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Safe Schools: A Descriptive Study Examining How to Prevent Peer-to-Peer Sexual Misconduct in K-12 Schools

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**Safe Schools: A Descriptive Study Examining How to Prevent Peer-to-Peer Sexual
Misconduct in K-12 Schools**

Dissertation in Practice for the Ed.D. in Educational Leadership at Virginia
Commonwealth University

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Abstract

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A dissertation-in-practice submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. Virginia Commonwealth University, 2024.

Chair: Gypsy Denzine, Professor, Educational Leadership

In response to a problem of practice presented by the non-profit Stop Sexual Assault in Schools (SSAIS), this study examines what training and resources K-12 Title IX Coordinators and school administrators need to prevent and effectively address peer-to-peer sexual harassment and assault. Grounded in Improvement Science, we partnered with SSAIS to address a real-world dilemma. Through the theoretical lens of the Social-Ecological Framework, a descriptive study was conducted using quantitative and qualitative methodologies to study changes needed to reduce peer-to-peer sexual misconduct in schools. Data were collected through focus group interviews and a Nearpod questionnaire with a national sample. Relying upon the Social-Ecological Framework, which assists researchers in understanding the experiences and outcomes of sexual violence, data were coded with descriptive statistical methods and analyzed by constant comparison. Findings revealed that Title IX Coordinators and school administrators are challenged by Title IX training and laws, which were designed for adult sexual allegations. Leaders reported they are taxed by adapting training to meet their K-12 needs and balancing federal law while responding to the needs of students and families. Our findings offer recommendations for SSAIS to develop K-12 case scenarios, professional learning, resources to support schools in sharing policy and law with staff, students, and families, and opportunities to

influence Title IX federal law for our youth. We also make recommendations regarding the efficacy of student-led sexual assault clubs in school settings.

Keywords: K-12 schools, sexual harassment and assault, sexual misconduct, Title IX Coordinator, school administrator, Title IX

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We acknowledge and applaud the educators who participated in our study. Your willingness to share insights for our research speaks to your passion and commitment to serving students and staff. Educators are under tremendous stress with competing priorities, and your contributions allowed our team to develop actionable recommendations that we are confident will help our client improve school safety and culture.

Lastly, we sincerely thank our VCU professors, 2024 cohort classmates, and educators across Virginia. From the onset of our doctoral program, we felt seen and supported by the professors who expanded our knowledge, challenged our thinking, and encouraged continuous reflection and growth. To our classmates, you have inspired and supported us through this journey. Thank you for making us better versions of ourselves. Our WAM is that educators have a quiet superpower that maintains their shared optimism and energy in times of strife.

Dr. Crystal Bell Acknowledgements

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13

This scripture represents my journey to this moment. I am thankful to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for the privilege and ability to make it to the finish line. I am thankful to be the first person to hold a doctorate on my mother’s side of the family. While I had to apply hard work to get here, being in the right place at the right time, with my abilities, stable mind, and all of the other experiences that culminated to this point are only possible because of God’s grace.

I told my father, Arnold Bell, that I had applied to this doctoral program sometime in February of 2021. I was driving him somewhere and I remember telling him the news. In typical fashion, he grinned, and said something to the effect of “that’s alright.” My dad was always sure of my abilities, nothing about my accomplishments ever surprised him, ever. He always thought I could do anything that I dreamed of. In March of 2021, he passed away before I could tell him that I had been accepted. Dad, I made it to the finish line. While I know you are resting in the Lord, I believe that you knew I would get here. Thank you for always believing in me. Nine months after his passing, the only grandmother that I’ve ever known, Annie Thornton, also passed away. Education was paramount to her. Thank you, “Graham” for instilling the importance of education in me. It is a gift that I will carry with me forever.

Every sports team has an MVP. For me that is my mom, Gracie. Many people would define grace as “unmerited favor” and that is what she has been for me my entire life. Mom, you are my first best friend, my biggest supporter, and my constant steady rock. We have been through a lot in this life, but we’ve always had each other. I know that you are proud of my accomplishments and I am grateful for that, but I want you to know that I am because you are. No matter what new venture I set out to accomplish, I hope and pray that you’ll always be there. Thank you, Mom, for everything.

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Brian, you were always willing to pick up the tasks at home and I cannot thank you enough for your love and support.

Of course, my team members, Beth, Crystal, and Leah. We worked well together on our first team project and I am confident we are offering SSAIS some recommendations they can pursue to make a difference for our education leaders and students. My dream is that Title IX will be revised to better address the needs of K-12 communities. This work is not done!

Dr. Elizabeth Terrier Acknowledgements

2024 has been the year of accomplishing my professional dreams. I've worked tirelessly over the last decade to become a principal and the first member of my family to earn their doctorate. Both have come true this year. I am extremely fortunate to be surrounded by dedicated educators, both in my school division and through the VCU Ed.D program, who inspire me to keep striving each day to be a great support and advocate for students.

I am deeply grateful for the unwavering support and encouragement of my loving husband, Alex. His endless patience and understanding made it possible for me to pursue my degree. Thank you for providing stability for our kids while I was in class, writing late at night or early in the morning, or at the library with Team TALKS. Over the last few months, each time I returned home, you would jokingly ask if I was done yet. I am excited to finally answer "YES!" There are no words to adequately express how much I appreciate you, I love you.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
AAUW	American Association of University Women Educational Foundation
ATIXA	Association of Title IX Coordinators
CPED	Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate
CRDC	Civil Rights Data Collection
ICS	Institutional Compliance Solutions
MADD	Mothers Against Drunk Driving
MAEC	Mid Atlantic Equity Consortium
MTSS	Multi-Tiered System of Supports
OCR	Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights
PL	Professional Learning
RAINN	Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network
SASH	Students Against Sexual Harassment
SSAIS	Stop Sexual Assault In Schools
TALKS	Teaching Allies Legal Knowledge with SSAIS
ToC	Theories of Change
VCU	Virginia Commonwealth University
VDOE	Virginia Department of Education
VTSS	Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports
USDOE	United States Department of Education

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Chapter 1. Introduction

In schools across the country, a deeply concerning issue persists and negatively affects the lives of countless young people: peer-to-peer sexual harassment and assault. According to Maginn (2021), the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) found a fifteen-fold increase in sexual harassment allegations in K-12 schools between 2009 and 2019. The increase in sexual misconduct reported to school officials includes incidences in which students report a peer speaking to or touching them in an unsolicited sexual manner. Najdowski et al. (2022) report that one-third of adolescents engage in sexual behaviors that could lead to legal consequences. In addition, according to Orchowski et al., 2022, over a 6-month period, sexual victimization had been reported by 40% of middle school students. In Virginia, between 2017 and 2021, school officials reported 15,526 incidents of student-related sexual offenses to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE, 2021). These numbers are not just statistics; they are a heartbreaking and unjust reality faced by far too many of our youth.

Schools are intended to be safe spaces where all students can flourish and thrive. Nevertheless, each day, students walk the halls of our schools, burdened by fear and uncertainty, not knowing if they are truly safe from harassment and assault. Students who have experienced sexual harassment or assault can be condemned to a future filled with anxiety and depression (Grant et al., 2023; Orchowski et al., 2022). Victims of sexual misconduct report adverse health effects such as difficulty sleeping, substance abuse, health impairments, self-harm or suicidal ideations, reluctance to participate in school activities, and a pervasive sense of lack of safety (Stein & Taylor, 2022). A student's educational journey is meant to empower and uplift, but the shadow of sexual misconduct haunts many, disrupting the educational foundation they need to be emotionally and academically successful. Every child deserves the right to learn in an

environment free from harassment, violence, and fear.

Establishing schools as safe spaces that protect the rights of all students is an ongoing evolution within the United States education system. In 1972, President Richard Nixon signed Title IX of the Civil Rights Act into law (The 14th Amendment and the Evolution of Title IX, n.d.). Congress enacted Title IX to ensure that any institution receiving federal funding did not discriminate against people on the basis of sex. The United States Supreme Court, Congress, and other agencies have defined acts of sexual harassment and assault as discrimination (Grant et al., 2023). Not until the 1992 case of *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education* was peer sexual harassment formally covered under Title IX (Knipp, 2022). If a student is a victim of sexual harassment or assault, the act is egregious because it interferes with their ability to receive an equal education (Stein & Taylor, 2022). The legal theory underlying the liability attached to schools articulated by the *Davis* case is that when a student is sexually harassed or assaulted by a peer, they are victimized by both the perpetrator and the education system that failed to protect them.

Because public schools receive federal funding, they carry the heavy responsibility of upholding Title IX's mandate to prevent, promptly investigate, and properly remedy acts of sexual misconduct (Grant et al., 2023). Richards et al. (2021) write that per Title IX, public school divisions must create, publish, and enact the following:

1. a policy prohibiting any type of discrimination based on sex, including sexual assault and harassment;
2. a process for complainants (alleged victims) to share grievances;
3. procedures for prompt and equitable resolution of complaints;
4. designate an employee to serve as the Title IX Coordinator and lead the division's

compliance and investigation efforts.

Title IX requirements seek to protect students, and if school divisions are missing any piece of the requirements, sanctions and monetary damages may be upheld. Losing federal funds creates a heavier financial burden for already fiscally limited public schools (Knipp, 2022). Yet, even with the safeguards and sanctions outlined in Title IX, incidences of peer-to-peer misconduct remain harsh realities for students and schools.

Adding to the concern of school safety is how little educational data at the school, state, and/or federal level captures the experiences of students who have been victimized by the sexual misconduct of a peer. Nationally representative surveys indicate that a significant portion of students experience sexual harassment or assault while in school; however, a vast majority of schools have little to no discipline data showing acts of peer-to-peer sexual misconduct occurred (Grant et al., 2023; Richards et al., 2021). When asked why they do not disclose incidences of sexual harassment and assault to school officials, students' answers include reasons such as fear of retaliation, feeling their concerns will not be addressed appropriately, and/or assuming the incident does not warrant a consequence (Allnock & Atkinson, 2019; Espelage et al., 2022).

Many young people do not have the developmental capacity to understand how to respond to sexual harassment, and it is the school staff's responsibility to protect and teach our youth. Grant et al. (2023) found that although Title IX requirements mandate that all staff, students, and families know who the division's Title IX Coordinator is and how to report a claim, 70% of students did not know how to file a complaint. In addition, while research supports positive outcomes when students receive sex education, there is no national policy on curriculum standards (Grant et al., 2023). Each state can decide if public schools teach sex education (Richards et al., 2021). The discrepancies between student experiences starkly contrast with the

school systems and curriculum developed to protect our youth. If safe schools are the goal, changes must be made.

Title IX Coordinators and school administrators are critical in creating a sustainable change that reduces sexual harassment and assault among students in school. First, school administrators are the curators of their school's culture. In a report published in 2013, the Wallace Foundation found that the leadership of the principal and administrative team is paramount in creating a climate conducive to learning. Without influential leaders, school improvement cannot occur. Therefore, efforts to reduce sexual harassment and assault amongst peers begin with the school administrators. Adding further importance to the role of the school administrator, the United States Supreme Court has established that if an administrator has actual knowledge of an allegation of sexual misconduct, they must address it "reasonably and promptly" (Grant et al., 2023, p. 515). There is, however, a lack of research on administrators' experiences in preventing and investigating allegations of sexual misconduct. Upon our research team's thorough literature review, little to no information was found regarding the needs and experiences of school administrators. The K-12 school system recognizes the need for violence prevention; however, the overwhelming number of priorities and lack of data, training, and funding create barriers to implementing successful programs (Orchowski et al., 2022; Shakeshaft, 2018). With administrators' significant role in creating change in their school buildings and processing allegations of Title IX violations, analyzing their needs to protect students is essential.

Additionally, Title IX Coordinators are responsible for verifying that school divisions are literally, not just symbolically, adhering to the requirements of Title IX. While mandatory reporting laws may differ across states, school administrators and other staff are frequently

designated as mandatory reporters (Richards et al., 2021). However, one study discovered that most Title IX Coordinators were unclear about their responsibilities and had little training (Knipp, 2022). Under the guise of an effective and knowledgeable Title IX Coordinator, school divisions can offer the training, resources, and publications needed to create a school culture that does not tolerate sexual harassment and assault among peers (Grant et al., 2023). School-wide prevention programs and training, efforts led by the Title IX Coordinator, can create a positive school climate and reduce sexual harassment (Hill & Kearl, 2021).

Raising awareness of Title IX Civil Rights Law in K-12 schools can break down the barriers that silence victims and permit perpetrators to act without consequence. Fostering open dialogue with Title IX Coordinators and administrators will assist in determining their needs and implementing professional learning to address and prevent sexual misconduct. These efforts should increase all students' access to equitable education. Effective age-appropriate sexual harassment policies, implemented with fidelity, can create safer school communities.

Research Overview

Educational leaders are responsible for creating and maintaining safe environments for our youth so they can learn and experience healthy relationships. Too often, other priorities take precedence over creating school-wide sexual misconduct programs (Orchowski et al., 2022). By understanding the essential needs of school administrators and Title IX Coordinators, we can help schools protect this crucial developmental time in students' lives.

Problem of Practice

In Spring 2023, Stop Sexual Assault in Schools (SSAIS) submitted a proposal to the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Department of Educational Leadership in response to the call for problems of practice. SSAIS is an entirely volunteer, national, non-profit organization

dedicated to assisting all students in accessing an equal education free from harassment. SSAIS's mission states that the organization will provide resources to K-12 students, schools, and organizations to ensure students' educational experiences do not include traumatizing moments of sexual harassment, assault, or gender discrimination (Stop Sexual Assault in Schools, n.d.). Located in Seattle, Washington, SSAIS is guided by a six-member board, an advisory committee, and multiple allies with a passion for changing how society views sexual harassment and assault. Board members have expertise in Title IX law, Equal Rights Advocacy, and the development of educational curricula. As stated on SSAIS's website, some board members have chosen to share personal stories about sexual assault. This committed team embraces collaborative, proactive work to prevent sexual misconduct and compel lawful and compassionate responses to students and families in crisis.

In its request for assistance, SSAIS asked for a research team to identify locations where SSAIS resources could be shared (e.g., websites, journals, parent organizations, media, student clubs, etc.). Their initial request stated that SSAIS feels its educational resources and advocacy tools are underutilized. The leaders of SSAIS requested further analysis to understand how to best disseminate the organization's services and resources. SSAIS also asked the team to gather data on existing resources to determine what new efforts are needed to create safer student educational experiences.

To fully understand SSAIS's request for assistance and to outline our research plan, we met with the organization several times. In one of our preliminary meetings, we asked each team member (Executive Director, Director of Programs, and Board Chair) to tell us their goal for our work. Figure 1 provides a summary of their diverse responses. One member requested that we complete a needs assessment with the goal of gaining information about how SSAIS could fulfill

the needs of school administrators, Title IX Coordinators, school counselors, teachers, and school resource officers. Another member wanted information about changing school culture to prevent sexual misconduct. This member sought insight on how to make Title IX enforcement a priority within school communities. The last member asked for details about how SSAIS could grow its total sphere of influence. Ideas SSAIS discussed within this realm of focus included how they could improve their social media presence to increase the usage of their resources. Additionally, they requested recommendations about how their SASH (Students Against Sexual Harassment) clubs, which are school-based student-run organizations, could increase and impact school culture/climate.

Figure 1

Summary of SSAIS's Responses to the Goal of Team TALKS Work

Option One	Option Two	Option Three
<p>Needs Assessment</p> <p>Team TALKS will identify what stakeholders NEED to stop sexual assault in schools</p> <p>Further Narrowing: Focus specifically on the needs of targeted groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrators • Title IX Coordinators • School Counselors • Teachers • School Resource Officers 	<p>Culture Change</p> <p>Team TALKS will determine how school culture can change to ensure sexual assault is prevented and appropriately addressed when it occurs</p> <p>Further Narrowing: What training do staff members need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prevent sexual assault • to handle sexual assault when it does occur 	<p>Growing the influence of a non-profit organization</p> <p>Team TALKS will explain the steps a non-profit organization can take to reach a larger audience</p> <p>Further Narrowing: What role does social media play in generating access to and increased use of information?</p> <p>How can SSAIS increase SASH club participation in schools?</p>

Note. Summary of SSAS goals for our research team.

With a breadth of varying priorities, our research team looked for patterns and began reviewing the literature. We noticed the consistent concept of “needs.” SSAIS requested information about what schools need, what administrators need, and what resources are needed.

We also found that school leaders were a common thread among SSAIS team members; the school administrator's role in driving the vision and climate of the school building is paramount.

After several conversations with SSAIS and our Capstone Chair, Dr. Denzine, we outlined the problem of practice for developing and implementing a needs assessment for school administrators and Title IX Coordinators regarding peer-to-peer sexual assault. Data from the needs assessments will help define what professional learning is needed to support administrators and Title IX Coordinators as they work to address and prevent sexual misconduct. In addition, this team will research how sexual harassment and assault impact K-12 school culture by exploring school clubs and organizations such as Students Against Sexual Harassment (SASH).

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this dissertation in practice is to identify the professional learning and resources K-12 public school administrators and Title IX Coordinators need to both accurately process allegations of sexual misconduct and to prevent peer-to-peer sexual harassment and assault. In addition, this team recommended how to increase the impact of SASH clubs in schools. The information from this study will assist SSAIS in fulfilling its mission of educating students, families, and schools about the right to an equal education free from sexual harassment and assault. To accomplish this goal, we were guided by the following research questions:

1. What do Title IX Coordinators need to address sexual harassment and assault when it occurs?
2. What do administrators need to address sexual harassment and assault when it occurs?
3. What do Title IX Coordinators need to prevent sexual harassment and assault in K-12 schools?
4. What do administrators need to prevent sexual harassment and assault in K-12 schools?

5. What are the best practices for implementing professional learning for K-12 school leaders?
6. What strategies could SSAIS take to increase its influence in K-12 schools?

Research Design

We thoroughly reviewed the literature and relevant data to determine how current research has addressed the following:

1. What data, and gaps in data, help understand sexual harassment and assault allegations and occurrences in our K-12 schools?
2. What sexual-based harassment and assault efforts are preventing occurrences in our K-12 schools?
3. How and why a needs assessment should be conducted for K-12 school administrators and Title IX Coordinators who address sexual harassment and assault?
4. What are the best practices for sexual harassment and assault professional learning for K-12 school administrators?
5. How can schools grow clubs and organizations to influence the K-12 school culture?

After reviewing the literature, we conducted a descriptive study in relation to sexual harassment and assault by interviewing K-12 Title IX Coordinators and school administrators, analyzing the needs of both crucial roles, and providing SSAIS with recommendations for the next steps.

Significance of Study

SSAIS's primary goal is to protect young people by stopping sexual harassment and assault from occurring in schools, and our research intends to aid in helping SSAIS achieve this goal. School staff, including Title IX Coordinators and school administrators, must have the knowledge and skills to equitably and appropriately manage and prevent acts of sexual

misconduct. Our recommendations aim to create safer school environments by expanding the impact of SSAIS and improving the practices of school administrators, Title IX Coordinators, and school clubs. Through our findings, SSAIS will be able to increase school leaders' knowledge of and response to students who have experienced sexual misconduct, thus allowing students to learn and grow academically, emotionally, and socially. As school cultures improve with support from Title IX Coordinators, school administrators, families, and the community, the K-12 experience will value safety as a priority.

Terminology

Our team worked diligently to review research, listen to the SSAIS team, and evaluate our own understanding to ensure the terms we utilized in our writing were accurate and clear. Throughout our writing, the terms peer-to-peer and sexual misconduct are regularly used to define the scope of our work. We use sexual misconduct to describe student behaviors as it is the most all-encompassing term for actions violating Title IX. Below are definitions of these terms and others in the context of our work.

K-12 - Public schools serving kindergarten through 12th grade students.

Mandatory Reporter(s) - School staff who are required to report all types of abuse to children, including sexual misconduct and harassment.

Peer-to-peer - An act involving two or more youth. In our research, any discussion of peer-to-peer sexual harassment or assault will reference an act that occurred at school or during a school-sanctioned event (field trip, extracurricular activity, dance, etc.).

Processing - The school administrator and/or Title IX Coordinator's act of investigating an allegation of sexual harassment and/or assault. Upon completing the investigation, the processing includes assigning consequences, logging and coding the infraction in the appropriate

school information systems, and contacting all families/guardians as needed.

School Administrator - A principal or their designee (Associate Principal, Assistant Principal, or Intern) who leads the school in both an operational and instructional capacity.

School Culture - The explicit and implicit manner in which a school functions. A school culture is established by the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of its students, staff, and community. Additionally, the culture includes a sense of safety, cultural responsiveness, and the instructional focus felt by students and staff.

Sexual Assault - Sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim. Some forms of sexual assault include attempted rape, fondling or unwanted sexual touching, forcing a victim to perform sexual acts, and rape (RAINN, n.d., www.rainn.org).

Sexual Harassment - Unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that is serious enough that it denies or limits a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the school's program. It might include unwelcome sexual comments, unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or attempted or completed sexual assault, among other behaviors (Richards et al., 2021).

Sexual Misconduct - Any act that uses power, control, and/or intimidation to force or coerce sexual acts without one's consent. Sexual misconduct, when used in this capstone, includes sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

Title IX Coordinator - The Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights directs all schools that receive federal financial assistance to designate at least one employee to coordinate compliance with and manage the school's responsibilities under Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972. Primary responsibilities are coordinating the school district's compliance with Title IX, training staff, reporting data, and carrying out the school district's grievance procedures for resolving associated complaints (Pennepacker, 2021).

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 - A declaration that “[n]o person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance” (Knipp, 2022, p. 72). The 2020 amendments added specific, legally binding steps that schools must take in response to a notice of alleged sexual harassment (USDOE, 2022).

Victimization - The act of making a person a victim by intentionally harming and/or hurting them without their consent.

Summary of Chapter One

In 1972, a federal law, Title IX, was enacted to prohibit sex-based discrimination in educational institutions (Grant et al., 2023). Despite the legal requirements mandated by Title IX, education data submitted for Virginia’s 2022-23 state reporting requirements show that incidents of sexual misconduct continually occur in our K-12 schools (VDOE). However, due to fear of retaliation or lack of awareness of reporting procedures, there is a disconnect between what students experience and what is reported to schools and states (Richards et al., 2021). Title IX Coordinators and school administrators are responsible for the safety of students and accurate reporting of sexual misconduct allegations. Violations of Title IX requirements can lead to both emotional and financial consequences. Educational leaders need better training to bridge the gap between students’ experiences and school-based investigation and response processing. Our research team has partnered with the national non-profit SSAIS to effectively address issues of peer-to-peer sexual misconduct by identifying the needs of Title IX Coordinators and school-based administrators. Additionally, the team will explore ways in which a club such as SASH can assist in creating a positive school culture free of sexual harassment and assault. A

deeper understanding of sexual misconduct in our schools will better inform decision-making and create safer school experiences for our youth.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Our team focused on four strands of research for the literature review: sexual misconduct reporting data and prevention efforts in K-12 schools, the development of an effective needs assessment, the creation of quality content and implementation of impactful professional learning for school staff, and growing the influence of school clubs and organizations. The team identified inclusion and exclusion search criteria based on research questions and additional information in Table 1. The information garnered through our synthesis will guide us to an understanding of gaps, controversies, or areas of need that our research should address.

Table 1

Literature Review Search Criteria

Topic	Inclusion Criteria 1	Inclusion Criteria 2	Inclusion Criteria 3	Exclusion Criteria
Sexual assault prevention and reporting	national and state-level	dated after 2000	K-12	higher education
Needs assessments	peer-reviewed	research-based	K-12	higher education
Effective professional learning	peer-reviewed	research-based	adult learning	no research to support the concept
School clubs	national and state	national associations	K-12	parent-led

Note. Inclusion and exclusion search criteria for research.

School Safety - Sexual Assault Numbers and Prevention Efforts

The feelings and attitudes students and staff experience while a part of a school's environment create the climate of the building (Kutsyruba et al., 2015). The more positive the school climate, the better the educational outcomes for students. Kutsyruba et al. (2015)

completed a literature review to determine the relationship between school climate, safety, and student learning. They reported that the climate of a school, or the sense of security a student feels, is primarily determined by the relationships between the student and their teachers, classmates, and the collective school community. The more positive relationships a student experiences in school, the greater the likelihood that the student will flourish (Kim et al., 2020; Kutsyuruba et al., 2015). Support for this claim can be found in a study surveying 26,000 6th-10th graders in Canada. Researchers noted that peer-to-peer relationships influence students significantly more than any other relationship in schools (Freeman et al., 2011; Kutsyuruba et al. 2015). Conversely, multiple researchers found that the more students are victimized by their peers, the more susceptible they are to negative experiences in school and later life (Gruber & Fineran, 2015; Kim et al., 2020). Before learning can occur, there must be safety; social, emotional, and physical security are prerequisites to a student's academic achievement.

Kutsyuruba et al. (2015) examined numerous studies highlighting the significant role school leaders, specifically principals, play in creating the school climate. Strong instructional leaders empower students and staff, build trust amongst all stakeholders, and promote reciprocal feedback that creates climates most conducive to learning (Kelley et al., 2005; The Wallace Foundation, 2011). With the leadership of impactful administrators, schools can create the psychological and physical safety required for student success.

While schools aim to build positive school cultures, incidences of violence and sexual misconduct erode such efforts. Thirty years ago, the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation (AAUW) administered the first-ever national survey asking K-12 students about their experiences with sexual harassment and/or assault. Per the data collected in the AAUW study, four out of five students in grades 8-11 experienced sexual misconduct at least

once throughout their years in school (Richards et al., 2021). Since the original survey, the AAUW completed follow-up inquiries in 2001 and 2012, and findings continued to show that most students reported that sexual misconduct was a part of their school experience, with almost 23% of incidences identified as criminal offenses. Recent but smaller reports found similar numbers of students experiencing sexual misconduct in schools. Research by Mayer (2017) stated that 81% of students in grades 8-11 were harassed by either a student or staff member. In their literature review, Kim et al. (2020) stated that 70% of girls experienced sexual harassment in high school. No matter the study, the numbers consistently show that sexual harassment and assault occur in schools far too often, and there is a need for action.

