MIDDLE SCHOOL CLIMATE: TEACHER AND

ADMINISTRATOR VIEWS OF INFLUENTIAL FACTORS

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Abstract

The outcome of creating and maintaining a positive school climate has been studied and linked to many beneficial outcomes for students, teachers, and administrators. Although it has been shown that a positive school climate is related to higher achievement, teacher satisfaction, and a decrease in discipline problems, little research has been conducted to provide educators with specific strategies and practices they can implement to help create a positive school climate in their own school. Thus, this study was designed to assess influential factors that impact and help to create a positive school climate based on the perceptions of teachers and administrators. In this study the researcher chose to use the interview method to collect data. Interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators in one particular middle school setting in which the staff has worked vigorously over the past five years to improve school climate. The focus of this qualitative study was to identify the most influential factors that impact school climate based on the perceptions of teachers and administrators. After thorough interviews with ten leaders in the middle school setting, common trends were identified as ways to improve school climate: relationships, school leadership, safety, school discipline, school vision, the right people, and creating pride.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

It is the basic goal of education to achieve success in providing considerable knowledge to the future of a nation. The school system of the U.S. is considered to be falling short in its efforts in keeping pace with the progressively competitive world. The U.S. Department of Education underscored the critical requirement to focus upon making intensive efforts in schools all over the nation (O'Brennan & Bradshaw, 2016). Special attention has been highlighted upon schools where an abrupt drop in test scores is most evident. The structure and efficiency of the schools has been under question. The situation is such that students are completing their graduation and even college without learning the basics (Goldenberg, 2013).

Various outstanding educators and researchers in the past have recognized the significance of schools in the country as well as the overall structure of educational success in the country. In the last few decades, the country has entered into a new phase of growth and increased expectations of the school and its education system. School climate studies by various researchers have demonstrated the existence of a close relationship between school climate and the achievements by the students. The teaching staff and the principal have been considered to be playing particularly essential roles in climate formation of the school. As climate has a significant impact on the effectiveness of school, it is crucial for educational research to investigate its diverse dimensions.

Background of the study

Researchers have recognized the importance of school climate and its impact on education. James Conant (1959) led the inclusive school approach through which the devotion towards the ideals of equality and opportunity and the equality of status can be reflected.

Peters and Waterman (1982) stated that the strict implementation of set norms and expectations led to high performance and a mutual idea of institutional purpose. The authors found that the most successful companies of America have a tendency to exhibit well-built cultural values and a well-defined set of guiding principles. The overall climate of positive expectations is the main reason behind high achievements of such organizations. According to Peters and Waterman (1982), these qualities distinguish such excellent companies from the rest of the companies.

A study was conducted on the high schools of America by the Carnegie Foundation and Ernest Boyer (1983) in which various troubling facts were reported such as the grade level of students was found to be behind two years from their standard particularly in reading and mathematics. A popular yardstick i.e. Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) was used to measure the performance of school from the year between 1952 and 1982. The average scores of the education level dropped from 476 to 426 i.e. 50 points. The score of the schools existing in U.S. was very poor in the report of Boyer (1983). According to the author, schools reflect the strength as well as the weakness of the nation, and due to increasing competitive environment, financial problems, and struggle to respond to the intense social changes occurring in the society,

numerous secondary schools of the U.S. were in the state of survival but not in the state of prosperity.

The studies related to the school climate have demonstrated the presence of close relationship between the school climate and the achievements by the students and the school. Because climate has a significant impact on school effectiveness, it is crucial for educational research to explore its diverse dimensions (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979). Educational research related to the climate components hides the amount of available literature on how climate evolves. The data collected during this study will analyze the significance of school climate and the factors influencing it.

Research Problem

Through considering the impact of school climate on the achievements of students, it has become essential to understand the climate formation. This study will focus on the dimensions of school climate that are most influential in creating and maintaining a positive school climate, according to teachers and principals. School climate is very important to today's educational area because research has proven that a positive school climate immediately impacts indicators of success in schools.

According to Cohen & Thapa (2013), sustained positive school climate is associated with positive child and youth development, effective risk prevention and health promotion efforts, student learning and academic achievement, increased student graduation rates, and teacher

retention. These research findings have contributed to the U.S. Department of Education's decision to examine ways to use school climate and culture as an organizing data-driven concept that recognizes the range of pro-social efforts including character and moral education, civic education, social emotional learning, developmental assets and community schools, and risk prevention/mental health promotion efforts that protect children and promote essential social, emotional, ethical, and civic learning (2013).

Throughout this study, this question is asked, what are the most influential dimensions of school climate according to teachers and administrators? This topic was developed through the researcher's review of literature. Through a qualitative approach, this study is predominantly helpful in determining methods that teachers and principals use to create a positive school climate. The use of the data will provide educational leaders with information that can aid in the organization and structure of schools when dealing with school climate.

Purpose of the study

The major purpose of this study was to examine the characteristics of a positive school climate, according to teachers and administrators in a high poverty middle school. The purpose was also to identify the dimensions of school climate that are considered to be the most influential when trying to create and maintain a positive school based on the perceptions of the teachers and administrators who participated in this study. Qualitative research methods were used throughout this study to show the participants perspective on the issue. Through this research and the interviews conducted, the significant role of principal in shaping the climate of

the school will be analyzed. The elements of positive school climate and its impact on the progress and development of students can be recognized as a positive way to improve school climate. Participants in this study were selected using purposeful, criterion sampling. A phenomenological approach directed the course of this study.

Research questions

The primary research question to drive this study was:

RQ1. What dimensions of school climate do principals and teachers perceive to be the most influential when trying to create and maintain a positive school climate?

Rationale for the Study

The researcher was interested in discovering the characteristics of a positive school climate according to teachers and principals in a high poverty middle school. Through in depth interviews with teachers and administrators, the researcher would like to identify the dimensions of school climate that the interviewees find to be most influential in creating and maintaining a positive school climate. This study has implications on researchers, administrators, educators, and students. Research has identified the importance of school climate and how it can positively impact student achievement, but research has yet to identify effective strategies in the development of a positive school climate. Examining the data in this phenomenological study can help to provide educators with strategies to foster a positive school climate.

The Researcher

As an educator, the researcher's professional passion revolves around the students and making school and learning a remarkable experience. As a reading teacher, the researcher is constantly looking for ways to make reading fun and stimulating for her students. After about three years in the classroom, the researcher became passionate about school climate and the learning community. The administrators and teachers in the school in which the researcher works began focusing strongly on building a positive school climate. The principal strived to create an environment that was welcoming, exciting, and rigorous for all the people involved. Initially, the principal started having conversations with the staff about school climate could be transformed. The researcher explored publications addressing motivation, and became intrigued by a school called the Ron Clark Academy. Four other teachers and the researcher took a professional development trip to visit the Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta, Georgia.

The Ron Clark Academy is a private school in Georgia that focuses on high expectations while building meaningful relationships with both staff and students. School climate is the foundation of RCA. RCA teachers hope to learn better ways to engage students, promote academic rigor, and create a climate and culture that promotes success. After going on a professional development day at RCA, the researcher's vision regarding the classroom and the school changed tremendously. The researcher saw first-hand what can happen when the teachers and administrators focus on school climate, and all of the dimensions of school climate. By implementing a strong set of rules and norms, following through with a strict discipline program,

building purposeful relationships with students and parents, and creating an environment that promotes openness and connectedness, RCA has seen a great change in their school surrounding school climate and student success

Upon returning to school, the researcher was anxious to begin implementing strategies to improve school climate with students. Three years later, the researcher is still searching for the most effective ways to improve and maintain school climate. School climate must be a continuous effort amongst everyone involved in order to remain positive and effective. It is the goal of the researcher that this research reveals information that teachers and administrators can use to create and maintain a positive school climate.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used during this study; hence, they are to be known as having the meaning depicted below:

1. *School Climate:* refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and values held by people in an educational institution. For the purpose of this study, it refers to the perceptions held by the people of the educational environment or institution. School climate serves as the dependent variable and will be measured through quantitative analysis of teacher perceptions on what creates a positive school climate, using a Likert Scale.

2. *Faculty Perceptions:* awareness and comprehension of an individual regarding environment or situation.

