making. This conforming attitude was an observation also noted in studies of the relationship of locus of control and people's perceived discretion in decision-making by Carpenter and Golden (1997). Anxiety as a second predictive variable was considered based on a large body of research in addition to the more recent work of Popper et al. (2004) who has identified anxiety as one of the most discriminant variables that influence leaders' decision-making.

### Hypotheses

*Hypothesis I:* A statistically significant relationship (correlation) is predicted between subject's level of trait-anxiety and the level of comfort subjects experience under conditions where they are required to implement a non-interpretable or strict zero tolerance policy and the extent to which subjects would broadly or strictly interpret zero tolerance policy.

*Hypothesis II:* A statistically significant relationship is predicted between locus of control (internal vs. external) and the degree of comfort (dilemma) experienced by implementers under conditions where they are required to implement a strict

interpretation of zero tolerance policy and the extent to which subjects broadly or strictly interpret zero tolerance policy when given a choice.

*Hypothesis III:* A statistically significant increase is not predicted in the amount of variance accounted for by the combined effect of the predictive variables, locus of control and anxiety, on zero tolerance criterion variables identified in the two criterion measures. While research provides support for predicting a statistically significant relationship between the individual predictive variables and the respective criterion variables, research is not available to support the prediction of an increase in the amount of variance accounted for by the combined effects of anxiety and locus of control.

This chapter summarizes the study procedures and includes detailed information regarding the study participants including their biographical information, their educational experiences and their understanding and experience with zero tolerance policy and related litigation. Included in the chapter is a description of the data collection instruments used including information regarding reliability for the summated Likert scores/values where appropriate. The final sections of the chapter describe the data collection steps and provide a synthesis of the data analysis procedures.

### Procedure Overview

Penn State University Educational Leadership graduate students, who were considered to be representative of the general population of zero tolerance policy implementers in the public schools, were invited to participate in this study. Subjects

were asked to complete two personality measures, the *Spielberger Trait/State Anxiety Self-Evaluation Questionnaire* (Spielberger, 1983) and the *Rotter Locus of Control Scale* (Rotter, 1966) and one criterion measure scale, the *Zero Tolerance Administrator Interpretation Decision Scale* (Moore, 2005) either by electronic confidential submission (supersurvey.com) or via hard copy survey. The *Spielberger Trait/State Anxiety Self-Evaluation Questionnaire* identified degrees of individual trait anxiety and the *Rotter Locus of Control Scale* determined subjects' degree of locus of control. The *Zero Tolerance Administrator Interpretation Decision Scale (ZTAIDS)* measured degree of comfort with policy decisions, degree of strict versus broad interpretation of policy, and an explanation of decisions rendered.

Following subjects' completion of these measures and the collection of the data, the data were analyzed through the use of a Pearson-Product Moment correlation (PPMr) and regression analysis to determine the amount of variance the individual and combined personality factors accounted for regarding the decision-makers' tendencies toward broad or strict interpretation of zero tolerance policy. In addition, a content analysis of the explanations of ZTAIDS decisions was completed for the identified 20% most strict and 20% most broad interpreters to determine specific factors that may influence their interpretation decisions. Subjects also were requested to provide personal demographic information and information related to their educational experience. Finally, subjects were asked to respond to student best interest questions and administrator responsibility questions.

## Study Participants

Approximately two hundred Penn State University students who were enrolled in either the masters or doctoral Educational Leadership programs during Spring Semester 2006 were invited to participate in this study. Seventy students participated, but only fifty students completed all components of both the predictive and the criterion scales (instruments). Therefore, the data analyses are based only on the 50 subjects that completed the entire survey.

*Demographic Profile.* The demographic data are presented in Table 3.1. The results indicated 90% of subjects were white, 8% were Black non-Hispanic, 2% were Asian, with a distribution of 52% male and 48% female subjects. The age of subjects ranged from 7% under the age of 30, 48% between the ages of 30 and 39, 24% between the ages of 40-49 and 4% over the age of 50.

Table 3.1

*Participants' Demographic Information*

Variable	Number	Valid Percent
Gender (n=50)		
Female	24	48.0
Male	26	52.0
Ethnicity (n=50)		
White non Hispanic	45	90.0
Black non Hispanic	4	8.0
Asian Pacific Islander	1	2.0
Age (n=50)		
Less than 30 yrs	7	14.0
30 through 39 yrs	24	48.0
40 through 49 yrs	12	24.0
50 yrs or older	7	14.0

*Educational Background.* The majority of subjects in this study had more experience in the middle school and high school environments than in elementary schools as can be observed in Table 3.2. Sixty percent of those surveyed reported they had no elementary experience, 38% indicated they had no middle school experience and 51% indicated no high school education experience.

Table 3.2

*Summary of Subjects' Professional Educational Experience.*

Location of School District	Number	Valid Percent
Where Employed (n=50)		
Rural	25	50.0
Suburban	17	34.0
City	8	16.0
Elementary Education Experience (n=50)		
None	30	60.0
1 through 4 yrs	14	28.0
5 through 10 yrs	5	10.0
11 through 15 yrs	1	2.0
16 or more yrs	0	0.0
Middle School Education Experience (n=50)		
None	19	38.0
1 through 4 yrs	10	20.0
5 through 10 yrs	12	24.0
11 through 15 yrs	4	8.0
16 or more yrs	5	10.0
High School Education Experience (n=49)		
None	25	51.0
1 through 4 yrs	6	12.2
5 through 10 yrs	12	24.5
11 through 15 yrs	3	6.1
16 or more yrs	3	6.1

Participants' experience among those subjects who indicated they were practicing professionals in the field of education was categorized into four levels based on years: 1-4 years of experience, 5-10 years of experience, and 11-15 years of experience and 16 or more years of experience. Twenty-eight percent of experienced educators reported

they had 1-4 years of experience in elementary education, 20% had 1-4 years of experience in middle schools and 12% had 1-4 years of experience in high schools as educational professionals. Ten percent of subjects had 5-10 years of experience in elementary, 24% had 5-10 years of experience at the middle school and 24% had 5-10 years experience at the high school. Only 2% of those surveyed said they had more than 11 years of experience at the elementary level, 18% at the middle school and 12% at the high school level.

The educational experience information (Table 3.2) indicated that 50% of subjects currently practiced in rural districts, 34% practiced in suburban and 16% practiced in urban districts. It was expected that these professionals who indicated experience as practicing professionals were likely to have exposure to zero tolerance policy in their current professional positions and were likely to be representative of the larger population of practicing implementers of zero tolerance policies.

*Background Regarding Zero Tolerance Policy.* The degree to which subjects reported their knowledge of zero tolerance policy and surrounding litigation was divided. Forty-eight percent of subjects reported awareness that they had a district zero tolerance policy, 32% reported they did not have a zero tolerance policy and 20% indicated they did not know if the district had a policy. Of the 48% who knew they had a policy, 56% of those reported that they knew what their zero tolerance policy said, and 44% indicated they did not know what the policy said. Fifty-eight percent were familiar with zero tolerance policy legal cases while only 26% reported awareness of zero tolerance policy



litigation that involved their district. Almost half the subjects in this study, 46% indicated they had been required to make decisions regarding zero tolerance policy infractions as a practicing professional.

#### Instrumentation for Data Collection

This research study intended to determine the influence of subjects' trait anxiety and locus of control, both individually and collectively, on participants' degree of comfort with decisions rendered in zero tolerance policy cases and participants' choice of a strict or broad interpretation when rendering a decision about student weapons infractions. Data were collected through the use of three web administered instruments (measures). The two predictive measures or instruments were the *Rotter Locus-of-Control Scale* (1966) and the *Spielberger Trait/State Anxiety Self-Evaluation Questionnaire* (1983). The criterion measure was the *Zero Tolerance Administrator Interpretation Decision Scale* (Moore, 2005).

*Trait Anxiety Scale. The Spielberger Trait/State Anxiety Self-Evaluation Questionnaire* (1983) was selected to measure trait-anxiety because of its construct validity for adult populations (Spielberger, 1983). Although the questionnaire measured both state and trait anxiety, for the purposes of this study only the trait anxiety component was used. Subjects answered 20 questions using a 1-4 Likert response scale. A rating of 4 indicated the presence of high anxiety with a total theoretical score range between 20 and 80. The general adult population mean was 35.06 with a standard deviation of 9. The

higher the subject score on the scale indicated a higher degree of trait anxiety. According to the norms established by Spielberger (1983): highly anxious people would have a score greater than 53; moderately anxious people would have a score of 44-53; average anxiety was in the range of 26-44; moderately low anxious people would have a score of 17-26; very low anxious people would have a score of 17 or lower (16).

The *Spielberger Trait/State Anxiety Self Evaluation* instrument is a highly valid instrument and provides highly reliable summated scores/values. Spielberger et al. (1983) indicate a Cronbach alpha internal consistency value of .94 for state anxiety and a Cronbach alpha internal consistency value of .90 for state anxiety. Salkind (2006) recommends that reliability coefficients of .70 or higher are acceptable with values of .80 and higher being more desirable.

*Locus of Control Scale.* The *Rotter Locus of Control Scale* (1966) was selected to measure the degree of subject internality or externality which research demonstrates has predictive validity for both adult and student populations (Lefcourt, 1982). Subjects answered 29 questions of which 22 questions were scored. The total theoretical scores ranged from a 0 to 22 on this scale; one point was given for each external locus of control response on each item. Seven items were filler questions, which were not scored. The higher the subject's score on the scale indicated a higher degree of subject externality. The mean for this assessment was a 9 with a standard deviation of 4. Thus, individuals who scored 17 or higher on the measure had a very high external locus of control; those who scored a 13-17 were identified to have external locus of control; those who scored

between 6-13 were moderately externally or internally oriented; and those who scored 5 or lower had very internal locus of control. The means and standard deviations were based on normative samples of educated adults and college students (Rotter, 1966). Satisfactory test-retest reliability coefficients have been reported for the *Rotter I-E Scale* (Rotter, 1966).

*Zero Tolerance Administrative Interpretation Decision Scale.* The three-part criterion scale, The Zero Tolerance Administrative Interpretation Decision Scale (ZTAIDS) measured: (a) the degree of comfort subjects experienced when required to implement a strictly defined zero tolerance policy; (b) broad (administrative discretion with a case-by-case rationale) versus strict (letter of the law or policy) interpretation of zero tolerance policy when applied to a variety of school discipline situations; and (c) explanations provided for decisional choices (Moore, 2005). Subjects were asked to respond to twenty-six case scenarios that were based on actual policy violation cases.