School safety is a priority for schools across the nation, and yet the number of students experiencing sexual misconduct has not decreased since AAUW's first study thirty years ago. Adding to the concern is the stark contrast between the high number of students sharing, via research surveys and focus groups, incidences of sexual misconduct in school versus the low number of schools reporting occurrences of such behaviors. Maginn (2022) reports that "half of students who experience sexual harassment never report it" (p. 357). In another study, Richards et al. (2021) used data from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) to find that of 96,440 schools in the United States, 85% reported zero allegations of sexual harassment or assault. With only 15% of schools reporting incidences of sexual misconduct, there is an alarming difference between the number of students who experience victimization and those who report the infractions to school officials. Of the schools that recorded occurrences of sexual harassment or assault, only 13.2% reported more than one incident (Richards et al., 2021). When reviewing the literature for their study, Allnock and Atkinson (2019) found limited data on peer-to-peer sexual misconduct. They noted that victims are less likely to report incidences of misconduct when the

perpetrator is a peer.

To reduce sexual misconduct in schools, barriers that make reporting acts of victimization must be removed. In England, Allnock and Atkinson (2019) conducted two focus groups in seven public schools, one with school staff and the other with students ages 13-17. The researchers found two obstacles that impede students from reporting sexual harassment or assault – the social context of sexual harm within the school and the systems in place to respond to infractions (Allnock & Atkinson, 2019). Regarding social context, respondents noted that some sexually derogatory language was seen as a normal part of life within the school. They shared that because some sexually based insults were so casually woven into everyday language, students did not report their occurrences. Additionally, the student focus groups reported cultures of no-snitching because students fear the negative reactions of their peers. Students fail to report sexual misconduct for fear of retaliation and social ostracization. Students are likely to break the silence code associated with an anti-snitching culture when peers perceive the behavior they report as unacceptable (Espelage et al., 2022).

Per Allnock and Atkinson (2019), another barrier to reporting wrongdoing is the perception that schools fail to address incidences of sexual harm appropriately. Based on the focus group conversations, the researchers outlined three systemic breakdowns that reduce students' reporting of sexual misconduct: lack of trusted adults, ineffective implementation of policies regarding sexual harm, and insensitive handling of disclosures of sexual misconduct. When students have a strong relationship with staff, the established trust trumps the fear of snitching, and they are more likely to report misconduct, including sexual harassment or assault (Espelage et al., 2022). Secondly, students noted a lack of follow-through as a reason not to report sexual misconduct (Allnock & Atkinson, 2019). Harris and Kruger's (2020) qualitative

study of sexual misconduct experienced by Black females in schools found similar experiences.

The Black female students did not report issues because their concerns were unheeded when they did share infractions with staff. Lastly, in the research conducted by Allnock and Atkinson (2019) and Harris and Kruger (2020), students shared that school staff addressed reports of sexual misconduct in manners seen as insensitive. The perceived insensitive responses included calling a student out of class to discuss, which resulted in others wanting to know what led to the attention, calling the student's parent to share what was reported without the student's permission, or listening to the student but then failing to act on their account. To create a safe and trusting environment for students to report any experience with sexual misconduct, school leaders must be trained to address victimizing and highly sensitive infractions carefully.

School leaders must work to create cultures in which the entire school community, including students and families, champion efforts to report any instance of sexual harassment or assault. Allnock and Atkinson (2019) provide two recommendations aimed at increasing students' comfort in reporting cases of sexual misconduct. First, they recommend that school-wide programming embedded in the curriculum should extend beyond school personnel and include prevention and reporting training for parents/guardians. Unfortunately, the researchers do not provide insights as to the type of programming or specific efforts that must be taken to implement a school-wide approach. Second, Allnock and Atkinson (2019) remind schools that the protocols for disclosing sexual harassment and/or assault must be clear and well-known by students and staff. Their work does not include further clarification about how to teach students the process for reporting incidents. While Allnock and Atkinson's work is compelling, we recognize that the study was completed outside the United States. We searched for U.S.-based research on barriers to reporting sexual assault, and very few additional studies

sharing a connection to our focus were found.

Under Title IX, school districts must provide school staff guidelines for responding to sexual misconduct allegations (Grant et al., 2023; Richards et al., 2021;). School districts have a responsibility to create safe environments, define and advertise grievance procedures, develop staff's ability to prevent and address sexual harassment or assault, and appoint a trained compliance officer (Grant et al., 2023). According to Title IX's requirements, **school administrators must reasonably and promptly respond to allegations of sexual misconduct. The lack of definition for what constitutes a reasonable and prompt response is problematic.** Dr. Becker, a professor of Educational Law at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), shared that the subjective terms leave school personnel susceptible to scrutiny (personal communication, September 20, 2023). To protect themselves from Title IX violations, school staff must have a strong understanding of their legal responsibilities.

The legal requirements of Title IX are well documented. However, efforts to find research about specific district or school-based implementation of successful prevention programs and/or efforts produced minimal findings. For this literature review, searches were conducted for specific training and support needed by teachers, school leaders, and Title IX Coordinators. Schimmel and Militello (2007) surveyed 1,300 K-12 teachers, and they found that 75% had no course in school law during their teacher training program. Additionally, fewer than 50% of respondents could correctly answer questions about the legal rights of students and staff. The survey did not specifically reference school administrators (Schimmel & Militello, 2007). Charmaraman et al. (2013) conducted focus groups of public middle school teachers from a school district in Illinois. In their discussions, the teachers noted that the training they received on sexual harassment was too peripheral and did not address students' experiences with sexual

misconduct. The teachers stated that training and support from administrators are necessary, and they felt it was lacking (Charmaraman, 2012). While these studies provide insights about teachers' ability to understand and address issues connected to Title IX, little research about training specific to administrators and Title IX Coordinators was found.

School leaders drive a school's culture and climate (Kelley et al., 2005; The Wallace Foundation, 2011). Thus, there is a critical need to examine the experiences and needs of the school administrators and Title IX Coordinators responsible for protecting and supporting all students. For schools to address Title IX incidents and maintain a learning environment free of sexual harassment or assault, accurate data must be collected on current practices and implementation. An assessment of needs will provide the quantitative and qualitative data needed to better understand the barriers to preventing harassment or assault and how to address illegal behaviors.

Needs Assessment

A needs assessment is created to correct a current problem or provide opportunities for improvement and future learning (Gupta et al., 2014). Data collected from the assessment is analyzed to understand the gap between current and desired conditions, thus defining the need. When identifying a problem with a needs assessment, being "user-centered and problem-specific" is essential (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, p. 43). Often used in human service programs, more recently in public education, researchers should conduct needs assessments through an equity lens (Lee, 2019). Needs assessments often assist school administrators in identifying the differences between ideal circumstances and reality (Gupta et al., 2014; Lee, 2019; Zanti & Culhane, 2022). For example, the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education for the United States Department of Education requires schools identified for comprehensive

support and improvement to conduct a needs assessment (School Improvement: Needs Assessment, 2020). For schools needing improvement, data from the needs assessment may help identify where changes are needed to support student outcomes.

Creating a beneficial needs assessment relies on data collection and collaborative analysis, identifying the gaps in learning and/or performance through developing root causes and determining future action (Gupta et al., 2014). Collecting data in four areas is key. A needs assessment evaluates and identifies discrepancy needs, democratic needs, diagnostic needs, and analytical needs (Gupta et al., 2014). A discrepancy need is defined as the difference between the current and expected performance state. For example, families expect their child's school to be safe, but in reality, data may identify safety concerns. A democratic need is based on the stakeholders' preferences, an analytic need is determined by expert intuition or insight, and a diagnostic need is based on research. All four data points contribute to education leaders' problem-solving and discovering a system's strengths and areas of necessary growth.

Once conducted, an organization may utilize the needs assessment analysis to allocate resources, identify a root cause, and implement discovered priorities (Zanti & Culhane, 2022). Subsequent actions could include training and professional learning, engaging identified stakeholders, or providing more explicit expectations and communications (Gupta et al., 2014). A needs assessment aids in changing mindset, moving from fixating on the problem to creating solutions and opportunities for improvement.

Stakeholder Engagement

Identifying relevant stakeholders to allow data triangulation is imperative to creating an informative needs assessment (Metz & Boaz, 2016; Zanti & Culhane, 2022). Triangulation allows the research team to cross-check results from multiple partner groups or collection

methods. Stakeholders, defined as individuals or groups who could be affected by or directly affect a change in process, are an essential component of a needs assessment (Bryson et al., 2011). For this reason, creating opportunities for buy-in and building trust between stakeholders and researchers is necessary. Authentic engagement will create robust data collection methods, allowing researchers to better analyze gaps between current and desired outcomes.

Zanti and Culhane (2022) recommend three stakeholder groups when conducting a needs assessment: the desired population implementing a program, those considered experts on the program utilized, and those whom the program will impact. Stakeholder mapping allows researchers to identify a group of diverse participants and ensure that a varied group is considered (Zanti & Culhane, 2022). Stakeholder input in the needs assessment leads to building effective and equitable programs that positively impact the community. To engage stakeholders, researchers should find ways to empower, collaborate, and build the capacity to share their voices (Hill et al., 2021; Orchowski, 2022). When done with fidelity, the conversations are a means for developing trust, allowing stakeholders to be part of the decision-making process, and developing action plans for change (Bryson et al., 2011). Understanding the roles of individual stakeholder groups produces credibility in the evaluation process and helps researchers better recognize how to create buy-in and potentially change mindsets.

Methodology

To strengthen recommendations, a research team begins by identifying the best approach for assessing needs. In Table 2, Gupta et al. (2014) outline five needs assessment approaches, their purpose, and when to use them. A needs assessment consists of the following methodology: conduct a gap analysis, interpret data, identify root causes, and create a plan to address the discovered needs (Zanti & Culhane, 2022). According to Gupta et al. (2014), practitioners should

focus on producing results that address the data-informed needs of the organization.

Organizations must consider whether their needs require a strategy focused on long-term success or if their needs are operational and can be addressed through short-term efforts. For example, should an organization address the capacity of employee performance or a learning need to rectify gaps in a person's knowledge and skills?

Table 2

Needs Assessment Approaches and Purpose

Approach	Purpose
Knowledge and Skills Assessment	Provides an understanding of how to perform a job through knowledge and skills
Job and Task Analysis	Determines job responsibilities
Strategic Needs Assessment	Develops long-term plans after examining existing problems
Complex Needs Assessment	Addresses challenging situations that require additional expertise and innovation

Note. Needs assessment approaches and their purpose.

The first phase for a research team should be to perform a gap analysis from the needs assessment data (Gupta et al., 2014; Zanti & Culhane, 2022). Gaps can be attributed to a lack of resources or the quality of a program or service, which directly impact the desired outcome. Researchers must avoid problem-solving and focus on data collection that will create the ideal circumstance for the organization regarding access, quality, and outcome (Zanti & Culhane, 2022). A data-driven dialogue protocol assists teams in deep data analysis without quickly jumping to solutions (Love, 2002). Beginning with sharing predictions, followed by each person's observations, and finally, their inferences drive meaningful examination of the data. Data review can include qualitative and quantitative aspects, allowing researchers to

cross-compare the data sets.

Quantitative and qualitative data can be utilized together to leverage their strengths and minimize limitations. Quantitative data can be analyzed quickly; however, qualitative data creates opportunities for rich discussion and additional comprehensive information (Gupta et al., 2014). Authentic stakeholder engagement, whether through quantitative or qualitative data, results in more valid findings.

The second needs assessment phase is for the team to understand and complete a root cause analysis. Finding the source of the problem creates the opportunity for addressing it (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). Reviewing root cause analysis data allows stakeholder groups to identify their reactions and perceptions of what was reported (Gupta et al., 2014). This information can be collected through interview protocols, equity audits, data walks, fishbone diagrams, or the five-whys analysis (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020; Zanti & Culhane, 2022). Root cause identification adds depth to the gap analysis in identifying the how or why of the issue (Sandomierskia et al., 2022; Zanti & Culhane, 2022). When the root cause is recognized, work can begin to eliminate the source.

The final phase of a needs assessment is utilizing the gap analysis results and the root cause analysis to create a plan (Zanti & Culhane, 2022). Improvement science allows practitioners to develop a process for improvement that increases positive outcomes: defines the problem, gains an understanding of what is causing negative results, identifies a necessary change, tests the impact of the change, and eventually maximizes the implementation of the change to reach a broader audience (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). After completing these three phases with fidelity, recommendations can be successfully defined.

Best Practices for Professional Learning for K-12 School Administrators

“Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets” is a frequent message when teaching educators about the successful implementation of new initiatives (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, p. 94). An ongoing professional learning system is necessary for educators to stay abreast of current initiatives, improve their practices, and continue growing to support the ever-changing needs of students and the school climate. It is essential to the well-being of a school community for educational leaders to be provided the support and resources needed to maintain a safe school.

The research defines a variety of best practices for successful professional learning. A VCU capstone on professional development for K-12 school leaders identified effective professional learning as collaborative, including active engagement, actionable, and tied to the real-world goals of stakeholders (Hill et al., 2021). Research-based professional learning (PL), framed by adult learning and supported by ongoing coaching, is also critical to acquiring and mastering new information. Principles of adult learning help structure and guide training with methods and practices that result in a depth of understanding. To further inform professional learning, constructive developmental theory is helpful, as is understanding that adults have different ways of making sense of “learning experiences, life experiences, and the world” (Drago-Severson, 2011, p.2). Research highlights that unique to youth education, adult education must apply meaning and collaboration for change (Drago-Severson, 2011; Knowles, 2015; Lyman & Daloisio, 2018). Readiness-to-learn, opportunities for self-directed learning, active participation, and solution-centered content are key for successfully acquiring new knowledge and must be components of professional learning.

Dunst and Trivette’s 2012 meta-analysis explored which professional learning practices

resulted in mastery of knowledge. The sample consisted of 58 randomized controlled design studies on four evidence-based practices: accelerated learning, coaching, guided design, and just-in-time training. Table 3 provides definitions for each of these practices. Eleven electronic databases and multiple journals and book chapters were searched. Studies were included if they had at least one of the following outcomes: knowledge, skills or practices, attitudes, and self-efficacy beliefs. Dunst and Trivette (2012) concluded that combining practices and actively engaging adults in the learning process significantly affected participants' knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy beliefs for a task. In addition, they concluded that professional learning with less than 40 attendees, over multiple sessions, and for 20 hours or less is most beneficial. Dunst and Trivette's earlier 2009 study showed that the effect size between practices and outcomes was largest when more learning methods were used throughout the PL.

Table 3

Definitions of Professional Learning Practices

Term	Definition
Accelerated learning	a method that creates a relaxed and multi-sensory environment with time for active learning, such as role plays, group activities, and practice
Coaching	a method where the coach, as an expert, builds the coach's skill set through information sharing, collaboration, modeling, practice, and feedback
Guided Design	a method of self-directed learning through decision-making and problem-solving for critical thinking
Just-in-time	is an individualized method based on real-life challenges

Note. Definitions of evidence-based professional learning practices. Dunst, C. J., & Trivette, C.

M. (2012). Meta-analysis of implementation practice research. In B. Kelly & D. F. Perkins

(Eds.), *Handbook of implementation science for psychology in education* (pp. 68–91).

Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139013949.008>

The thoughtful inclusion of Dunst and Trivette’s (2012) professional learning guidelines will enhance events with planning, application, and a goal of deep understanding. Table 4 outlines six core practices for professional learning design. As a result of this research, the Participatory Adult Learning Strategy (PALS) was created and can serve as a construct for high-quality professional learning.

Table 4

Six Core Practices for Professional Learning Design

Characteristics	Practices
Planning	
Introduction	Engage the learner in a preview of the material, knowledge, or practice that is the focus of instruction or training.
Illustrate	Demonstrate or illustrate the use or applicability of the material, knowledge, or practice for the learner
Application	
Practice	Engage the learner in using the material, knowledge, or practice.
Evaluate	Engage the learner in the process of evaluating the consequence or outcome of the application of the material, knowledge, or practice.
Deep Understanding	
Reflection	Engage the learner in self-assessment of his or her acquisition of knowledge and skills as a basis for identifying “next steps” in the learning process
Mastery	Engage the learner in assessing his or her experience in the context of some conceptual or practical model or framework or some external set of standards or criteria.

Note. Dunst & Trivette professional learning guidelines. Dunst, C. J., & Trivette, C. M. (2012).

Meta-analysis of implementation practice research. In B. Kelly & D. F. Perkins (Eds.), *Handbook of implementation science for psychology in education* (pp. 68–91). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139013949.008>

Knight's Seven Partnership Principles further support high-quality professional learning and guide the creation of interconnected work. The principles listed in Table 5 “shift us towards a collaborative practice” and foster an inclusive environment where attendees feel welcome to express their opinions, work to develop a common goal, and provide feedback for continuous improvement (Stewart, 2014, p. 28).

Table 5

Adapted Knight's Seven Partnership Professional Learning Principles

Principle	Description
Equality	Input planning professional learning activities; not simply required to attend.
Choice	Choice of what and how they learn.
Voice	Empowers and respects their voice.
Dialogue	Conversational learning together.
Reflection	Reflection is an integral part of learning.
Praxis	Learning is applied to real-life practice.
Reciprocity	Participants offer and receive feedback.

Note. Principles supporting high-quality professional learning. Stewart, C. (2014). Transforming professional development to professional learning, *Journal of Adult Learning*, 43(1), p. 28-33.

Continuous evaluation of professional learning will ensure that the content and delivery meet the needs of school administrators. Guskey's (2000) Five Levels of Professional Development Evaluation describes how evaluation feedback can support changes and improvements. Table 6 provides details about Guskey's findings.

Table 6*Guskey's(2000) Five Levels of PD Evaluation*

PD Evaluation Level	Decisions Supported
1. Participant's reaction to training and coaching experiences.	Improve program design and delivery.
2. Participant's acquisition of new knowledge and skills.	Improve program content, format, and organization.
3. Influences at the organizational level that can facilitate or hinder PD success.	Document and improve organizational support. Inform future change efforts.
4. Participant's use of knowledge and skills.	Assess fidelity of implementation.
5. Student behavioral and academic outcomes.	Focus and improve all aspects of PD design, implementation, and follow-up. Demonstration of the overall impact of PD (i.e., summative evaluation).

Note. Five levels to evaluate professional development. Guskey, T. R. (2000). *Evaluating Professional Development*. Corwin Press.

We must address this work by acknowledging the challenge of developing professional learning to support school administrators on the sensitive topic of sexual harassment and assault. Boris and Peterson (2018) describe storytelling as a practice that enhances professional learning, builds connections, and supports organizational change. Sharing stories and scenarios helps create a risk-free environment to discuss and problem-solve around change needed for school cultures. Stories are how humans “receive, analyze, organize, and archive information” (Boris & Peterson, p. 2, 2018). With sexual harassment and assault being such an emotional topic, presenters with scenarios will engage participants through their hearts and minds. With the

awareness that this content may invoke a range of emotional responses, efforts in developing content should reduce negative impact and any mental health triggers. Further complicating this topic, educator burnout, and compassion fatigue will play a factor in carefully developing this professional learning content (Collins, 2013). Effective professional learning opportunities can support school leaders in creating safer schools and protecting the youth they serve.

Hinnant-Crawford (2020) asks educators, “What change might I introduce to solve my problem and why?” (p. 116). Educating school administrators and Title IX Coordinators is an important initiative to reduce sexual violence in our schools. Understanding that thoughtful planning and application are crucial to adult acquisition of new information when designing professional learning about sexual harassment and assault, including evidenced-based learning practices, is vital. Educators are frequently introduced to new information and practices. By building learner-readiness, we can avoid frustrated feelings of another new initiative added to their overwhelming responsibilities. Reports of sexual harassment and assault are real-life challenges in our schools and have a negative impact on the school climate. Defining the why behind this professional learning will engage the participants and increase buy-in. Multiple levels of engagement and applicable scenarios will deepen understanding. Building the skills of our educational leaders will positively impact safety school-wide, students’ mental health, and advance lifelong skills.

Growing SSAIS’s Influence

To help SSAIS fulfill its mission, it is important to consider how to expand its influence. For this project, relevant literature was reviewed on the methods of one well-known prevention organization that has accomplished successful expansion and outcomes, ways to increase non-profit impact, and ways to expand student clubs. Exploring these areas provides an

opportunity to examine key elements of success that can provide an action plan for SSAIS.

Model Organization: MADD

Looking to specific organizations like Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD) can provide valuable insights on how to grow an organization, gain public recognition, and influence behavioral changes. The history of MADD and its success has been researched, revealing critical decisions and strategies that helped the organization grow and remain relevant. MADD is a grassroots advocacy group founded in 1980 by a mother who lost her child to a repeat offender, a drunk driver (Fell & Voas, 2006). This incident created an advocacy movement that has grown and is still active. Generally given credit for changing attitudes toward drunk driving, a 2005 Gallup poll revealed that 94% of Americans recognized MADD and were familiar with the organization's purpose (Loewit-Phillips & Goldbas, 2013).

According to Fell & Voas (2006), MADD's founder, Candy Lightner, proved to be a charismatic public face for the movement who centered children at the heart of MADD's message. Ms. Lightner worked to position MADD as a ready source of public comment for media outlets. The success of MADD was attributed to its ability to attract members and funding through the development of victim services and to include key professionals on its board, such as researchers, a vice president of public policy, and a president who was also a victim member to humanize the organization's message (Fell & Voas, 2006). In addition, MADD continued to expand its focus by developing policies around areas related to drunk driving prevention, such as legislation and other alcohol safety issues, while emphasizing its original mission (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014; Fell & Voas, 2006). MADD represents one organization focused on national prevention and provides a wealth of knowledge to increase a non-profit's impact.

Increasing Non-Profit Impact

Dr. Joel Levin, co-founder of SSAIS, shared that because SSAIS is based in Seattle, Washington, most of their connections and networks are on the West Coast, limiting their reach (personal communication, August 4, 2023). This valuable insight substantiates why strategies for non-profit growth and marketing are relevant. The literature on social impact scaling strategies and digital campaigns for nonprofits can provide valuable steps to achieving organizational expansion.

Social Impact Scaling Strategies. In their research on scaling social impact, Nardini et al. (2022) shared strategies that help non-profit organizations expand beyond their local context. These strategies include creating relationship networks, creating a system of knowledge sharing, and collaborating for fundraising (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014; Nardini et al., 2022). Relationship networks allow nonprofits to leverage the expertise and resources of other organizations with similar missions. In addition to combining resources, relationship networks inspire synergy (Nardini et al., 2022). In the same way, nonprofits leverage relationship networks and they can form knowledge-sharing networks to impact change. One practical example of knowledge sharing is providing access to resources that the organization has already developed, such as media toolkits that include email templates, promotional materials, and program documents (Nardini et al., 2022). Lastly, one way to grow funding is to view peers as collaborators and not competitors (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). In addition, digital strategies are another avenue to expand an organization's reach.

Digital Strategies. The impact of social media is undeniable. Traditional marketing strategies such as radio, print ads, billboards, and commercials can be costly, and leveraging digital tools provides a cost-effective avenue to expand influence in a digitally-based society

(Krawiec et al., 2021). The first strategy that can be beneficial is to use digital tools to segment audiences based on behavioral characteristics instead of traditional demographic data (Krawiec et al., 2021). Analyzing behavioral characteristics helps organizations understand an audience's beliefs, habits, and lifestyles. In addition, nonprofits can utilize artificial intelligence and text-mining software to provide customized messaging and solutions to their target audience (Krawiec et al., 2021). Another option is to pair digital strategies with behavioral change theories. Behavioral change theories explain why people behave in specific ways (Klonoff, 2019). Pairing digital tools such as social media, artificial intelligence, and other data analysis software with these theories increases the likelihood of nonprofits achieving their goals (Freeman et al., 2015; Krawiec et al., 2021). Lastly, nonprofits can focus on human-centered design to create solutions and products that are highly tailored to their target audience. These strategies provide insight into how SSAIS can grow as a non-profit organization and expand SASH clubs.

Expanding SASH Clubs

Sexual misconduct in schools is often perpetuated by a culture of dismissiveness, ignorance, and misguided humor (Hill & Kearl, 2011). The school setting is one of the primary ways students socially interact, making the likelihood of sexual misconduct higher in these spaces (Young et al., 2008). According to the 2011 AAUW report, sexual harassment is so prevalent that many K-12 students see behavior deemed as sexual harassment customary or do not know that the exhibited behavior could be labeled as sexual harassment (Hill & Kearl, 2011). These findings make it imperative for K-12 educators to focus on ways to change school culture.

SSAIS has worked to contribute to changing school culture through the creation of SASH clubs. The literature on student perceptions of extracurricular activities and the impact of extracurricular activities, such as sports clubs, cultural clubs, STEM clubs, and arts, on academic

performance has been well-examined. According to Matjasko et al. (2019), extracurricular activities positively influence academic achievement and behavior and the teaching of appropriate social skills for youth. In a study on bullying, the presence of an adult sponsor, which most clubs and organizations require within the K-12 setting, provided opportunities to teach social skills that lead to a reduction in bullying behaviors (Matjasko et al., 2019). In addition to social skills, extracurricular activities promote a sense of belonging and community and increase empathy and concern for others (Christison, 2013; Young et al., 2008). Relevant literature on two youth clubs, Gay-Straight Alliances, and 4-H clubs, provide valuable insights into the structure of clubs, clubs' impact on school culture, and student perceptions of clubs.

Gay-Straight Alliances. In a 2021 survey, the Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network reported that nearly a third of students surveyed reported having a gay-straight alliance within their schools, making this student-led organization an important model to learn from (Kosciw et al., 2022). The literature on the benefits of Gay-Straight Alliances for students is abundant, revealing that the presence of Gay-Straight alliances positively impacts school climate by making more students aware of the issues impacting gay students, increasing teacher support, increasing engagement and knowledge of straight allies, and decreasing the number of homophobic or gender-based bullying reports (Day et al., 2020; Porta et al., 2017; Poteat et al., 2016; Poteat et al., 2018; Scheer & Poteat, 2016). Gay-Straight alliances are based on positive youth development models whose premise is that all youth have strengths and can be positive contributors to society by cultivating those strengths (Poteat et al., 2018). Research suggests that Gay-Straight alliances with the most significant level of engagement possessed several of the following: a sense of community, a focus on relationships and social connections, an element of fun, resources and gateways to other resources, fulfillment of member needs, parental

involvement, flexible structure, and open climates (Porta et al., 2017; Poteat et al., 2016; Scheer & Poteat, 2016). Gay-Straight alliances represent one type of student club that has positively impacted students, and 4-H clubs represent another.