3. *Respondent:* individual responded to questions presented by an investigator. In this study, the terms respondent, subject, and interviewee are used in the similar context.

Summary

The researcher hypothesized that school climate causes a serious impact on the development and achievements of students. It potentially determines the effectiveness of a school. Climate of the school comprises of the attitudes, beliefs, and values, which are common in between the people in a school. Studies conducted by various authors regarding school climate found that school climate is a beneficial components in the study of school effectiveness and role of school climate influencing it. School climate is a combination of complex interaction of various factors. The principal plays a significant role being a pivotal factor in determining the differences between various schools. Faculty satisfaction and cooperation are also important climate factors. Teachers are considered to be the support system of a school and play an important role in decision-making and establishing norms and values of a school.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

A positive school climate has been recognized as the foundation to a successful school. To understand the formation of school climate, one must understand the factors that influence the climate and ways to build a positive school climate. This chapter provides a critical review of the literature relevant to the study. The discussion of this literature is organized into the following four sections: (a) motivation, (b) school climate, (c) the importance of school climate, and (d) the dimensions of school climate.

Motivation

Educational learning environments would be ideal if they were full of students who were eager to learn, excited about the lesson, and driven to succeed by intrinsic motivation. Unfortunately, education, like anything else, is not perfect. Classrooms are not filled with students sitting on the edge of their seats ready for the lesson to begin. However, this does not diminish the importance of motivation and excitement that should be present in the classroom environment. Classrooms are overflowing with students from a variation of backgrounds who have an assortment of needs. Teachers are confronted with the difficult task of figuring out ways to motivate a classroom full of diverse children with dissimilar likes, needs, and desires. What motivates one child may not motivate the other (Mart, 2011). Despite the overwhelming task, motivation in the classroom cannot be left behind. The teachers are the ones who hold extreme powerful positions in the lives of students. The role of a teacher is vital, and the responsibility

should not be taken lightly. Educators are and should be responsible for making the classroom a fun, exciting, and motiving place where students are given the opportunity to flourish.

Motivation is the desire to earn, succeed, or do something (Shabait, 2010); People who are motivated are driven to accomplish something (p. 1). The role of motivation in the teaching-learning process: Human behavior is complex and people are naturally curious. Therefore, instructional designers should meet the challenges of designing instruction assisted by motivation because it is of paramount importance to student success. Students work longer, harder and with more vigor and intensity when they are motivated than they are not. In other words, motivation helps individuals overcome inertia. (p. 1). It should be the goal of the teacher to find ways to motivate the student so that learning can be fun and successful. To do so, the teacher must first focus on building relationships, striking a sense of curiosity within the students' minds, and creating innovative and exciting lessons to nurture this curiosity.

In his book, "Organizational Behavior in Education," Owens discussed many motivational theories and its theorist. One motivational theory is Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation: "The two-factor theory of motivation posits that motivation is not a single dimension that can be described as a hierarchy of needs, but rather is composed of two separate, independent factors: Motivational factors and maintenance factors" (Owens, 2007). Motivational factors are often related to job satisfaction and consist of things such as achievement, responsibility, promotion, challenges, and personal growth. Maintenance factors

work to reduce dissatisfaction in the work place and make room for motivation to come in to play.

Owens also spoke of Abraham Maslow's theory of motivation, Motivation as a Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow believed that people are driven from within themselves (Owens, 2007). Human needs start with survival, and then unfold in an orderly, sequential, hierarchical pattern that takes us toward continued froth and development. Maslow focused on the idea that one cannot be motivated by higher needs until the lower needs are met. A person's basic needs such as food, shelter, and safety must be met before he can focus on his higher needs. Feeling safe, socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically, is a fundamental human need (Maslow, 1943). Feeling safe in school strongly promotes student learning and healthy development. However, there is a great deal of research that has shown that many students do not feel physically and emotionally safe in schools. This is largely due to the school climate or lack they're of a positive school climate. In schools without supportive norms, structures, and relationships, students are more likely to experience violence, peer victimization, and punitive disciplinary actions, often accompanied by high levels of absenteeism and reduced academic achievement (Cohen & Thapa, 2013).

The last theory is Motion Leadership, as mentioned in Change Leader by Michael Fullan. Motion leadership is simply leadership that causes positive movement. It creates a process and a set of conditions that foster moral will and skill, as well as technical expertise. It builds these aspects into the culture by increasing the likelihood that peers will influence peers with respect to

both moral will and technical expertise (Fullan, 2011). Motion leadership focuses on the group. Fullan suggests that the group needs the group in order to make positive change.

The first step to motivating children involves the teacher purposefully building relationships with his or her students. Children want to feel loved, accepted, and important. Children also want to feel like their opinion and thoughts are respected. Teachers who overlook these qualities and fail to focus on the children's perspectives when they are developing the classroom lessons, strategies, and environment are making a huge mistake (Downey, 2014). Building relationships with students may require a teacher to read vampire books when he or she absolutely despises vampire books. The teacher may have to go to ten different sporting events in one week just to watch his or her students compete in their sport of choice. Whatever it may take to build that relationship, it is worth it! Taking time to build and foster relationships with students is likely to encourage motivation in the classroom.

School Climate

School climate and culture are crucial to building motivation. Schools should be seen not as a collection of teachers, pupils, classrooms and curricula. Instead, examine the parking lots. Are they places in which wild driving takes place and school authorities are not to be seen, or are they places where one learns respect for others' safety, regulated either by faculty or by fellow students? Are the cafeterias places where students pelt each other with food and the noise is overwhelming, or are they civilized places where students can conduct meaningful conversations over lunch? Are the corridors areas where muscles and social status are required to avoid being

pushed aside by bullies, or are they safe conduits patrolled by faculty or students? Is vandalism held in check and when it does occur, do the offending students correct the damage? Are students treated according to reasonable and understandable criteria? Etzioni explains how it should be a goal of the school to create a morally rich environment where expectations of behavior are laid out in the beginning, a place where students can feel the positivity, a place where students feel safe and loved, and a place where students are held accountable for their behavior. He emphasizes the importance of teaching these skills to our students.

School climate is a critical element that should be present in schools that wish to place emphasis on school improvement. Owens mentioned school climate: "Climate is generally defined as the characteristics of the total environment in a school building" (Owens, 186). He goes on to mention four characteristics that are important to school climate: ecology, milieu, social system, and culture (186). In the newsletter, Developing A Positive School Climate, school climate was defined as the following: "School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. It is based on patterns of school life experiences and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structures" (National School Climate Center, Center for Social and Emotional Education, and National Center for Learning and Citizenship at Education Commission of the States, 2008, p.5). According to the newsletter, there are many factors that influence the climate of a school. For example, discipline, attendance, parent cooperation, academic performance, student participation, and staff participation. A positive school climate is very important to having a successful school. To obtain and maintain a positive school climate, it requires the work and

cooperation of everyone involved in the school. The newsletter also stated, "a positive school climate can be viewed as the foundation of safety, pride, respect, trust, and motivation on which a school can build the structure of high academic achievement for all students" (p. 6). The climate of a school is truly the most important component to building a safe, fun, and successful school. When a positive climate is established, students are going to soar above expectations and be eager to learn and be involved, and teachers are going to teach with the spark in their eyes because they are happy with their job. The classroom environment and the teacher's leadership are more important than the specific approach to developing moral behavior in young people. The teacher sets the moral tone for the classroom through both words and actions. Core values of honesty and respect for others' rights need to permeate the curriculum. Students must feel that they belong in school, that their teachers are supportive, and that it is safe to offer their views without fear of embarrassment or ridicule.

The Importance of School Climate

School climate is often the target of school improvement plans due to its possible positive impact on the school. Bradshaw (2014) defined school climate as the shared beliefs, values, and attitudes that shape interactions between students, teachers, and administrators and set the parameters of acceptable behavior and norms for the school. School climate is a product of teacher and student social interactions, and is influenced by educational and social values. Ali (2016) said that climate is not something that is tangible; it is a matter of the mind. Examples of positive elements of school climate are an atmosphere of caring, a motivating curriculum,

professional collegiality, and closeness to parents in the community.   There also exists a feeling

of cohesiveness, as well as an increased sense of school pride. Regardless of whether the climate

is positive or negative, warm or cold, it is something that all senses of the human body can

detect.