Subjects completed the 26 questions on *The Zero Tolerance Administrative Interpretation Decision Scale (ZTAIDS)*. Each question described a student zero tolerance-policy weapons violation which the subjects were to evaluate using the specified zero tolerance policy. In order to minimize learner mind-set and maximize face and content validity, the twenty-six randomly assigned cases were contextually representative of elementary, middle and high school environments and represented perceived levels of severe, moderate, and mild scenarios. In addition, subjects were randomly assigned one of three versions of the assessment in which questions on the

survey were presented in three different question sequences. In an effort to maximize the face and content validity of the survey, the case scenarios were based on actual litigation within the last seven years (Hanson, 2005) with zero tolerance policy situations (Christle et al., 2004) that had occurred due to local, state and federal conflicting interpretations and implementations of existing zero tolerance policies. The names and some details of the cases were modified to prevent subject bias because of background knowledge regarding case law.

An underlying assumption of the ZTAIDS Comfort Scale was the greater the rated discomfort, the greater the probability that, given a choice, the subjects would interpret the policy broadly. Buck's research (2003) identified successful managers of critical situations to be characterized by open-mindedness and flexibility in decision-making. Conversely, the greater the comfort subjects perceived to experience, the greater the probability that implementers would interpret the zero tolerance policy strictly. Janis and Mann's (1977) research suggests such a relationship in that if an implementer has, "...the illusion of no real choice, or the reality of a severely limited choice, [it results in] a rapid termination of decisional conflict" (p. 225).

*The ZTAIDS Decision Scale* was designed to measure more directly implementers' broad or strict interpretation (decision) of zero tolerance policy in simulated situations while they considered the best interests of the students. The twenty-six case scenarios used in this assessment component were the same items used to assess subject comfort levels.

### *ZTAIDS Scoring*

The policy used in each of the twenty-six scenarios provided a description of weapons that violated policy, the location of the weapons possession that would violate policy and the discretionary clause that administrators could choose to implement on a “case-by-case” basis. Subjects scored each scenario on a four point Likert response scale for both their degree of comfort of 1 (very comfortable) to 4 (very uncomfortable) with the designated decision; and, decision (level of intervention) they would implement for the student zero tolerance violation on a response scale range of: 1 (expel), 2 (suspend), 3 (punish other than expel or suspend), to a very broad discretionary interpretation of the policy with the choice of 4 (a mild reprimand). The total possible subject score range for each component of ZTAIDS Comfort and ZTAIDS Decision was 26 (very comfortable/expel) to 104 (very uncomfortable, mild reprimand). Following subjects’ choice of response to administrator comfort and administrative decision in each scenario, subjects were provided the voluntary option to write a response that would provide explanations for their decision.

Cronbach alpha was calculated to assess the internal consistency of the scores/values generated for the ZTAIDS Comfort and the ZTAIDS Decision subscales. The scores/values generated represent summated Likert scores/values and are, thus, treated in this data analysis as “approximating” interval type data. The Cronbach alpha for ZTAIDS Comfort was .86 and .88 for ZTAIDS Decision.

### *Explanatory Responses to ZTAIDS*

This research study intended to determine the reasoning used by educational leaders who appeared more to strictly (letter of the law) interpret or more to broadly (administrative discretion with case-by-case rationale) interpret policy for student weapons violations in educational settings. Subjects were provided the voluntary option to script a free response following their selected choices on ZTAIDS Decision for each of the twenty-six cases. Subjects were only asked to provide explanations following the ZTAIDS Decision because a high correlation was expected to exist between the total scores on ZTAIDS Comfort and ZTAIDS Decision. The 20% of subjects who provided the most strict decisions were compared to the 20% of subjects who provided the most broad decisions. Subject responses were evaluated and patterns in these explanations were categorized.

### *Administrative Perceptions*

Subjects were asked to respond to an additional three questions which attempted to clarify their decision-making process. The first question asked subjects to clarify why they chose their course of action. The second question asked subjects to interpret the phrase “best interests of students”. The third question asked subjects to indicate the degree to which other professionals impacted their decision.

### Data Collection Procedure

Subjects were sent an e-mail with a password to log-in to the web survey site and were informed of the evaluation process through a letter of consent they read prior to beginning the survey. Subjects read the conditions of agreement to participate in the research study prior to logging into the survey. The principal investigator provided directions for completion of the surveys and provided a brief rationale for the purpose of this study on the web site. Following subjects reading this statement, they could either choose to continue with the survey or terminate their participation.

Anonymity for the subjects was provided by assigning random numeric coding to the individual surveys and through the use of electronic confidential submission through the Super Survey Website (supersurvey.com). All information was treated with strictest confidence. Subjects who logged on to the website could not have their surveys traced back to their e-mail address. The data collection process for this research was approved by the Human Subjects Review Board of Pennsylvania State University. (See Appendix B for a copy of the IRB approval letter.)

Subjects completed the three assessment measures in one time period. The sequence of the survey completion began with subjects first completing the *Trait Anxiety Scale*, followed by the *Locus-of-Control Scale*. The *Zero Tolerance Administrative Interpretation Decision Scale* was completed immediately following completion of the first two measures. Upon completion of all three measures, subjects were provided the opportunity to indicate if they would like to be contacted with the results of the study

and/or given the opportunity to participate in a follow-up study. Subjects were given four weeks to log on to the website or take the survey via hardcopy during Spring Semester 2006. Two reminder notices were sent via e-mail to those subjects contacted for this study using their Penn State University e-mail address.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis for this descriptive correlational study began with a Pearson-Product Moment correlation analysis using the SPSS statistical package and Mini-Tab. Pearson correlations were used to determine the degree to which each predictor variable (trait anxiety and locus of control) individually accounted for the variance with respect to the criterion variables of comfort level with decision when required to implement the stated zero tolerance policy in the situation and the implementer's broad or strict interpretation (decision) of zero tolerance policy for the given situations. Regression analysis was used to determine the extent to which the two predictor variables collectively accounted for the variance with respect to the two criterion variables.

Next, an analysis of the free response items assessing subjects' reasoning for comfort and interpretive decision was conducted by this researcher, and the categorical responses of the 20% most strict interpreters and 20% most broad interpreters was reported. Descriptive information was compiled for each of the three administrative perception questions. These included: (1) clarify why the subjects chose their course of



action, (2) interpret the phrase “best interests of students” and, (3) determine the degree to which other professionals made an impact on the subject’s decision.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

Several analyses were completed to examine the influence of trait anxiety and locus of control on comfort with decision and decision interpretation. The first analyses examined the hypothesized relationships using descriptive measures of central tendency and variability, correlations, and regression analyses. The second analyses examined the explanations provided among the most strict and most broad interpreters to determine if differences existed in these explanations using cross-case analyses when appropriate. Descriptive data were also examined to see if patterns existed between administrative interpretation of terminology and trends in strict or broad interpretation among study subjects.

#### Influence of Anxiety and Locus of Control on Comfort with Decision and Decision Interpretation

The first analyses were designed to examine the extent anxiety and locus of control influenced subjects' comfort with the decision and with the interpretation of the decision (strict or broad interpretation). To address that purpose the researcher examined the data using descriptive measures of central tendency and variability, correlations and regression analysis.

*Descriptive Statistics Summary of Variables*

The data in Table 4.1 descriptively summarizes the two criterion variables (comfort with decision and decision interpretation) and the two predictor variables (anxiety and locus of control) used in the regression analysis. On average subjects had a fairly low level of anxiety ( $\underline{M} = 32.88$ ,  $\underline{SD} = 6.85$ ). The average for locus of control ( $\underline{M} = 8.86$ ,  $\underline{SD} = 5.77$ ) would indicate a “healthy” internal locus of control where a value of 1 through 3 indicates an extremely high internal locus of control, 4 through 11 reflects a healthy internal locus of control and values greater than 11 reflect external locus of control orientation (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/~lapoffen/tasha/rotter.htm>).

Table 4.1

*Summary Descriptive Statistics for Trait Anxiety, Locus of Control, Comfort with Decision and Decision Interpretation (n = 50)*

Variable	Mean	SD	95% CI	Median and (IQR Value)	Actual Low and High Value
Trait Anxiety <sup>a</sup>	32.88	6.85	30.93 – 34.83	32.00 (9.00)	20 - 48
Locus of Control <sup>b</sup>	8.86	5.77	7.22 – 10.50	7.00 (5.57)	3 - 23
Comfort with Decision <sup>c</sup>	64.78	8.87	62.26 – 67.30	65.50 (10.50)	44 - 82
Decision Interpretation	56.06	9.73	53.29 – 58.83	57.50 (12.00)	37 - 77

Notes:

- Trait anxiety values could theoretically range from a 20 to 80 (theoretical midpoint = 50) with higher values indicative of higher degrees of anxiety.
- Locus of control was measured using Rotter's Locus of Control Scale where lower values indicate a greater internal locus of control and higher values indicate a greater external locus of control.
- Comfort with decision values could theoretically range from 26 to 104 (theoretical midpoint = 65) with lower values indicating greater personal comfort with the decision and higher values indicating less personal comfort with the decision.
- Decision interpretation reflects a stricter or broader decision interpretation with zero tolerance policy. Values could theoretically range from 26 to 104 (theoretical midpoint = 65) with lower values indicating stricter interpretation and higher values indicating broader interpretation of zero tolerance policy.

For the criterion variable comfort with the zero tolerance decision the score reflected a summated Likert score across the 26 scenarios. The higher the score the more comfortable (satisfied) the subject is with the decision. The mean summated score was 64.78 (SD = 8.87). The overall mean is very close to the theoretical midpoint (65) on the

summated response scale. This overall mean implies the participants were neither comfortable (satisfied) or uncomfortable (dissatisfied) with the decision.

The second criterion variable decision interpretation was designed to assess a subject's decision in terms of being either a strict interpretation or a broad interpretation. A strict interpretation reflects greater adherence to the "letter of the zero tolerance guideline" whereas a broad interpretation reflects a more open approach to interpretation of the zero tolerance policy. Higher decision interpretation scores reflect broader interpretation of zero interpretation policy and lower scores reflect a stricter interpretation (theoretical midpoint score = 65). The average summated decision interpretation score was 56.06 ( $SD = 9.73$ ). This mean would reflect only a slight tendency toward a strict interpretation of zero tolerance policy.