4-H Clubs. Defore et al. (2011) studied factors influencing 4-H club enrollment and retention in Camden County, Georgia. The researchers determined that students attributed their continued participation in 4-H to parental support and involvement, a focus on fun activities, a mentoring system, schedule considerations, and community-based programs (Defore et al., 2011). Another 4-H community club described its successful experience recruiting Latino students by partnering with a local church and having a Spanish-speaking volunteer as the leader of the project (Janeiro & Bird, 2018). In yet another study, 4-H impact was examined through the lens of youth purpose (Burrow et al., 2022). Burrow et al.'s (2022) study revealed that youth purpose was fostered through diverse and transformative experiences and having or being role models.

SSAIS has dedicated a great deal of time and effort to creating SASH clubs, and the studies reviewed provide valuable insights into the benefits of extracurricular activities on school culture, social skills, and academic achievement. However, in this literature review, a limited number of relevant sources were found to address how to increase the growth and sustain K-12 clubs for students who have experienced sexual misconduct or for students who want to support victims who have experienced sexual misconduct, highlighting an area for further research.

Summary of Chapter Two

The literature review provides an evident need for essential action to stop sexual misconduct in K-12 schools, focusing on four themes: sexual misconduct in schools, conducting a school administrator and Title IX Coordinator needs assessment, recommendations for

effective professional learning for administrators, and growing influence through school-based clubs and organizations. Studies show an overwhelming gap between the low number of students reporting peer-to-peer sexual misconduct and the high number of occurrences (Grant et al., 2023; Maginn, 2022; Richards et al., 2021). Education leaders impacted by the consequences of sexual harassment and assault in their schools can contribute to the root cause analysis and potentially lower reporting of incidents (Sandomierskia, 2022).

Quantitative and qualitative data will support building a system and quality content for school administrators' professional learning. Incorporating evidence-based adult learning theories will ensure that the delivery and learning process significantly impact building knowledge and self-efficacy (Dunst et al., 2012). While Title IX requirements provide a safety net for the adults and youth in our schools, building their knowledge and skills, engaging legitimate stakeholder input and buy-in, and encouraging youth voice in the clubs and throughout their schools will further proactively address sexual misconduct offenses.

Combining professional learning for administrators on Title IX procedures, based on comprehensive needs assessment results, aims to address occurrences of peer-to-peer sexual misconduct effectively. For the learning to be meaningful and relevant for administrators, the literature review suggests a coaching model incorporating adult learning strategies and active participation. We acknowledge that a proactive approach to creating a safe learning environment, free of peer-to-peer misconduct, is necessary to protect our students in schools. SSAIS aims to do its part in preventing sexual misconduct by implementing SASH clubs within K-12 schools. The research provides examples of proven non-profit organizations that effectively expand and increase their influence to create behavioral change and ultimately address needs. The literature review addresses our quest to prevent and address peer-to-peer sexual misconduct in K-12

schools. It is guided by understanding the disconnect between the number of students reporting misconduct, conducting an effective needs assessment, providing professional learning for K-12 administrators, and implementing organizations to create a safe environment for children in schools.

Chapter 3. Methodology

After reviewing the literature, our team developed a research design intended to answer our research questions and close the gap in knowledge about the needs of Title IX Coordinators and school administrators responsible for addressing and preventing peer-to-peer sexual misconduct in schools. As scholar-practitioners, we worked carefully and ethically so SSAIS and school leaders can confidently utilize our findings as they continue their efforts to protect students from sexual assault and/or harassment. This chapter opens with information about the epistemology and theoretical frameworks grounding our work. We then fully define, describe, and justify our research design, data collection, and analysis methods. Lastly, the conclusion details the research team's positionality and the efforts to build the trust required to produce meaningful outcomes.

Epistemology

Before establishing our research design, we considered how we understand knowledge and reality. We believe people create realities based on their lived experiences, backgrounds, and personal feelings; therefore, realities are socially constructed. Our drive to understand school administrators and Title IX Coordinators' unique needs led us to interpretivism epistemology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interpretivist researchers construct knowledge by interpreting people's experiences. They recognize that reality is different for everyone. Every individual's perception of what is true and real is built on personal experience (Capper, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Our research questions are best answered through understanding the reality of Title IX Coordinators and school administrators.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is the anchor of a research project; it provides a definition and

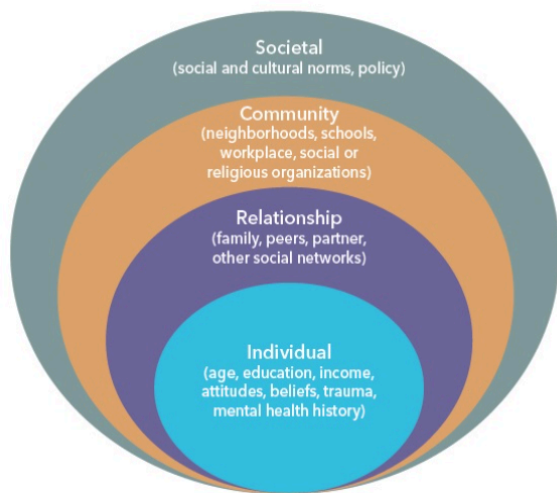
structure for all decisions regarding methodology and analysis (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). In analyzing the mission and vision of SSAIS and after holding several meetings with the SSAIS leadership team, it was clear the organization is seeking to create safer schools. Additionally, through dialogue with SSAIS, a literature review, and professional experiences, our team was reminded that producing organizational and sustainable change within the education system is neither fast nor easy. Dismantling institutional inequities requires careful, systematic planning and execution. Therefore, our research was, and continues to be, grounded in theoretical frameworks specific to school safety and organizational change.

Determining a pertinent theory for our research questions led us to school safety. Upon review, we discovered the Social-Ecological Framework, which assists researchers in understanding the experiences and outcomes of sexual violence (Richards et al., 2021). Psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner published the Ecological Systems for Human Development in the 1970s (Guy-Evans, 2023). Bronfenbrenner postulated that to understand how humans develop, one must consider the entire ecological environment in which they live. Through considering the interplay between the individual, relationships, community, and societal factors, the framework examines what must be done at a micro and macro level to prevent violence (The Social-Ecological Model: A Framework for Prevention |Violence Prevention|Injury Center|CDC, n.d.-b). Figure 2 illustrates how the Social-Ecological Framework asserts behaviors resulting from multifaceted interactions between an individual and the world in which they live (Cross et al., 2015; Safe States Alliance, n.d.). Although the Social Ecological Framework is widely used amongst researchers seeking to understand human behavior and development, it is not without criticism. Some experts fear that empirically testing the theory is problematic (Guy-Evans, 2023; Navarro & Tudge, 2023). While a study can interpret the effects of one's environment, it cannot

assert that the environment alone caused the outcome (Guy-Evans, 2023). Even with the framework's reproach, it effectively guided our questioning and research about school environments.

Figure 2

Social-Ecological Framework

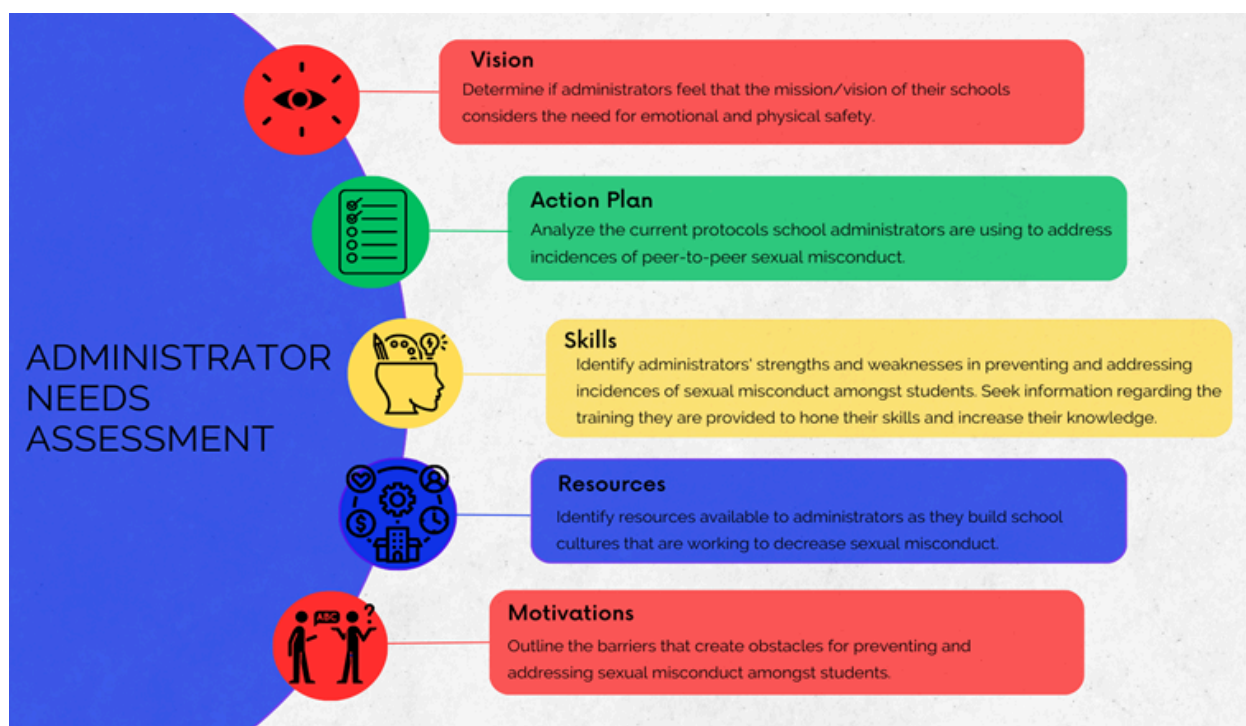


Note. Image from Socio-Ecological Model for Driver Safety - Safe States Alliance, n.d.

We believe schools do not act in isolation. Through the lens of the Social-Ecological Framework, our work seeks to determine changes that must be made at various levels to reduce peer-to-peer sexual misconduct in schools. To create a climate shift within the school, leaders must first understand the individual students they are supporting. They must consider students' ages, backgrounds, interpersonal skills, and attitudes about peer-to-peer relationships. However, focusing solely on the individual will disadvantage efforts to change. The school must receive support from the family and community if it wants to change how students perceive sexual misconduct. Behavior expectations in schools that do not align with the world in which students live outside the school walls may create dissonance, and the potential for change will erode.

Thus, preventing sexual misconduct requires a holistic approach that fosters two-way communication and support between school, home, and the community.

Additionally, creating sustainable organizational change requires persistence. To increase the number of students who perceive a school as safe and free from sexual harassment and assault, the culture and climate of the building must evolve. Theories of Change (ToC) assist people in understanding the specific plans and actions that must be taken to produce the change they wish to curate (Oberlack et al., 2019). Utilizing a ToC assists teams in planning, implementing, learning, and evaluating their efforts in changing an organization (Oberlack et al., 2019). Specifically, the Lippit-Knoster Model for organizational change outlines five components required for evolution: vision, action plan, skills, resources, and motivations (Elwood, 2021). If one of these components is missing, change efforts may result in negative outcomes such as anxiety, confusion, and frustration. Figure 3 represents how the Lippit-Knoster Model for change was adapted to develop the school administrators' and Title IX Coordinators' assessment of needs. Our research linked questions to the five elements required for change. The responses accomplished two goals. They established the unmet needs of school administrators and Title IX Coordinators that must be addressed to reduce peer-to-peer sexual misconduct in schools, and they provided action steps that will assist SSAIS and school leaders in better serving their school communities. The Social-Ecological Framework assisted in identifying what reform is needed and using the Theory of Change components to guide the change process will lead to a more successful change effort.

Figure 3*Adapted Lippit-Knoster Model for Change*

Note. Knoster, T. (2022), Presentation by Whittaker & Company, What is the Knoster Chart for Managing Complex Change?

Positionality

We aim for our findings to be a valuable contribution to both SSAIS and school leaders working to provide all students with educational experiences free from sexual harassment and assault. For our work to be impactful, we must own our positionality and relationship to the research. We are a group of highly experienced educators, each with over 15 years of experience working in or with K-12 public schools. One of our team members serves as a middle school principal, one is a middle school associate principal, one is a former school counselor, and the other is a former special education teacher. The latter two team members currently work at the university level and directly support school districts across Virginia through state educational initiatives. While our passion for providing students with equitable and safe schools makes this

work personal for each of us, we cannot allow our assumptions or individual experiences with Title IX policies and practices to invade our findings.

As we collaborated with SSAIS to determine the direction of our work and share our positionality with them, we sought to understand their needs and determine the avenues we felt would best achieve their goals. After researching SSAIS's website, we noticed that school administrators were missing from the curated resource lists. We were curious about what resources and/or research about peer-to-peer sexual misconduct existed, specific to school administrators, and as we reviewed sources, we noticed a gap in research. We found little to no reference to school administrators' experiences with processing and/or preventing sexual misconduct. Additionally, information about training for K-12, public school administrators and Title IX Coordinators was not readily available. Over the span of two meetings with SSAIS, we came to a consensus that focusing heavily on school administrators and Title IX Coordinators was a worthy endeavor because of the direct impact these two stakeholders have on school culture.

We have a unique understanding of the complexities of creating safe schools. We acknowledge that our identities and experiences impact our views and outlook in researching sexual misconduct. As a team of current K-12 educators who are heterosexual, cis-gendered women, we were mindful of our biases and member-checked our research. Three members of this team identify as White and one team member identifies as Black. Two team members are responsible for reporting and investigating all potential allegations in their school. As educators, by law, we are required to be mandated reporters. While our current educational roles provided credibility, we recognize that each research team member brought our unique background to this topic. We recognized that our biases may infiltrate how we define sexual misconduct, how we

see the role of school leaders, and how to best support our youth. Therefore, we intentionally took action steps to discuss the data with awareness of our identities and biases. We are all seeking doctoral degrees in educational leadership to grow as professionals and improve the school experiences bestowed on our youth. We chose to work with SSAIS, knowing the prevention of sexual misconduct needs to be further addressed for the future of our youth.

Research Design

To understand what school administrators and Title IX Coordinators need to prevent and process peer-to-peer sexual misconduct, a descriptive study using quantitative and qualitative methodologies was planned. Billups (2021) notes that a descriptive methodology is beneficial when researchers seek to understand participants' experiences of a specific phenomenon. Our original proposal included data collection through focus groups and a survey of K-12 administrators and Title IX Coordinators (see Appendix A). After meeting with our capstone committee, the team agreed to prioritize efforts on focus groups to collect qualitative data while seeking quantitative and demographic data from the members during the interview protocol. Through conversation with our committee, we realized focus groups allowed us to delve deeper into responses. With participants dialoguing amongst a group of professionals, we hoped their responses would produce richer, more insightful findings. While the drafted survey for administrators and Title IX Coordinators was never distributed, this survey became the basis for our focus group protocol and we were able to utilize some components verbatim including demographic, likert scale, yes/no, and free-type questions for the embedded quantitative data collection. We hope the survey still serves as an additional resource for future researchers.

Data Collection

To ensure our work was ethical, thorough, and correctly portrayed the needs of school

administrators and Title IX Coordinators working to prevent sexual misconduct, we first established the protocols for collecting, comparing, and analyzing data. Our data was collected via planned focus groups or one-on-one interviews, with an open-ended semi-structured protocol for school administrators and a separate protocol for Title IX Coordinators (see Appendix H). The focus groups were scheduled separately for school administrators and Title IX Coordinators, each lasting seventy-five minutes. During that time, participants joined a Nearpod lesson, which we used as a supplemental tool (see Appendix H). Billups (2021) describes supplemental tools as “data collection tools that support primary data collection in a qualitative study” (p. 13). Nearpod, a free, online, self-guided interactive platform, allowed us to complete our qualitative protocol while capturing quantitative and demographic data. In addition, it allowed participants to visually follow along by seeing all of the questions at their own pace.

We completed the initial focus group with all four members and our capstone chair to norm our process and make necessary adjustments. We purposefully invited five administrators with whom we had built a rapport and were professionally acquainted. The relationships among members created an environment where we felt comfortable receiving feedback from participants and our capstone chair after the session. Participants eagerly contributed to the conversation and understood the need to build a safe conversation space. We asked the participants if the formatting of the Nearpod or protocol needed to be adjusted and received positive feedback. After the focus group concluded, we met with our capstone chair to discuss areas of strength and improvement. With no adjustments recommended by the focus group participants or our capstone chair, the team agreed to include this first focus group in our data analysis.

Qualitative Phase: Title IX and Administrator Focus Groups

The dyad team of researchers each served a specific role. One member facilitated the discussion, while the other took notes and recorded observations. The focus groups were approximately seventy-five minutes to allow fifteen minutes for group norming, thus generating the psychological safety required for effective focus groups (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a team, we decided that even if one person attended the scheduled focus group, the team would move forward with data collection and conduct the session as a one-on-one interview. Any data collected from participants who could not stay for at least 50% of the allotted focus group time would not be included in the data set. In addition, we decided only to allow focus group participants to join within the first 15 minutes of the start time of each focus group so as not to create distractions. While conducting and analyzing interview data, we acknowledged that our individual biases, each with an educator background, could affect our understanding of the data. We worked in groups of two or more and discussed themes and observances of the data with all members before drawing conclusions. In real-time, texting via cell phone enabled the two-person team to communicate without disrupting the flow of conversation and pivot based on participants' answers and time constraints.

To begin each focus group, we, the facilitators, introduced ourselves and described the purpose of the study. Our introduction stated, “Our goal is to spend an hour and fifteen minutes together so our research team can better understand your experiences preventing and/or processing peer-to-peer sexual misconduct. These discussions are confidential. We are recording this session; however, all names and identifying information will remain confidential in our findings.” This introduction was shared with Title IX Coordinators and K-12 school administrators.

As facilitators, we acknowledged the sensitivity and challenging nature of some of the research questions. In our protocol, we encouraged focus group participants to take care of themselves and their needs if they experienced trauma or discomfort. We encouraged them to keep their camera on to assist with non-verbal cues but also respected the need for privacy. Next, focus group participants were asked to change their names as a data collection tool. Initially, we asked the participants to rename themselves using only demographic data. Data included the state where they worked, the school level (elementary, middle, high), the school setting (rural, suburban, city), the individual's year of experience in their role, and the number of students enrolled. However, after the first session, we found engaging with the focus group participants challenging without knowing their preferred names. Therefore, we adjusted the protocol to have the participant enter their information in the chat and rename themselves as they prefer to be called during the focus group.

We then shared our focus group norms. These included the following:

- We encourage you to participate as much as possible.
- We will respect all comments without judgment.
- If you feel uncomfortable with a question, please feel free to pass.
- We prefer that you leave your camera on, but respect your privacy if you prefer not to.
- We have designed ten discussion questions. However, our semi-structured format will allow for flexibility in following up or eliminating questions.

We began the administrator and Title IX Coordinator focus groups with a K-12 sexual misconduct scenario and asked administrators and Title IX coordinators to explain their process in addressing the potential concern. We aimed to begin the focus group with an opportunity for

members to draw on prior experiences and activate learned knowledge (Trivette et al., 2009). Additionally, this allows for members to build rapport amongst one another before continuing with more specific discussions that address the research questions. While the scenario remained the same for administrators and Title IX Coordinators, the questions differed by role. The scenario describes a student who identifies as female who reported to the school counselor that her behind was grabbed by another student, who also identifies as female. The scenario explains that the female victim has previously experienced this action from their peer but did not report the incident because she did not want to be labeled as a “snitch.” The victim is uncomfortable but does not want her parents notified or for the alleged perpetrator to receive a consequence. We asked the administrators and Title IX Coordinators to describe their next steps.

While focus group questions varied based on roles, we intentionally aligned our protocol with our six research questions. Some consistent inquiry allowed for common themes to be addressed with both groups. For example, both groups were asked what online resources were used to access sexual harassment and assault information, with the understanding that both roles might access materials for different reasons and standard search terms or familiar organizations might be utilized. A second common question addressed what barriers make it difficult for students to report sexual harassment and/or assault. As focus group facilitators, we asked open-ended questions aligned with our research questions to seek deeper answers (see Appendix H). For Title IX Coordinators and school administrators, we created questions specific to their role in the Title IX process and asked similar questions to compare findings across the two roles (see Appendix I).

Quantitative Phase: Nearpod Data Collection

In addition to our focus groups' qualitative data, we used the opportunity to ask

quantitative questions while we had a captive audience. Demographic data was collected utilizing Likert scales, yes/no, and numerical responses. Using Nearpod allowed us to encourage all members to complete the questions and share the results for additional discussion in real time. The quantitative questions included in the Nearpod were intentionally aligned with the research questions to allow for further data analysis (see Appendix I).

Trustworthiness

Collectively, we understood the need to develop trust amongst all of the stakeholders we engaged with while researching the sensitive topic of sexual harassment and assault. We implemented various techniques to ensure our participants felt secure, including actively listening to responses, sensitively questioning the participants, encouraging the choice to keep their cameras on or off, and carefully observing and responding to the emotions of those being interviewed (Billups, 2021). To develop trustworthiness between the study participants and our team, we allowed the participants' thoughts and perspectives to drive the focus group conversations. We were transparent about our intention to learn from experienced Title IX Coordinators and school administrators. We ensured that personal information and identifying factors remained private by addressing this at the beginning of our semi-structured protocol.

Billups (2021) provides a trustworthiness framework when collecting qualitative data. The elements include credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Credibility is established when the researcher has prolonged engagement by spending time in the research field, persistent observation, and data triangulation, allowing the researcher to uncover bias and understand the participant's perspectives (Nowell et al., 2017). We completed a thorough literature review and held several meetings with our client, who works to reduce sexual misconduct in schools. In addition, we conducted interviews with two members of our Capstone

Committee, both of whom are VCU professors. The interviewees included a law professor, Dr. Becker, and a sexual misconduct researcher and expert witness in case trials, Dr. Shakeshaft. Dependability is achieved if the research process and findings are consistent with previously collected data. Our literature review supported many focus group findings. For example, there are barriers to reporting because students fear being called a “snitch” or the perpetrator not being disciplined. Transferability allows other researchers to interpret and apply the methods to enhance their study.

Reflexive practices allow for confirmability. Reflexivity empowers researchers to ask themselves what they know and how they know it. As school administrators, two of our team members concurred several times with answers to participant questions. Researchers then question if their previous knowledge has the potential to dilute or contest the data shared by the participants. Member-checking can be achieved by sharing data with participants during analysis to affirm that their thoughts and perceptions are adequately articulated and authentically represented (Nowell et al., 2017).

We engaged in reflexive practices by self-questioning and norming our protocols to ensure, to the best of our ability, that biases were not driving the interview or analysis process. We also worked in pairs to check these biases while facilitating interviews, memoing, and member-checking. Ultimately, we will reduce our biases from infiltrating our research findings by debriefing and sharing our ideas and reflections.

Participant Recruitment

Purposeful, convenience, and snowball sampling were used to collect contact information and invite individuals to participate in the focus groups. Purposeful sampling involves the intentional selection of participants who, due to their unique perspectives and experiences, have

the capacity to provide specific information (Billups, 2021). Convenience sampling, based on time and availability, was used in addition to snowball sampling, in which we conveniently located participants who met our criteria and requested their assistance with referring qualified colleagues to our focus groups (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Our criteria for participation in the focus group required participants to currently serve as a school administrator or Title IX Coordinator in a public education K-12 setting. We aimed to recruit at least 25 school administrators and 25 Title IX coordinators to participate in the focus groups. We concluded that this sample size would allow us to conduct reliable focus groups, reach data saturation, and ensure our ability to thoroughly answer the research questions and make meaningful recommendations to SSAIS (Billups, 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

We solicited participation from K-12 school administrators and Title IX Coordinators across the United States and all school levels (elementary, middle, and high). The invitations were disseminated to participants through a variety of efforts. We created a call-to-action social media graphic with a QR code that took interested participants to a Google Form for signing up (see Appendix B). The Google form collected an email address, educator's position, and availability (see Appendix C). We advertised the call-to-action on our personal social media platforms, including X, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Utilizing Facebook, we posted on our personal accounts and to specific groups dedicated to K-12 administrators and doctoral degree holders and doctoral students nationwide, including: PhiniseD/FinishEdD (Drs/Future Drs) #WhoGotNext, Minority Doctoral Network, Inc., Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) Network, and Principals Principles Leadership Group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1213125328776999/>; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/343284949083620/>; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/805246746267756/>; & <https://www.facebook.com/groups/principalprinciplesleadership/>).

We posted to these groups because we felt it would increase our chances of gaining purposive participants who were empathetic to our recruitment needs while meeting our participant requirements. Groups dedicated to K-12 sexual misconduct were also contacted, including the Association of Title IX Coordinators and Institutional Compliance Solutions (www.atixa.org; www.icslawyer.com). The Program Director for VCU's School of Education's EdD Program shared a listserv we used to distribute our focus group invitation to doctoral and graduate students. SSAIS also advertised our call to action through their social media platforms. The total recruitment process took approximately three weeks as the team continued to work on increasing participation and diversity to achieve our goal of data saturation.

In addition to the social media graphic, we created a one-page narrative that described our study and its purpose in detail. Appendix D includes a copy of the narrative. This one-page narrative was included as a QR code on our social media graphic and included our names, professional roles, and pictures to humanize our group. For any emails we sent to potential participants and networks, the one-page narrative was attached to a brief email with a link to our Google Form. We began by emailing five contacts from SSAIS to request participation, three of whom expressed interest and participated in focus groups. We completed a Google search for random public schools nationwide to find contact information for Title IX Coordinators and administrators. Collectively, through this search, we contacted 57 Title IX Coordinators and 121 school administrators via email.