In supportive school climates, Kılınç (2013) claimed that members of the school

community respect each other and find ways to collaborate to basically increase the quality of

classroom instruction. Furthermore, principals in such kind of school climates are open to ideas

and suggestions from teachers as teachers are regarded as the potential power to create a healthy

and proper school climate. Professional orientation is also present in supportive school climates.

Additionally, strong shared and pleasant relationships are experienced in intimate school

climates in which teacher and principals support each other, reflect on ideas, and socialize

together (Kılınç, 2013).

A healthy school climate defines a school environment which includes an orderly and

serious workplace, a rewarding mechanism for students' academic achievement, coherent work

units built upon trustworthy relationships among faculty members, and effective principals

focusing essentially on student learning. Kılınç (2013) stated that teachers become more

committed to teaching profession in positive school climates and principals will be more likely to

work to improve the quality of instruction by creating appropriate conditions for colleagues to

collaborate effectively. An open and positive school climate presents a wide variety of

opportunities for faculty members to collaborate and reflect on different ideas in order to influence student learning.

The Dimensions of School Climate

Research points to four dimensions that greatly affect school climate: safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, and institutional environment. Additionally, professional development, teacher workload, perceptions of job security, and administrative support are also factors that influence school climate.

1. Safety
    a. Rules and Norms: Schools should work together to develop a clear and understandable set of rules about physical, verbal, and emotional abuse. Everyone involved in the school should understand the expectations and the enforcement that will be involved when dealing with issues revolving abuse. A critical component of a strong and positive school climate is a school-wide discipline policy that sets high expectations for behavior, provides clear, developmentally appropriate, consequences for misbehavior, and uses disciplinary incidents to help students learn from their mistakes, improve their behavior, and meet high expectations (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Once the expectations are established, all rules and expectations should be clearly communicated with all students. The U.S. Department of Education suggests that in order to create a positive school climate, schools should create

an instructional approach to discipline. Hence, schools must teach students behavioral expectations and help students develop new behavior skills and positive strategies to avoid conflict and focus on learning. For example, while schools should make clear that bullying is unacceptable, schools should also use the disciplinary process not just to hold those who bully accountable, but also to help those students learn from their behaviors, grow, and succeed. In doing so, schools should consider the most effective ways to teach new social and emotional skills to students who bully in order to prevent future bullying (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

b. Sense of Physical Security: Students and staff should have a sense of safety from physical harm while at school. Over the past two decades, school security and disciplinary measures have increased in school districts, despite overall declines in school violence nationally (Peguero, 2015). Today's public schools employ a variety of security measures, such as School Resource Officers, security guards, surveillance cameras, metal detectors, and random searches of students and lockers to control school buildings. The security measures are used in hopes of decreasing violence related problems. School safety is important for student learning to take place. In order for students to focus on academics, they must not feel threatened by physical violence or harm, and should feel safe while at school.

c. Sense of Social-Emotional Security: Students and staff should feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion while at school. Students should feel emotionally secure and accepted so they can focus on learning. Jones (2016) explains that the more one feels accepted and acceptable, the more one will be able to express one's self, act authentically, and be fully present to others. A sense of belonging and acceptance is essential to a young person's mental health and ability to trust and take risks. The students will eager to participate and be involved if a sense of community is established in the school and in the classroom and the students feel as if he is a part of this community. Research has shown a relationship between a sense of belonging with acceptance and self-esteem (Jones, 2016). Moreover, building a sense of classroom belonging, and the sense of self-and peer-acceptance has been shown to promote higher achievement among students.

2. Teaching and Learning

a. Support for Learning: The process of teaching and learning is essentially relational. One of the most important aspects of relationships in school is how connected people feel to one another. Relationships refer to how people feel in connection to other people, but also how people feel about themselves. Jia (2009) concluded that for both Chinese and American students that when students' perceived teacher-student support and student-student support, these

perceptions were positively associated with self-esteem and grade point

average while negatively associated with depressive symptoms. Also,

teachers' interactions with students can directly affect students' behavioral

and emotional engagement in the classroom. According to Skinner and

Belmont (2009), when teachers support and interact positively with students

and each other, then students are more likely to be engaged and behave

appropriately.

3. Interpersonal Relationships

   a. Student/Teacher: The emotional dimension of engagement supports the

      importance of relationships between teachers and students as well as teachers

      to teachers. Students conceptualize emotional engagement as a feeling of

      identification and investment and as a sense of belonging, feeling an important

      part of the school body, and finding value in the school experience (Connor,

      2015). Effective teachers will find a way to get to know their students on a

      personal level and make them feel valued and important. By doing so, this

      relationship will manifest into a positive working relationship within the

      classroom. School teachers serve as mentors, role models, sources of

      encouragement and support, and representatives of the educational system.

      Therefore, students' relationships with teachers can shape students' behavior

      in school as well as influence their educational progress and success. Connor

      (2015) says that relationships build a sense of community and are a vital

component of emotional human nature. According to Peguero (2015), research consistently reveals that adolescents who report healthy and strong relationships with their teachers show improved educational achievement, motivation, cognitive, emotional, and social development, pro-social behavior, and self-esteem. Student diversity must be respected and explored as relationships develop in the classroom and in the school. Students will feel valued and important if teachers take a personal interest in getting to know them individually. Different cultures among students and faculty should be embraced as ways to build relationships, get to know others, and as an educational tool.

b. Collegial: Relationships among teachers are also important to building a positive school climate. Research suggests that teachers need to construct collegial and cooperative relationships as the first step to establishing rapport, and then through trust and support, the process of authentic collaboration can begin. Although caring teachers are devoted to supporting students through their academic success, teachers must also encourage, support, and respect one another. Connor (2016) explained that building relationships among colleagues is no different from students. Colleagues should use various occasions throughout the day to build more personal and professional associations among coworkers. A more respectful and personal approach and a feeling of camaraderie may lead to more problem solving and pedagogical

collaboration among colleagues. Once a shared vision and common goals are created for the school, teachers are able to work with one another to accomplish these goals. Teachers should work together and try to help each other become better. This could be in the form of working on lesson plans collaboratively, professional development, classroom management, or any other area that a teacher may need help or advice in. It is important for students to see teachers working together, helping each other, and building relationships amongst themselves. This will help to create an environment and a culture of collaboration and will set the expectation for students to also build these types of relationships. Connor (2016) stated, "The most powerful strategy for improving both teaching and learning is to create the collaborative culture and collective responsibility among school faculty" (p. 15).

c. Studies have argued that school climate is directly related to factors related to positive relationships. In a school with a healthy school climate, administrators know how to support teachers in their work, and such support is noticed and valued by teachers. In a school with a healthy school climate, teachers believe that they are influential in affecting what happens in the school. Therefore, relationships are crucial to building a positive school climate. The following types of relationships should be pursued when working to develop a positive school climate: positive adult-adult relationships between and among teachers, administrators, and staff; positive

adult-student relation-ships; positive student-student relationships; shared

decision-making; common academic planning opportunities; diversity valued;

student participation in learning and discipline.

4. Institutional Environment

   a. School connectedness/engagement: A school environment that fosters a

      positive and encouraging school climate will possess a sense of connectedness

      among the teachers, students, administrators, and parents. Shared visions will

      lead the direction of the school and drive daily instruction and effectiveness.

      Teachers will feel comfortable working with one another, as students will feel

      a sense of security to work with teachers and other students. The school

      environment should always be a place where teachers and students feel

      comfortable and supported if a positive school climate has been established.

5. The Role of the Principal/Administrative Support

   a. The principal is said to be one of the most influential persons in the school.

      The principal holds a position to have a great impact on students, teachers,

      and all staff involved in educational environment. The principal's primary

      responsibility is to improve the teaching and learning that takes place in the

      school. According to Engles (2008), because of the many aspects of

      instructional leadership, a principal must utilize varying methods to lead the

      staff, students, and parents of a school. A principal must create a school

      climate that is conducive to change (Engles, 2008). McCarley (2009) claimed

that the school principals in a positive school climate work to build a capacity

for change, embrace teachers as leaders, encourage professional development,

and provide opportunities for collaborative growth among the staff. As a

result, leadership styles must be developed that influence relationships

between the leader and followers, possessing a mutual commitment to the

school's mission and fostering collaboration to facilitate continuous

improvement (McCarley, 2009). To create a positive school climate,

principals must have an innovative mindset in which they inspire teachers to

perform and meet goals.

b. Although the principal plays an important role in the development of

community and culture, the principal does not have the sole responsibility for

ensuring the success of a learning community. Cherkowski (2016) explained

how principals should work with his or her faculty to create a positive culture.