#### *Relationships among Variables*

The Pearson correlations among the primary variables of interest in this study are summarized in Table 4.2. The relationships between trait anxiety and comfort with decision ( $r = .06$ ) and with decision interpretation ( $r = .20$ ) are not statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ). The associations between locus of control and comfort with decision ( $r = .03$ ) and with decision interpretation ( $r = .20$ ) are not statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ). There was a positive ( $r = .45$ ) statistically significant relationship ( $p < .01$ ) between the variate trait anxiety and the variate locus of control. Those with higher locus of control values (greater external locus of control orientation) tended to have higher trait anxiety values.

The two criterion variables, comfort with decision and decision interpretation, were highly correlated ( $r = .83$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Subjects with higher expressed levels of comfort with the decision tended to have a broader interpretation of the zero tolerance policy.

Table 4.2

*PPMr Correlations for Trait Anxiety, Locus of Control, Comfort with Decision and Decision Interpretation (n = 50)*

Variable	Trait Anxiety	Locus of Control	Comfort with Decision	Decision Interpretation
Trait Anxiety	1.00			
Locus of Control	$r = .45$ $p < .01$	1.00		
Comfort with Decision	$r = .06$ $p = .66$	$r = .03$ $p = .82$	1.00	
Decision Interpretation	$r = .20$ $p = .15$	$r = .20$ $p = .17$	$r = .83$ $p < .01$	1.00

*Comfort of Decision and Decision Interpretation Regressed on Anxiety and Locus of Control*

The assumptions of normality and linearity were examined for the variables used in the regression analysis. Because there were only 50 cases, checking the assumptions was especially important as the violation of assumptions contributes to unstable

regression coefficients. The assumption of linearity between the predictor variables and the dependent variables was met. The assumption of normality for the variables was met with the exception of locus of control. Locus of control was positively skewed (skewness value = 1.71), and the variable was logarithm transformed using  $\log_{10}$  which resulted in locus of control having a skewness value of .61 which is considered acceptable (Field, 2004).

The regression model (Table 4.3) for comfort with the decision was not statistically significant ( $F = .18, p = .84$ ). Subjects' levels of trait anxiety and locus of control orientation collectively do not significantly influence the variance in subjects comfort with decision values.

Table 4.3

*Summary of Regression Results for Comfort with Decision Regressed on Trait Anxiety and Locus of Control*

Variable	b (S E of b)	Beta	Correlation	Partial Correlation	P
Constant	62.95 (6.66)				<.001
Trait Anxiety	.12 (.21)	.09	.06	.08	.570
Locus of Control	-2.44 (5.99)	-.07	-.02	-.06	.686

  

Model Summary Information	F	=	.18
	df	=	2/47
	p	=	.84
	Multiple R	=	.09
	R square	=	.01
	Adj R square	=	<.01

Subjects' decision interpretation values are not significantly influenced ( $F=1.26$ ,  $p=.29$ ) by the collective influence of their level of trait anxiety and locus of control orientation (Table 4.4).



Table 4.4

*Summary of Regression Results for Decision Interpretation Regressed on Trait Anxiety and Locus of Control*

Variable	b (S E of b)	Beta	Correlation	Partial Correlation	P
Constant	44.93 (7.2)				<.001
Trait Anxiety	.22 (23)	.16	.20	.14	.335
Locus of Control (log <sub>10</sub> )	4.45 (6.42)	.11	.18	.10	.492

  

Model Summary Information	F	= 1.26
	df	= 2/47
	p	= .29
	Multiple R	= .23
	R square	= .05
	Adj R square	= .01

The researcher then decided to examine whether other factors, not originally planned as part of the research data analysis, may have an influence on either of the dependent variables. Analysis of variance was used to examine whether differences existed when the dependent variables were examined by gender, age, professional experience in schools, school location and knowledge of zero tolerance policy at the local school level. The one-way Anova results are summarized in Table 4.5. There were no statistical differences ( $p > .05$ ) in the scores for decision comfort or decision interpretation when examined by gender, location of the school, age of the subject, and

subjects' self reported general knowledge or knowledge of district zero tolerance policy or related litigation. The only statistical differences were related to the subjects' experience in elementary education or experience in the high school setting. Subjects with five or more years of elementary school experience had significantly higher decision comfort scores ( $M = 72.67$ ) than did those subjects reporting no elementary experience ( $M = 64.73$ ) or those reporting one through four years of elementary school experience ( $M = 61.50$ ). For the variable high school experience statistical differences were found for both the decision comfort scores and the decision interpretation scores. Subjects with no high school experience ( $M = 68.52$ ) had significantly higher decision comfort scores as compared to those with one through four years experience ( $M = 60.01$ ) or those with five or more years experience ( $M = 61.37$ ). For decision interpretation scores those with no high school experience ( $M = 59.76$ ) had significantly higher scores as compared to those with five or more years of experience ( $M = 51.16$ )

Table 4.5

*Summary of Anova Results Examining Differences in Decision Comfort and Decision Interpretation Values Examined by Subjects' Personal and Educational Background Characteristics (n = 50)*

Variable and Level	n	Decision Comfort <sup>a</sup> M (SD)		Anova F (p)	Decision Interpretation <sup>b</sup> M (SD)		Anova F (p)
Gender							
Male	26	64.50	(8.02)	.05 (.819)	55.46	(7.11)	.20 (.656)
Female	24	65.08	(9.87)		56.71	(12.69)	
School Location							
Rural	25	64.24	8.41)	.18 (.671)	54.20	(8.22)	1.86 (.179)
Urban & City	25	65.32	(9.45)		57.92	(10.90)	
Age							
30 yrs or less	7	66.14	(4.34)	.42 (.739)	60.0	(5.35)	1.39 (.258)
30 – 39 yrs	24	64.71	9.68)		54.46	10.73)	
40 – 49 yrs	12	66.01	7.39)		59.17	(6.09)	
50 + yrs	7	61.57	(12.12)		52.29	(3.10)	
Elementary School Experience							
None	30	64.73	(7.83)	3.70 (.032)	56.07	(8.05)	1.74 (.186)
1-4 yrs	14	61.50	(10.51)		53.43	(12.74)	
5 + yrs	6	72.67	(4.80)		62.17	(8.18)	
Middle School Experience							
None	19	65.16	(10.02)	.54 (.588)	57.58	(10.50)	.77 (.470)
1-4 yrs	10	66.90	(8.82)		57.40	(10.93)	
5 + yrs	21	63.43	(7.93)		54.05	(8.48)	
High School Experience							
None	25	68.52	(7.98)	5.29 (.008)	59.76	(9.90)	4.88 (.012)
1-4 yrs	6	60.01	(6.78)		56.17	(7.99)	
5 + yrs	19	61.37	(8.78)		51.16	(8.06)	

Table 4.5 (CONT)

*Summary of Anova Results Examining Differences in Decision Comfort and Decision Interpretation Values Examined by Subjects' Personal and Educational Background Characteristics (n = 50)*

Variable and Level	n	Decision Comfort a M (SD)	Anova F (p)	Decision Interpretation b M (SD)	Anova F (p)
Knowledge of Zero Tolerance Policy					
Yes	28	63.71 (9.37)	.92 (.343)	55.25 (10.64)	.44 (.512)
No	22	66.14 (8.19)		57.09 (8.57)	
Familiar with Zero Tolerance Policy Legal Cases					
Yes	29	65.17 (10.05)	.13 (.717)	56.59 (11.32)	.20 (.658)
No	21	64.24 (7.11)		55.33 (7.20)	
Knowledge of District Zero Tolerance Litigation					
Yes	13	62.01 (12.10)	1.75 (.192)	53.92 (11.55)	.84 (.363)
No	37	65.76 (7.38)		56.81 (9.07)	
Know if District has Zero Tolerance Policy					
Yes	24	63.29 (9.15)	.90 (.415)	54.42 (9.91)	.76 (.474)
No	16	67.13 (9.33)		56.88 (10.81)	
Don't Know	10	64.60 (7.29)		58.70 (7.40)	

- a. Comfort with decision values could theoretically range from 26 to 104 (theoretical midpoint = 65) with lower values indicating greater personal comfort with the decision and higher values indicating less personal comfort with the decision.
- b. Decision interpretation reflects a stricter or broader decision interpretation with zero tolerance policy. Values could theoretically range from 26 to 104 (theoretical midpoint = 65) with lower values indicating stricter interpretation and higher values indicating broader interpretation of zero tolerance policy.

### Explanations for ZTADIS Decision

A modified cross-case analysis was completed to determine if subjects' patterns of explanations tended to differ because of their more strict or broad decisional interpretation. In an effort to evaluate subjects' differing explanations and to determine whether these responses formed patterns among subjects, total subject individual scores were ranked from one to fifty. To maximize the possibility that differences in explanations would be observed between strict and broad interpreters, only the 20% with the highest scores defined as most strict (letter of the policy) and 20% with the lowest scores defined as most broad (discretionary interpretation) subject responses were chosen for comparison. The strict interpreter raw scores ranged from 37 to 45. The broad interpreter raw scores ranged from 64 to 76. As can be observed in Table 4.6, the lowest raw score (64) of the 20% of the subjects who broadly interpreted the zero tolerance policies differed by 19 points from the highest score (45) of the subjects who most strictly interpreted the zero tolerance policies. The "broad interpreters" in reality reflect decision interpretation scores that are very close to the midpoint of the summated decision interpretation scale. The 20% broad interpreters are in reality fairly neutral with only a very slight tendency toward a broad interpretation

Table 4.6

*Lowest 20% highest 20% Subjects Ranked Raw Score Totals on ZTAIDS Decision Scale*

20% of subjects who scored in the Strict Interpreter Range			20% of subjects who scored in The Broad Interpreter Range	
Subject #	Raw Score	Rank	Subject #	Raw Score
18	37(S)	1	55	76(B)
54	38	2	22	76
53	39	3	21	73
52	40	4	69	70
70	41	5	68	67
50	48	6	26	67
28	44	7	51	66
56	44	8	39	64
47	45	9	2	64
5	45	10	--	

The modified cross-case analysis indicated that differences in explanations existed among implementers of zero tolerance policy in weapons' violation cases. Table 4.7 presents the categories of explanations for policy violation and no policy violation decisions, and the mean frequency of the explanations for strict and broad interpreter groups within each explanation category. A column is provided to indicate whether the broad or strict interpreters had a higher mean for the number of explanations in each category favoring (F) either strict or broad interpreters.