Additionally, to broaden our efforts in finding educational leaders committed to furthering their knowledge and sharing their experiences, we contacted 43 Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) directors to distribute the call to action to potential participants (<https://www.cpedinitiative.org/>). We solicited participants through this resource, hoping VCU's

status as a CPED member institution would positively impact the response rate. Based on a cross reference of our distribution lists, no responses were received from this effort. SSAIS published two articles, one by EdPost (Join Innovative Research to Reduce Sexual Harassment and Assault (edpost.com) and the other by 74 Million (New Research Looks for Ways to Reduce Sexual Harassment and Assault in Schools – The 74 (the74million.org), sharing our call to action.

Lastly, and most effectively, each research team member shared the focus-group sign-up link with personnel in schools and divisions in which they have close contacts. One of our team members is a systems coach for the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) initiative in Virginia, and she was permitted by the VTSS (Virginia Tiered System of Supports) Director to contact K-12 administrators using her organization's extensive listserv.

Using our Google form results, which included participants' availability, we grouped participants based on an agreed-upon protocol of limiting each group to five persons or less. See Appendix E for the details of all focus groups. Initially, 17 school administrators and 19 Title IX coordinators expressed interest. However, six of the individuals used Gmail accounts, and when we reached out to gain more information, they asked for an honorarium. No honorarium or participation compensation was given to any focus group participants. We responded to the six individuals, letting them know that there was no honorarium for participation and that we understood if it impacted their ability to participate.

Once the focus groups were formed, we emailed a more detailed description of the purpose of our research and the importance of their insights, with a link to join at their requested time (see Appendix F). Each participant was sent a reminder email approximately 24 hours before the session. We offered eight focus group meetings for Title IX Coordinators, but some sessions had no participants attend. We successfully completed two focus groups with a total of

nine participants. Per our agreed-upon focus-group protocol, we conducted one-on-one interviews if others did not log in during their assigned date and time. This protocol resulted in a single one-on-one interview with a Title IX coordinator that was held due to a schedule conflict.

Nine of the original 19 registered Title IX Coordinators participated in our focus groups, resulting in a 47% participation rate of Title IX Coordinators, with seven states represented. We offered seven focus groups for school administrators (principals, associates, and assistant principals) and conducted two. Within those two focus groups, we had eight total administrator participants. In addition, we conducted two one-on-one interviews with school administrators due to several no-shows. Efforts to gain involvement resulted in a 53% participation rate for school administrators from various rural, suburban, and city schools, with enrollment from 500 to 2,000 students (see Appendix G). Combined, we had input from ten administrators and nine Title IX Coordinators.

As scheduling conflicts arose for seven interested participants, we continued to offer and extend invitations for future focus groups. A team member personally emailed each participant who could not attend their assigned focus group to increase future participation. We successfully increased participation by rescheduling four participants to a later session. However, despite our efforts of repeated emails to invite participants, there were 22 no-shows.

Purposeful sampling of Title IX Coordinators and school administrators created homogeneous group interviews to support the generalization of topics (Patton, 2002). The focus groups were facilitated using a semi-structured protocol that allowed for uniformity amongst researchers and room for flexibility based on responses from the group (Billups, 2021). Each facilitator responded to answers to delve into topics when needed and passed on some questions due to time constraints. With participants responding to prompts and questions during focus

groups, their evolving interactions provided rich and descriptive primary data (Billups, 2021).

All interviews were conducted via Zoom. The virtual format allowed participants from any state to join, thus enabling a broader sample. Permission was asked and granted for the sessions to be recorded. We worked in pairs, and the recordings ensured that the information garnered through the focus groups was accurate and accessible to all members. Transcription was provided through the Zoom recording or a similar transcription program in Microsoft Word using audio recordings from Zoom. The transcriptions were not verbatim; however, the meaning was clearly understood. We agreed that if a specific quote or idea would be used in our data analysis and findings, we would review the recording to ensure the transcription was accurate.

Data Analysis Methods

The data analysis methods were interactive and cyclical, allowing us to understand the information we collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Before in-depth analysis, we screened the data. As a group, we established rules for data collection and analysis. We reviewed all transcripts individually to conduct initial inductive coding and look for information that helped create tentative subject categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Quantitative analysis will give us information on trends or categories of ideas, relationships, and opinions from our sample population (Hanley et al., 2013).

We used descriptive statistical methods to analyze the raw data. By determining medians, averages, and outliers within our data set, we can tell a story about the experiences of Title IX Coordinators and school administrators. For questions that require numerical answers, the data allows us to determine relationships and patterns to inform SSAIS and educational leaders about the needs of school administrators and Title IX Coordinators.

Analyzing the data collected through our focus groups required constant comparison

(Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). In the first step after the focus groups, we, the researchers, will engage in open-coding of the data. Working independently, we identified overlapping themes to assign descriptors (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). The second step allowed us to review our work together and create a codebook with agreed-upon definitions of themes that address the research questions. Third, by discussing and finding consensus on how the information was coded to assigned definitions, the team creates meaningful categories of data (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). After team members shared individual ideas, the initial 21 codes were collapsed into seven categories. Finally, we used the categories and identified themes that emerged from the discussion. These themes are essential to our research findings and recommendations for SSAIS.

To ensure credibility within the study, we allowed all participants to sign up to receive a copy of our findings before publishing. In addition, once we chose the quotes that would be utilized in our data analysis, we emailed the focus group participant the quote(s) we used in context (see Appendix J). This allowed the opportunity for focus group members to see the importance of their participation and provided us with an added layer of trustworthiness and reliability that, to the best of our ability, our biases would not inaccurately skew the data analysis process. We received two requests for revisions to direct quotes included in our findings. The team agreed that to maintain trust with the participants, all requests would be honored as long as the quote's meaning was not altered. Once those changes were made, we resent the quotes to those participants for re-approval. Additionally, we received a request from one participant to discard their quotes from our findings section. Despite our team members individually and collectively reviewing transcripts, this participant believed we took their quote out of context. We obliged them by removing all of their quotes from Chapter Four.

Limitations

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. Execution of the semi-structured protocol resulted in focus group participants receiving differing questions or order of questions. Although we tried diligently to adhere to the protocol, our facilitation varied based on the level of participation and engagement in each session, comfortability, or interest. For example, one participant joined while in their car and did not consistently answer all questions. Another limitation of the study was that all of the administrators who participated were from the state of Virginia. We attempted to find literature to support the idea of administrators' experiences being relatively the same across the nation but did not find any relevant studies in our search. This geographical limitation could skew the data and be an opportunity for further research.

Due to the sample size, we acknowledge that it may be difficult to draw conclusions that will be applicable across the nation. For example, large and small school districts with diverse needs, funding, and demographics may have challenges not described within our sample. Instead, we focused on reliability and pattern analysis (Patton, 2002). We also recognize that participants could influence each other's responses. For instance, some Title IX Coordinators had attended the same training and knew each other before the focus group.

Nearpod created minimal technological issues; however, a few participants expressed initial problems using this supplemental tool. We worked diligently to address concerns and assist all participants in adequately capturing the data using technology.

Another limitation of our study is that we did not validate the employment/role of focus group participants outside of screening participants based on using an active, school-issued email account and the titles posted on website searches used to create our potential participant list. We also did not include any questions on the interest form for participation about how each

participant heard about our study. Asking such a question could have provided our team and future researchers insights on the best methods for gaining participation.

Summary of Chapter Three

Our team used a Social-Ecological Framework with grounding in school safety and organizational change to better understand what is needed to prevent peer-to-peer sexual misconduct in K-12 schools. Through homogeneous focus groups of K-12 administrators and Title IX Coordinators, we collected qualitative and quantitative data to establish the professional learning needs of both groups. We gained helpful insight and suggestions on how to prevent and address instances of sexual misconduct.

Chapter 4. Findings

The findings from our focus groups and supplemental quantitative data collections provide essential insights into the experiences and needs of K-12 school administrators and Title IX Coordinators as they work to prevent and process incidences of peer-to-peer sexual misconduct. Our focus group questions were intentionally designed to determine the resources needed to respond to incidents of sexual misconduct appropriately, the changes needed to prevent acts of victimization, and the actions a non-profit organization, specifically SSAIS, can take to support educators' efforts in creating safe and secure schools. In our facilitation of focus groups, we sought honest and vulnerable feedback from Title IX Coordinators and school administrators to ensure their answers reflected their individual and school-wide successes, areas of growth, and concerns about Title IX implementation in K-12 school settings. Within this chapter, we will present important research that can be utilized by educational leaders, non-profit organizations, and policymakers to ensure students are given their right to attend schools free from sexual harassment and/or assault.

This chapter presents our research in an order and context designed to amplify our analysis of participant insights and feedback. First, processing and preventing peer-to-peer sexual misconduct findings are shared based on Title IX Coordinator input, then administrator responses, and then a summary of information that was heard from both participant groups. Next, the data regarding preferences for professional learning is reported. We conclude the chapter by synthesizing details reported by participants and presenting findings specific to how SSAIS can increase its sphere of influence in K-12 schools. Quotations from participants will be used within our writing to provide evidence and context to our analysis. The direct quotes will highlight participants' voices and create authenticity within our reporting.

Needs for Processing Sexual Misconduct

Schools cannot forge a greater sense of safety without identifying the support, resources, and experiences their stakeholders need. In designing our research study, we opted to host focus groups, providing a space for Title IX Coordinators and school administrators to discuss what they need to serve students and families best. The first portion of our focus group questions focused on participants' experiences with processing reports of sexual harassment and/or assault. From our literature review, we know that for schools to provide students with a supportive environment and the best conditions for learning, there must be concerted efforts to swiftly and effectively address complaints of sexual misconduct. Allnock and Atkinson's (2019) focus groups found that "cultures of complacency" occur when students feel as though reports of sexual misconduct are not properly heard, investigated, or processed. They explain how this perception of ineptitude leads to students silencing their experiences. We heard similar sentiments echoed throughout our focus groups. One Title IX Coordinator we spoke to echoed these beliefs. They noted, "It's really a matter of are they [school staff] going to believe me [student reporter], or are they going to take it seriously? And then worrying about the retaliation piece. That's something that I hear about a lot. " In listening to the feedback of Title IX Coordinators and school administrators, we deduced several underlying needs. The findings pinpoint specific areas for improvement, and once these needs are met, schools are anticipated to increase reporting of sexual misconduct, investigations will be more efficient and effective, and a greater sense of safety will be established.

Title IX Coordinator Responses for Processing

In our focus groups with Title IX Coordinators, two needs for addressing peer-to-peer sexual misconduct emerged. First, Title IX Coordinators must possess and continually hone

strong knowledge of legal literacy. Second, the coordinators desire professional development specific to Title IX's implementation and implications in the K-12 school setting.

Legal Understanding. Title IX Coordinators are responsible for ensuring school divisions uphold every component outlined in the federal law. Our analysis finds that the words legal or law were mentioned 50 times by eight of the nine Title IX participants when using the word search feature within our transcripts. Two Title IX Coordinators shared how their background in legal studies elevated their work, while others articulated a need for increased knowledge of the legal process. One participant noted, "I should probably go back and get my law degree because of how much I was spending in legal counsel to help me navigate the process." Another said, "It's [Title IX] a mini judicial process." Without a proper understanding of the legal system, terminology, and reading the law, Title IX Coordinators fear misinterpreting the essential steps to protect students' rights.

In addition to legal knowledge, Title IX Coordinators must be cognizant of the continuous regulation changes. While Title IX has been in effect for over 50 years, guidance changes regularly to ensure students face no form of discrimination while attending school. The evolution has been powerful in protecting students' rights, but the changes can cause disruption and confusion for school divisions and Title IX Coordinators. One coordinator said:

I think that there needs to be, from the federal level as well as at the state level, effort to make sure that the people who are responsible and the organizations...that are responsible for adhering to Title IX that they're fully informed about what they need to be aware of. Because I could tell you that some of my colleagues across the state are nowhere near where we are with regards to Title IX, and if you ask them about Title IX, they're like title, what title? You know they confuse it with so many other things.

This quote illustrates a theme that Title IX Coordinators articulated as a need; help in understanding new Title IX regulations and assistance in updating internal school protocols to ensure they are aligned with federal mandates. A participant said:

But I also think it would be beneficial...when a new policy comes out, when new federal law comes out or leading up, go ahead and start working on this for your policy. These are the changes that you need to know are coming. Having that helps us.

Another coordinator commented:

The timeline is always changing, and it's hard to keep up with the changes, honestly. And, one of the things for me that's difficult is understanding how... the changes affect us. And you know, different divisions interpret it, which, you know, I think is sometimes difficult. Our findings indicate that Title IX Coordinators need assistance understanding how changes to Title IX impact K-12 schools, staff, and students.

Training Specific to K-12 Implementation of Title IX. While speaking with Title IX Coordinators, we asked about professional training specific to their roles and responsibilities. These participants shared their experiences with training from national organizations such as The Association of Title IX Coordinators (ATIXA) and Institutional Compliance Solutions (ICS). While the coordinators consistently emphasized the importance of training, there was concern that implementation of Title IX in K-12 schools is not the focus of most professional learning opportunities. Rather, professional learning is designed with post-secondary institutions as the focus. One participant shared:

We went to our first ATIXA thing and they didn't really have much of a K-12 focus, so I was having to filter a lot of information. We don't have residence halls. We don't have sororities and fraternities. I was trying to glean out the part that was important.

Another participant seconded these sentiments by saying:

I did an ATIXA training. That was my initial training for Title IX. And, while it was good, I mean, that was my first training, so I was all for it. But it was more suited for businesses and possibly higher-ed and it didn't fill the K-12 space.

To effectively uphold the law, Title IX Coordinators request training specific to K-12 school operations and the nuances of youth, families, and school discipline policies.

School Administrator Responses for Processing

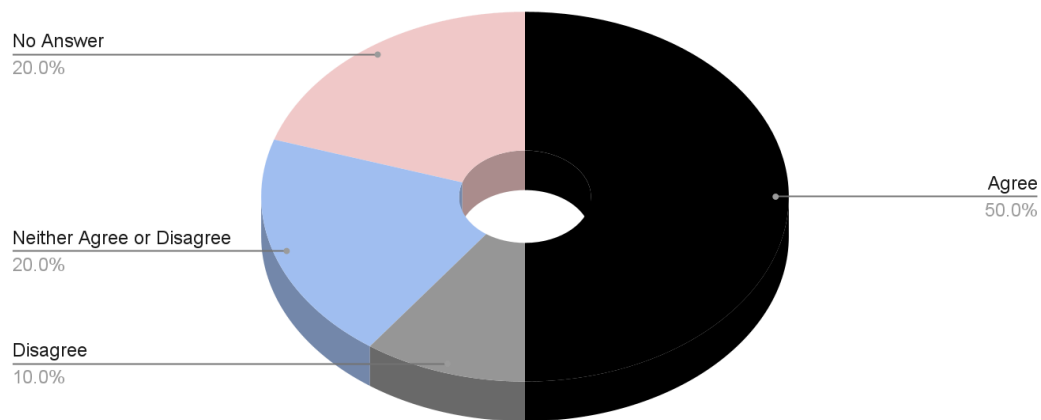
While Title IX Coordinators are responsible for a school division's implementation of Title IX, school administrators are often the first responders and the staff tasked with walking students through the difficult experience of sexual harassment and/or assault. An administrator we spoke to said, “It's my obligation, responsibility, I don't know, whatever word you want to use there, to make sure that we're protecting all of our kids, all of our staff, and that everyone is comfortable and safe in our environment, right?” To fulfill this duty, administrators need assistance. In our 4 focus groups for school administrators, we found two trends in administrators' petitions for support. Administrators need more training specific to Title IX in the K-12 environment and support in continuously enacting practices and protocols prioritizing safe and trusting relationships between students and staff. These findings are explored in depth in the sections below. While there may often be an emotional and stressful burden associated with processing an act of sexual misconduct reported by a student, providing administrators with the assistance they requested will improve the investigative process and increase the sense of school safety.

Training for School Administrators. Throughout our dialogues with school administrators, training specific to peer-to-peer sexual misconduct and Title IX violations were

discussed with depth and breadth. To begin, we asked the 10 school administrators to respond to the statement, “I need more training to understand how to process reports of sexual harassment and/or assault in accordance with Title IX law.” Figure 4 illustrates their responses. Half of the administrators expressed a desire for more training. One administrator proclaimed, “I don't think there can ever be enough training with this [processing sexual harassment and/or assault].” The same person also shared a level of concern with training, highlighting that, **generally speaking, there's an uptick in reporting because once training is provided, attendees experience heightened awareness around the topic they were made aware of when they said, “I feel like once you provide training, then people start searching for victims.”** The more effective training administrators receive, the more intentional they can be in noticing and accurately addressing **characteristics of sexual misconduct.** Thus, training is a powerful tool in creating safer schools and empowering education leaders.

Figure 4

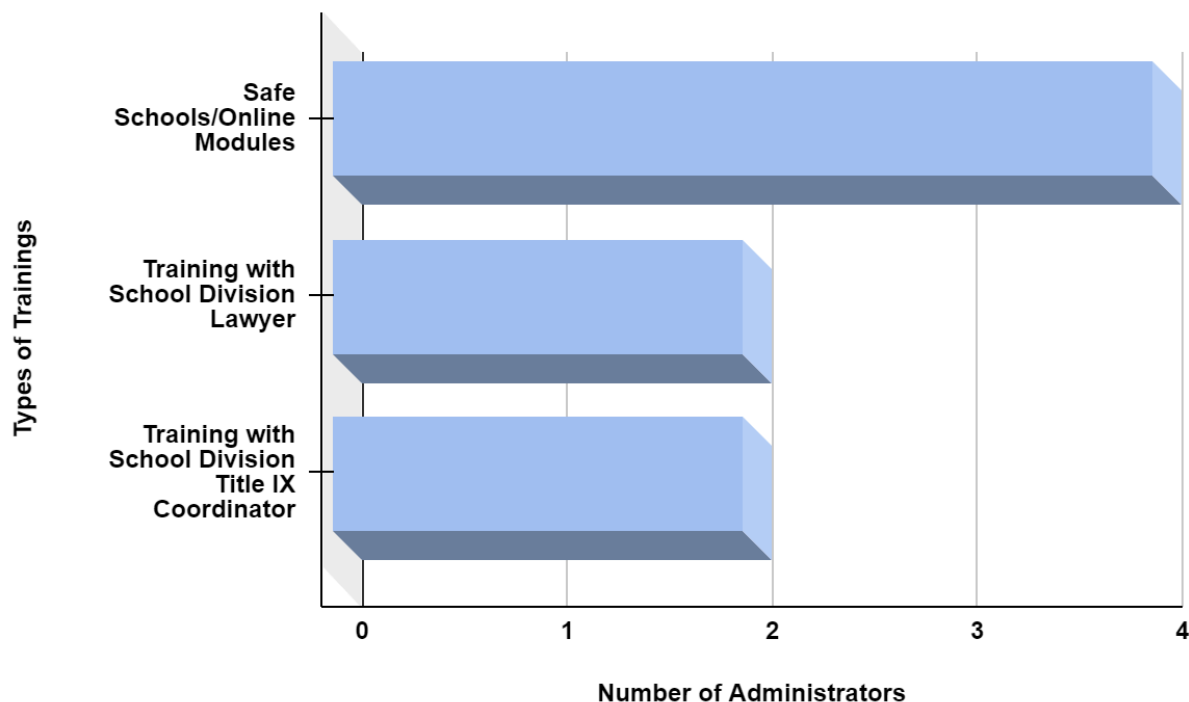
Administrator Responses to the Statement: “I need more training to process reports of sexual harassment/assault.” (n=10)



Administrators' requests for additional training are important, and we sought to enrich our understanding of their needs by asking questions about the type of professional learning they have experienced and what additions or changes would be most beneficial. Our Nearpod survey asked the 10 school administrators about the number of training sessions specific to sexual misconduct or Title IX they attended within the last year. Of the eight who responded (two administrators did not complete the Nearpod questions), only one indicated they had not attended any instructional sessions. The other seven administrators took part in one or two training sessions. Figure 5 lists the sexual harassment and assault training administrators attended last year. Two of our 10 administrators spoke highly of the training they attended with their school division's lawyer to learn more about Title IX. However, one noted that the training with the lawyer discussed peer-to-peer sexual misconduct, but it was lacking as a primary focus on K-12.

Figure 5

Sexual Harassment/Assault Training Attended by School Administrators (n=10)



Trusted Adults for Students. In addition to requests for training, our analysis of the focus group transcripts found that administrators believe positive, trusting relationships between students and staff create an environment in which students are more likely to report incidences of peer-to-peer sexual harassment and/or assault. We heard one administrator say, “At our school, there's a big focus on making sure that everyone has a trusted adult, so if something does happen, they have someone who can help guide them to whom they can talk about it with or how to report it.” When students have access to an adult they trust, their willingness to share increases and the school is provided an opportunity to investigate and address sexual misconduct. From another administrator, we heard:

We, our staff, work really hard. Because our school's small, I think it's easy for us to, get

really strong relationships. I think that not all of them, but a large percentage of our student body have at least one adult that they feel they can go to. And our staff are really good about making reports about what the kids report. If that makes sense.

Here, we note that the size of the school may impact the ease with which each student can connect with one or more staff members. A smaller school environment, where everyone is more familiar with one another, may encourage a connectedness that is harder to achieve in larger schools. Additionally, the quote indicates that **for trusting relationships to impact the processing of sexual misconduct, adults must know when and how to notify the appropriate Title IX school staff or district coordinator of the information they receive from students.**

Shared Responses: Needs for Processing Sexual Misconduct

After coding the transcripts for all Title IX Coordinator and school administrator focus groups, we recognized there were themes about processing reports of peer-to-peer sexual misconduct that often transcended job responsibilities. Both groups shared how **clear, concise policy implementation, a strong relationship between coordinators and school administrators, and removing barriers for student reporting assist in allegations of sexual misconduct being appropriately and sensitively addressed.**

Positive Relationship Between Title IX Coordinator and School Administrator. For many school leaders, allegations related to Title IX and/or sexual misconduct are unnerving; the burden of the law and the responsibility of protecting children is heavy. One administrator said, “I was really nervous about this [focus group] because I feel like, in my mind, Title IX is this big thing. I was so nervous, I brought my Title IX manual home with me so I could read up on it before.” The quote highlights the fear of failure staff may feel as they navigate investigations involving sexual harassment and/or assault. However, our findings indicate that **when Title IX**

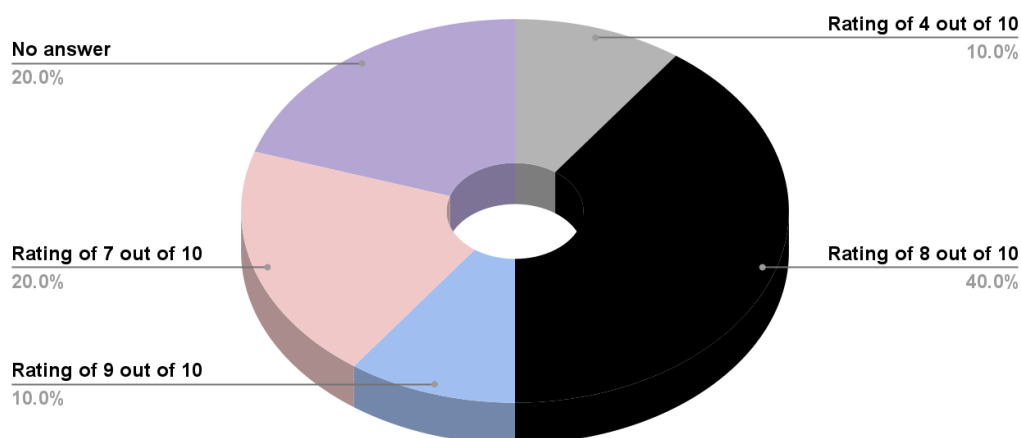
Coordinators and school administrators work closely with one another to process acts of misconduct, confidence and effectiveness increase collaboratively. Figure 6 shows that most of the administrators we spoke with feel comfortable processing allegations of sexual misconduct. However, in discussing their answers, we heard school administrators note that their confidence comes not from their own abilities but from their partnership with their Title IX Coordinator. One administrator told us:

I'll say that I felt comfortable handling it. Maybe not a 10 [strongly agree in their level of confidence], but a nine because of what you're asking now, which is the division coordinator. So I feel comfortable because I know that my first step is to contact the Coordinator. That's what makes me comfortable, because then we will navigate it together and I don't feel alone that I'm on an island and having to navigate that by myself.

Knowing they are not working alone increases the administrator's ability to address misconduct confidently. We find it important to note that none of the 10 administrators could inform us of any online resources they use to work through sexual harassment and/or assault. They view their Title IX Coordinator as a critical element and primary tool of their resource toolbox. One administrator said, "And so I'm lucky because we've got our Title IX coordinator, and other [division] resources are really accessible to us."

Figure 6

Administrator Responses to "On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable are you with processing a sexual harassment and/or assault allegation?" (n=10)



Note. For this Nearpod question, the scale of 1-10 was defined as 1 being very uncomfortable and 10 being very comfortable with processing a sexual harassment and/or assault allegation.

Similarly, the Title IX Coordinators view coaching and supporting school administrators as a key component of their role. One coordinator stated, “And part of my role, even being new, is guiding administrators through this [Title IX].” We received two different responses when we asked nine Title IX Coordinators how they build trust and connection with administrators. First, visibility and responsiveness are crucial. One participant in a Title IX focus group said:

It's listening to administrators. It's them knowing that you're there and that you care...it's about being visible, but also being able for people to get in touch with you because that's what I try to do. Like, I try to guide and mentor them through what actually is Title IX because I think everyone has a different lens in terms of what that is.

Further developing this thought, another Title IX Coordinator shared:

The more that we talk about Title IX, the more comfortable our folks are in reaching out... I try to, you know, come at it from a place of 'don't take it on by yourself. Let me be your support.' So I felt like being more vocal about Title IX and what goes with that, I think our folks are comfortable just reaching out and they've built a relationship that you know they feel comfortable going to me saying I know I can depend on [name] to be our district expert in this area and so.

When Title IX Coordinators prioritize coaching administrators, they gain trust and create a more dynamic relationship. With increased visibility, be it through training, communication, and/or school building visits, the Title IX Coordinators provide administrators the necessary assurance needed to support students and families through experiences of sexual misconduct.