Shared leadership at many levels of the school is needed to ensure that any

implementation represents the values and visions of all members of the

learning community. Cherkowski (2016) stated, "Principals should join with

teachers to cultivate three forms of capital essential for improving teaching in

all schools: human capital (the knowledge and skills of teaching and learning);

social capital (the processes and structures that enable relationships built on

trust and respect to form bonds among teachers that support the hard work of

learning to improve teaching); and decision-making capital (the ability to

make wise and informed decisions that reflect the level of professionalism

required as a teacher)" (p. 526).

c. Collaboration amongst administrators should be visible to teachers. Connor

(2016) explained that teachers need leadership support through professional

development, common planning, and team building activities. Administration

should establish a substantial commitment to not only supporting, but also

modeling positive relationships and a climate of trust within the school and

community.

d. One of the most influential tools for preventing disruptive student behaviors is

the use of rigorous instructional strategies that motivate and engage students

in learning. In addition, when prepared with strategies for responding to

inappropriate student behaviors, staff can help promote positive student

behavior. Administrators should provide all school based personnel who

interact with students with effective professional development and ongoing

support, and match professional learning opportunities with the needs of

various school personnel. In order to maintain a positive school climate,

administrators should provide staff with appropriate trainings and professional

development opportunities.

Conclusion

Thapa (2012) summarized his ideas on the importance of school climate by explaining that any sustainable, positive school climate will foster youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributive, and satisfying life in a democratic society. This climate includes norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe. People are engaged and respected. Students, families and educators work together to develop, live, and contribute to a shared school vision. Educators model and nurture an attitude that emphasizes the benefits of, and satisfaction from, learning. Each person contributes to the operations of the school as well as the care of the physical environment (Thapa, 2012). A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included, and accepted, and actively promote positive behaviors and interactions. Principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded in the learning environment to support a positive school climate and a culture of mutual respect. A positive school climate is a crucial component of the prevention of inappropriate behavior.

Theoretical Foundation

According to Maslow (1970), humans have five different levels of needs. The first two levels deal with physiological and safety needs; the third with love and belonging needs. Levels four and five (the higher levels) focus on esteem needs and the need for self-actualization. According to Maslow, the levels of needs are hierarchical in nature — meaning that meeting higher levels of needs is usually dependent on lower levels having been met (1970). Belonging

is developed in a social context, and is something that all children desire in schools. In a positive school environment where the leaders foster an inclusive environment for everyone, students will feel like they belong. Wilson (2012) said that establishing a climate of inclusivity can be difficult. She explained that all members of the group must be committed to making everyone feel welcome and a part of and focusing on the same goals (2012). According to Maslow (1970), belongingness and love needs are more basic than esteem and achievement needs. This means that many children aren't motivated to achieve until their belonging needs are met. Therefore, it is imperative that educational environments focus on the needs of the students and work to build and create a positive school climate where children can flourish.

The concept of school climate is related to the educational effectiveness, school environment, and various modes of student achievements. School climate has been defined by the National School Climate Council (2007) as the norms, values, and expectations that assist the people in that environment feeling safe from the point of view of social, emotional, and physical aspects (National School Climate Council, 2007). It is the atmosphere of a school building in which impressions, moods, and feelings of the people involving in the environment can be experienced. According to Alessandro and Sadh (1997), the school climate impacts upon the feelings and willingness of the students to get involved in the school environment as well as their enthusiasm to contribute in the educational activities being performed in the school. The commitment of the teachers and students to extend the vision of inclusion and involvement requires the climate of school to reflect the characteristics of respect, honesty, dignity, equity,

justice, and protection (Higgins-D'Alessandro & Sadh, 1997). It can be considered as the social

environment in which the people who perform within the environment of the school reflect the

product of the norms, beliefs, and attitudes. For the purpose of this study, climate is defined as

the product of common attitudes, beliefs, and values as understood by the people in a school,

fundamental parts of which include pride, esprit, and cooperation.

Studies conducted by various authors have specified school climate as an essential

variable in the equation of school effectiveness. Rutter et al. (1979) conducted a study on the

impact of school climate on student achievement. After analysis, it was concluded that there had

been various factors that were responsible for influencing the achievement of students. The

authors conducted a survey of twelve secondary schools and the achievements of around 2700

students in them (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979). The study reported that

the impact of school climate on achievement and behavior of students had no relationship with

the intelligence or home environment of the student. It was found that the climate provided to a

student in the school could raise the standards of behavior among all the students of a school. It

was also analyzed during the research that teachers also play an important role in this process,

and the initial step is required to be taken by them through conveying their expectations to the

students in the manner that how they themselves behave such as punctuality, accuracy, time

precision tasks, and many more (Welsh, 2000). The norms followed by the school are closely

linked to the appropriate behavior and test scores such as the standards of punishment should be

fair and consistent. Despite formal grading criteria of the school, students must be provided with

feedback in other ways too in order to motivate them. Moreover, the findings of the study indicated that the staff members of a school could also assist in developing a positive climate in the school by keeping the norms and values as formal (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Stewart (1978) associated teachers' perceptions of school climate to the achievements by the students. In the opinion of the author, the schools, which were regarded as having more positive climate, had students who established higher scores on, standardized tests (Stewart, 1978).

The perceptions of teachers frame a significant portion of the common belief followed in a school. Their thoughts, feelings, and ideas resonate through and assist in forming the school climate (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Furthermore, teachers are well aware about the complex set of roles being played by the principal in their daily performance in the school. They encompass the belief system and norms established in a school, and are considered as the solution to the increasing issues in the educational environment. Lightfoot (1983) conducted an interview study of six best schools and found that the effectiveness of the educational programs in these schools was determined by the critical role of teachers. The author analyzed that teachers were playing the central role in the educational process in these schools and their satisfaction was significant for the smooth functioning of the school (Lightfoot, 1983).

Teachers appreciate the support of the principal at both personal as well as professional level so as to make them comfortable performing their duties and responsibilities in the school.

The principal must listen patiently to all the issues arising in the school, implement rules appropriately and in a fair manner, and should communicate honestly and frankly with the members of the staff. All these qualities in a principal are strictly associated with the positive climate of the school.

Working relationships are also powerful factors that influence the school climate. Various teachers pronounced that mutually respectful support, companionship, and positive group chemistry assist in fostering high levels of professional commitment and positive climate as well. They can also be promoted through mutual exchange of skills and enthusiasm to help each other. The staff leaders are considered to be having a strong influence on the beliefs and opinions of the other staff members. It was stated by various teachers that the opinion of a small group of staff members influences the school climate to a greater extent. Therefore, important climate factors, which influence the student achievement, incorporated academic emphasis, rewards and praise, discipline, staff organization and student teacher interaction. The ability of a principal to create a positive climate can also determine the efficiency and effectiveness of school in the progress and development of students (Trocaire, 2016).

The most important educational goal is for students to learn. Another important goal is to make this newly gained knowledge and information purposeful and profound to the students, so that it may be recollected and useful throughout their lives. An indispensable factor involved in meeting these goals is motivation. If students are unmotivated in one way or another, it is likely that little learning will take place, or if by chance some learning should take place, it is likely that

it will not be remembered. This theory has great impact on educational organization. In order to maximize on the effectiveness of school-wide and individual classroom teaching programs, administrators and teachers must consider student needs and their hierarchical order. Administrators should make this a top priority in schools.   The way an administrator leads his school, or the way a teacher leads her classroom, has a great impact on the motivation of the ones involved.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore the dimensions of school climate and to identify which aspects of school climate are the most influential in creating and maintaining a positive school climate according to teachers and administrators. This study utilized a qualitative methodology to help gain a deeper understanding of what aspects of school climate impact the overall climate of the school.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research was used in this study to explore the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding school climate. Qualitative studies provide rich and descriptive accounts targeted to understanding a phenomenon, a process, or a particular point of view from the perspective of those involved (Ary et al., 2014). Ary et al., explained that the basic question in qualitative research seeks to find out how an event or process is perceived by the participants (2014). Qualitative research is conducted in a natural setting and seeks to explore human behavior within the context of a bounded program. The qualitative researcher wants to answer the "what" and the "how" questions. The "what" question may involve a phenomenon, a person, or a program; whereas, the "how" question looks at the effects of the study focus on all stakeholders within a bounded system (Hatch, 2002). Ary et al., (2014) described qualitative researchers as ones who pursue to comprehend a phenomenon by looking at the total picture rather than breaking it down into variables. The objective is a holistic picture and profundity of understanding rather than numeric analysis of data. A qualitative approach was used in this

study to gain understanding of teacher and principal perceptions of which dimensions of school climate are the most influential when trying to create and maintain a positive school climate.