Table 4.7

*Explanations for Strict vs. Broad Interpretation of Policy*

Explanation Category	Policy Violation (Expel)					No Policy Violations			
	20% Strict (S) <sup>a</sup>		20% Broad (B) <sup>a</sup>		Favor ____(F)	20% Strict (S) <sup>a</sup>		20% Broad (B) <sup>a</sup>	
	Raw <sup>b</sup>	Mean <sup>c</sup>	Raw <sup>b</sup>	Mean <sup>c</sup>		Raw <sup>b</sup>	Mean	Raw <sup>b</sup>	Mean <sup>c</sup> ____(F)
No Explanation	111	11.1	57	6.33	S	-	-	-	-
Group 1 (policy)						Gp. 1			
Policy	23	2.3	2	.22	S	10	1.0	3	.33
Policy with explanation	17	1.7	8	.89	S	11	1.10	33	3.67 B
Possession of weapon	7	.70	3	.33	S	8	.80	19	2.11 B
Group 2 (student motive)						Gp. 2			
Intent to harm	4	.40	2	.22	S	20	2.0	24	2.67 B
Threat to harm	3	.30	0	0	S	11	1.0	7	.78 S
Know-weapon/policy/rule	6	.60	1	.11	S	15	1.5	7	.78 S
No policy (no intent, threat) Knldg. no policy violation)	15	1.5	18	2.0	B				
Group 3 (std. current action)						Gp. 3			
Age of student	0	0	0	0	-	12	1.2	13	1.44 B
Protect self/other	0	0	0	0	-	3	.30	5	.56 B
Poor choice/student msk.	2	.20	0	0	S	9	.90	14	1.56 B
Group 4 (Adm. action)						Gp. 4			
Adm. More information	1	.10	1	.11	-	6	.60	9	1.0 B
Counsel/teach student	3	.30	1	.11	S	7	.70	19	2.11 B
Discipline student	1	.10	0	0	-	6	.60	10	1.11 B
Group 5 (context)						Gp. 5			
Character of student	3	.30	0	0	S	5	.50	4	.44 S
Student discipline record	0	0	0	0	-	4	.40	2	.22 S
Obj – another person's	0	0	0	0	-	2	.20	3	.33 B
Context/situation	0	0	0	0	-	14	1.4	26	2.89 B

X scores used to compensate for 10 respondents in S group, and 9 respondents in B group (Table 4.6)

Notes: a (s) refers to those classified as strict interpreters and (B) refers to those classified as broad interpreters  
b refers to the raw frequency count reflecting the total number of explanations  
c refers to the average number of explanations per person in the respective S or B interpreter group

The first explanation or lack of explanation provided (no response) in Table 4.7 indicated the number of respondents who provided no explanation at all. The first category—policy—considered the respondents’ use of policy, policy with explanation, or weapon as their reason. These were grouped together because they were statements referenced in the policy. The second category—student motive—consisted of policy statement explanations that indicated the interpreter considered the thinking process of the student prior to the offense taking place as an important factor in the zero tolerance policy violation. In this group, policy violation coupled with intent, threat to harm, and knowledge of the weapon, policy or rules, was considered. The third category—student current action—grouped characteristics of the student actions that were not pre-meditated as perceived by the educational leader. These characteristics included the age of the student, whether the student action was in self-defense or in protection of another person, or whether the student made a poor decision or innocent mistake as perceived by the implementer. The fourth category—administrator action—coupled administrators’ actions with their decision either to expel or to not expel the student. These actions of the administrator included: need for more information about the incident, provisions for counseling or instruction to the student or parent or both, or provisions for discipline in addition to the decisions related to policy violation. The fifth category—context or situation—grouped contextual elements that were frequently stated, such as the weapon belonging to another person, the discipline record of the student, the character of the student, and the specific context of the situation.



The five categories of explanations were derived from statements by subjects of the following type: “It does not matter how the knife got into the locker or the situation that happened before. Zero tolerance means you are held accountable for your actions; the knife was found in his locker.” This statement was made by a strict interpreter responding to a student who had placed a knife in his locker after taking it from a suicidal friend. The knife was found in the student’s locker later that day during a locker search. In contrast, the broad interpreter responded to the same situation with the statement, “A student may have saved a life. It is important, as an administrator to inject humanity into these situations. The student should be commended for assisting a fellow student.” Differences in broad versus strict interpretation of the same situation are stated in a case where a student was caught filing his nails with a small pocketknife. The strict interpreter of policy stated, “A knife is a knife, no matter what size it is.” The broad interpreter reviewed this same situation and did not expel the student and provided the reason. “The knife was miniature and he was filing his nails; we are approaching the ridiculous with some weapons’ definitions.” Variations in administrative decision-making regarding both in weapons’ definition and student intent were noted in the key chain incident. Participants were to respond to this statement, “Frances was an eleven-year old student who brought to school a Sylvester novelty key chain that had a 9 ¾ inch chain attached, which is interpreted to fall under the chains category of weapons” (Moore, 2005). Respondents who chose to expel the student who possessed the key chain stated, “The student was in violation of a policy even though he showed no intent to hurt

someone”. The broad interpreter did not expel the student in the same situation with the explanation, “This is not a weapon, if it is in this case, then all items brought to school can be considered weapons.” These are typical responses to the twenty-six scenarios provided by broad and strict interpreters in the ZTAIDS survey.

It can be observed in Table 4.7 that the strict versus the broad interpreters demonstrate differences in reasons used to explain subject decisions. A trend was observed upon initial comparison of the general categories of policy violation versus no policy violation. The strict interpreters favored ten of the eighteen explanations; none favored broad interpreters; and eight explanations did not differ. While the differences between any individual category may not be of great significance, of interest is the consistency in differences between broad and strict responders across the individual explanations. The pattern was reversed in the no policy violation general category. In this instance, twelve of the eighteen explanations favored the broad interpreters and only five favored the strict interpreters and one for which there was no difference.

#### Strict Interpretation

The more strict interpreters of zero tolerance policy compared to their broad interpreting counterparts used the definition of policy with or without additional qualification to justify their choice to expel the student. Most often they favored no explanation at all to confirm their choice to expel. Or, they would favor the category of policy under which the explanation is included: policy, possession of weapon, or policy

coupled with an explanation of intent, threat or knowledge of the weapon, policy or rule. In addition, strict interpreters would cite threat or intent to harm under the category of student motive. They possibly considered individual explanations under the category of context such as the character of the student or under the category of student current action choosing poor choice of student or student mistake as their rationale. Infrequently they would choose an explanation under the administrative action category and note the discipline record of the student as a reason to expel the student. This strict group of interpreters chose to counsel the student in addition to expel them. Also, this same group of strict interpreters more frequently used “no policy” as their explanation if they chose to “not expel” compared to their broad interpreter counterparts.

### Broad Interpretation

Subjects categorized as the broad interpreters of zero tolerance policy compared to strict interpreters more frequently state: no policy violation; no policy violation coupled with the explanation of no intent; no weapons, or no knowledge of the weapon, rule or policy as their reason for their decision not to expel the student. In addition, broad interpreters of policy who rejected expulsion of students as a choice, more frequently identified student variables such as age, protecting others, or poor choices/mistakes as reasons to not expel the student. In addition, a pattern also emerged surrounding the concept of “student intent” which was more frequently favored by broad interpreters who chose to use student intent as a reason to determine if policy violations in each case did or

did not occur. The broad interpreting group predominantly favored the categories of “current student action” and “administrative action”. The data provided support for the conclusion that those educational leaders who were the broad interpreters of zero tolerance policy more frequently evaluated the context of the situations, while taking into account student character or reputation, ownership of the weapon, and specific case-by-case factors considered by the broad interpreter before rendering a decision.

### Summary

The results of the research associated with reasons given by subjects for decisions made with respect to implementation of zero tolerance policies appear to support the conclusion that differences in responses exist among implementers of zero tolerance policy in weapons violation cases. Specifically, differences were observed between both broad and strict interpreter categories as determined by rank order of total scores on the *ZTAIDS* (Table 4.5). In addition, the results of this research indicate that these categorized responses also formed patterns between the strict and broad interpreter response groups as the findings indicate in Table 4.7. The more strict interpreters of zero tolerance policy used the definition of policy with or without additional qualification to justify their choice to expel the student. The favored reasoning stated by the strict interpreters most often was “student intent” or “threat to harm” or “knowledge of weapon, policy or school rules.” More obvious, was a markedly higher percent of strict interpreters finding no need to justify their need to expel a student, and who found their

indicated choice to be sufficient; that is, no response was indicated. If this response pattern by the strict interpreters is compared to that of the broad interpreters, the findings indicate that the broad interpreters, whether choosing expulsion or no expulsion, more frequently provided clarification and justifications to their responses while reviewing the specific instances of the case.

In addition, a pattern also emerged surrounding the concept of “student intent” which was more frequently favored by broad interpreters who chose to use “student intent” as a reason to determine if policy violations in each case did or did not occur. The broad interpreting group predominantly favored the categories of “current student action” and “administrative action”. The data supported the conclusion that educational leaders who are the broad interpreters of zero tolerance policy more frequently evaluate the context of the situations, and at the same time took into account student character or reputation, ownership of the weapon, and specific case-by-case factors considered by the broad interpreter before rendering a decision.

#### Administrative Perceptions

Subjects were asked to respond to three questions, which attempted to clarify their general decision-making process regarding student infractions. The first question asked subjects to clarify why they chose their course of action. The second question asked subjects to interpret the phrase “best interests of students”, and the third question asked subjects to indicate the degree to which other professionals impacted their decision.

### Administrative Explanations- Question 1

If subjects held the position of administrator, 4.4% indicated they were legally bound to implement the policy. Results indicated that 75.56% of subjects said they would consider mitigating circumstances before rendering a decision to expel a student. Twenty percent of subjects who were to consider zero tolerance policies chose to consider an alternative action to re-educate the student rather than expel the student.