The second means of developing strong working relationships between administrators and Title IX Coordinators centers on creating a safe space where administrators do not fear judgment or retaliation if they make a mistake. One of our Title IX participants stated:

And so definitely, it was about building trust when they knew they could actually call and say, 'I probably should know this, [name omitted], but I don't. And this is what happened. Should I make a report to your office or are you gonna call that parent kind of thing?' ...So our trend is now a heavy reliance on our Title IX office, but I am not gonna fault that ever.

Coordinators agreed they would rather administrators feel comfortable calling and asking for help even if it is not a true Title IX incident, as opposed to working in isolation and potentially under-reacting to a problem. Another participant in the same focus group said:

I'm here to help and I always say if you [school administrator] make a mistake in the process, we can pick it up where it should have been. We will correct what we should

have done and we'll go forward.

Trust and dependability are key to a positive relationship between Title IX Coordinators and school administrators.

Removing Barriers to Reporting Incidences of Sexual Assault/Harassment. In our analysis of the transcripts from six focus group with Title IX Coordinators and school administrators and one interview, we noted that **the biggest need for responding to peer-to-peer sexual misconduct is removing the barriers that keep students from reporting their experiences.**

We learned of several reasons students may silence their painful experiences, and the information is detailed below. Title IX coordinators and school administrators shed light on important information for school and civic leaders. Reviewing the findings will arm leaders with new knowledge they can use to examine the culture and climate of their schools and communities.

In our seven transcripts, we found multiple participants who shared the opinion that **students frequently do not report experiences of peer-to-peer sexual misconduct because they believe the school's response to the situation will do little to nothing to help them. Because school investigations require due process and student privacy, legally, the victim and their family cannot always know the exact measures that have been taken to handle the situation with care.**

We heard one administrator say:

There is a pocket of students that feel like there's no point in telling them [school staff] because they're not gonna do anything. And part of it too, is we [administrators] don't get to go back to those kids. I can't go tell that kid I watched 15 hours of tape, you know. I can't tell the kids what's happening in the investigation.

Fear of retaliation is another barrier schools must address for students to feel they can share incidences of sexual misconduct. Within the transcripts, we found the concept of 'snitching' was

mentioned more than 10 times. Four of our six focus groups discussed snitching or fear of retribution as a reason students struggle with sharing their experiences. **Being known as a snitch, a person who makes a report that causes another person to receive a consequence comes with a stigma students seek to avoid.** A Title IX Coordinator said:

It's fear of retaliation, not necessarily that retaliation happens. But just the fear of retaliation, and that sometimes is hard for people to come to terms with. Even if I [a student] trust the administrators in my building, or even if it's a staff member, if I have a good relationship with my principal, I'm afraid that if I go and say that, you know, 'I've been harassed' ... I'm going to be retaliated against...it becomes difficult for people to come to terms with.

An administrator similarly stated:

You know and it's this perception of the kids feeling like...'I don't want to be a snitch, right?' There's a lot of that. 'I don't want it to get worse. I don't want there to be retaliation.' And unfortunately, there can be situations where schools do everything right and everything by the book...there are worlds where that could happen and the behavior still doesn't stop or it gets worse. And that's frustrating for kids.

The participants who discussed snitching recognized how its negative connotation impacts students and creates an invisible obstacle to reporting incidences of sexual misconduct.

Throughout our focus groups, we heard leaders in both roles speak about **students not reporting sexual harassment and/or assault because they did not want their families or anyone else to know about their experience. When students know the school must contact their parents/guardians about their victimization, some recoil in fear of what the response may entail.**

An administrator shared, "My community is very, very rural. And so sometimes there's a little bit

of that ‘rub some dirt in it’ attitude from the parents. And that doesn't help anything when the students are not feeling supported at home.” If students fear their families will be disappointed, angry, or frustrated by their victimization, they will not report. Additionally, students may not tell of an incident of sexual misconduct if they fear their family will be negatively impacted by the report. Because allegations and investigations of sexual misconduct may include law enforcement, some students and their families avoid reporting. One Title IX Coordinator shared, “I was seeing a very different response with our families of color.” School communities with large immigrant populations shared fears about reporting when it might bring attention to their undocumented status and shared that “There is confusion around law enforcement in K-12; that intersecting work of what’s a law enforcement matter with an actual sexual assault.” Families feared that if they reported an incident, it would threaten their lives in America. Stein and Taylor (2022) also reviewed student reporting based on demographics in the 2001 AAUW study, which found that White and Black students are more likely than Hispanics to report harassment in school. A second Title IX Coordinator provided the following example:

There is a Hispanic population in [city name]. Because so many of them were undocumented, I got a real quick no thank you. I had young girls that were sexually assaulted in our buildings and their parents would not engage in any supports or any process.

From both our participant groups, we learned that a student reporting peer-to-peer sexual misconduct to a school official does not stop at the proverbial schoolhouse gate; the information will impact their life outside of school. Students’ concerns about how the incident will impact their parents/guardians and/or community play a role in their willingness to report. As the diversity of student populations continues to expand, educating families and students on Title IX

policy may increase communication and reporting and foster safer schools.

Needs for Preventing Sexual Misconduct

SSAIS seeks to do more than assist schools in properly processing acts of sexual misconduct and assault; it wants those acts to cease. Because sexual misconduct can rob a student of their right to learn in an environment free of harassment and/or assault, prevention efforts are essential. However, the task of preventing misconduct is neither small nor simple. In one of our focus groups, a school administrator explained the magnitude of their role in preventing misconduct in schools, when the problem can be societal, saying:

I think starting in education is the wrong point because I don't have the statistics, but I would say women, or men in society, would report that they are being sexually harassed regularly, but it's not being prosecuted. So, solving a problem that's everywhere starts in education. That's not possible when it's endemic in our society.

While feelings of helplessness may leave administrators overwhelmed with how to improve safety for their students, they know prevention efforts must evolve.

School administrators are responsible for establishing confidence in the school community that distressing occurrences are handled with care and sensitivity within the law.

When administrators were asked if they needed more training to understand how to process reports of sexual harassment and/or assault in accordance with Title IX, one participant responded that they did not need more training, two neither agreed or disagreed, and five agreed they wanted more training. None of the 10 administrators had attended more than two training sessions in the past year (see Appendix G). Four educators expressed anxiety over waiting for new regulations, which, according to the U.S. Department of Education, were to be published in the Spring of 2024 (Knott, 2023), and wondering when they would receive updated training.

“The new regulations, which were supposed to be released about a year ago, and now they’ve been pushed till March. So we’re in kind of a wait and see mode.” shared one coordinator. They further explained, “Those that are currently drafted will require more proactive, preventative work. But it remains to be seen how much the proposed regulations are, in fact, revised before they’re released in their final forum.” Education leaders are held hostage by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) before training can be revised and delivered. Professional learning, based on the most current Title IX regulations and designed to address the special needs of our youth, will better prepare educators to support students’ well-being and create safe school climates. The following information explains the key, powerful points that Title IX coordinators and school administrators shared regarding the need to prevent peer-to-peer sexual misconduct.

Title IX Coordinator Responses for Prevention

State officials and school leaders are responsible for implementing policies that protect students from harm. Implementing a sexual harassment policy can be an “important indicator for students and teachers of what the school community values” (Maginn, 2022, p. 345). Prevention is the primary goal in supporting safe school environments; however, the current requirements of the Title IX law make creating effective prevention systems difficult. When asked, “When thinking about your role as a Title IX Coordinator, what three responsibilities immediately come to mind?” only one of the nine coordinators in our research mentioned prevention as a responsibility. Additionally, none of the nine K-12 Title IX Coordinators we interviewed had a support system such as a state representative, collegial associations, or training specific to the K-12 environment to rely on and turn to for prevention guidance. In analyzing our Title IX participants' responses about their role in prevention, we gained insights into their needs regarding legal compliance and processing timelines.

Legal Compliance vs. Prevention Efforts. In the responses from our Title IX participants, opinions varied about their responsibility in leading sexual harassment and/or assault prevention efforts. One Title IX Coordinator stated, “[It’s] my responsibility to keep the district compliant with Title IX. It’s not necessarily to solve every problem or prevent every possible occurrence, but it’s to respond appropriately.” Later in the focus group, we asked the coordinators to discuss their current prevention practices. The same participant said:

[We must] consider whether the Title IX regulations are, in fact, the best way to prevent peer-to-peer sexual misconduct. My job as a Title IX Coordinator is to comply with Title IX and to follow the Title IX mandates. But that process is sometimes a tough match for the realities of K-12 education.

The participant discussed how current Title IX requirements are more reactive than proactive, and the law is not designed with K-12 schools in mind. Only one coordinator listed prevention as one of their major job responsibilities. Managing sexual harassment or assault involving young people, according to laws designed for adults, creates a challenging balance. Another participant said:

So, I don't think common sense always prevails. But there's laws, and it's not for me to dictate what's right or wrong. So, I have to do it, yes. It's always about kids, it should always be about kids, but at the same time, we have to make sure we're following procedure to ensure that our division is covered.

Four of the nine Title IX Coordinators shared that they strongly agree with the statement, “I feel confident in my ability to train and support school administrators as they work to prevent and address peer-to-peer sexual assault and/or harassment.” While some may feel confident in their

skills, Title IX Coordinators in the K-12 school environment struggle with balancing legal regulations and maintaining a preventive culture to meet the needs of students.

While sentiments about prevention varied, coordinators agreed that current Title IX requirements can be challenging and frustrating for those walking through the K-12 process. The rigid requirements can erode trust amongst students and families, making prevention efforts even more difficult. One participant explained how parents react when they, the division's Title IX Coordinator, reach out to speak to them about an alleged act of sexual misconduct. "I have found in recent experience that parents often feel at that point [when the Title IX Coordinator contacts them], like maybe the school didn't do their job, not realizing that there are parts of the policy that they're actually complying with," stated the coordinator. Balancing the law, student code of conduct, respect for students, and honoring the needs of families is difficult and emotionally taxing. Title IX Coordinators expressed frustration over investigation and confidentiality regulations that hinder the victims and their caretakers' confidence in the process. One coordinator shared the challenge of balancing compliance with family emotional support:

When you [Title IX Coordinators] start sending out letters, names are on there, like at that point, there's no confidentiality in terms of who and what's getting witnesses. I would also consider, after the meeting with parents or talking to them as a counselor, how much information are we gonna get because there is a burden of proof on us to gather information.

Illustrating related feelings, another coordinator said:

And so that is something I feel like I strive for all the time, being very compliant and doing exactly what Title IX demands while also trying to meet the real needs of the division and that's very hard to reconcile at times.

Similar thoughts were shared by a coordinator in a different focus group who said:

They [families and students] want nothing to do with the fact that it's [the Title IX] a very non-confidential process. Information is going out to both parties...And I think when people have experienced that and that gets out, that gets a lot of attention.

Title IX Coordinators recognize the need for prevention efforts. However, they shared how improving how incidents of sexual assault and/or harassment are reconciled is a key element for building trust and increasing safety.

We learned from our Title IX Coordinators that relationships between district and school leaders and students and families are critical. For the sensitive topic of sexual misconduct to be prevented, trust is essential. However, Title IX guidelines are barriers to building trust between education leaders and families. “The process alone will turn 8 out of 10 people off,” explained one coordinator. Under Title IX law, schools can ask both the victim and assailant probing questions that can leave the victim retraumatized (Maginn, 2022). As educators, staff want to care for students, not force them to relive their horrible experiences.

Processing Time as a Prevention Tool. We learned that prompt and precise processing of sexual harassment and assault can act as a means of prevention. When acts of sexual misconduct are assigned consequences, students note that the school will not tolerate such infractions, and this may stop others from acting in a similar capacity. However, from one participant, we heard how the coding of a discipline incident could impact the processing speed. One discipline code can be handled more swiftly than a Title IX code. The participant said:

With hazing, harassment, bullying - typically once you learn of alleged conduct that could meet that criteria, you have a window of time that we're responding to that. And it's about a 10-day window. Whereas Title IX is eighty to ninety days. So at the onset, there

was a lot of ‘well, let's just take it under HHB [hazing, harassment, and bullying] policy because we can wrap it up in 10 days’. And it was like, ‘Well, you know, there's really due process rights that are afforded to the parties under Title IX.’

Students and families expect the K-12 public education system to respond quickly to misbehavior and safety issues. However, “Not being able to discipline and waiting a long time for an investigation - it's an awkward fit,” explained one Title IX Coordinator. When families are confronted with a traumatic event experienced by their child, they want answers and justice quickly. They often demand that the report be taken seriously and processed efficiently and that the perpetrator be held accountable. However, one coordinator noted,

At first, I was taken aback about the timelines and how long it takes...And when you're investigating, many times, I'm very honest with people, if this [Title IX investigation] does occur, that student or personnel person is not removed [from school] because there cannot be any type of discipline done until the Title IX issue is finished.

Following Title IX protocols require thorough investigation and can delay assigning school-sanctioned discipline. For victims and families, the time lapse between reporting an allegation and delivering consequences for the offender does not build confidence in the school environment or leadership. It sends a loud, implicit message that sexual misconduct is not worthy of swift and significant action, and therefore, acts of sexual harassment and assault will still occur. More expeditious responses to student reporting would serve as a preventive practice and create a safer school climate.

School Administrator Responses for Prevention

As described in Chapter 2, school administrators lead in supporting students and teachers in creating healthy school climates. In the Nearpod questions posed during our focus groups,

eight school administrators responded to the question, “In my opinion, the climate of my school creates a safe space for students to report incidents of peer-to-peer sexual-based harassment and assault.” Two administrators strongly agreed with the statement, while six others agreed. To deepen our understanding of what schools are doing to create supportive climates, we asked the school administrators to explain what efforts are made to prevent incidences of sexual misconduct. While no prevention efforts were mentioned by more than three administrators, the shared ideas are important and defined below.

Electronic Tools for Prevention Efforts. Because we live in an age of technology, schools are opting for electronic tools that aid in the prevention of sexual misconduct. First, three administrators in different focus groups discussed anonymous reporting systems. One administrator said their school’s prevention efforts “include an anonymous alert system that they [students] can access on their cell phone or on any computer ..., that is truly anonymous, that allows for two-way communication for reporting.” When students know that anonymous alerts are utilized for reports and addressed by staff, they may be less likely to violate behavior expectations. Another administrator mentioned computer-monitoring software as a tool for prevention. By monitoring students’ activity on their school-issued laptops, schools detract from online harassment and can support students struggling to cope with a negative experience. An administrator told us:

“And we do use platforms and software to monitor what's happening on those [school-issued laptops]. So if the kids are talking to each other on G-chat in Google Docs, or if they're, in Google Docs, or if they're googling things... we get alerts about that. And so we have an opportunity to, maybe not investigate it, but say ‘hey counselor, check in with Billy because Billy's Googling some weird stuff.’ So we're pretty proactive in that

regard.”

The three administrators who specifically mentioned the electronic tools spoke favorably of their impact on creating a school climate that promotes student wellness and safety.

Multi-tiered System of Supports. A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) is an evidence-based practice that two administrators felt positively impacted their school's climate and culture. One shared:

I think in terms of our VTSS [Virginia Tiered System of Supports] class of kids, they help to reinforce positive school behaviors in general. And that could be keeping hands to yourself, you know, using appropriate language, being respectful. They help to build those lessons that we teach at home.

Creating, teaching, and reinforcing behavior expectations in school buildings fosters a safe environment where students understand what is acceptable conduct. When implemented well, MTSS helps students build their capacity to manage their emotions and develop their social skills. The second administrator who discussed MTSS shared, “I think we have a strong MTSS system that lets us really kind of identify which kids need us to reach out to them, and then sometimes we can get them to communicate a little bit more with us.” When adults and students have resources on prevention and model healthy interpersonal skills with their peers, they advance a safer school climate.

Educating Students. Another form of prevention, mentioned by four administrators, centered on **direct instruction of student behavior expectations**. School administrators in elementary buildings reflected on routine curriculum that includes social skills such as “keeping hands to themselves, ...boundaries, and being respectful of others.” Another administrator serving in an elementary school shared that although they do not broach the legal aspects of Title

IX and sexual misconduct with students, they do “let the students know if they're inappropriately touched or if something makes them feel uncomfortable, then that's something that they can report.” From the secondary perspective, two administrators, in different focus groups, spoke about holding student expectation meetings. In these meetings, administrators gather students to review the student code of conduct, speak about the ramifications of negative infractions, and encourage students to speak up if they see others violating expectations. However, two other secondary administrators expressed some uncertainty about whether means for preventing and addressing sexual harassment and/or assault are explicitly taught to students. One secondary participant reported that school counselors discuss “emotional health, but I don't know if they get into the sexual misconduct.” Another was not sure if “sexual misconduct is taught in health and PE [physical education] classes or not.” Opportunities to instruct students on social skills and appropriate peer interactions need to be built into school curricula.

Barriers to Prevention Efforts. Although many of our school administrators spoke of prevention efforts that contribute to a positive school climate in their building, there was also discussion of obstacles that impede progress. One administrator spoke about the challenge of prioritizing education about sexual misconduct when the school is considered “at-risk.” The administrator explained, “If you are a school that's challenged with academics and attendance, harassment is not one of those things that is being discussed.” Schools that are not meeting state-required academic and behavior metrics are continuously striving for improved student performance. The conversations and actions in such schools include building a strong school culture, but preventing sexual misconduct is not a part of the discussion. Per the administrator sharing their experience:

Every program, every intervention is tied around academics and instruction, and trying to get kids to move instructionally, just trying to help them grow test scores and academics.

We talk about school culture all the time, but we never talked about it [sexual misconduct] and intent.

This participant felt their school's efforts to address sexual misconduct were strong. Still, prevention was difficult to prioritize because of the multitude of academic, attendance, and behavioral interventions that needed to occur to meet state requirements.

Administrators aspire for their schools to be held in high esteem. Recognizing that families regularly attend to state-released reports, social media posts, and communication about their child's school, leaders are confronted with a fear of how data reflecting high numbers of sexual misconduct in their buildings may be perceived. One administrator shared, "Discipline incidents coded as sexual offenses could have the school labeled as a persistently dangerous school." The school community may see this data and conclude that their child attends a school that does not prioritize safety. However, administrators in our four focus groups want the data to reflect behavior concerns accurately. If incidences of peer-to-peer sexual harassment and/or assault are explicitly named and documented in state reporting, the need for increased prevention efforts is visible and highlights the need for change.

How families will accept sexual harassment and assault instruction can be a barrier to prevention efforts. Describing the climate in his community, one administrator explained:

I mean I think it is great that we want to prevent sexual misconduct and sexual assault. I think it's just how do you leverage kids to do that for such a sensitive topic and do it in a way that's going to be supported? I think that's going to be the key. Do I think the

community could support it? Yes, I just think you'd have to be very deliberate and thoughtful in how you put that together.

Secondary administrators felt targeted prevention, such as teaching boundary setting, conflict management, and empowerment, might be more acceptable and reduce the number of sexual misconduct allegations. For the health and safety of students, instruction to build age-appropriate social skills, dating safety, proper use of social media, and peer communication are necessary.

Shared Responses: Needs for Preventing Sexual Misconduct

The diversity of school communities and different family backgrounds impact how sexual misconduct is perceived and, therefore, how it can be prevented. Both leaders at the district level and in school buildings discussed how cultural awareness impacts efforts to keep students safe. Prevention efforts are key, yet leaders are frequently challenged by families who feel sexual misconduct is too sensitive of a topic for schools. Educators are service professionals who care for students. However, federal law creates a unique challenge of balancing care and compliance. Implementing MTSS and using advanced technology to monitor student safety are preventive practices schools have found to improve the school climate.

Societal Norms. Preventing sexual assault and harassment is difficult when students receive competing and conflicting ideas from school and their world outside of school. As stipulated in the Social-Ecological Systems Theory, the explicit and implicit messaging from family, community, and society play a significant role in shaping students' understanding of sexual assault and/or harassment. One participant said, "It [sexual assault] needs to be understood as a community. Not just we're [the school] trying to teach our students, but when they go home and they are not receiving a conflicting message." The "community mindset of what's appropriate and what's not, like the boys will be boys mentality" continues to be a barrier,

reported one administrator. Some adults will brush off a claim based on what they think is acceptable behavior. Confusion between bullying and sexual harassment can also impact students, teachers, and families. Easy access to cell phones and social media has impacted student's "sexualized behavior," was another topic one focus group member raised. Students who see behavior as normalized do not see themselves as victims and, therefore, may not report an incident of sexual harassment or assault. Our findings explore how administrators and Title IX Coordinators indicated they can work with families, outside agencies, and state/level government to create the safest schools possible.

Public Perception. As Title IX Coordinators and administrators reported, many students fear retribution from their peers if they report an incident. "I think a barrier I see from the students is sometimes the status of the perpetrator or the respondent in the Title IX case," reported one coordinator. Student perception of how their classmates will respond if they report an incident is a challenge many schools face. Lack of reporting leads to inaccurate data, reducing the awareness of this significant issue and the need to educate students in K-12 schools. Nevertheless, all 10 school administrators reported that the climate of their school creates a safe space for students to report incidences of peer-to-peer sexual harassment and assault (see Appendix G).

Professional Learning

When asked how confident Title IX Coordinators felt in their ability to train and support school administrators as they work to prevent and address peer-to-peer sexual assault and/or harassment, with the exception of one, eight coordinators felt confident in their abilities and listed training first when describing their role (see Appendix G). Despite these responses, all Title IX participants discussed how important ongoing professional learning is to their work. A

coordinator shared, “I joke and say educators need a lot of education sometimes. We needed a lot of education here [to support] teachers who are uncomfortable with the topic themselves.”

Discussed below are the four topics that emerged as needs for Title IX Coordinators and school administrators to improve K-12 professional learning on sexual misconduct.

Financial Implications of Ineffective Professional Learning

Sexual allegations that are mishandled can result in dire consequences for a student, their family, and the school district. One Title IX district coordinator shared a story of spending limited funds on legal fees and another how the faith in their system deteriorated after several sexual misconduct reports made the news. The coordinator said:

We were not in a very good place seven or eight years ago when we hit the news. People lost jobs [because] we had mishandled multiple Title IX things. That's when I came. I was in the district as a paralegal not long after that.

As leaders who ensure each school administrator has the necessary skills to prevent, address, and process sexual misconduct allegations, the role of Title IX is pivotal. Administrators are the first line of defense for their students, and they must be professionally trained to manage all allegations correctly and ethically. The number of allegations can be overwhelming for administrators; however, instructions on how to talk to students, protect their confidentiality, help them feel safe and heard, and provide meticulous documentation are vital to avoid mishandling a painful topic. With limited resources, public schools cannot afford to use precious funds on legal fees for mishandled Title IX allegations. In addition to prioritizing trust in the community and with families, educators must understand Title IX policy and procedures and build critical conversation skills when addressing allegations with students and families.

Professional Learning Delivery Methods

We asked all six focus groups and one interview participant to describe the type of training that would be most beneficial to them. Consistently, across each focus group, we heard calls for in-person, collaborative, and scenario-based opportunities for learning. The evidence-based practice of learning through scenarios was discussed 10 times in our Title IX Coordinator focus groups and over twenty times with administrators. An administrator said they preferred in-person training because:

I felt like you actually got to collaborate with other people and you talked through scenarios, and you could actually talk about what you were doing. And then if you had questions, you were able to ask them. With the module, you're just watching a video and answering questions. So you're not able to do any of the other things.

This quote highlights administrators' desire for opportunities to process information collectively. While the information in an online module is helpful, the inability to ask questions and hear how others interpret the information decreases the effectiveness.

We also heard Title IX Coordinators and administrators speak about the benefits of scenario-based learning. According to one coordinator, scenarios give attendees "an opportunity to kind of bounce ideas off of one another, and it builds that relationship where they're comfortable talking about these kinds of situations with myself, but then also with one another."

In the administrator focus groups, we heard similar sentiments. One administrator said:

I think I'm very scenario-based. Like, I want the PowerPoint. I want the notes. I want the knowledge, right? But then I want to, I want to do it. I want, what kinds of questions do you want me to ask in the interview?... I want to practice. I want to do case studies. I want those sorts of situations.

While this person clarified their desire for professional learning to include direct investigation instruction, they also articulated the importance of practice. **There is a desire to walk through the process without the pressure of a real-life situation.** Another administrator preferred scenario-based learning but included a potential downfall for such offerings. They said:

What's most beneficial is when we can have training as an administrative team and can know and cover scenarios. But I think that can be a slippery slope and a bit of a risk because ... **each situation is going to be so nuanced that it can be difficult to review scenarios and possibilities in a training.** But that's what I feel is helpful with even other disciplinary training. You know, applications of the disciplinary protocols is always just being able to apply them in a discussion.

Our findings indicate a strong preference for professional learning to embed opportunities for attendees to connect, collaborate, and apply their knowledge through credible K-12 case studies or scenarios.

Legal Training

Legal compliance was a theme throughout all six focus groups and one interview. While some Title IX Coordinators have a legal background, most education leaders do not. **Fear of being held liable, staff losing their jobs due to incorrect processing of claims, and student and family discontent, creating a hostile education environment, were expressed as reasons for continued professional learning.** In addition, one Title IX Coordinator illustrated that **“OCR complaints are essentially costing the state thousands and thousands and millions of dollars” and are avoidable with accurate training.** Contributing time and funding to essential professional learning on Title IX law is key to staff feeling equipped to thoroughly manage distressing scenarios of sexual harassment and assault amongst students.

Existing Title IX Professional Learning

Two Title IX Coordinators recommended training conducted through Institutional Compliance Solutions, and this team notes that their in-person and virtual certifications include interactive engagement as a training method. ATIXA is a second training mentioned in the Title IX Coordinator focus groups. The ATIXA website promotes interactive seminars where attendees can practice the necessary skills. One of Knight's seven partnership principles for group learning, reviewed in Chapter 2, supports that applying real-life situations creates the most relevant learning environment and adult learning theories recommend real-life application in practice. With precious time away from the school to attend professional learning, it is imperative that content be relevant to the daily work of school administrators, teachers, and Title IX Coordinators, engaging, and well-designed.