Phenomenology

In order to capture the essence of the teachers and principals' attitudes and perceptions, a phenomenological research design was used. Phenomenology is a genre of qualitative research where the researcher explores the lived experiences of the individuals participating (Ary et al., 2014). Welman & Krugger (1999) stated, "The operative word in phenomenological research is 'describe'. The aim of the researcher is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts" (p. 189). According to Welman and Kruger (1999) the phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved. Christenson, Johnson, and Turner (2010) said that the primary objective in phenomenological research is to explicate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a person, or a group of people, around a specific phenomenon. The phenomenologist attempted to understand human behavior through the eyes of the participants in the study.

The preliminary focus of this research was to gather data regarding the perspectives of research participants about the phenomenon of school climate. Individual interviews were used to gather data. The researcher identified the most influential dimensions of school climate according to teachers and principals. Ary (2014) described a phenomenological study as one that is designed to describe and interpret an experience by determining the meaning of the experience

as perceived by the people who have participated in it (p. 501). The goal of the research questions was to find the essence of an experience as perceived by the participants.

Description of the Study Participants and Setting

The middle school selected for this study was established in 1975. The school serves students in grades 6th through 8th grade, and is located in the Southwest part of a city in Tennessee. A team of teachers serves each grade level with various academic specialties. In addition, a related arts team serves all students. Various resource programs are available for the learning disabled and various other disabilities. The school has two administrators, one male, and one female. The school consists of thirty-one female teachers, fourteen male teachers, three female teacher assistants, and two male teacher assistants. Twenty-five teachers in the building have their Bachelor's degree, nineteen have their Master's degree, and three have their Educational Specialist degree. There are fifty-two staff members total that are being considered as participants for this study. The researcher has chosen to interview the following for the purpose for this study: Principal, Assistant Principal, 6th grade team leader, 7th grade team leader, 8th grade team leader, related arts team leader, state teacher of the year, and one additional teacher from each grade level for a total of 10 interviews.

Ary (2014) explained that the participants in a phenomenological study are chosen because they have been through the experience being investigated and can share their thoughts about it (p.503). Purposive sampling was utilized in this study. Welman & Kruger (1999) explained that in phenomenological research, the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice-

versa) including even the type of participants. Purposive sampling was utilized in this study, and is considered the most important kind of non-probability sampling, to identify the primary participants. The researcher selected the sample based on participants who have had experience with the phenomena. Participants were chosen from the selected population of the middle school chosen for this study. Purposive, criterion sampling was utilized in this study. According to Ary (2014), criterion sampling requires all participants to experience the same phenomena (p. 459). The school of focus in this study began implementing strategies to improve school climate four years ago. As a high poverty school where 96 percent of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch, the administrators and teachers felt it necessary to create an environment that was welcoming, safe, fun, and exciting for students. The teachers and administrators have thus attended several professional development sessions on school climate and implemented many strategies to improve the climate. Therefore, the participants in this study have experience with school climate, understand its importance for teachers, administrators, and students, and have been working over the past three years to implement school climate strategies in hopes of improving school climate.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher completed documentation and submitted required documentation to the IRB. Upon approval from the researchers attending university and IRB, the researcher began to plan interview meetings. Ary (2014) said the main data collecting method in a phenomenological study is the personal unstructured interview (p. 503). The researcher used the

interview method to assess teachers' and administrators' perceptions of what creates a positive school climate, which dimensions of school climate are the most beneficial, and descriptions of the strategies implemented to improve school climate.

The purpose of the interview was to provide the participants with a chance to share their story of the phenomenon studied and explain their experience with school climate strategies. The interview was an in-depth interview that consisted of questions about what creates a positive school climate. Ary (2014) explained the interview method: "The human instrument is the only data collection instrument which is multifaceted enough and complex enough to capture the important elements of a human experience "(p. 503). Therefore, the researcher designed questions that were thorough and intended to capture the essence of the experience of the participants. The interviewees consisted of the principal of the school, the assistant principal, and teachers from the building. The interview questions were designed to gain understanding on the factors that influence school climate, ways in which the interviewee creates a positive school climate, and how they maintain a positive school climate, and which dimensions of school climate are of the most significance. The interview responses were used as the main source of data collection in this qualitative study. The researcher began with the principal and assistant principal of the school, and then went on to interview all team leaders in the school, and then other teachers. The researcher used a tape recorder to record all interviews for subsequent analysis. The interviews were conducted in a classroom in the middle school that was selected. The classroom allowed enough space and was small enough for the participants to feel

comfortable to participate in discussion. The setting was chosen to make it accommodating for the teachers. Interviews were conducted after school hours.

After the researcher conducted the interviews with the administrators, she analyzed the data, logged the interview, and acknowledged common themes for summarization. The researcher wrote descriptions of the participants' experiences and how the experiences were perceived. Through the process of reduction, the researcher developed an overall explanation of the general meaning of the experience. Reduction is a phenomenological device that aims to bring aspects of meaning into focus (Ary, 2014).

Interview Questions:

1. To what extent do you believe school climate is important at your school?

2. Tell me about the atmosphere of our school. If you were describing it to someone who has never been here, what might you say it's like to be a student, teacher, or administrator at this school?

3. How would you explain the administration leadership style and how does it impact school climate?

4. How does student discipline impact school climate? Does your school have a discipline plan and how do you feel like it influences school climate?

5. Explain a time when experienced support from the administrators at your school. Describe the situation and the actions that were taken that made you feel supported.

6. Does parental involvement affect the climate of your school? If so, how does your school work to involve parents?

7. What do you believe would make a good teaching and learning environment for teachers and students? What are effective strategies for ensuring each student and parent is fully engaged in the school?

8. How do you motivate students to take an active role in creating a positive school climate?

9. What do you see as the greatest challenges facing school climate?

10. What is the shared vision and set of norms for your school? Describe how the vision and norms help to develop and maintain a positive school climate.

11. Tell me about a time when the school discipline process seemed to work well. How did teachers and administrators respond in this situation? How do you think this worked well for the students involved?

12. What is the role of the principal in dealing with discipline problems?

13. What do you consider to be the key elements of establishing and maintaining a safe and secure learning environment?

14. What specific strategy do you feel has been the most effective in creating a positive school climate in your school?

15. How do you motivate, encourage, and support your staff? (Administrators only)

Ethical Considerations

In qualitative research, credibility refers to the truthfulness of the inquiry's findings (Ary, 2014). The researcher must represent the data as accurately as possible. The researcher used referential evidence of validity to accurately portray the data taken. Through member checks and low-inference descriptors, the researcher will increase the validity of the data. Member checks will be used after the interviews are taken and scribed. The researcher asked the participants to review the tape recordings for accuracy. The researcher scribed the responses verbatim to help the reader understand the participants' world. Bias is possible in this study. To control bias from occurring, the researcher used reflexivity, which is self-reflection to identify one's own bias and seek them out (Ary, 2014). Through descriptive adequacy, the researcher endeavored to provide accurate descriptions of the participants to assist the reader in determining transferability (Ary, 2014). To help with transferability, the researcher used reactivity, by describing biases through a reflective statement and providing specific interview questions. To establish dependability, the researcher used an audit trail. This will allow others to determine how decisions were made. The researcher kept organized notes throughout the data collection process. The researcher has relationships with the participants because they work in the same school with each other. Because of this working relationship, ethical issues could arise. The researcher may face ethical dilemmas involving confidentiality, the relationship to the participants, and reciprocation.