### Best Interests of Students- Interpreted- Question 2

Four categories were used to define best interests of students. The majority of subjects surveyed (73.33 %) indicated they would consider both the best interests of the individual students committing the infraction while also considering the best interests of the general population of students. Twenty percent of subjects chose to interpret “best interests of students” to mean the welfare of others (non-offending general student body). Only 6.67% of subjects indicated that their first obligation was to the safety of the staff and then to the students. “Best interests of students” defined as “the best interest of the student who committed the infraction” was not chosen by any subjects.

### Influence by Other Professionals- Question 3

Subjects were to indicate the degree to which other professionals impacted their decision in student weapons’ violations and their implementation of zero tolerance policy decisions. Results indicated that 24.4% of subjects said they would defer to the superintendent to render the final decision. As administrators, 31.7 % of subjects indicated they had the skills to review the facts and felt the decision was their

responsibility. Although 29.27% of the subjects would consider team recommendations, ultimately they would be responsible for the final decision. Only 14.6% of subjects would only make a decision based on team consensus after reviewing the facts.

An examination of the subjects' responses indicates that there were large numbers who provided similar responses to the first two questions. Specifically, in response to the first question, 75.6% of the subjects chose, "I would consider mitigating circumstances before rendering a final decision." In response to the second question, 73.3% of the subjects chose, "I equally consider the best interest of both the individual who has committed the infraction with the welfare of others". Both responses indicate that most subjects were considering the total range of circumstances and were not limiting their responses to a particular sub-group. Subjects' responses to the third question regarding how decisions were made are particularly interesting. Slightly more than one-third—39% of the subjects—chose to defer the final decision to someone other than themselves. Of those who chose to defer, 14.6% deferred to a group decision, and 24.4% deferred their decision to the superintendent. Thus, 60% of subjects chose to personally take responsibility for the final decision.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

Good administrative decision-making is critical when acting in the best interests of students. The advent of zero tolerance policies and the required implementation of those policies in the school environment have generated many questions regarding the consistency among educational leaders regarding zero tolerance policy interpretation and implementation. The purpose of this study was to provide information that will allow researchers to gain greater understanding of the personal characteristics of educational leaders related to zero tolerance policy interpretation and implementation.

A review of the literature indicated that internals who believed that they were in control of their own behavior and decisions, often created their own decision making criteria; sorted irrelevant environmental information or cues; used complex, flexible and researched responses to unexpected situations; and anticipated change. The research also indicated that internals were less likely to conform to group judgment and less likely to conform to authority. They were willing to help individuals and face punitive consequences while being able to tolerate discomfort while maintaining their conviction. Additional research indicated that internals were more open-minded and flexible because they perceived that they could be in control of both their own behavior and the events presented to them, which allowed them to see a difficult situation as a challenge, and focus on the problem to be solved.



Conversely, a summary of the literature indicated that externals tended to perceive events outside of their own control and unrelated to their own behavior. Because they did not believe that their actions influenced change, their decisions concerning situations tended to be more influenced by environmental stressors and pressures and by the opinions and judgments of peers because they did not trust their own judgment.

Researchers also saw a pattern in the extent to which externally oriented people used less complex thinking, used less of the provided information, and allowed the criteria for their decisions to be determined by others such as set policy or those in authority. Apparently, externals tended to abdicate control or responsibility to a higher authority, especially those of prestigious influence, or interpreted events using more rigid “rules or policies”, particularly in uncertain situations with uncertain consequences or both. They appeared to be less capable of being in control of their own behavior, and tended to display discomfort in approaching a decision that would not conform to the status quo, acquiescing to social pressure, even if it would harm those involved.

A number of federal court cases, as well as educational literature and the popular press, indicate that implementers of zero tolerance school policies varied in their interpretation of these policies during individual decision-making. One explanation for this observation involves differences in the selected personality characteristics of the implementers of zero tolerance policies. The results of numerous investigations indicate that a relationship existed between decisions made by individuals and the personality variables of trait anxiety and locus of control.

Research on administrative decision-making regarding zero tolerance student infractions has been limited to a few specific quantitative studies that have evaluated the relationship between specific characteristics of leaders and their specified zero tolerance decisions (Ackerman, 2003; Mattison, 1994; Wasser, 1999). Two specific characteristics of leaders that prior research associated with decisional processes were trait anxiety and locus of control (Carpenter, 1997; Nutt, 1989). This study attempted to determine if a significant relationship existed between these two variables and the decisional process of educational leaders specifically associated with student weapons violations, and the implementation of zero tolerance policy in the decisional process.

The hypotheses in this investigation had two major purposes. First, this study attempted to determine the relationship between implementers' personal characteristics of anxiety and locus of control and the degree of comfort or discomfort they experience when no opportunity is provided for them to interpret a school zero tolerance discipline policy. Second, this study attempted to determine the relationship between the school policy interpreters' personal characteristics of trait-anxiety combined with locus of control (internal or external), and the degree to which the implementers, when given a choice, would interpret an organizationally determined discipline school policy either strictly or broadly.

Although the initial findings of this research did not provide support for the hypotheses, the findings did allow this researcher to consider the potential effect of the specific factors related to individual differences in perception and thinking that influence

decision-making and also consider situational factors that may impact the results of this area of research. The results of this study indicate that statistically significant correlations were not found between each of the predictive variables (trait anxiety and locus of control) and the two criterion variables of administrator comfort with zero tolerance policy regarding student weapons infractions (ZTAIDS Comfort) and administrative decision (ZTAIDS Decision). Further, the combined effects of trait anxiety and locus of control did not account for a statistically significant amount of variance for either administrator comfort or decision. The lack of statistically significant correlations between the predictive variables and criterion variables was somewhat surprising given that prior research (Carpenter & Golden, 1997; Janis & Mann, 1977; Meyer et. al., 2002; Popper, 2004; Spielberger, 1983) demonstrated relationships between the personality variables of anxiety, locus of control and decision-making. An interesting finding of this research, one not predicted, was the observed differences in explanations given by subjects to the *Zero Tolerance Administrative Interpretation Decision Survey*. These explanations of subjects indicated that the subjects' reasons for policy implementation regarding student infractions were either based on broad (consider mitigating circumstances) interpretation or strict (letter of the law) interpretation of zero tolerance policy.

### Correlation among Study Variables Considered

The finding of a statistically significant correlation between the predictive variables of anxiety and locus of control is consistent with prior research (Sarason & Johnson, 1978) although measuring different constructs. Neither the individual nor the combined effects of these variables accounted for a significant amount of variance for administrative comfort or decision in this study. The high correlation identified between the criterion variables of ZTAIDS Comfort and ZTAIDS Decision was not surprising. It may be reasoned that on this particular ZTAIDS survey, those people who would indicate agreement with the strict interpretation of the policy, as stated, would provide a decision choice that would be consistent with the level of comfort indicated initially. To continue this line of reasoning, it is probable that the decision-maker's degree of discomfort with the strict interpretation of the policy could coincide with a more broad decisional choice (Colby et.al., 1987; Kelman & Lawrence, 1972; Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977). Further use of this assessment tool would provide a greater body of evidence to support or refute the degree to which ZTAIDS comfort and ZTAIDS decision are measuring the same construct.

Buck's (2003) research added additional support to the research of Alker and Poppin (1973) who found that internals were more likely to use principled reasoning than externals. Buck's (2003) research findings demonstrated that the stressful nature of the situation initiated the problem-solving strategies innate to the personalities of internals that employed open-mindedness and flexibility to solve the problem rather than rigid

adherence to those in authority. Westman's (1990) and Baron's (1994) findings demonstrated that low-trait anxious individuals compared to high anxious individuals could channel their coping efforts to solve problems during stressful situations rather than exert energy toward curtailing emotional upheaval and thought or avoiding the consequences of the decision by shifting the responsibility to others. The personality variables of trait anxiety and locus of control neither individually nor collectively accounted for the lack of statistical variance for administrative comfort or interpretation. A number of explanations were considered for these observations. These include the potential effects of: (1) the subjects' personal characteristics and experience, (2) the size and homogeneity of the surveyed population, (3) the circumstances under which the subjects made their decision, and (4) subject decisional style.

#### Personal Characteristics and Experience

Personal characteristics of participants, the population size and population homogeneity were all variables considered when examining the outcomes of this study. An analysis of the potential confounding effects of selected personal demographic variables of age, gender, years of kindergarten through twelfth grade experience, knowledge of zero tolerance policies or experience with zero tolerance policies on administrator decision making indicated that no significant differences were observed in the subjects' responses on the zero tolerance survey, comfort and decision, as a function of these variables except for years of high school experience. In this case, differences

among those subjects in this study with no years of experience compared to subjects with five or more years of experience was statistically significant ( $p > .01$ ). These results were inconsistent with the findings of Mattison (1994) who found no significant relationship of gender or years of experience on decision makers' choice of action. The results of these analyses indicate that the personal characteristics of subjects most likely did not contribute to the failure to obtain statistically significant results. However, participants' years of experience at the high school level was a contributing factor in this study.

One possible explanation for this observation that those with five or more years of experience were more strict in their interpretation of zero tolerance policies than those with no experience at the high school level may be the degree to which they were both exposed to situations in which weapons were brought to school or were possibly held personally accountable for the decisions rendered for both the regular student population as a whole, the individual student, and their knowledge of zero tolerance policy and knowledge of zero tolerance policy litigation. Future research should consider examining the effects of years of experience specifically at the high school level and the strict versus broad interpretation of zero tolerance policy violations and explanations for those choices.

#### Population - Size

Although the high correlation between the predictive variables and between the criterion variables and both individually and collectively were considered, as well as the

effects of the population demographics, these factors did not seem to provide any additional explanation to account for the lack of statistical differences established between trait anxiety and locus of control on ZTAIDS comfort and ZTAIDS decision. Several other factors, such as the population surveyed, are considered explanations. For this study to be feasible, the accepted number of subjects was set at fifty. It is possible that the relatively small sample size may have influenced the statistical significance of the results. According to statistical principles, normally one would expect that by increasing the size of the population, the reliability of these relationships would increase which, in turn, could contribute to obtaining a statistically significant correlation (Estes, 1976).

#### Population - Homogeneity

Another explanation for the failure to obtain the expected significant relationship between the personality variables and zero tolerance variables is the self-selective nature of the population. Specifically, fifty of the seventy students, who initially agreed to participate, completed all three surveys from approximately two hundred educational leadership students who were invited to voluntarily participate in this study. It is possible that these fifty subjects who chose to participate and complete the study, had characteristics that although unidentified, in some way differed from the larger population sample who were selected to participate. This might include computer skills, task resiliency, and so forth.