Growing SSAIS's Sphere of Influence

In their original request for assistance, SSAIS solicited help to grow the impact of their non-profit organization. We developed questions asking education leaders in both roles how a non-profit organization could support their efforts to create safe school environments. Additionally, we asked all 17 participants if and how SASH clubs, SSAIS's student-run organizations, could work in their schools. Our findings are explained in the sections below.

First, we learned that **non-profit organizations must work with school division leaders to have access to schools**. One Title IX Coordinator said:

Because access in K-12 is huge. You [a non-profit organization] don't walk into any school and say, 'I'm a community non-profit, and I can help you. Can I come in and talk to somebody?' You will not get in the door. **But at the district level, when we say, 'Here's**

an introduction and they're going to partner with us and I vetted them and they're doing this work.'

This approach expedites the school division's willingness to partner with the organization. We heard educators assert the need for a clear connection to the division's mission and vision and were told by another Title IX Coordinator:

The non-profit community organizations that I wanted to partner with, I could show where they would tie to 2 or 3 of our district strategic priorities. And you know, that's kind of how you talk in K-12. Does it align with what the district says they wanna do?

The clear connection to a school division's strategic goals helps expedite the process of partnering with an organization outside the district.

We also heard from research participants in three administrator and two Title IX Coordinator focus groups, especially those working in a school building, that the best way for non-profit organizations to connect with schools involves contacting multiple personnel and forming a collaborative partnership. One of the administrators shared with us:

As the principal, I appreciate you reaching out and contacting me. But you know, we have social workers and school counselors ... Yeah, just don't send me the e-mail in my inbox by itself. Not to say that everything gets ignored ... it's just a lot of information coming our way. So I think the more people they share with within the school building, the more likely we will stop to discuss and talk about.

We heard from two administrators that they are pulled in many different directions, and their capacity to read and fully comprehend literature and resources is limited. However, if an organization can provide in-person speakers and/or ongoing programming, that would benefit the school community. We heard:

I also like the idea of actively bringing people in to speak or run sessions or something like that. I feel like the go-to nowadays, a lot of times, is to create some sort of dashboard of information or links. And I feel like, unfortunately, because of all the different ways we get pulled every day we can't fully digest all of those things and become experts in all the things. So I love the actual partnership versus just the literature, if that makes sense.

According to two Title IX Coordinators, a non-profit organization looking to support students and staff in public schools should move beyond information-sharing and focus on regular interactions, such as ongoing, consistent in-person programs/curricula run by the non-profit's own personnel and specific to the school's needs.

SASH Clubs

The purpose of SSAIS's SASH clubs is to offer resources that empower youth to end sexual harassment and assault in their schools and communities. The clubs are designed to be safe spaces for students to educate themselves, support survivors, and promote changes that reduce sexual misconduct. We asked our 19 focus group participants if and how SASH clubs could be implemented in their schools.

We opened the discussion about SASH clubs with school administrators by asking if they currently have any co-curricular or extracurricular activities in their schools that are specific to sexual assault and/or harassment. None of our 10 administrator participants shared any current clubs or activities with such a focus. We learned that schools and divisions might hesitate to create a club specific to sexual assault and/or harassment because of how it could be perceived by the community. Staff fear that if they create a club, they are admitting to a problem. A participant expounded on this idea, saying:

It [a club focused on sexual assault and/or harassment] would probably meet some resistance to be established. Just simply because when you have a club like that, it indicates that, or at least the perception would be, that it indicates that there is a problem... That people are being victimized and they need to create or establish this club to be able to find that support, and I don't know if that would really go over well in our community. I know for a fact my Superintendent would have a seizure if something like that were to be brought about ... Yeah, I think they would want that energy channeled in other ways.

This participant was of the opinion that their school division would rather put finances and resources towards “eradicating” the problem than create a student club.

Beyond the reaction of the school division, we heard from both participant groups that some communities may oppose their school promoting a SASH club. A Title IX Coordinator told us that their school community is small and values privacy. The person said:

I wouldn't consider it [the school division] conservative. But I would consider it, a community that is very private with their families. There is a privacy-at-home kind of mentality. I know I'm not alone in that.

School administrators shared some similar sentiments about the potential negative community response. One discussed that the recent politicization of schools has increased community pushback. We heard, “But [with the] current political climate using anything with the word sexual...needs to come from Central Office.” Amongst our participants, there was recognition that SASH clubs have a powerful and important mission; however, hesitation to implement a chapter of the club stemmed from concern that negative perceptions from the community may thwart effectiveness.

While school administrators were not certain that SASH clubs would be widely accepted in their schools, they shared recommendations for how to avoid conflict and/or community pushback. First, administrators spoke about the power of student-led club creation. According to one administrator, a SASH club could be started if “it [club creation] was driven by student interest in speaking up. Because there is a clear policy around us not blocking that. So I think that would be a great way to get around the current political climate.” Second, participants mentioned that their schools have clubs intending to improve the overall school community. These clubs currently are student-run, focused on kindness and/or positive-behavior systems, and respected amongst the student body. Two school administrators spoke about how current clubs could embed education about sexual misconduct within their current programming. Another administrator mentioned both a diversity and inclusion club and a gay/straight alliance that are thriving in their school. They believed these two clubs could utilize materials intended for a SASH club and successfully implement them within the school building.

Summary of Chapter Four

Through the intentional design of our focus group protocols, Team TALKS addressed our six research questions regarding the need for processing sexual misconduct, the need for preventing sexual misconduct, preferences for professional learning, and growing SSAIS’s sphere of influence. The data we collected through 6 focus groups and 1 interview paints a vivid picture of the needs of Title IX Coordinators and school administrators to support the safety of students in K-12 schools. We garnered insights from 10 administrators and 9 Title IX coordinators about preventing and processing sexual misconduct.

To better process peer-to-peer incidents of sexual misconduct, Title IX coordinators and administrators voiced a need for additional professional learning, specifically requesting training

on the legal understanding of policy and procedure for the K-12 environment. Next, administrators spoke at length about the importance of creating trusted adult relationships with students and removing challenges for reporting sexual misconduct. They presented multiple barriers to students reporting harassment and/or assault that can be addressed by establishing sexual misconduct as a priority in our schools.

Title IX Coordinators in the focus groups had varied opinions regarding whether prevention was part of their job responsibility. Conversely, school administrators believe prevention is critical to their leadership in fostering a safe school climate. School administrators acknowledged prevention through MTSS as a key factor in decreasing the number of students experiencing sexual harassment or assault. By teaching behavior expectations and addressing the need for a social skills curriculum at all grade levels, educators can endeavor to prevent future incidents. However, they feel they fall short of this responsibility due to competing student achievement priorities, school accreditation, and balancing the law with student care. Prevention efforts can also be challenged by focusing on students when the community must have a shift in mindset. Families and caretakers may have differing definitions of appropriate behaviors and how to respond to their child's experience for the family's well-being. The investigation process for Title IX is another barrier that diminishes students' trust in the system; often not reporting incidents when they occur. The mismatch between Title IX policy and the needs of our youth must be addressed in addition to prevention efforts.

Professional learning is imperative to support Title IX Coordinators and school administrators in processing and preventing sexual harassment and assault among students. These efforts can support students, minimize families feeling that schools are not caring for their children, and avert financial implications for school districts. Title IX Coordinators and school

administrators expressed interest in collaborative, scenario-based professional learning. Incidents each come with their own set of challenging nuances, and allowing discourse on how to process the incident effectively and legally creates opportunities for professional growth. ATIXA and ICS were mentioned as exemplars in the field due to their focus on legal compliance for K-12 Title IX infractions. Opportunities to build the skills of the adults who strive to serve our students are essential.

Growing SSAIS's sphere of influence in K-12 schools will be most viable and beneficial if a connection is made with the district or school's strategic safety goal. Title IX Coordinators and administrators recommended attention to professional learning with in-person training for educators and continuous opportunities for students to build their interpersonal skills. There was concern among administrators about the potential for negative community reaction if a SASH club was created since it is sensitive content and could message that sexual harassment and assault are prevalent within the school. However, with approval from the administration, student-led SASH clubs may be feasible in some communities.

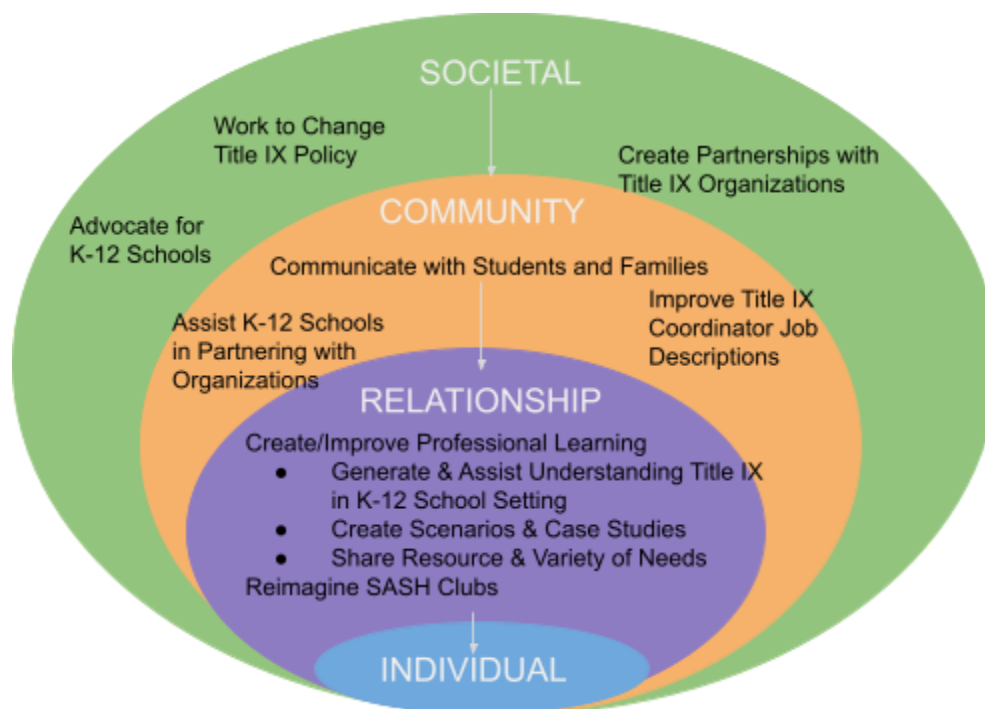
Chapter 5. Recommendations

The mission of SSAIS is critical; safer schools lead to improved academics and healthier and happier students. Through our research, we gained valuable insights aimed at assisting SSAIS and educational leaders in their ongoing efforts to ensure students are provided their right to an education free of sexual harassment and/or assault. The problem of practice submitted by SSAIS noted that the non-profit organization's valuable resources, all designed to stop sexual assault in schools, are underutilized. SSAIS sought help determining the best ways to disseminate resources to further its work in supporting students, families, and schools. In meeting with SSAIS to gain further clarity on the problem of practice, they described their needs in greater detail, and our collaborative conversation resulted in three different avenues for research. After thoughtful team conversations and a thorough literature review, we identified six research questions listed in Chapter 1, designed to meet the needs of SSAIS. In focus groups, we sought direct and descriptive feedback from K-12, public school Title IX Coordinators, and school administrators. We learned about their needs in processing and preventing peer-to-peer sexual misconduct, their preferences about professional learning, and their thoughts on how SSAIS and other non-profit organizations can have the largest impact on schools. We diligently worked through strategic research design, implementation, and analysis to ensure our findings accurately amplify the experiences and opinions of Title IX Coordinators and school administrators. The information in this chapter draws on our research findings and presents recommendations for SSAIS and non-profit organizations, school and civic leaders, and future researchers. It is our intent for the information to resonate with each and every person who is working to create safer schools.

While analyzing the discussions of focus-group participants, we grounded our work in the Social-Ecological Framework. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Social-Ecological Framework examines how the relationship between an individual and their peers, community, and/or society can impact their psyche and overall development (Guy-Evans, 2023). In listening to and reflecting on participants' input, we recognized an inability to separate the work done in schools from that needed in communities and across society. With this in mind, we present our recommendations in the spheres of society, community, and relationships encompassed within the framework. The findings are not listed in order of priority, value, or timeline for completion, but rather, they are presented in terms of what can be done in schools, within the community, and in society. Figure 7, shown below, provides an outline of our findings. The headers for each sphere encompass the following:

- societal - national or statewide efforts;
- community - efforts that impact families and the community outside of the brick-and-mortar school building;
- relationship - efforts that have an impact inside school buildings or at the division level.

Arrows pointing downward from the societal recommendations to the individual have been included to depict that each broader sphere impacts the next, with the hope that there will ultimately be a change on an individual level.

Figure 7*Recommendations for SSAIS*

Note: Adapted from Guy-Evans (2023) Socio-Ecological Framework

Recommendations for Societal Influence

Schools do not function in vacuums. They are pillars of the community and society that surround them. Change in schools will not come without a shift in society. Therefore, based on feedback from our participants, the recommendations below offer suggestions intended to impact policy and practices functioning at a national or state level. Without a societal shift, schools will forever be held to the impossible task of teaching students expectations that are not then reinforced at home or in society.

Advocate for K-12 Schools

The current Title IX requirements test the protective relationships schools work to build with students and families. Our focus group participants recognize their legal responsibility in protecting and supporting students. However, school leaders seek clarification about

implementing Title IX, specific to K-12 students and staff. The recommendations below outline how SSAIS can advocate for policy change that will benefit students and schools across the United States.

Work to Change to Title IX Policy. We recommend that SSAIS advocate for revisions to the current Title IX guidance and regulations. We heard from Title IX Coordinators and school administrators that current requirements are difficult to implement and challenging for students and families to understand. In our analysis, **coordinators and administrators felt that revising the law to become more specific to K-12 will empower them to address and prevent incidents of sexual misconduct.** SSAIS has an opportunity to work with lawmakers to address needed changes in Title IX law to support K-12 students. SSAIS's focus on protecting students in the K-12 public school setting makes the organization a great candidate for informing lawmakers, lobbyists, and civic leaders about the needs and experiences of students and schools. Advocating for change to Title IX policy can be done through meeting with civic leaders, legislators, and lawmakers, presenting at professional conferences, and collaborating with other organizations. The MidAtlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. (MAEC) works through social justice for educational equity (<https://maec.org/>). Funded by the United States Department Of Education, MAEC's civil rights origins offer an alliance opportunity to champion educational equity. **In collaboration with MAEC or other social justice organizations, SSAIS should advocate for changes to the law that will assist K-12 schools in taking preventive measures that seek to reduce sexual misconduct.**

Create Partnerships with Title IX Organizations

Increasing school safety, protecting students' rights, and reducing acts of sexual harassment and assault are large tasks that require the attention and effort of a plethora of stakeholders. To assist schools in achieving these tasks, **we recommend that SSAIS seek and**

build strong partnerships with other organizations. Per our literature review, non-profit organizations increase their impact when they partner with groups that share similar visions and missions. For SSAIS to enlarge its sphere of influence, it should not work in isolation. Organizations that focus on school safety, equity, and/or educating students about sexual harassment and assault exist and could serve as strong SSAIS collaborators. One potential partner is the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (<https://www.missingkids.org/home>). The mission of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children includes preventing future victimization of children. This non-profit has an outreach team working with victims, families, law enforcement, and the public to provide training and prevention resources. An example of their work is the website Take It Down (<https://takeitdown.ncmec.org/>), which provides a service for youths 18 and younger to remove inappropriate online photos. Additionally, our participants spoke of the Association of Title IX Administrators (ATIXA) and Institutional Compliance Solutions (ICS) as leaders in Title IX training and policy awareness. Two coordinators recommended training conducted through ICS, and our team notes that their in-person and virtual certifications include interactive engagement as a training method. ATIXA is a second source of training mentioned in the Title IX Coordinator focus groups. While neither organization is specific to K-12, they are well-respected because of their focus on teaching about Title IX and their intentional focus on collaboration amongst members. These three examples could be valuable partners for SSAIS. These organizations are supported by federal grants, awards grants, and/or have large membership pools that could serve as a targeted audience for SSAIS to address. We recommend that SSAIS connect with these organizations or others with similar missions, attend conferences hosted by ATIXA and ICS, and utilize their large member base and experience to generate new

partnerships to support schools and divisions. Soliciting these relationships will improve sexual misconduct prevention efforts and processing of claims and increase SSAIS' impact.

Recommendations for Community Influence

Outside the school doors, students have families, friends, and community-based supports that play an integral part in developing their minds, body, and spirit. For schools to stop acts of sexual harassment and assault, they must work in tandem with the greater school community. Each recommendation below seeks to share ways SSAIS can support and nurture the communication and connection between schools and the communities they serve.

Improve Title IX Coordinator Job Descriptions

Clear job descriptions for Title IX Coordinators are often lacking (Grant, 2023). Grant (2023) found that when job descriptions were available, they were frequently incorrect and did not help the applicant understand the responsibilities. Additionally, the Title IX role can be negatively impacted when educators are given this position as an additional responsibility to their primary role. The Title IX Coordinators we spoke with either interviewed for their position or were appointed. Some served their school division in capacities in addition to Title IX. When educators wear multiple hats, colleagues, students, and families can be uncertain about their primary duties. We heard Title IX Coordinators in our focus groups describe the priorities of their position in various ways. The differences in their focus, whether compliance, training, student support, family assistance, or a myriad of other tasks, can create ineffectiveness. Districts must establish a well-defined Title IX Coordinator job description with roles and responsibilities. We recommend that SSAIS create sample Title IX Coordinator job descriptions for school divisions to adapt. Within the job responsibilities and roles, we recommend that SSAIS include specific language about Title IX Coordinators working with families and community

organizations to provide information and programming about peer-to-peer sexual misconduct. Including these points in the job description articulates the need to prioritize Title IX education outside the school walls. The clearer the job description, the easier it is for the person filling the role to hone their skills, meet their requirements, and reduce confusion amongst the staff, students, and families they are required to support.

Create Communications for Students and Families

Educational leaders are awaiting updated Title IX regulations that should be available in 2024. This is a pivotal opportunity for SSAIS to assist school divisions in sharing updated policy information with all staff, students, and families. Data shows that schools with public-facing information have statistically significant 2.06 lower rates of sexual misconduct incidences (Grant et al., 2023, p. 523). This research illustrates that the combination of shared policy with educational materials reduces the occurrences of sexual misconduct. Transparent messaging around the prevention of sexual misconduct must increase. In one of our focus groups, a Title IX Coordinator mentioned posters that are displayed in each school to inform students and staff how to report acts of sexual harassment and/or assault. We recommend that SSAIS develop and share templates explaining the legal updates for Title IX. If SSAIS creates digital resources such as short films, flyers, and/or letters explaining the Title IX updates, educational leaders can use this information as a basis for communicating with their school community. With the templates already built by SSAIS, school leaders can carefully consider the best format to share information and adapt the materials to ensure they meet the specific needs of their population. Additionally, if SSAIS crafts a communication plan and timeline of what information can be shared and when, it will assist school divisions in setting benchmarks to monitor if they share Title IX information with fidelity. SSAIS can strategically assist schools with the anticipated

release of new regulations. SSAIS's valuable knowledge, paired with its large resource library, can be used to generate and share templates for schools to modify and disseminate. As the schools share this information beyond the school walls, communities and families will be more aligned in their understanding of sexual misconduct and Title IX, and both reporting and prevention efforts will improve.

Assist K-12 Schools in Partnering with Organizations

Title IX Coordinators and school administrators shared a need for school divisions to partner with outside organizations to educate students, staff, families, and the greater school community about sexual misconduct. Although our school administrators could not share any current partnerships they have with non-profit organizations focused on addressing and preventing sexual harassment and assault, they were not opposed to collaborative efforts. During a focus group, one Title IX Coordinator shared a concern regarding the lack of funds for Title IX. However, if there are organizations that do not require funds to provide resources to the school, this may increase the potential for partnership. When schools and nonprofits partner, it can be a mutually beneficial relationship. The organization receives access to K-12 students, while the school division saves time, money, and resources.

Title IX Coordinators in our focus group accessed outside organizations, including ATIXA and ICS, to provide training for faculty and students on Title IX. Finding intersections of a non-profit organization's goals with the school division's goals creates partnership opportunities. Understanding that public schools have limited resources, encouraging schools to build relationships with community partners has been beneficial. Two Title IX Coordinators in our focus groups described collaborative programs with non-profits in their communities who helped create lesson plans for students. To increase programming for staff, students, and families

related to sexual harassment and assault, SSAIS's ability to serve as a conduit between schools and organizations fighting for students' safety is key. Whether a school partners with SSAIS directly or SSAIS assists in connecting them with a local organization in their area, the collaborative effort to connect schools and communities will benefit students. Working together, teams with unique expertise can move this work forward.

Recommendations for Relationship - School Impact

A school is not just a brick-and-mortar building; it is an ecosystem built by the people, programs, and palpable culture that lies within it. Our literature review revealed school leaders' pivotal role in creating and sustaining school culture. Through our work, we aim to assist SSAIS and schools in creating cultures where sexual misconduct is promptly and adequately addressed and means of prevention are explicitly taught. Based on the Theory of Change, we know positive shifts in school cultures require vision, plans, skills, and resources (Oberlack et al., 2019). SSAIS has the ability to assist schools throughout the change process. The following recommendations are intended to help SSAIS influence relationships within K-12 schools and divisions.

Create and/or Improve Professional Learning

In conjunction with academic achievement and student attendance, safety must be addressed in school divisions' improvement plans and annual professional learning calendars. While Grant et al.'s (2023) study found that 66.5% of students responded "yes" or "somewhat" when asked if they fear being sexually harassed by a peer, Orchowski et al. (2022) found "schools are reluctant to identify violence prevention as equally or more important than other school priorities" (p. 1323). Our findings align with this research. Participants noted that educating students about sexual harassment and assault was not given the same level of priority as academic initiatives. For the safety of our youth, we must change this dynamic; academics and

safety should not compete for attention. Therefore, just as staff members receive professional learning about instructional practices, similar safety-related training, including sessions on sexual harassment and assault, is necessary. Additional professional learning will redesign the K-12 landscape and better prepare educators to support students' well-being (DePaoli & McCombs, 2024; Stein & Taylor, 2022;). The information below includes recommendations about how SSAIS can fulfill its mission by assisting schools in providing much-needed training for staff.

Generate Resources to Assist in Understanding Title IX in a K-12 School Setting.

Currently, K-12 Title IX Coordinators must rely on sexual misconduct training, guidance, and policies created for higher education (Maginn, 2022). We heard from our participants about the difficulty of supporting K-12 students and their families throughout the Title IX process.

Managing sexual harassment and/or assault involving young people, according to laws created for adults, creates a challenging balance between honoring the law and caring for the child.

Establishing a clear understanding of student rights is important. Based on Title IX law, school personnel must know how to interact with victims and alleged perpetrators, especially those under 18, within the parameters of a K-12 school. Based on our findings, we recommend that SSAIS create resources and training specific to peer-to-peer sexual misconduct in the K-12 public school setting. If SSAIS creates teaching tools about how Title IX functions in a K-12 setting, this alleviates divisions having to make their own interpretations of the law. Beneficial materials may include discussion questions for leaders to work through with colleagues, videos that model how to respond to an allegation, and/or a parent communication that explains the Title IX process to families in a digestible, meaningful capacity. With increased legal guidance, questions can be answered, and processing and prevention efforts are enhanced. Knowledge and confidence are key to handling sexual allegations.

Additionally, most of our participants noted their lack of background in legal studies. They requested assistance in better understanding the legal components of peer-to-peer sexual misconduct in K-12 schools. School personnel need assistance understanding new Title IX regulations and identifying how those changes impact their daily job requirements. SSAIS could assist school leaders by designing and sharing information that provides insights into Title IX's legal requirements in an approachable and consumable manner.

Recommendations for Professional Learning Content. As noted in Chapter 2, successful adult training must be designed with best practices at its core. Training built into busy school calendars gives school staff committed time to learn how to process allegations, understand Title IX law, develop communication skills needed for all parties, and make mistakes without hurting students or resulting in legal and financial consequences. From Hill et al.'s (2021) study, the second most important component for effective professional learning was alignment with attendees' values and needs. Understanding participants' visions and goals for learning will produce better outcomes. For example, Title IX Coordinators listed coaching school administrators to manage and process sexual misconduct allegations as one of their primary responsibilities. Research-based curricula on developing coaching skills should be reviewed and presented to Title IX Coordinators. SSAIS could offer in-person or virtual meetings that create opportunities for Title IX Coordinators to share how they interact, coach, and support administrators. As reviewed in Chapter 2, events with small groups, planned over multiple sessions and delivered in 20 hours or less, best meet the needs of professionals. Active learning through collective participation, story-telling, decision-making, and problem-solving results in more engaged learning. Including these adult learning principles will ensure successful growth for educators.

SSAIS can offer a variety of training models to support different learning styles, flexibility of time or travel, and career goals. Professional learning options may include in-person, hybrid, online asynchronous, a cohort model, or staff participating as a school team to support collaboration and insight. A certificate of completion or credentialing would add value to professional learning. SSAIS could partner with an association or university to create an acknowledgment system for each attendee to receive a certificate for their Curriculum Vitae. Creating choices for adult learning is an evidence-based practice that improves instruction.

Create Scenarios and Case Studies. Our research participants overwhelmingly concurred that professional learning through case studies and scenarios is one of the most beneficial learning methods. The evidence-based practice of learning through scenarios was discussed 10 times in our Title IX Coordinator focus groups and over twenty times with school administrators. Considerable research has concluded that real-world application is the most important component of effective professional development (Dunst & Trivette, 2012; Hill et al., 2021; Stewart, 2014). The wide variety of Title IX cases with unique variables, student attributes, and personal accounts have been challenging for schools to respond appropriately. Two of Knight's Seven Partnership Principles, reviewed in Chapter 2, are practice and dialogue (Stewart, 2014). Alongside fellow educators, practicing and discussing responses through case studies or scenarios is an evidence-based training practice that gives staff a safe space to rehearse skills needed to address Title IX infractions. Developing Title IX training with time committed to participants conferring, collaborating, and finding consensus on the best responses will ensure a strong learning environment.