Although the researcher does not expect any identifiable risks associated with the study, precautions were put into place to ensure the research will be neutral. The researcher provided participants with written documentation informing them about the voluntary nature of the study, and with an overview of the study. The participants signed the consent forms and returned them to the researcher.

Data were collected as stated and not altered. Member checking was used to allow the participants to elucidate the data that was provided in the study. Triangulation through the methods of the interviews was used to confirm the validity of the data. Gathering data from different participants and developing themes from the data provided from the participants conveys the credibility of the data.

Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher attempted to comprehend the phenomenon, which has been studied in this research study. The researcher will organize the data, and then begin to engage with the data through reading and reflecting (Ary et. al, 2014). The researcher followed the concept of data analysis spiral in order to analyze qualitative data: familiarize and organize; code and reduce; interpret and represent (Ary et al., 2014).

Moustakas (1994) described the process in of phenomenological analyses that includes: immersion: the researcher is involved in the world of the experience, incubation: a space for awareness, intuitive or tacit insights, and understanding, illumination: active knowing process to

expand the understanding of the experience, and explication: reflective actions Creative synthesis: bringing together to show the patterns and relationships. Moustakas (1994) explained that during the data analysis process the focus is on understanding the meaning of the description of the phenomenon. To get at the essential meaning of each individuals experience, a common approach is to use the methodology of reduction, and analysis of specific statements to recognize overarching themes.

The researcher began by familiarizing herself with the data by working through the data several times, listening to the interviews over and over, and reflecting on the data. While doing so, the researcher transcribed all data received through the research. Words will be transcribed directly to avoid potential bias. When transcribing, the researcher used pseudonyms to protect confidentiality of the participants. The researcher completed a reflective log while working through the data to capture thoughts as they occur. The researcher completed a list of data sources and organized the data by interviews. Next, the researcher began the coding and reducing process. Ary (2014) said that coding and reducing is the core of qualitative analysis and includes the identification of categories and themes and their refinement (p. 515). To begin this process, the researcher reviewed data and sorted it by units of meaning. The dimensions of school climate will be reviewed and turned into codes of meaning. The dimensions of school climate that teachers and administrators find to be the most influential in developing and maintaining a positive school climate will be developed into organizational categories. Once codes are established, the researcher combined the units that have the same coding.

The researcher looked for themes that ascended from the categories. Major themes were established based on the data and categories that were drawn from the research. Summarization occurred next. The researcher examined the data with the same code and merged them into categories (Ary, 2014). The researcher looked for relationships among the different categories. The researcher used the constant comparative method strategy for qualitative analysis. Ary et al., (2014) explained this process is combining the inductive category coding with simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained (p. 522). The concepts were examined to determine its characteristics. Then, comparison was made between categories. The researcher used Nvivo, a computer analysis program, to assist with coding.

Finally, the researcher entered the interpreting and representing stage of the study. The researcher reflected and made generalizations based on the connections and common aspects among the categories. Interpretation is about bringing out the meaning and developing explanations (Ary, 2014). The researcher attempted to examine the essence of school climate. The researcher reported themes through descriptive detail. The researcher provided a narration related to the essence of school climate. The researcher reported the findings and conveyed the participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

Summary

Through in depth interviews with teachers and principals, the researcher strived to determine the most influential dimensions of school climate that can be used when trying to develop and maintain a positive school climate. The researcher sought to determine the elements

that can enhance school climate in a particular school. Qualitative design was used to determine teachers and administrators perceptions of what is useful in fostering a positive school climate. The research questions were answered by themes that emerged from interview data, and were reported in Ch. 4. This chapter provided a detailed description of the research methodology used in this study.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify the most influential factors that can be used when creating and maintaining a positive school climate based on the perceptions of teachers and administrators in a middle school setting. The researcher interviewed ten participants from a middle school where the teachers and administrators have worked diligently to improve the climate and culture of the school. Participants gave their opinions and thoughts on ways to create a positive school climate, and factors that they believe influence the school climate. As outlined in chapter three, the data were collected using the interview method. Data were analyzed in order to provide answers to the following research question guiding this study:

1.   What dimensions of school climate do principals and teachers perceive to be the most influential when trying to create and maintain a positive school climate?

Demographics of Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Degree	Years of Experience
P1	43	M	Masters	19
P2	40	F	Masters	17
P3	29	M	BA	3
P4	30	M	BA	5
P5	59	F	Masters	33
P6	29	M	EDS	5
P7	29	F	EDS	5
P8	35	F	BA	10
P9	40	M	BA	16
P10	42	M	BA	18

Data Analysis and Coding

The motivation for this study was based on the climate transformation that has taken place in the school that this particular study focuses on. The researcher set out to discover the most influential factors, according to teachers and administrators, that impact school climate. The research questions were answered by themes that emerged from the interview data, and are reported in chapter 4.

Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher began analyzing the data. Ary (2014) said that analysis of the data includes the following: reducing and organizing the data, synthesizing, searching for significant patterns, and discovering what is important (p. 510). Hogan, Dolan, and Donnelly (2009) described the phases of qualitative data analysis as data generation, managing data, and analysis. Ultimately, all qualitative analysis attempts to comprehend the phenomenon under study, synthesize information, and explain the relationships that have emerged (Ary, 2014).

The first stage of qualitative analysis is familiarization and organization. The researcher listened to the audiotapes over and over to familiarize her with the data. The researcher began with open coding. Charmax (2006) said that using open coding allows the researcher to remain open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by the readings of the data (p. 46). In this phase of the analysis, the researcher looked for consistency within the interviews to develop trends or themes within the data taken. As she was familiarizing herself with the data and listening to the recordings, she transcribed the data verbatim. The researcher transcribed the in-

person interviews into electronic format. She continued to read the interview data and kept a reflective log of the key ideas that developed from the transcripts. The data was organized by interview. The researcher used highlights to help identify what teachers described as influential factors and to discover concepts or themes throughout the interview data. The researcher also used a text analysis tool to analyze the interview syntax and identify keywords and phrases that were revealed. These key words became the codes in the initial phase. This type of coding was used in order to identify similarities and differences within the data.

The second step was to compare the codes, or categories, that were developed in the first stage. By completing axial coding, the researcher was able to group the first set of codes into categories that are related.

Lastly, triangulation of the patterns and themes took place. This created a new level of understanding of the current knowledge by reviewing the interviews and completing a comparative analysis. The researcher used the constant comparative method throughout the analysis process. Ary et. Al (2013) describes the process as one that combines inductive category coding with simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained. Ary (2013) states, "You examine each new unit of meaning (topic or concept) to determine its distinctive characteristics. Then you compare categories and group them with similar categories. If there are no similar units of meaning, form a new category. Thus, there is a process of continuous refinement; initial categories may be changed, merged, or omitted; new categories are generated; and new relationships can be discovered" (p. 522).

Themes

After detailed analysis of the data, the researcher identified themes that emerged that indicate factors that impact and help to create a positive school climate. While much research has been conducted to prove that a positive school climate will increase academic achievement and have other positive outcomes in a school setting, research is lacking in the area of the creation of a positive school climate. This study sought to determine the measures that can be taken to impact the school climate itself, and therefore have the positive outcomes of a positive school climate. To find out this information, the researcher sought to understand the perceptions of the professionals who are involved in the school daily. Teachers and administrators were the researchers main source of participants. These participants were vital to the understanding of climate development because they are the ones who are involved in climate creation daily. The conclusions drawn from the interviews were based on careful investigation of the central themes and revealing expressions from the views of participants. The principals and teachers are referred to as participant 1, participant 2, etc. to protect identity of the participants involved.

Several dominant themes emerged throughout the analysis of the data, and identified the most influential dimensions of creating and maintaining a positive school climate based on the perceptions of teachers and administrators. The following themes are the most influential dimensions in creating and maintaining a positive school climate according to the perceptions of teachers and administrators: Relationships, school leadership, safety, school vision, school discipline, choosing the right people, and creating pride.

School Climate: The first research question that was asked to all interviewees asked them to explain how important they felt like school climate was at their school. The results showed that all participants feel that school climate has overwhelming impact on the school as a whole, and it is very crucial to the school.