## Homogeneity - Locus of Control

The test subject homogeneity in locus of control was of particular interest. An examination of the locus of control data using the Rotter classification criteria (Lefcourt, 1982; Rotter, 1966) indicates that 40% of the test population was classified as internal, while only 12% were classified as external; the remaining subjects fell within the middle range (moderately internal or external). In retrospect, this is not surprising, given that highly educated people tend to be more internally oriented than those less well educated (Rotter, 1966). Thus, the relative homogeneity of this population with respect to at least one of the personality variables may have reduced the likelihood of the expected statistically significant correlation. This possibility is important to consider given that some research on the control construct suggests that locus of control, outcome expectancy and self-efficacy all relate strongly to the idea of perceived control. This observation suggests that what appears more influential on decisions is a person's perception of the situation's controllability, not one's actual control (Rodin et. al., 1990). Consequently, individuals' perceptions of reality more directly affect the degree to which they feel they have control over a decision and the outcome of that decision rather than what in reality is under their control. In turn, they perceive that they are in control of the outcome of their decision (internality by definition) rather than perceive that their decision is a result of factors outside of their control (externality by definition). Although attempts have been made to develop more precise instruments to measure locus-of-



control using specific populations, this field of study would benefit from instruments that would be more sensitive to highly educated populations.

#### Homogeneity - Trait-Anxiety

Homogeneity in trait-anxiety in the test population also occurred. Thirty-seven percent of the subjects in this study scored in the normal range (moderately anxious), 10% fell in the moderately low anxious range and only three percent fell in the high anxious range as determined by the Spielberger (1983) criteria on a normal distribution. This result makes sense given that locus of control and anxiety are correlated and that 40% of the test population scored high in internality. It is conceivable that those who chose not to participate and those who chose to abort the survey completion process were those who were more highly anxious than those who chose to participate and complete the surveys.

Given the potential effects of population homogeneity on this study's outcomes, future research should address the issue of the effects of population homogeneity on decision-making. Researchers should replicate this study using more heterogeneous graduate student populations from multiple university settings or replicate this study using non-student populations such as practicing school administrators selected from a variety of cultural and socially diverse economic situations. Research should also consider the differences in responses of these same populations. In addition, a replication of this study should compare the characteristics of the test population and their ZTAIDS

responses when required to complete the study. This research would be interesting as an all inclusive study because it could subsume subjects whose personal characteristics such as high anxiety, or externality, would more likely give them the propensity not to participate in this study if given a choice. If the population was more heterogeneous by design, than statistically significant results would be more likely.

#### Decision-Making and Circumstances (Consequences)

Another possible explanation for the failure to obtain a statistically significant relationship between the personality variables and the zero tolerance variables is that of circumstance. The personality variables of anxiety and locus of control may have greater influence on decision makers' choices under conditions where significant positive or negative consequences on the decision maker result from that decision. If administrators in actual situations expel a student, administrators may be rewarded by both the school and higher administration or punished by being sued by a parent, or fired. Administrators with different personality types could differ in their decisions as a function of whether or not there are consequences as a result of their decision. Thus, administrators who have a high propensity (high trait anxiety) to be anxious probably perceive a situation as threatening and exhibit state anxiety when the outcome of a decision is uncertain. Janis and Mann (1977) postulate that decision makers make irrational policy decisions or engage in decisional error because they are anxious about the actual personal consequences of their actions such as loss of personal reputation or social or material

ramifications. Conversely, if people who attribute their decisions to outside pressures feel little responsibility for implementing their decision, they will not spontaneously implement the decision once the pressure is removed (Janis & Mann, 1977, p. 267).

Because conditions in this research did not provide positive or negative consequences for the subjects' chosen course of action, it is possible that this result may explain why the expected relationship between the personality variables and administrative comfort and interpretation were not obtained. That is, state-anxiety that might occur in actual situations could not be simulated in this project and could not be induced in the subjects who had high trait anxiety or high externality or both. In turn, the impact of state anxiety on trait-anxious decision makers could not be measured. This concept of decision-maker anxiety related to personal ramifications of their actions is supported by Haleblain et al. (2004) whose research found that people's anxiety levels were directly proportionate in degree to the level that they perceived the environment in which they were making their decision to be threatening.

The research of Haleblain (2004) extended the investigation of the effects of situational variables on decision-maker anxiety, while using March's concept of *contextual rationality* as a framework to explore the effects of situational factors on decision-maker perceptions. Some researchers note that contextual elements change how people approach decision-making. Subjects isolated from a social context by the experiment's design are deprived of important cues and background information that they typically use when making decisions (Halpern & Stern, 1998). March's (1978) research

noted the importance in accounting for contextual rationality in that both the social context in which the decision is made and the resulting social consequences of that decisional choice influence how decisions are made. Beach and Mitchell (1978) identified the perceived importance of the decisional outcome, the type of accountability, and irreversibility of decisions as three important environmental characteristics to be considered in decision-making if people were going to be held accountable for their decisions. Subjects who know they will be held accountable for their decisions tend to choose decisional strategies that are more analytic and require more resources (McAlister et al., 1979).

Several factors in the study design unintentionally controlled for the effects of environment on decision-making: (1) subjects voluntarily completed the surveys, (2) actual consequences to the decision maker for making specific decisions on the case scenarios were not included, (3) the anonymity of the subject as part of this study design provided an environment that may have been perceived by subjects as non-threatening (which would subsume all levels of anxiety), and (4) subjects perceived an environment that was under their control (Johnson & Sarason, 1978). Although personality characteristics may manifest themselves in decisions within real life circumstances where consequences of actions are perceived, there may be fewer differences between the groups of decision-makers due solely to personality characteristics in non-consequential situations. Future research should attempt to include an added measure of accountability or consequence on the educational leader, or both which would be associated with

decisional choice in order to determine if differences in subjects' responses occur during zero-tolerance policy violations.

#### Decision Making (Independent of Consequences)

##### *Administrative Interpretation*

While the effects of the predictive variables may be dependent on the presence of situational consequences on decision-makers, this study's results indicate that factors, which are independent of consequences, may be characteristic of administrator interpretation and implementation styles in zero tolerance decisions. Although the intent of this study was not to control for the effects of circumstances and the induced consequences for the decision-maker, most subjects in this study voluntarily chose to complete the free response items that allowed them the opportunity to clarify their decisions rather than rely solely on the stated multiple-choice responses on the ZTAIDS survey. This observation indicates that subjects in this study desired some degree of justification to validate their choice of action, independent of decisional consequences. Jenson (1987) postulated that Janis and Mann's model of anxiety and decision-making is similar to Festinger (1957) and Aronson's (1968) cognitive dissonance theory in that incongruence of ideas (discomfort with the decision) results in anxiety, and people use rationalizations as a defense against anxiety to make decisions previously rendered more explainable. Of interest were the results of the analysis of the subjects' explanations, which indicated that the rationale used by those subjects who most strictly interpreted the

ZTAIDS differed from those who most broadly interpreted the ZTAIDS. If subjects chose to expel a student, often they would either provide no explanation, which implied that the decision was self-explanatory or, subjects would justify the expulsion referencing the definition of the policy. If those who chose to expel the student did provide an explanation, the favored reasons were student intent; student threat to harm; or student knowledge of weapon, policy or school rules.

By contrast, the broad interpreters, whether choosing expulsion or no expulsion, much more frequently provided clarification and justifications for their responses. Paramount in their rationale was the motive of student intent while also considering current student action and administrative action, which was a critical point of Hansen's (2005) research. It was clear from the data presented that the 20% of subjects who were the most broad interpreters of zero tolerance policy more frequently evaluated the context of the situations, taking into account student character or reputation, ownership of the weapon, and specific case by case factors before rendering a decision than did their more rigidly interpreting counterparts.

The subjects' responses to questions regarding administrative perspective supported the explanation that administrative perceptions may influence their interpretation of policy, independent of the circumstances. Approximately three quarters of the subjects indicated they would consider circumstances before rendering a final decision and would equally consider the best interests of both the individual who committed the infraction and the welfare of others. Both responses indicate that most

subjects were considering the total range of circumstances and were not limited to a particular sub-group. One can infer from these responses that by definition (consider policy, best interests of students, and mitigating circumstances) the majority of subjects in this study may be broad interpreters of zero tolerance policy. Of particular interest was the study's results regarding the comfort level of administrators when they were to render the final decision in zero tolerance infractions. The results provided some insight into whether the subjects were independent or dependent decision makers. Thirty-nine percent of the subjects chose to defer their final decision to someone else. In turn, 60% of subjects chose to take responsibility personally for the final decision. These results mean that the majority of educational leaders considered mitigating circumstances and considered the best interests of all students when making their decisions. In addition, over half of the educational leaders would make decisions independent of committee recommendations or the superintendent's position while approximately one third of educational leaders' decisions would be solely determined by a committee's consensus or the decision of the superintendent.

Even though the data collection system did not provide a means for determining if the independent decision makers were also the broad interpreters of zero tolerance policy, it can be speculated that this is the case. If this is true and if administrators who tend to interpret school policies broadly when making their decisions and are desired as professionals in the schools, then the question associated with their approach to decision-making would be useful in the interview process when recruiting new administrators.

Future research should examine the relationship between broad versus strict interpreters of zero tolerance policies and dependent versus independent decision-makers.

### *Decision Making and Pre-Decisional Bias*

Administrative decision makers' perceptions of critical factors associated with policy interpretation, definition of best interests of students, and ownership of the final decision, provided initial evidence to support the concept that some factors influence educational leaders' choices, independent of circumstances. Thus, an important question can be raised: How can one explain the variation of reasons given by broad and strict interpreters of zero tolerance policy in situations that may be perceived as non-consequential to the decision maker? Multiple factors such as pre-decision bias, cognitive style and personal values may be variables, other than the consequences of one's actions, which influence decisional choices. March's (1978) application of the rational choice theory implies that factors such as internal attitudes and beliefs influence peoples' decisions. Brownstein concurred and referred to the concept of pre-decision bias that provided a construct to explain how these attitudes affect peoples' interpretations of situations. Brownstein (2003) noted that biased, pre-decision processing occurs when decision makers restructure their mental representations of the environment to favor one alternative before making a choice. This selective information search, which favors one alternative or re-evaluation of alternatives, occurs when one



alternative is bolstered and the other options denigrated until the choices become obvious (Brownstein, 2003).