SSAIS asked for "the best ways to disseminate resources to further its groundbreaking work." Based on our literature review and qualitative data collected from focus groups, we

recommend that SSAIS create training resources specific to the K-12 environment. Real-world scenarios and case studies are needed, with guiding discussion questions to be used in training events for group and individual learning. Practice with case studies and scenarios will allow time to prepare for challenging situations rather than extend the processing time of deliberating the next steps when an allegation is filed. One example of a means for sharing case studies is through the Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership (<https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jel>). SSAIS could submit cases specific to processing and/or preventing sexual misconduct to the publication. If published, these pieces could spawn productive discussion and highlight SSAIS as an organization. Additionally, the case studies and/or scenarios can be warehoused on SSAIS's website, increasing traffic to the website while providing school officials access to important practice tools. Including K-12 legal experts in professional learning and discussions will also benefit participants. Answers to scenarios with diverse populations, provided by those trained in the law, are immutable. They will build confidence in school leaders who fear legal consequences and causing harm to students in the process. These scenarios will be valuable for in-person and virtual training sessions as they bolster participants' application of knowledge, collaboration amongst colleagues, and attention to the issues associated with sexual harassment and/or assault.

While providing administrators with case studies and scenarios creates authentic learning experiences, there must be clarity that no two situations will be the exact same. Training from scenarios must not create a false bravado that clouds an administrator's judgment and keeps them from seeking help and clarity in real-life situations.

Share Resources in a Variety of Formats

Resource creation is important, but disseminating resources is also imperative to implementation. In speaking with our focus groups, we heard participants note that if their school and/or division utilizes tools shared by an outside agency, they recommend that the following steps be taken.

First, we learned that personnel are not using the internet to search for information about sexual misconduct. When seeking new insights, they ask their colleagues questions, connect with their legal representatives, visit the website of ATIXA, and/or revisit their division's current policies and protocols. SSAIS has many resources that are not being accessed at their desired rate. We recommend that SSAIS make its resources accessible by directly sharing them with the intended audiences. This sharing can be done through electronic communication, fostering partnerships with other organizations focused on school safety and mental health, setting up display tables with their resources, or presenting at in-person conferences.

Second, it is important to individualize communication to the school division's specific goals. A coordinator shared that when seeking the division leadership's approval of a resource, they feel more confident in advocating when they can explain exactly how the organization connects to the division's direction. When SSAIS is working with a specific school or division, it should use language and ideas that mirror what is included in the strategic plan.

Third, administrators spoke of the overwhelming amount of information they receive in their email inboxes. Administrators recommended contacting several staff members when seeking partnership with a school, specifically referencing the benefit of including school counselors in the communication.

Reimagine SASH Clubs

In both their problem of practice and in our discussions with their leadership team, SSAIS sought information about how to increase the number of SASH clubs in schools. We specifically asked Title IX Coordinators and school administrators about how SASH clubs may function in their school buildings. We believe the current SASH club protocol should evolve based on the feedback we received. While participants appreciated and supported the mission of SASH clubs, no participant expressed that the club would be easy to implement in their school. Rather than SASH clubs being a stand-alone extracurricular activity, our participants felt the mission and actions of the club would be best met by being embedded within the current school curriculum, content, and activities. The sections below describe how the SASH club efforts can be infused within the school community.

Embed Sexual Harassment and Assault Education into Existing Curricula. An educational opportunity lies in exploring physical/health education curricula and sexual harassment and assault content. Bullying prevention instruction is more common than sexual harassment, based on research conducted by Stein and Taylor (2022). However, leveraging existing instruction on social skills and bullying offers an opportunity to infuse sexual misconduct prevention into existing curricula. School counselors often prepare classroom lessons on social skills, conflict resolution, and safe use of social media. Expanding this content to include sexual harassment and assault could offer strong preventative practices. The more education students are provided about sexual harassment and assault, the more barriers to reporting will be broken.

Form and Maintain Partnerships with School Divisions. To increase its impact, we recommend that SSAIS partner with a multitude of schools. Here, we define partnership as a

collaborative, reciprocal relationship where communication between SSAIS and the school occurs regularly. SSAIS advertises the following goals on its website

(<https://stopsexualassaultinschools.org/our-mission/>):

- Students understand their rights to an education free of sexual harassment and assault;
- Students and their families understand their recourses in the aftermath of a sexual assault/harassment;
- School administrators understand and comply with regulations governing their response to reported sexual assault/harassment, and
- Educational institutions understand that compassionate and nonjudgmental support of victims is part of the healing process after an assault/harassment.

Based on our findings, SSAIS can best achieve these goals through well-maintained partnerships with schools and their leaders. From our participant feedback, we learned that **the connection between schools and SSAIS would be more palatable for the school community than current SASH clubs**. Per Nardini et al. (2022), relationship networks and knowledge sharing are important tools for increasing the impact of a non-profit organization. **Phone calls, networking at professional conferences, and in-person meetings with school officials are recommended for initial contact with potential partners**. These efforts will assist SSAIS in demonstrating how the organization can help schools create safer, more inclusive environments. **To successfully nurture these relationships, SSAIS should create a system that records the organization's interactions and role with each of the schools/divisions they support. Accurate records, including contact information, prominent needs and/or roles, dates of interaction, and next steps, will assist SSAIS**

in monitoring the progress of their partnerships. In addition, data will be helpful for reporting and sharing their efforts as SSAIS works to build impact across the nation.

For SSAIS to partner with school divisions, they must connect their resources to the school division's needs. School divisions share their strategic plans and goals with their communities. Linking the goals of SSAIS with the division's goals allows SSAIS to align its resources with those who need them. When meeting with the division, SSAIS must be non-accusatory and share ways their partnership will benefit students. Providing opportunities for the division to fulfill its goals while saving money, maximizing time, and/or adding resources will be the best pitch for SSAIS to partner with the schools. In our focus groups, two Title IX Coordinators shared that they began the partnership process by seeking approval from their general counsel. If the legal counsel supported the partnership, the proposal moved to approval from the superintendent. Following the superintendent's endorsement, the coordinators created a memorandum of understanding between the district and the non-profit. They highlighted that community partners want to help, have expertise to share, and often have funding to support schools. SSAIS is rich in knowledge and resources, and through careful curation of intentional communication with school divisions, the organization can build meaningful partnerships that will aid in reducing sexual misconduct in schools.

Without partnerships with school divisions, SSAIS has limited access to students. Two of SSAIS's goals involve educating students. As a school partner, SSAIS can assist in creating and sharing learning opportunities for students to understand their rights to an education free of sexual misconduct while guiding how to report and prevent acts of sexual harassment and assault. Providing schools with activities and programming designed to teach students how to set clear boundaries with peers, how to be an ally to someone after an incident of sexual misconduct,

and how to report Title IX violations to school personnel allows SSAIS to accomplish its goal of supporting students. SSAIS has some of these resources on its website, such as its student fact sheets, tool kits, and an extensive library of articles and research on sexual harassment, sexual violence, Title IX, and more. Once SSAIS has partnered with a school, they can determine which resources are most beneficial for the school, provide educational tools for students and staff to access, and act as a guide for the leaders.

The second goal of SSAIS is student access to resources in the aftermath of sexual misconduct. While partnering with school divisions to create opportunities to support and educate students and staff, SSAIS can share its resource library as an additional aid for students who have been victims of sexual misconduct. SSAIS allows schools, educators, students, and families to access their materials online at no cost. We heard from Title IX Coordinators and school administrators about the importance of support plans and how they provide comfort to victims of sexual misconduct. With strong partnerships, SSAIS's free resources can be of significant benefit to school leaders tending to the needs of victims of sexual misconduct.

The third goal of SSAIS is for Title IX Coordinators and school administrators to understand and comply with regulations and effectively respond to reports of sexual misconduct. Previous recommendations are specific to improvements needed regarding the professional learning Title IX Coordinators and school administrators can access. By partnering with individual schools or divisions, SSAIS can provide professional learning regarding the K-12 investigation process with their specific needs in mind. Instead of school divisions creating their own processes to align with regulations, SSAIS can share its materials to save school divisions time and resources while ensuring accurate guidance. Materials with contact information for each division/school's Title IX Coordinator will build students' and families' trust. SSAIS can be

the bridge with which Title IX coordinators work to support administrators, students, and families through the investigation process.

The final goal of SSAIS is for educational institutions to provide compassionate support to victims of sexual misconduct. Outlining mental health best practices creates an opportunity for SSAIS to accomplish its goal while giving K-12 Title IX Coordinators and administrators research-based strategies to support students. Collaboration with school counselors, who are trained to respond to trauma, will advance the care of our youth.

Utilize Current Student-Led Organizations to Increase Education About Peer-to-Peer Sexual Misconduct. Participants shared about current clubs and extracurriculars working to improve their school culture throughout our focus group conversations. They were clear that student-led initiatives are a powerful means for creating change. Students teaching students about Title IX legalities, methods for preventing sexual misconduct, and means for reporting acts of harassment and/or assault have the potential to change mindsets and behaviors. We recommend that SSAIS work with school leaders to determine how educational tools and programming affiliated with SASH clubs can be incorporated into pre-existing organizations. This will allow the messaging and mission of SASH clubs to continue via efforts already established in the school. SSAIS should continue to create activities that student-leaders can implement within their roles.

Recommendations for Future Research

The issue of processing and preventing peer-to-peer sexual misconduct in K-12 schools is undoubtedly ongoing. Throughout our research, we have noted several opportunities for future research that may reduce the number of young people impacted by a traumatic experience caused by the sexual misconduct of a peer.

First, within our literature review, we researched effective needs assessments. The information we learned from the review guided our research methods and assisted us in developing our assessment of needs. We encourage future researchers to use our findings to complete a formal needs assessment to determine the root causes of peer-to-peer sexual misconduct in K-12 public schools. This work could be done at an individual school level, division level, or a more expansive societal reach.

Next, of crucial importance, multiple research studies show that victims of sexual misconduct can be challenged by lifelong mental health issues following an incident (Grant et al., 2023; Orchowski et al., 2022; Stein & Taylor, 2022; Young et al., 2009). School counselors provide needed mental health services to students, and during our focus groups, two school administrators suggested that counselors offer preventive messaging and sexual harassment lessons. According to three Title IX Coordinators and two school administrators in our focus groups, the mental well-being of students is key to their personal and academic success. Our findings suggest that future research should include if and how schools can utilize the mental health expertise of school counselors as they work to prevent sexual misconduct.

Additionally, future scholars could explore school districts' strategic plans to glean how often sexual assault/harassment is mentioned. Prevention of sexual harassment and assault will never be given the time and effort it needs if it is not prioritized in the district's plans for resources and attention. A quantitative analysis of the percentage of division/school websites that include contact information for their Title IX Coordinator and/or how often sexual harassment and assault are mentioned at school board meetings is one step toward collecting data on this issue. Conducting exit interviews with Title IX Coordinators could also add a layer of understanding to the challenges of this role. A nationwide understanding of the level of attention

given to sexual misconduct in our K-12 schools will highlight the urgency of this challenging societal issue.

Once professional learning specific to Title IX and/or sexual harassment and assault is developed, the next step to ensure the fidelity of implementation and positive outcomes is to create an evaluation system. Continuous progress monitoring with data that defines attendees' beliefs on the strengths and weaknesses of the content and delivery methods will improve future efforts. Evaluations used over multiple sessions will assist presenters and organizations in understanding if changes made in response to attendees's feedback show improvement. Research on developing a survey to successfully assess the impact of professional learning would be beneficial in ensuring effective programs.

Finally, artificial Intelligence (AI) is a growing influence in K-12 schools and another factor to consider. While the future is unknown, new challenges and opportunities will arise as organizations, adults, and students become more adept at using this advanced technology. Understanding how AI can advance SSAIS's website, influence social media, and/or support the creation of resources could have a powerful effect and be a considerable time saver (Krawiec et al., 2021).

Summary of Chapter Five

This chapter provides several recommendations for SSAIS organized by three spheres of the Social-Ecological framework: societal, community, and relationships. It is our hope that by focusing on these spheres, ultimately, there will be a substantial improvement in the individual person. We provide eight main recommendations that encompass a variety of more specific, actionable tasks. We concluded this chapter with recommendations for future researchers.

Conclusion

As educators in the service of our youth, we have a professional and personal drive to create safer schools free from sexual harassment and/or assault. Through a literature review, assessment of needs and data analysis structured in the Social-Ecological framework, we better understand what K-12 leaders need to ensure student safety. Our research process focused on qualitative findings via focus groups with Title IX Coordinators and school administrators. We collected quantitative data by embedding strategic questions within our focus groups. Based on findings from Title IX Coordinators and school administrators, we addressed SSAIS's problem of practice with several recommendations focused on societal, community, and relational efforts. As advocates, SSAIS can build partnerships with organizations and legislators who have additional resources to make sexual misconduct a priority in our schools and ultimately change Title IX law for young students. Community relationships will strengthen with two-way communication between school leaders, families, and community organizations. Quick wins such as creating clear Title IX job descriptions will improve understanding of this important role for all stakeholders. Relationships, the key to a prosperous school climate, will improve with thoughtfully created professional learning and resources shared in various formats. Sexual harassment and assault prevention can move forward by reimagining clubs to support the social skills and mental health of K-12 students. Partnerships create a stronger support system by including everyone's voice and expertise. We are optimistic that our recommendations can assist SSAIS in their continued advocacy efforts as they work to create safer schools where each and every student is provided their right to receive an education free from sexual harassment and assault.

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Appendix A

Table A1: Administrator Survey Questionnaire (27 questions)

Focus Area	Question	Answer Choices
Prevention Practices	In my opinion, the climate in my schools creates a safe space for students to report incidences of peer-to-peer SBH and Assault.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
	What efforts does your school take to prevent sexual harassment among students?	(choose all that apply) curriculum, code of conduct, student behavior meetings, other - with free form to enter text
	Is peer-to-peer SBH something that is discussed with families at your school?	Yes/No
	If yes, what grade levels discuss sexual misconduct?	(choose all that apply) 6,7,8,9,10,11,12
	Does your school have a sexual harassment and assault student club?	Yes/No
	If yes, in my opinion, our sexual harassment and assault student club helps prevent sexual misconduct in my school.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, N/A
	If not, in my opinion, a sexual harassment and assault student club would be helpful in preventing SBH and Assault in my school.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, N/A
	Does your school currently partner with any community or non-profit organizations to support its efforts in preventing SBH and assault?	Yes/No
	If yes, please list the organizations in which your school has a partnership.	Free Form
Needs (including PL)	As a school administrator, I understand my legal responsibilities included in Title IX.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
	If an allegation of sexual assault/harassment comes across my desk, I am confident in my ability to process it adequately.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
	On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable are you processing a claim of sexual harassment and/or assault?	(1 being very comfortable)1-10

	I need more training to understand how to process sexual harassment and/or assault cases according to Title IX law.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
	In the past year, how many required trainings have you attended that are specific to peer-to-peer SBH and Assault?	0, 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10, more than 10
	The required peer-to-peer SBH and Assault training I attended were effective.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
Resources	Does your school division/district have a Title IX Coordinator?	Yes/No
	How many times did you contact your Title IX Coordinator during the 2022-23 school year?	Free Form
	How many reports of peer-to-peer sexual misconduct have you received in the past 12 months?	0, 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10, more than 10
	Title IX requires administrators to respond to an allegation "in a reasonable amount of time." How would you define a reasonable amount of time?	Free Form
	Do you have a School Resource Officer /School Security Officer in your building?	Yes/No
	If yes, do you know what training your School Resource Officer/School Security Officer receives?	Yes/No
	If yes, in your opinion, is your School Resource Officer /School Security Officer adequately trained to respond to a sexual harassment and/or assault allegation?	Yes/No
	Have you accessed any websites to search for sexual misconduct information?	Yes/No
	If yes, in your opinion, were the sexual harassment and assault online resources for Administrators helpful?	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
	What resources or support do you need to remove those challenges?	Free Form
Final	Why do you think SA &H isn't addressed more	Free Form

Questions	often?	
	Do you have any other thoughts/ideas to share about how schools can better prevent and/or process SBH and assault?	Free Form

Demographic Questions (7 questions)	How many years of experience do you have as an Administrator in K-12 education?
	What state do you work in?
	How many students are enrolled in your school?
	Are you in elementary, middle, or high school?
	Are you in a public, private, or parochial school?
	Did you volunteer for this role, apply for this role, or were you delegated to this role?
	Is your school in-person, hybrid, or online?

Table A2: Title IX Coordinator Survey Questionnaire

Focus Area	Question	Answer Choices
Prevention Practices	In my opinion, the climate in our division/district/schools creates a safe space for students to report SBH and Assault.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
	In my opinion, the SBH and Assault preventive practices currently in place in our division/district/schools support Building Administrators well.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
	What practices are in place in your division/district/schools to prevent SBH and Assault.?	Free Form
	I have the necessary knowledge to support my division/district/school administrators in preventing SBH and Assault in their schools.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
	I have the necessary knowledge to support my division/district/school administrators in correctly managing SBH and Assault complaints in their schools.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

	Were you trained specifically on how to be a Title IX Coordinator?	Yes/No
	If yes, I was adequately trained before being given the role of a Title IX Coordinator.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
Needs (including PL)	On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable are you processing a SBH and Assault claim?	(1 being very comfortable)1-10
	In my opinion, my division/district's school-based administrators are well equipped to handle SBH and Assault.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
	I need more training on how to support administrators in our schools to prevent SBH and Assault.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
	I need more Title IX legal training to understand how to process SBH and Assault allegations.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
Resources	I am well aware of online resources available to support students and families impacted by SBH and Assault.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
	For my professional needs, the SBH and Assault resources for Title IX Coordinators are helpful.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
	Many states have a state or regional SBH and Assault Professional Learning Community. In my opinion, a Professional Learning Community would improve my abilities to meet the needs of school administrators in responding to SBH and Assault allegations.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
	I need more resources to share with families if their student reports a SBH or Assault.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
	Do you have a School Resource Officer/School Security Officer in your buildings?	Yes/No
	If yes, do you know what training your School Resource Officer/School Security Officer receives?	Yes/No
	If yes, in my opinion, our School Resource Officers/School Security Officers are adequately trained to respond to a SBH and Assault allegation.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
	If yes, in your opinion, my divisions/districts School Resource Officer/School Security Officer are adequately trained to respond to a SBH and Assault allegation.	Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

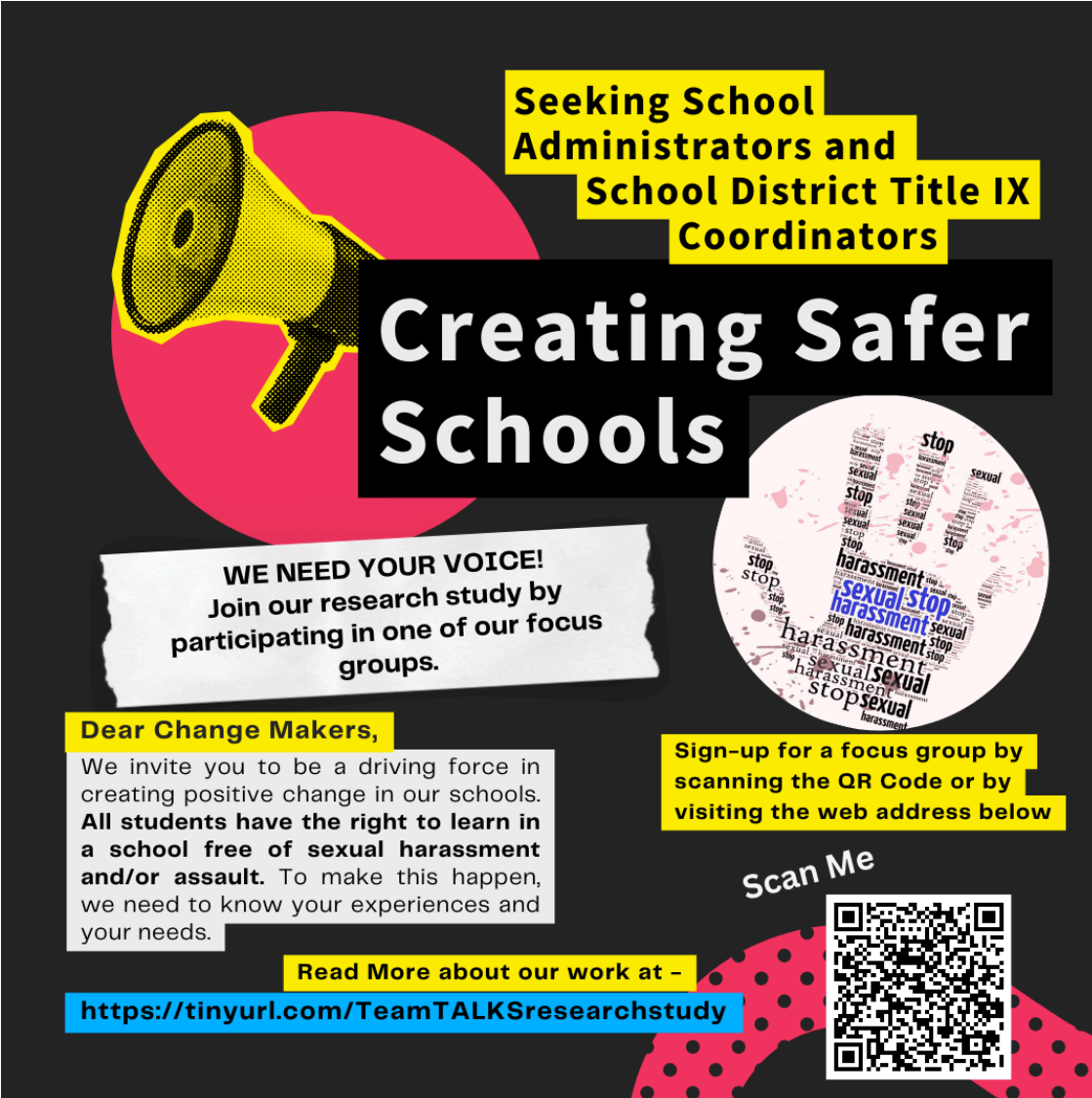
	What forms of communication are in place in your district for students to report SBH and Assault.?	Free Form
	Have you accessed any websites to search for sexual misconduct information?	Yes/No
	What state, regional, or national organization(s) do you believe best serve K-12 Title IX Coordinators?	Free Form
Final Questions	What percentage of your work is for Title IX responsibilities?	Free Form
	Rank order the amount of time you spend on each of the following responsibilities (1 being the highest):	preventing incidences of SBH, investigating allegations of SBH, training school staff on sexual misconduct prevention, training school administrators on legal compliance of Title IX, supporting students, supporting families
	How many reports of peer-to-peer SBH and Assault have you received in the past 12 months.	0, 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10, more than 10
	Do you belong to any organizations specific to Title IX and/or SBH and Assault.?	Yes/No
	Why do you think SBH and Assault aren't addressed more often?	Free Form
	What SBH and Assault policy change(s) would be helpful in your division/school?	Free Form
	If asked, would you be willing to participate in a focus group with your colleagues facilitated by a doctoral research team?	Yes/No
	If yes, please provide your name and email address.	Name and Email Address fields

Demographic Questions (7 questions)	How many years of experience do you have as a Title IX Coordinator in K-12 education?
	What state do you work in?
	How many students are enrolled in your division/district?
	Are you in a public, private, or parochial division/district?
	Did you volunteer for this role, apply for this role, or were you delegated to this role?
	As a Title IX Coordinator, is this your only responsibility?

	Are you the only Title IX Coordinator in your division/district? If not, how many are there?
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Appendix B

Team TALKS Social Media Graphic



Seeking School Administrators and School District Title IX Coordinators

Creating Safer Schools


WE NEED YOUR VOICE!
Join our research study by participating in one of our focus groups.

Dear Change Makers,
We invite you to be a driving force in creating positive change in our schools. **All students have the right to learn in a school free of sexual harassment and/or assault.** To make this happen, we need to know your experiences and your needs.

Sign-up for a focus group by scanning the QR Code or by visiting the web address below

Read More about our work at -
<https://tinyurl.com/TeamTALKSresearchstudy>

Scan Me



Appendix C

Focus Group Participant Interest Google Form

Focus Group Participants

Team T.A.L.K.S. (Teaching Allies Legal Knowledge with SSAIS) is seeking focus group participants to determine the needs of **Title IX coordinators and school administrators** as they work to prevent and address peer-to-peer sexual harassment and assault in K12 schools. **By participating in the one-hour and 15 minute virtual panel, Team T.A.L.K.S. will gather valuable insight to inform the client (SSAIS) of what professional learning and additional resources are needed for these influential groups of educators.**

epterrier@henrico.k12.va.us [Switch account](#)



Not shared

* Indicates required question

I am interested in being a virtual panel participant *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Name *

Your answer

Position/Title *

Your answer

Email (only used to receive meeting link) *

Your answer



Section 2 of 3

School Administrator



Description (optional)

Availability for the one hour and fifteen minute panel discussion for school administrators (please choose all times you are available) *

☐ Wednesday, December 20, 2023 - 6:00-7:15pm EST

☐ Thursday, January 4, 2024 - 7:00-8:15pm EST

☐ Tuesday, January 9, 2024- 5:30-6:45pm EST

☐ Wednesday, January 10, 2024 - 8:00-9:15am EST

☐ Tuesday, January 16, 2024- 4:00-5:15pm EST

Questions for Team T.A.L.K.S.

Long answer text

After section 2 Submit form



After section 2 Submit form



Section 3 of 3

Title IX Coordinators



Description (optional)

Availability for the one hour and fifteen minute panel discussion for Title IX Coordinators ^{*}
(please choose all times you are available)

☐ Tuesday, December 19, 2023 - 6:00-7:15pm EST☐ Tuesday, January 9, 2024- 4:00-5:15pm EST☐ Wednesday, January 10, 2024 9:30-10:45am EST☐ Wednesday, January 17, 2024 5:00-6:15pm EST

Questions for Team T.A.L.K.S.

Long answer text

Appendix D

One-Page Narrative for Potential Focus Group Participants

Hello!