P1: I think the role of climate has changed at our school for the last six years. It has been the most important thing at our school because we needed to have a positive school climate for the school population that we are educating.

P2: I think the climate is crucial.

P3: I think it is the most important thing. If your climate is not what it should be then they will not pay attention to anything else.

P4: I feel that school climate is very important at our school, not only for the students but also for the staff. I feel like it is very important to build a culture and climate where students feel welcome, loved, and safe.

P5: I think it is the most important thing at our school. It is the most important thing because the climate is what creates the motivation for student success. Without a positive school climate, quality instruction won't be as effective. You can have great teachers in a school that has a poor climate, and it would not be as successful. The climate controls all aspects of the building.

P6: School climate is the utmost important thing at our school. It determines the day-to-day atmosphere, attitude of the students and teachers, and how successful the students are.

P7: School climate drives every aspect of a school.

P8: I feel like it is very important at our school.

P9: The climate is what drives our success.

P10: School climate is the absolute most important thing at our school.

Relationships: Participants agree that building relationships, both colleague to colleague, and student to teacher, is an influential factor in developing and maintaining a positive school climate. The participants expressed their relationships with the students and other teachers as family.   They described their relationships as being there for each other, drowning out negativity, and motivating each other.

P1: I hope the students come here every day and feel like the teachers care. Each student should feel like they have one very important relationship with a teacher.

P2: We have to focus on building relationships. We have to work on relationships and building social concept with climate. It plays a huge part in how the schools are going to succeed and why we have been successful. Positivity is contagious and overrides the work demands that we have to put in. The atmosphere is demanding, the kids need us to coach them, love them, mother them, discipline them, but the positivity and the inspiring climate overtakes the demands that are being asked of us. Relationship building is huge in creating a positive learning environment. The students here need relationships with adults. Therefore, it has been sort of easy to build those relationships. Complimenting a student here is a great way to just open those doors of

building relationship with students. For me, it is important to recognize the different personalities of the staff that I work with and try to enhance our relationship. It is crucial that the administrators strive to strengthen each teacher in their own way. Relationship building and having crucial conversations with kids themselves is important. You must know the student and the personal situation that the kid is going through.

P3: Our school is family. As a teacher, I believe that we are nurturing. The majority of our teachers feel that they have been called to this career and approach it as a parenting job. In my classroom I work to keep it family oriented. I work to build relationships with my students, but also encourage the students to make relationships with one another.

P4: Students are engaged with not only their teachers, but also their administrators. You walk through the hallways and see the students smiling and laughing. At the same time, students know and realize that there are consequences for their actions.

P5: The houses are a great way to get to know students across the building that you may not see on a daily basis, as well as teachers from other grade levels. I also like that the houses allow students to continue relationships with teachers that they no longer have. Relationships are very important at this school. I think positivity is huge. Staff to staff, administration to staff, and staff to student, should all be about positive relationships.

P6: Being a student at this school would feel like so much fun. Students at our school feel safe,
loved, and they believe that the teachers are invested in them individually. Teachers feel support
from above, and have great relationships amongst each other and with the students.

P8: Students at this school are listened to and cared for but also pushed. Being a teacher at this
school consists of a lot of respect between the grade levels. The teachers respect each other.
Understanding the students and meeting them where they are at makes a good learning
environment. Building relationships with students helps to get them involved. Getting to know
the students and understanding what is going on in their lives helps to understand them as a
person.

P9: The teachers' work really hard to build relationships with the students and show them that
they care. Students should feel like they can do to their teachers with any problem they might be
experiencing and get advice. Working here is like being a part of a big family. If relationships
are built with the students, then the discipline will be where it needs to be. The students need to
have relationships with the staff so that they feel safe in the environment. They need to trust the
teachers.

P10: The principal's presence in the building and working on relationships with the students
helps with discipline. Relationships are huge. Trust is key.

School Leadership: The data revealed that school leadership is an influential factor
when creating and maintaining a positive school climate.   Many of the interviewees mentioned a

motivational leadership style where the administrators support them and allow the teachers to be involved in the decision making process. Participants say that positivity should be a big part of the administrator's leadership style, and that the leaders should have high expectations.

P1: I try to model the culture I want for the students and the staff at this school. I try to be up beat and positive and talk about our school in a positive light. I try to model what the expectation is for staff and students in this school. Giving the teachers the autonomy to go in and teach using the strategies that are research based to be effective and giving freedom creates a learning environment that is positive for teachers. The teachers can then look at the data and assess their own strategies and ideas, and reflect on what is effective and not effective. I believe this works much better than dictating what they will do.

P2: Administration at this school is described as defined autonomy. We have boundaries, and we know the non-negotiable. However, we have the autonomy of changing it and making it fit the needs of the teachers and kids based on what they are lacking and what they need. We have defined boundaries, but we have so many options based on what we deem necessary and most effective. As an administrator, you have to keep an open mind and be willing to be fluent in your leadership and decision-making. You have to be flexible. The administrative team and their relationships are huge to the school climate. Trust is key. Collaborative trust and expectations in the building is something that we tend to focus on.

P3: Our leadership style is really good at keeping the tone as teamwork. I've never felt like either one of our administrators dictate.

P4: The leadership style of our school is very open to the input of teachers.

P6:   We have a motivational leadership style at our school. He leads by example and tries to better himself. He holds the same expectations for both students and staff. I think he is very open and positive. He is laid back but stern. I think it extends into our climate by being so motivational and upbeat. Because students see him being positive and working hard, they are motivated to follow in his footsteps. He has always been very supportive in those situations and been on our side in any decision that we have made.

P7: Our leadership does not "allow" complaining or negativity. Administrators generally leave teachers to run their individual classrooms as if teachers are professionals. These characteristics of our school's leadership are only a few of the behaviors that drive the school climate. More than once I have received complete support from the administration when dealing with students who do not comply with classroom/school policies.

P8: They do not talk down to the teachers. They are very uplifting and try to help everyone. I get a lot of support at this school. They support us in what we do and the decisions that we make.

P9: The leadership style at this school is motivational, and defined by teacher autonomy.   The principal seems to allot responsibilities to other leaders in the school so that they have a say in what happens. He puts smart, dedicated, positive people in positions so that they can have some decision-making in the school and create a positive influence. He is very good about listening to

teachers and giving them what they think will help the students. For example: materials, technology, professional development, etc. He lets the teacher be in control of their classroom, and tries to involve everyone in the decision making of the school. He is a huge supporter of professional development and doing whatever he needs to do to help his teachers continue to grow. He is very supportive about continuing education and advancing in the profession.

P10: The style is strict, but supportive. He has very high expectations and we are to meet them. However, he backs us and helps us as much as he can. He is motivational and a great leader.

Safety: The data concluded that establishing a safe and secure learning environment is very important to establishing and maintaining a positive school climate. To create a safe and secure environment, many believe that rules and norms must be in place, be familiar to anyone involved in the school, and be implemented consistently. Rules and expectations should be communicated clearly to all involved in the school. It is very important that administrators, teachers, and students know what the rules and expectations are in the school. Consistency is crucial so that students and teachers know the everyday practices and what to do in the occurrence of an abnormal day.

P1: They feel safe here, and they need to be in this school. They are in a place where they feel safe, challenged, and encouraged. To create a safe and secure learning environment the school must have consistent policies and routines in place.

P2: Being consistent in policies, regardless of whom it involves, is hue in keeping the school safe and secure. Practicing procedures is important too. Making students feel like it is just another part of the day to prevent panic will help in the real situation so that they feel comfortable in knowing how to react.

P4: Key elements of a safe and secure learning environment would be establishing firma and clear expectations in your own classroom and maintaining that those are followed at all times to ensure that all students feel like the environment is consistent and structured for learning. Also, following the safety procedures set forth in your own building give you and the students an even greater sense of safety in the building.

P6: A good working plan and communication is crucial to creating a safe and secure learning environment.

P7: A solid safety plan is necessary to maintain a safe building. Prepping for a variety of scenarios is essential but still not completely fail-proof. Safety is key and making sure individuals within the building uphold security measures is a must.

P8: I think having rules and expectations for your students helps to create a safe and secure learning environment.