Pre-decision bias might explain the predisposition of workers to select different types of solutions to dilemmas depending on workers' rule oriented verses discretionary tendencies (Mattison, 1994). Also, pre-decision discretionary cognition helps to explain why successful managers of critical situations are characterized by open-mindedness and flexibility in decision-making (Buck et al., 1994). These pre-decision biases are implied in the work of Wasser (1999) who found that administrators often interpret zero tolerance policy strictly when they have pre-conceived agendas.

Janis and Mann's concept of vigilance considers both the decision making process and the belief system that influences decision-making. Cognitively, decision makers have limitations. People often use simple strategies to solve complex problems (Janis & Mann, 1977). The conflict theory model provides additional support for the influences of pre-bias decisional style. Three conditions are essential for a vigilant search and appraisal response to serious threat: belief that serious risks are associated with whichever alternative course of action is chosen, belief that it is realistic to be optimistic or hopeful about finding a better alternative solution than the objectionable ones that are being contemplated, and belief that there is adequate time in which to search and deliberate before rendering a final decision (Connolly & Janis, 1982).

Thus, high quality decision making, independent of circumstances, involves the following processes: thorough canvassing of alternatives and objectives, careful

evaluation of consequences (current policy and alternative new policies), search for information, unbiased assimilation of new information, careful reevaluation of consequences, and planning for implementation and contingencies (Janis & Mann as cited in Spielberger & Sarason, 1986, p. 469). This process of decision-making provides a rationale for the difference between those who implement zero tolerance policy to situations more strictly compared to those who implement zero tolerance policy to situations more broadly. Future research should study the effectiveness of trained decision makers versus non-trained decision makers on simulated decisional situations.

### *Values*

The personal values of decision makers may also affect how educational leaders render decisions, with or without resulting personal consequences. Kohlberg identifies autonomous decision-making based on abstract principles as the highest form of moral thinking (Huitt as cited in Kohlberg, 1984). The research of Alker and Poppin (1973) found that internals were more likely to use principled reasoning than externals. To continue this line of reasoning, Canto-Sperber (as cited in Langlois, 2004) maintains that acting ethically demands a thought process that often requires the application of precise knowledge and rational methods and procedures to situations for which there are no ready-made answers. Moral decision makers are required to interpret situations in terms of how their actions affect others, how they determine what action best fulfills moral ideals, and how decisions are made and executed (Rest, 1983). A study of

superintendents (Langlois, 2004) found that legalities did not ultimately represent the justification for their decisions. Instead, administrators appeal to their personal and professional judgments of what they considered to be right or wrong.

Future research would benefit from examining the effects of administrator's values and how administrators render decisions in highly challenging circumstances. The variation in this study of subject definitions of "best interests of students" and the categorization of patterns of subject explanations provide some initial data that these may create some pre-biases in the decisional process, independent of circumstances. This should be more extensively investigated in future studies considering the interaction effects of values, decisional style and implementation style.

### *Complexities of Decision-Making*

Nutt's (1989) research seems to provide some further insight into the various explanations one could provide to explain the results of this study. Not only is the explanation of personal characteristics of educational leaders such as pre-decision bias (personal perceptions and values) considered, but also factors such as circumstances are considered when making tough decisions. Nutt considered the pre-decisional bias, mind-set, and values of educational leaders as he applied his behavioral decision theory to tough decisions. Just as the majority of those surveyed in this study considered mitigating circumstances, Nutt would concur that "tough decisions could become bad decisions when ambiguity, uncertainty and conflict are ignored, treated superficially or

assumed away during decision making” (Nutt, 1989, p 25). Applying the Jungian and Briggs principle, Nutt considered multiple interaction effects when making tough decisions (Nutt, 1989, p. 124). He also identifies the types of decisional processes applied in different decisional contexts as well as the types of situations, which may create tough decisions (Nutt, 1989, p. 173). He then studied the complexities of the implementation styles of leaders as a result of their dominant personality type and decisional style. Future research may consider Nutt’s constructs of complex implementation styles to tough decisions to the specifics of educational leadership when rendering decisions about zero tolerance policy weapons’ infractions such as those addressed in this study.

### Summary of Discussion

The statistically significant correlation between the personality variables locus of control and trait anxiety was confirmed from the correlational analysis. The predicted correlation of these personality variables and the measures of zero tolerance, comfort and decision, was not confirmed. Further, the combination of the two personality variables as predictor variables for each of the two zero tolerance measures did not account for a statistically significant amount of variance with respect to the two zero tolerance survey measures. The influential effects of the demographic variables and the decisional variables were not substantiated.

Differing patterns were identified in the responses of the 20% most strict and 20% most broad zero tolerance policy interpreters' explanations given in response to the ZTAIDS (decision) survey. In this case, the broad interpreters provided explanations more often than the strict interpreters. Both types of interpreters acknowledge "student intent" as a justification for either their strict or broad decisional choice.

Explanations given for the failure to obtain the expected relationships were primarily in terms of the limitations of the research design. First, if the population size had been greater and if the relatively high level of homogeneity observed with respect to the personality characteristics of the subjects had been less, then statistically significant correlations might have been obtained. It is recommended that future research address these limitations and give greater attention both to the population size and to the heterogeneity of the population with respect to personality variables involved in the study and the reliability of the criterion measure.

A second limitation of the research design is that it did not account for environmental conditions, nor did it provide for a measure of administrative accountability or consequence implicit in actual decisional environments. It is possible that the effects of personality variables such as trait anxiety and locus of control would be more evident, when consequences would be attached to decisions that are made by administrators. Future research should consider the effects of trait anxiety and locus of control on administrative decisions when those decisions are associated with either real or perceived consequences for their policy decisions.

One of the more interesting findings of the present study was the explanation given for subjects' decisions which indicated different patterns of responses for strict compared to broad interpreters. More extensive research focusing only on this one component of the study could provide further evidence that might either support or refute the current findings. Explanations given for these observations generally focused on characteristics of the decision maker, which appeared to be less responsive to the effect of environmental variables. Most of these explanations focused on characteristics of the decision maker such as bias, thinking style, values, and complexity of implementation styles.

Future research should provide for the interaction effects of the "more stable" personal characteristics of the decision maker and the presence or absence of environmental variables, such as consequences for the decision made. Another study could also be designed to evaluate possible interaction effects of selected personality characteristics such as trait anxiety, and perceivably more "stable" personal characteristics such as values. This study could be designed to also include the relationship of selected personality characteristics and the presence or absence of environmental variables, which would include consequences on the subjects for the implementation of a zero tolerance policy as a function of their decision. It would be productive for future research to address these issues.

Finally, if the findings of this research regarding school administrators' decision-making are to be maximally generalized, an effort should be made to use practicing

administrators as subjects in future research. If one assumes that broad interpreters of zero tolerance policies are more effective administrators (with respect to the best interests of the students and the school as a whole), then a major implication of the findings of this study is that school boards should include, as one of their criteria in recruiting administrators, evidence that prospective administrators should be broad in their approach to the interpretation of most school policies.

This research was an initial investigation of the many variables that influence effective administrative interpretation and implementation of zero tolerance policies during difficult decision-making such as student weapons' violations in public schools. Of importance, this study did demonstrate some specific differences in the rationale used by administrators who chose to apply strict versus broad interpretations of policy during difficult decision-making circumstances. Consequently, the results of this study provide information that will help to develop criteria to be used in more effective hiring practices and training of administrators who are responsible for making decisions about students under their charge.

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## APPENDIX A

### SURVEYS

1. Trait Anxiety Scale : *Spielberger State/Trait Anxiety Questionnaire*

This Assessment is on file with the Human Subjects Review Board of Pennsylvania State University. SSTAI @mindgarden.com

2. Locus of Control Scale: *Rotter's Internal External Locus of Control Scale*

This Assessment is on file with the Human Subjects Review Board of Pennsylvania State University. *Psychological Monographs*, 80 (Whole No. 609).

3. Interpretation/Decision Scale: Moore et. al. *Zero Tolerance Administrative Interpretation and Decision Scale (ZTAIDS)*

This Assessment is on file with the Human Subjects Review Board of Pennsylvania State University. A sample of this assessment can be viewed in Appendix A, p 122.



- b) Mark the statement that indicated *what* you would have done and *why*. Your completion of the open-ended responses will help us to better understand your decision.

Policy: State law requires schools to expel from school for a period of not less than one year a student who is determined to have brought onto school property, or is in possession of, any weapon, at any school-sponsored activity or on any school transportation. The expulsion should apply regulations PA Code 24 and Chapter 12 and 14. The superintendent or administrative director may recommend to the board modifications of such expulsion requirements for a student on a case-by-case basis. *Weapons are defined as, but not limited to the following: firearms, explosives, marshal art weapons, electronic defense weapons, clubs, billies, metallic knuckles, containers with chemicals such as pepper gas or mace, or other items used as weapons.*

1. Pat took a knife from his friend who was suicidal. Pat placed the knife in the locker and was going to give it to the principal at the end of the day. However, a random locker search that day exposed the knife. Pat was expelled.

- a) How comfortable or uncomfortable do you feel about this situation?  
 Very Comfortable/Strongly Agree  
 Comfortable/Agree  
 Uncomfortable/Disagree  
 Very Uncomfortable/Strongly Disagree
- b) What would you have done in this situation?  
 Expel  
 Suspend the student  
 Punish the student other than suspension or expulsion  
 Take little or no actions (e.g., mild reprimand)
- c) Why would you choose this course of action?  
 d) What factors influenced your decision?

2. A teacher received an anonymous note that Jo had threatened to kill a classmate. Three days later during a random locker search, a loaded 22 pistol was found in Jo's locker. Jo was expelled.

3. During a random search, a knife that belonged to Chris' friend was found in the glove compartment of Chris' mother's car that Chris had driven to school that day. Chris stated that he did not know the knife was in the car, even though Chris had seen the friend carrying the knife in another social situation. Chris was expelled.