We are Team T.A.L.K.S. (Teaching Allies Legal Knowledge with SSAIS), a group of Doctoral candidates at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). As scholar-practitioners, we are working with [SSAIS](#) (Stop Sexual Assault in Schools) to complete a critical research study. SSAIS is a non-profit organization whose mission is to ensure all students are provided their right to learn in schools free of sexual harassment/assault. **Our research seeks to determine the needs of current school administrators and Title IX Coordinators working to address and prevent incidences of peer-to-peer sexual harassment and/or assault in public K12 schools.**

We are seeking current school administrators and/or Title IX Coordinators who are passionate about creating schools free of sexual misconduct and are interested in sharing their experiences and insights via a focus group. Your participation in a **one-hour and fifteen-minute virtual panel** will assist our team in gathering valuable data to inform our client (SSAIS) of what professional learning and additional resources are needed for these influential groups of educators. **Understanding your efforts and areas of need in preventing, investigating, and processing incidences of sexual misconduct is imperative in helping SSAIS grow its sphere of influence and in creating safer, more equitable schools.**

Please complete this [Google form](#) if you are willing to participate in a focus group with our team. The Google form provides multiple dates/times for different focus groups, please choose the times that work best for you. Once you have signed up, we will send additional communication regarding specific details for your selected focus group.

We thank you in advance for your consideration and participation. **Additionally, we would greatly appreciate you sharing this call for participants with other school administrators and/or Title IX Coordinators who may be interested in joining the conversation.** The data gathered in our conversations will add valuable depth and breadth to the research regarding peer-to-peer sexual misconduct in K12 schools. Your voice is important to us!

Working for Change,

Team TALKS

Team T.A.L.K.S.

(Teaching Allies Legal Knowledge with SSAIS)



Crystal Bell
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Specialist



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Focus Group Dates & Pairings

[illegible]

Appendix F

Email Description of Research and Zoom Link

Hello,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in Virginia Commonwealth University's doctoral candidates focus group on **Thursday, January 4th, from 4:00-5:15 pm EST**. Our research seeks to determine the needs of current Title IX Coordinators and school administrators working to address and prevent incidences of peer-to-peer sexual harassment and assault in public K-12 schools. Throughout our hour and 15 minutes together, we will:

- connect and build community
- discuss your experiences and training specific to preventing and addressing peer-to-peer sexual misconduct
- share what school leaders need to help students learn in environments free of sexual harassment/assault

Beyond our discussion, we will use a Nearpod to collect additional participant insights.

Your responses will remain anonymous and confidential in our findings. The Zoom meeting will be recorded to ensure our transcriptions are accurate. One team member will facilitate the conversation, and another will monitor the chat box and take notes. We will begin and end at our assigned times out of respect for your time. Because we want our focus groups to be collaborative and safe spaces, we will not allow participants to join if they are more than 15 minutes late.

Here is the **Zoom Link:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81644133078> to join the focus group.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to email me. There is no need to prepare or study anything before our conversation; we are most curious about your professional experiences. We know your time is valuable, and your participation in our focus groups speaks volumes about your desire to support students, schools, and educational research. Please let us know as soon as possible if you have a conflict with this focus group date. Thank you again, and we look forward to a productive and meaningful conversation!

Working for Change,

Team T.A.L.K.S. (Teaching Allies Legal Knowledge with SSAIS):

Crystal Bell, Kris Herakovich-Curtis, Beth Terrier, and Leah Wiedenhoft

Appendix G

Table G1: Nearpod Quantitative Participant Responses Administrators

Date	11/29	11/29	11/29	11/29	11/29	11/29	12/12	1/4	1/16	1/16
Participant Question	1 - Admin. Answer	2 - Admin. Answer	3 - Admin. Answer	4 - Admin. Answer	5 - Admin. Answer	6 - Admin. Answer	7 - Admin. Answer	8 - Admin. Answer	9 - Admin. Answer	10 - Admin. Answer
State work in	Virginia	Virginia	Virginia	Virginia	Virginia	Virginia	Virginia	Virginia	Virginia	Virginia
Elem. Middle, High	Elementary	Middle	Middle	Middle	High	Middle	High	High	Elementary	Middle
Rural, suburban, city	City	Rural	Suburban	City	Suburban	Suburban	Suburban	Rural	Suburban	Rural
Year of experience	8	8	4	5	1	10	3	2	4	2
Student enrollment	600	1157	1400	650	1300	900	2000	500	500	900
As a school administrator, I understand my legal responsibilities included within Title IX	strongly agree	agree	agree		agree	agree	agree	agree	no answer	strongly agree
In my opinion, the climate of my school creates a safe space for students to report incidences of peer-to-peer sexual based harassment and assault	agree	agree	strongly agree		agree	strongly agree	agree	agree	no answer	agree
Names of trainings	school division lawyer	Safe Schools Modules	online modules	Participant in the car so did not answer questions with Nearpod or the chat.	online modules	no answer	no answer	Title IX Investigator Training with Division Lawyer	By my Division Title IX Coordinator	By my Division Title IX Coordinator & Safe Schools
I need more training to understand how to process reports of sexual harassment and/or assault in accordance to Title IX law	agree	agree	disagree		agree	Neither agree or disagree	agree	agree	no answer	Neither agree or disagree
In the past year, how many trainings have you attended that are specific to peer-to-peer sexual based harassment and assault	1-2	1-2	1-2		1-2	1-2	0	1-2	no answer	1-2
On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable are you with processing a sexual harassment and/or assault allegation?	8	9	8		8	8	4	7	no answer	7
How many times did you contact your Title IX Coordinator during the 2022-23 school year?	1	3	4		12-15	3	2	2-3	no answer	2

Table G2: Nearpod Quantitative Participant Responses Title IX

Date	12/13	12/13	12/13	1/4	1/4	1/4	1/4	1/4	1/4/2024 (1:1)
Participant	1- Title IX	2- Title IX	3- Title IX	4- Title IX	5- Title IX	6- Title IX	7- Title IX	8- Title IX	9- Title IX
Question	Answer	Answer	Answer	Answer	Answer	Answer	Answer	Answer	Answer
State work in	Virginia	South Carolina	Vermont	Illinois	Indiana	California		Virginia	Virginia
Year of experience							6 mos.		
Student enrollment	50,000	21,300	2,000	323,300	22,000	Title IX Consultant	9,000	14,000	550
When thinking about your role as a Title IX Coordinator, what three responsibilities immediately come to mind?	policy, triage, support	policy, training, a system	prevention, training, follow-up	review reports, assign an investigator, parent contact	reporting, compliance, contact family	compliance	supporting students, investigations, helping Admin.	creating uniform procedures & templates, compliance, & liason between stakeholders	investigating and training
Describe your role in supporting school administrators. How do you meet their needs?	training and processing reports	training and processing reports	training, coaching and reports	training	training, building trust with schools and Admin.		training		training
What barriers make it difficult or uncomfortable for students to report sexual harassment and/or assault?	don't think we will believe them	fear of retaliation/ status of perpetrator/the reporting process	don't want to face accuser	nothing will happen if I report	don't know diff. between sexual harassment and bullying	they go to a trusted adult or friend rather than Title IX Office/ fear of snitching	our hands are tied from the discipline side	regulations are very rigid, don't want the trauma, putting family through it	societal, make excuses for the behavior
Approximately, how often do you coach school administrators about how to investigate an allegation of peer-to-peer sexual misconduct?	multiple times each day	2-3 times/week	once a week	multiple times each day	2-3 times/week	multiple times each day	once a week	daily	
If you had a magic wand, what sexual harassment and assault policy change(s) would you change in your division/district?	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Answer	process very difficult for K-12	too much process	make more user friends & get rid of single decision maker	less process & empowering students to have more agency	process takes to long
I feel confident in my ability to train and support school administrators as they work to prevent and address peer-to-peer sexual assault and/or harassment.	strongly agree	strongly agree	agree	strongly agree	strongly agree	Did Not Answer	disagree	Did Not Answer	agree
What professional learning for administrators is missing?	continued PD	get my law degree	legal	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask
What professional resources, specific to sexual harassment and/or assault, do you turn to for information?	Society of Human Resources Managment, ATIXA	NIAAA Title IX training, Title IX Online University	https://www.vsb.it.org/title-ix/ & Title IX Brown Bag Lunch	Did Not Answer	ATIXA	our attorney	scenarios	ATIXA and VA School Board Association	VASPA
Do you belong to any organizations specific to Title IX and/or sex based harassment and assault?	Institutional Compliance	Institutional Compliance	School Board Insurance Trust & School Board Assoc.	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Participant had to leave early	Regional HR Group
How satisfied were you with your training before being given the role of a Title IX Coordinator?	Dissatisfied	Neutral	No answer	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Participant had to leave early	Dissatisfied
I need more training on how to support administrators in our schools to prevent sex based harassment and assault.	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Participant had to leave early	Strongly agree
Rank amount of time: A. Preventing incidences of SBH B. Investigating allegations of SBH C. Training school staff on sexual misconduct prevention D. Training school administrators on legal compliance of Title IX E. Supporting students F. Supporting families	1. Investigating allegations 2. Supporting Students 3. Supporting Families 4. Training school admin. 5. Training school staff 6. Prevention	1. Training School admin. 2. Supporting students 3. Training school staff 4. Prevention 5. Investigating allegations 6. Supporting families	1. Prevention 2. Training school staff 3. Supporting students 4. Investigating allegations 5. Supporting families 6. Training admin.	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Participant had to leave early	1. Investigating allegations of SBH 2. Supporting Students 3. Supporting Families 4. Training school admin. on legal compliance 5. Prevention 6. Training school staff

Date	12/13	12/13	12/13	1/4	1/4	1/4	1/4	1/4	1/4/2024 (1:1)
Participant	1- Title IX	2- Title IX	3- Title IX	4- Title IX	5- Title IX	6- Title IX	7- Title IX	8- Title IX	9- Title IX
Question	Answer	Answer	Answer	Answer	Answer	Answer	Answer	Answer	Answer
How many reports of peer-to-peer sex based harassment and assault have you received in the past 12 months?	102	10	13	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Participant had to leave early	4
Did you volunteer for this role, apply for this role, or were you delegated/voluntold to this role?	Applied for role	Voluntold	Voluntold	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Participant had to leave early	Voluntold
As a Title IX Coordinator, is this your only responsibility?	No	No	No	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Participant had to leave early	No
Are you the only Title IX Coordinator in your division/district? If no, how many are there?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Did Not Ask	Participant had to leave early	Yes

Appendix H

Nearpod Slides for Title IX Focus Group Participants

Welcome! Please introduce yourself!

First, rename yourself with just your first name.

Then, in the Chat Box, please enter:

- What state you work in
- Rural (R), Suburban (S), City (C)
- How many years of experience you have in this role
- How many students are enrolled in your district

Ex. Beth has been a school administrator for 5 years, in a city middle school in VA, and her school has 1015 students. Her name would now say "VA-MS-C-5-1015"

Welcome to the Title IX Focus Group with Team T.A.L.K.S.

Teaching Allies Legal Knowledge with SSAIS

Crystal Bell
Secondary Program Specialist

Kyle Houshahnd-Curtis
MSIS Data Coach

Beth Terrier
Assistant Principal

Leah Widenhult
Assistant Principal

Introduction

Today, our goal is to spend **an hour and 15 minutes** together so our research team can better understand your experiences dealing with reports of sexual misconduct or assault.

As a reminder, these discussions are **confidential**. We are recording this session, however all names and any identifying information will remain confidential in our findings.

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol 1/61 nearpod

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol 2/61 nearpod

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol 3/61 nearpod

We understand that...

- These conversations are sensitive and challenging. Please take care of yourself and your needs.
- Not everyone will answer every question. We want to share the air and hear from everyone. We apologize in advance if we need to redirect.

Reminder

First, rename yourself with just your first name.

Then, in the Chat Box, please enter:

- What state you work in
- Rural (R), Suburban (S), City (C)
- How many years of experience you have in this role
- How many students are enrolled in your district

Ex. Beth has been a school administrator for 5 years, in a city middle school in VA, and her school has 1015 students. Her name would now say "VA-MS-C-5-1015"

Focus Group Norms

- We encourage you to participate as much as possible.
- We will respect all comments without judgement.
- If you feel uncomfortable with a question, please feel free to pass.
- We prefer that you leave your camera on, but respect your privacy if you prefer not to.
- This will be a one hour and 15 minute session with ~ 10 specific discussion questions. However, our semi-structured format will allow for flexibility in adding or subtracting questions.

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol 4/61 nearpod

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol 5/61 nearpod

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol 6/61 nearpod

Nearpod

- Please go to <https://nearpod.com/student/> to view all questions for this focus group.
- Next enter the code from the chat box
- This is a self-paced resource to view the questions
- Answer each question in Nearpod after you see this image

Let's Begin!

Scenario

A student who identifies as female, reports to the school counselor that her behind was grabbed by another student who also identifies as female. The counselor alerts the school administrator about what is reported. The administrator recently moved into their role and they are new to the school district. They immediately call you to ask for advice.

How do you coach them? What support/ guidance do you provide?

A day later, the administrator calls you again. They met with the victim, and the student shares this has happened a few times before. She did not tell staff because she "did not want to be a bitch." However, the victim now feels very uncomfortable and wants the behavior to stop. She does not want her parents to find out and she does not want the other student to get a consequence, she just wants the touching to stop. The administrator has lots of questions, including: Should they call the police? What do they do if the alleged aggressor denies the allegation? Do they need to involve law enforcement?

What would be your next steps?

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol 7/61 nearpod

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol 8/61 nearpod

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol 9/61 nearpod

Open Ended Question

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

10/61



After the first call, how do you coach the administrator? What support/guidance do you provide?
After the second call and all of their questions, what guidance do you provide?

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

11/61



When thinking about your role as a Title IX Coordinator, what three responsibilities immediately come to mind?

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

12/61



How do you support your school division in creating policies and protocols that work to actively prevent peer-to-peer sexual misconduct?

For example: What practices are in place to educate administrators about sexual misconduct, how to report an allegation, or information regarding legal ramifications of sexual harassment or assault?

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

13/61



Describe your role in supporting school administrators. How do you meet their needs?

What patterns or trends do you notice from your interactions with school administrators?

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

14/61



Based on your experiences and interactions with students and administrators, what barriers make it difficult or uncomfortable for students to report sexual harassment and/or assault?

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

15/61



Approximately, how often do you coach school administrators about how to investigate an allegation of peer-to-peer sexual misconduct?

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

16/61



Poll

Approximately, how often do you coach school administrators about how to investigate an allegation of peer-to-peer sexual misconduct?

- ☐ Multiple times a day.
- ☐ Once a day.
- ☐ 2-3 times a week.
- ☐ Once a week.

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

17/61



Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

18/61



If you had a magic wand, what sexual harassment and assault policy change(s) would you change in your division/district? Explain your thinking.

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

19/61



When you think about the professional learning/trainings you have attended, specific to sexual harassment and assault, discuss how they were helpful.

What are the names of the trainings you attended? What made them most effective?

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

20/61



I feel confident in my ability to train and support school administrators as they work to prevent and address peer-to-peer sexual assault and/or harassment.

Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

21/61



Poll

I feel confident in my ability to train and support school administrators as they work to prevent and address peer-to-peer sexual assault and/or harassment.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree or disagree.
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

22/61



What trends or patterns do you notice regarding the incidences of sexual misconduct that are occurring among students?

Or, what trends do you notice about the challenges you and administrators face in investigating and processing the incidents?

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

24/61



What professional learning, for Title IX Coordinators, is lacking?

What professional learning for administrators is missing?

What learning experiences do you wish were more common and/or available to all educators? Why?

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

25/61



What professional resources, specific to sexual harassment and/or assault, do you turn to for information?

Why are they helpful?

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

26/61



Do you belong to any organizations specific to Title IX and/or sex based harassment and assault?

Yes/No

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

27/61



Open Ended Question

Do you belong to any organizations specific to Title IX and/or sex-based harassment and assault? If yes, what is the name of the organization?

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

28/61



Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

29/61



Many states have a state-wide or regional sexual harassment and assault Professional Learning Community.

Do you have a learning community? If yes, how does the Professional Learning Community improve your ability to meet the needs of the schools you serve?

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

30/61



Do any of the schools you serve have student clubs focused on preventing sexual misconduct? If yes, how do they function in the school? Are they helpful? Explain.

If there are no student organizations with this purpose, do you think student organizations would it be helpful?

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

31/61



How could a non-profit organization effectively share information about student organizations with you or the schools you serve?

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

32/61



How satisfied were you with your training before being given the role of a Title IX Coordinator?

Very satisfied, satisfied, Neutral, Dissatisfied, Very dissatisfied

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

33/61



Poll

How satisfied were you with your training before being given the role of a Title IX Coordinator?

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Dissatisfied
- ☐ Very dissatisfied

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

34/61



Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

35/61




I need more training on how to support administrators in our schools to prevent sex based harassment and assault.

Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree


Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

36/61






Poll

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol 37/61 


I need more training on how to support administrators in our schools to prevent sex-based harassment and assault.


- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree or disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol 38/61 


Rank order the amount of time you spend on each of the following responsibilities (the last item being the highest):

- Preventing incidences of SBH
- Investigating allegations of SBH
- Training school staff on sexual misconduct prevention
- Training school administrators on legal compliance of Title IX
- Supporting students
- Supporting families

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol 39/61 




Poll

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol 40/61 

Rank order the amount of time you spend on each of the following responsibilities (6 being the highest):

- ☐ Preventing incidences of sex-based harassment and assault
- ☐ Investigating allegations of sex-based harassment and assault
- ☐ Training school staff on sexual misconduct prevention
- ☐ Training school staff on sexual misconduct prevention
- ☐ Supporting students

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol 41/61 




Fill in the Blanks

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol 42/61 

Investigating Administrator...training
Students....supporting Staff....training
Families....supporting

Rank order the amount of time you spend on each of the following responsibilities (the last item being the highest #6):

Preventing....Incidences of SBH
.....allegations of SBH
misconduct prevention school staff on sexual
legal compliance of Title IX
school administrators on

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol 43/61 

How many reports of peer-to-peer sex based harassment and assault have you received in the past 12 months?

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol 44/61 



Open Ended Question

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol 45/61 

As a Title IX Coordinator, is this your only responsibility?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

55/61



Are you the only Title IX Coordinator in your division/district? If no, how many are there?

Yes/No

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

56/61



Poll

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

57/61



Are you the only Title IX Coordinator in your division/district? If no, how many are there?

- ☐ I am the only Title IX Coordinator.
- ☐ My division/district has 2 Title IX Coordinators.
- ☐ My division/district has 3 Title IX Coordinators.
- ☐ My division/district has more than 3 Title IX Coordinators.

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

58/61



The goals of this focus group were to:

- understand the current climate related to sex based harassment and assault in your division/district
- what changes are needed to prevent occurrences
- what additional resources are needed to reduce the number of incidents and what resources are needed to help Title IX Coordinators
- how a non-profit organization could support your school's effort to reduce sexual misconduct

Is there anything we haven't touched on today that you would like us to know?

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

59/61



In 30 seconds or less, what is your WAM? (Walk Away Message)

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

60/61



Thanks!

Please record your name and email address on the Google Doc if you would like to see our final report.

33

Lesson: Title IX Coordinators Focus Group Protocol

61/61



Appendix I

I.1 Qualitative Focus Group Questions Linked to Research Questions

1. What do Title IX Coordinators need to address sexual harassment and assault when it occurs?
 - Title IX Coordinators: Based on your experiences and interactions with students and administrators, what barriers make it difficult or uncomfortable for students to report sexual harassment and/or assault?
 - Title IX Coordinators: If you had a magic wand, what sexual harassment and assault policy change(s) would you change in your division/district?
 - Title IX Coordinators: What trends or patterns do you notice regarding the incidences of sexual misconduct that are occurring among students? Or, what trends do you notice about the challenges you and administrators face in investigating and processing the incidents?
2. What do administrators need to address sexual harassment and assault when it occurs?
 - Administrators: Thinking back on incidents regarding sexual harassment and/or assault in your school, what additional training would help you to better prevent and address these incidences?
 - Title IX Coordinators: What professional learning for administrators is missing?
3. What do Title IX Coordinators need to prevent sexual harassment and assault in K-12 schools?
 - Title IX Coordinators: How do you support your school division in creating policies and protocols that work to actively prevent peer-to-peer sexual misconduct?

- Title IX Coordinators: What additional resources or support do you need to prevent and address sexual assault and miscommunication?
4. What do administrators need to prevent sexual harassment and assault in K-12 schools?
- Administrator: Describe the preventive practices at your school to educate students about sexual misconduct.
 - Administrator: What are the biggest challenges school leaders face when attempting to create school cultures that prevent sexual harassment and/or assault.
5. What are the best practices for implementing professional learning for K-12 school leaders?
- Title IX Coordinators: When thinking about your role as a Title IX Coordinator, what three responsibilities immediately come to mind?
 - Title IX Coordinators: When you think about the professional learning/trainings you have attended, specific to sexual harassment and assault, discuss how they were helpful. What are the names of the trainings you have attended? What made them most effective?
 - Title IX Coordinators: What professional learning for Title IX Coordinators is lacking? What learning experiences do you wish were more common and/or available to all educators? Why?
 - Title IX Coordinators: Many states have a state-wide or regional sexual harassment and assault Professional Learning Community. Do you have a learning community? If yes, how does the Professional Learning Community improve your ability to meet the needs of the schools you serve?

- Title IX Coordinators: Do you belong to any organizations specific to Title IX and/or sex-based harassment and assault? If yes, what is the name of the organization?
 - Administrators: If you have attended training on sexual assault and harassment, what were the names of training(s) you have attended and who was the provider?
6. What strategies could SSAIS take to impact its influence in K-12 schools?
- Title IX Coordinators: Describe your role in supporting school administrators. How do you meet their needs? What patterns or trends do you notice from your interactions with school administrators?
 - What professional resources specific to sexual harassment and/or assault do you turn to for information? Why are they helpful?
 - Title IX Coordinators: Do any schools you serve have student clubs focused on preventing sexual misconduct? If yes, how do they function in the school? Are they helpful? Explain. If there are no student organizations with this purpose, do you think student organizations would be helpful?
 - Title IX Coordinators: How could a non-profit organization effectively share information about student organizations with you or the schools you serve?
 - Administrators: What online resources do you access for information regarding sexual-based harassment and assault?
 - Administrators: Several not-for-profit organizations exist for preventing and addressing sexual misconduct. Does your school currently partner with any community or non-profit organizations to support its efforts in preventing sexual harassment and assault?

- Administrators: Does your school have any clubs or organizations to educate students about sexual misconduct?

I.2 Quantitative Focus Group Questions for Team TALKS

1. What do Title IX Coordinators need to address sexual harassment and assault when it occurs?
 - Title IX Coordinators: Approximately how often do you coach school administrators about how to investigate an allegation of peer-to-peer sexual misconduct?
 - Title IX Coordinators: How many reports of peer-to-peer sex-based harassment and assault have you received in the past 12 months?
 - Title IX Coordinators: As a Title IX Coordinator, is this your only responsibility?
 - Title IX Coordinators: Are you the only Title IX Coordinator in your division/district? If no, how many are there?
2. What do administrators need to address sexual harassment and assault when it occurs?
 - Administrators: As a school administrator, I understand my legal responsibilities included within Title IX.
 - Administrators: In my opinion, the climate of my school creates a safe space for students to report incidents of peer-to-peer sexual-based harassment and assault.
 - Administrators: On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable are you with processing a sexual harassment and/or assault allegation?
 - Administrators: How many times did you contact your Title IX Coordinator during the 2022-23 school year?

3. What do Title IX Coordinators need to prevent sexual harassment and assault in K-12 schools?
 - Title IX Coordinators: I need more training on how to support administrators in our schools to prevent sex-based harassment and assault.
4. What do administrators need to prevent sexual harassment and assault in K-12 schools?
 - Administrators: In the past year, how many trainings have you attended that are specific to peer-to-peer sexual misconduct?
5. What are the best practices for implementing professional learning for K-12 school leaders?
 - Title IX Coordinators: How satisfied were you with your training before being given the role of a Title IX Coordinator?
6. What strategies could SSAIS take to impact its influence in K-12 schools?
 - Title IX Coordinators: I feel confident in my ability to train and support school administrators as they work to prevent and address peer-to-peer sexual assault and/or harassment.
 - Title IX Coordinators: Do you belong to any organizations specific to Title IX and/or sex based harassment and assault?
 - Administrators: I need more training to understand how to process reports of sexual harassment and/or assault in accordance to Title IX law.

Appendix J

Member Check Example Email & Quote in Context

Good Morning Participant,

We hope you are doing well. Thank you again for participating in our Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Title IX focus groups. Our research team is in the process of revising and editing the chapter that explains the findings of our research. As a part of our methodology and to ensure we accurately reflect the insights garnered from participants, we are member-checking the direct quotes used in our writing.

Below, you will find one or more of your quotes we plan to include in our findings. Each of your quotes is bolded in the context of the paragraph we wrote. If there are multiple direct quotes, we highlighted the ones that are specific to you.

We ask for you to review our writing. Please share with us your thoughts and/or concerns. We would love your feedback on whether the quote(s) accurately reflect your true thoughts and experiences. As we finalize our writing, receiving any of your comments by Friday, March 8th, would be helpful. See the attached document, and please reply to all with your responses so our entire team can review your feedback. If we do not hear back from you, we will proceed with our writing.

Your review of our work is much appreciated! We are excited to share our final product with you once it is complete.

(Link to individual document with quotes)

Sincerely,

Team TALKS

Quote in Context Example

Participant Name

As described in Chapter 2, school administrators lead the charge in supporting students and teachers in creating healthy school climates. During focus group interviews, several administrators spoke about the challenge of sexual misconduct education being a priority. “If you are a school that’s challenged with academics and attendance, harassment is not one of those

things that is being discussed.” Orchowski et al.’s 2022 research also found that “schools are reluctant to identify violence prevention as equally or more important than other school priorities” (p. 1323). School leaders are also confronted with the fear of data that reflects high numbers of sexual misconduct in their buildings. **“If administrators mark sexual offenses..., then the school will be labeled as a persistently dangerous school.”** Administrators aspire for their schools to be held in high esteem. However, without accurate data to reflect safety issues, school leaders and families will not understand the need for education on the prevention of sexual assault in their schools, and more youth will be damaged.