4. Marty, who was in kindergarten, stated to another student, "I'm going to kill you" while the kids were playing at recess. Marty was expelled.
5. Jony was expelled after the materials used to make a fire stick that exploded in the bathroom wastebasket were traced to Jony's locker.
6. Alex, age 14, was found to possess a miniature Swiss army knife when the teacher observed Alex filing fingernails during study hall. Alex was expelled.
7. Frances was an eleven-year old student who brought to school a Sylvester novelty key chain that had a 9 ¾ inch chain attached, which is interpreted to fall under the chains category of weapons. Frances was expelled.
8. Jo and Jan were two fifth grade students who were expelled for bringing an orange florescent toy gun on the bus.
9. Gerry was expelled after expressing on the school public website his intent to kill a teacher. Gerry had written the plan of attack in detail and sent the plan to the superintendent and public newspaper naming the day and time.
10. Kelly, a fifth grade honors student was expelled after reporting to the teacher that, "mother had mixed up our lunch boxes and I found a paring knife in her lunch box."
11. Robyn was expelled for possessing a small machete in a toolbox in the back of Robyn's truck, which was found by the dogs during a routine school search.
12. Casey and other middle-schoolers, belonged to the gray-jaggers website. After several hate-mails sent to Angel, Casey took his pen and stabbed Angel five times in the back. Casey was expelled.
13. In the car that Jody had borrowed to bring to school that day, was found a gun that belonged to Jody's brother who owned and regularly drove the vehicle. Jody was expelled for one year.
14. Channing, an 8<sup>th</sup> grader wrote a note that stated, "I'm going to get you. You die". The letter had not been given to the recipient. The school perceived this letter as a threat of harm. Channing was expelled.
15. Carol, an eleventh grade student, wrote a poem that expressed the feelings of a person who had shot and killed 28 people. A school professional found the poem. Carol was expelled.

16. During a fight in the middle school cafeteria, Jan grabbed numchucks and threatened Bobby. Jan was expelled.
17. Bernie was an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student who was expelled for making a knife in shop class even though it was against the rules the teacher had posted.
18. Kendel, a 6<sup>th</sup> grader, took a thumbtack and stabbed Lee in the back. Kendel was expelled.
19. Jesse, a middle school student brought a cap gun to school to show the teacher during the study of the Wild West. Jesse was expelled.
20. Nine-year-old Jamie took out the razor blade taken from Dad's shaving kit, and ran up to Ms. Gray and sliced her face. The teacher had not allowed Jamie to go out to recess for a week. Jamie was expelled.
21. Ronny, Jamie and Shawna were shooting at their elementary school bus as it pulled up to their stop. The night before they had observed a gang fight in their neighborhood. They were expelled.
22. In 6<sup>th</sup> grade art class students were using kerosene and impulsive Tracy said, "hey, anybody got a match, we can burn down the school," which was overhead by the art teacher. Tracy was expelled.
23. Nicky, a fifteen-year-old accidentally brought a multi-purpose tool to school which had a sharp-edged chisel on it. Nicky had automatically stuck it in the jeans pocket after fixing the flat bike tire on the way to school. Nicky told a friend the mistake and word got back to the principal. Nicky was expelled.
24. Friday night at the Halloween party in the High School gym, Lee was showing off the plastic gypsy knives that went with the elaborate costume. The pearl handles were beautiful. Dr. Keats saw the knives. Lee was expelled.
25. Thirteen-year-old Kenda found a bullet or rat-shot cartridge on the school grounds and threw a rock at it. The cartridge exploded and a small piece hit a nearby girl in the arm. Kenda was expelled.
26. Bucky forgot to remove the gun clip from the hunting jacket worn last evening to the rifle range which was supervised by the Boy Scout leader. As Bucky hung the jacket over the chair, the gun clip fell to the floor. Mr. Washington saw the bullets and reported it to the principal. Bucky was expelled.

What is the category that best describes why you made your decision as a principal or dean of students?

Please choose one of the three choices:

- a) Given my position as an administrator, I am legally bound to implement the zero tolerance policy even if the punishment may seem extreme for some offenses in order to maintain school safety, prevent favoritism, or send a clear message to students about the seriousness of breaking the law.
- b) Although I may choose to expel a student, I would consider mitigating circumstances before rendering a final decision.
- c) Although I am to consider zero tolerance policy, I would most likely take an alternative course of action and would re-educate rather than expel the student.

Which statement best describes how you interpret the phrase “best interests of students”?

- a) I equally consider the “best interests” of both the individual who has committed the infraction with the welfare of others.
- b) Welfare of others ( non-offending general student body)
- c) Best interests of student (who committed the infraction)
- d) My first obligation is to the safety of the staff then to the students

Please choose one of the five choices:

- a) although I would consider it legally binding to implement zero tolerance policy, I would defer to the superintendent to render the final decision.
- b) Although I am aware of the legal policy, I believe I have the skill to review the facts. The decision is my responsibility as an administrator.
- c) I only make a decision after team consensus is reached upon review of the facts; I prefer not to make decisions without team consensus.
- d) I consider zero tolerance policy, and consider team recommendations; however, I would be responsible for the final decision.
- e) Other position:  
(Explain) \_\_\_\_\_

Please write any other comments you feel would be helpful in understanding your perspective.

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*Participants signed off the on-line survey and were then asked to provide the following information:*



If you would be interested in receiving a summary of results or possibly participating in a follow-up study, please provide your contact information. Note that this information will be kept in a secure site and will not be used for any purpose other than to contact you to send a summary and/or contact you regarding a follow-up study.

Name:

E-Mail:

Phone Number:

Would you like to receive a summary of the group results of this survey? Yes      No  
Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up study?

Yes- I am willing to participate in a follow-up study.

Maybe, please contact me and I will make the decision at that time.

No, Please do not contact me.

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS SURVEY.

*\*Do not use any form of these questions in future research projects without express written permission from the author of this dissertation or published test.*

**APPENDIX B**  
IRB Certification

PENNSSTATE



PLEASE PRINT THIS FORM TO KEEP FOR YOUR  
RECORDS

November 10, 2005

Dear Participant:

Good administrative decision-making is critical when acting in the best interests of students. The advent of zero tolerance policies and required implementation of those policies in the school environment has generated many questions regarding the consistency among educational leaders in zero tolerance policy interpretation and implementation.

To help provide additional information that will allow researchers to gain greater understanding of the personal characteristics of educational leaders as it relates to zero tolerance policy interpretation and implementation, we are asking you to complete and return to us these four questionnaires. Your opinion is important to us. We want to hear from *everyone* who receives the questionnaire, not just people with strong opinions. To obtain a representative sample, we worked with the Penn State Educational Leadership Department to select students or practitioners who have indicated by course selection, an interest or intent to become educational leaders in schools. You must be at least 18 years old to complete the questionnaires. Completing the first two personal characteristics questionnaires takes approximately 15 minutes. The second administrative survey will take approximately 15 minutes. The questionnaires and survey randomly assign a participant number. If you provide your contact information at the end of the survey, it is immediately separated from your data. Study data assessment is viewed by the researcher by random number assignment only and group results are reported without personal identifying information. Your personal data is sent to a link, separate from the research data, which will be held by a pass word on the temporary data file until the completion of this study. All confidential information will be kept at a separate secure location and only the numbered surveys will be used. Your confidentiality will be safe to the degree permitted by the technology used. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties. Your participation is completely voluntary. *By completing and returning the questionnaire, you have indicated your consent to participate in this research project.*

To learn more about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Penn State Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775. The project director for this survey is Mrs. Jackie Gardner. If you have any questions please contact Dr. Jackie Stefkovich, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies: 814-863-0619 or [jas71@psu.edu](mailto:jas71@psu.edu) or Laura Moore [ljm218@psu.edu](mailto:ljm218@psu.edu). Thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,  
*M. Laura Moore*

## VITA

### Laura Josie Moore

<b>Current Position</b>	<b>District School Psychologist</b>
Membership	Pi Lambda Theta, ASPP, NASP, Phi Delta Kappa
<b>Experience</b>	1991-2007 District School Psychologist and Counselor 1998 Summer ESL Program Writer-Teacher, Black Forest Academy 1989-1990 Substitute teacher- special education classrooms, K-12 1988 Summer Laurelton Center behaviorist-SPMR 1987 Summer Teacher for infant-toddler preschool daycare, Silver Bay, NY
<b>Certification</b>	2003 Principal K-12 2003 National Certified and Licensed Professional Counselor 1991 School Psychologist, Elementary and Secondary Counseling 1987 Elementary Education- Teacher
<b>Education</b>	
Graduate Studies	<b>2001-2007 Penn State University Ph.D. Educational Leadership</b> Dissertation <i>The Relationship of Personal Characteristics of Educational Leaders on Their Interpretation of Policy and Decision Making for Zero Tolerance Weapons Violations in K-12 Environments</i>
	Residency Full-time residency Penn State Ph.D. Educational Leadership Requirement fulfilled. G.P.A. 3.94/4.00
	Assistantship School Study Council: Develop On Line Courses: Ethics, State Standards in Education; T.A. for Ethics On-Line Course Moral Literacy and Ethics Committee 2005-2006
	Papers "Perceptions of Administrator Practice & Student Best Interest" "Zero Tolerance and Administrative Practice" "Problems of Implementation of Ethical Codes in Education" Presented papers: UCEA, Values and Leadership Conference
	Book <i>Teaching and the Supervision of Teachers</i> (in progress)
Internships	Internships MS (Bellefonte MS) and HS (Radnor HS) Principal
	Honors Pi Lambda Theta, Bartges Family Endowment Scholarship, Chancellor's List, Who's Who In America
	<b>1991 Bucknell University Masters of Science in Education</b> Concentration School Psychology, Elementary and Secondary Counseling Thesis <i>Values Acquisition by Children</i> Full Academic Scholarship Student G.P.A. 3.74
	Assistantship Researcher for provost and graduate assessment course
	Internships School Psychology and El. and Sec. Counseling 2500 hours John Hopkins Hospital- Child Life Specialist 500 hours Neonatal, Inpatient, Cystic Fibrosis, Oncology, ER
Total Graduate Credits	<b>108</b> graduate credits completed to date
Undergraduate Studies	<b>1988 Furman University Bachelor of Arts</b> Double Major Elementary Education; Music Committee Improvement of student teaching, Furman Singers, tutor
Professional Committees	ESL, Autism, Inclusion, RTI, Moral Literacy, SAP, Missions