P9: Policies need to be familiar and practiced. Students should not be shocked when things happen. They should be so rehearsed in the policies that they don't miss a beat.

Creating a School Vision: The data concluded that creating a shared school vision is crucial to increasing and maintaining a positive school climate. Several participants said that the vision drives the school climate and the vision should be acted upon on daily. The school vision for this school is good to great. Within this vision, every student is held to high expectations. Students are motivated to succeed by teachers and administrators. The vision of good to great is the idea that all students will grow while being at this school. Students will grow academically, socially, emotionally, and more. Students will improve daily and continue to learn. When students understand the school vision and what the teachers are trying to get them to do while in the school, they develop a sense of pride in the school. Instilling a school vision in the teachers and students increases the school climate.

P1: The shared vision of our school is good to great. This is our key to success. We look for growth, growth, and more growth. Then, the achievement will come. This is a great way to maintain and develop our positive school climate.

P2: In our school, when we go to the root of our success, it is good to great. We want to change the belief in our community about what goes on in this building.

P3: Good to great. All means all. High expectations.

P4: Our shared vision is good to great. We strive to move students from just being good to being great. It is our goal for every student to achieve greatness.

P5: Good to great is the motto of our school. We promise to grow all students while they are in our building. Focusing on the student and helping them to become better is a part of our positive school climate.

P6: We give students the opportunity to take control and make it into what they want so that they have a sense of ownership and pride in what they are involved in. Our main goal is to improve every single student that comes through our building.

P10: Our vision is good to great. We set high expectations for ALL of our students and we watch them accomplish. Good to great means that our students will leave our building great, and they will grow while they are here.

School Discipline: Teachers and administrators described school discipline as an influential factor when creating and maintaining a positive school climate. Without an appropriate school discipline plan, discipline could bring a negative impact to school climate. By implementing a proper discipline plan, discipline problems are decreased, and the climate is increased. Also, creating high expectations within the discipline plan has increased the climate. The plan has also allowed the staff to build relationships and create trust with the students by showing them that mistakes will happen.

P1: School discipline gives you an opportunity to set your expectations for the school. The plan gives the kids the understanding that they are allowed to make mistakes. It also teaches them that they have to learn from the mistakes because as they continue to mess up the consequences

become more severe. As far as the culture goes, it shows them they can mess up, keep working on it, and that we have expectations that we demand for them to meet.

P2: I think school discipline is a large component when it comes to our school climate. It takes being consistent, and having hard days, to keep the climate what we want it to be We have a climate with expectations, and our discipline must be consistent to maintain the climate that we want to have. The plan is in place to allow them to make mistakes and create improvement opportunities. When they don't take those opportunities, it is the administrator's job to adhere to the expectations and make them realize that they must rise to our expectations. The discipline must stay consistent with the climate that we want to build.

P3: Our discipline plan is very focused on creating success for the students in that it allows the student the time and opportunity to self reflect and fix their mistakes before reaching a more severe level of discipline. It is our hopes that through this, students will learn from their mistakes and help to increase the overall climate of our school.

P5: Student discipline is controlled by the high expectations that we implement. High expectations are demanded.

P6: Consistency helps students to understand that rules will be followed and that actions always have consequences. The school discipline plan influences the school climate because it sets the boundaries for what will go on in our school. Because our discipline plan is based on rewards, it leans more on the positive aspect than the negative.

P10: Our school follows the countywide assertive discipline plan. I believe that it works very well for our students because it allows them a chance to correct their behavior and mistakes before the consequences move to more severe levels. Student discipline has a huge impact on school climate. This has a lot to do with expectations. We hold our students to very high expectations, keep them engaged, and implement full rigor into our lessons. Also, if relationships are built with the students, then the discipline will be where it needs to be. Therefore, if all the right things are in place, school discipline should not be a problem. However, it is important that students know that they do have a chance to mess up, they understand that we will give them chances, but that we will also hold them accountable and to very high expectations.

The right people and creating pride: Researchers agree on two things as the most influential dimensions that impact school climate: choosing the right people to be a part of the school, and creating a sense of pride in the building. The teacher is the one interacting with the student daily, hourly, and has a huge impact on how the school runs and how the students feel about the school. To increase the climate, the participants in this study confirmed that the school must have the right teachers in the building, or as they referred to, the right people on the bus! By incorporating a school wide professional development plan and sending teachers to The Ron Clark Academy, teachers were able to see the positive outcomes of increasing the school climate. Hence, all teachers came together to create a plan to transform the climate of the school. Without the right people, the climate will not change. Second, creating a sense of pride in the students and getting them invested in the school is the other very effective strategy to create a

positive school climate. Participants agreed that the most effective way to accomplish this was implementing the house system. In the house system, everyone in the building is placed in a house. The houses are like sororities. They have team names, colors, mottos, etc. Competitions take place weekly in each house. The houses allow everyone to be a part of something, create relationships, and have fun.

P1: Hiring the right people and making sure that the people in the building are here for the right reason, believe in what you are trying to do as a school, put those people in leadership positions so that they are sharing that vision throughout their teams, continue to actively search for people that are on the wrong bus, get them off the bus, it is very important to have the wrong people off the bus and have the right people in the building. Sacrificing good teachers for teachers that are the right fit regarding to the school climate. We try to create an atmosphere of pride and make sure we all make decisions to where everyone is proud. We want everyone to be prideful at our school. It is important to develop pride in the students so that they are proud and want to be here.

P2: We always try to keep motivation as the center of our focus because we feel that it is our key to success. Our teachers are our sheep, and you must keep your flock at the center of your focus. Their will always be wolfs at the door (testing, RTI, standards, parents, etc.). We emphasize to ourselves not to let those outweigh the importance of the flock! It is key that the flock is the purpose of being there. It is important that the main thing is kept the main thing. We get caught up in everything else that we don't always do enough. Keep the main thing the main

thing. Let's remember why we are here, let's motivate them and coach them, laugh, and help them realize why they are here. Recognizing what our staff needs and catering to that, patting them on the back, feeding them, coaching the, and hearing them when they cry are things that you must do as an administrator. We can't lose sight of the teachers and who they are. You must take care of who is in the trenches with you. They are the ones fighting, so we must find the fun, find the laughter, and celebrate together. Motivate and celebrate! Sending teachers to RCA every year has had a huge impact. We can't lose this. It is an incredible tradition that helps to motivate and fan the fire. It keeps things going for us. In particular, those non Kool-Aid drinkers. There is tremendous value in this professional development. We want to make sure the kids, the staff, and visitors feel welcome. We try to create an atmosphere of pride and make sure we all make decisions to where everyone is proud. Our house system is huge in getting the kids involved. Indoctrinating them into believing that they are a part of this. We have to find something for everyone so that they have a connection and investment in our school.

P3: Me wanting to be here is huge for the kids wanting to be here. Putting a smile on my face is key to creating the climate. Students are extremely perceptive, so they will immediately get it if I am not feeling it for a day. So regardless of how I am feeling, I have to put a smile on my face and work for the kids. The house system has changed the climate at our school. The house system gives everyone the chance to be involved.

P4: Students are encouraged to take an active role in our school climate through a variety of activities, clubs, and sports. We have a house system where every student is divided into one of four houses.

P5: The atmosphere in the building provides me with enough energy and encouragement to get through the tough days. Knowing the climate, and what I'm walking into on a daily basis, helps me to disassociate with everything going on in my life, and to focus on my career and the importance of these kids. The students are depending on me, and the climate only helps me to remember what is important and push through. This school is very inviting, high energetic, and offers a lot of opportunities to be involved. The houses are a great way to get to know students across the building that you may not see on a daily basis, as well as teachers from other grade levels. The high expectations at this school encourage students to strive for success. The house system supports relationship building and a sense of connectedness in our school. Developing a house system for our school has been the single most effective strategy to improve school climate.

P6: Kids are at a place where the teachers and staff's influence is the total influence when we are here. The staff chose to go in all together and get on board with school climate. We wanted to change our climate, and we did. We chose to include everyone in the transformation of our school: cafeteria, students, teachers, administrators, custodians, etc. Everyone has a contributing role.

P9: We really work to create a sense of pride in our students. We want them to be proud of this school, their teachers, their friends, clubs, events, etc. We want our students to feel like this is their home, their family, and want to protect it and make it better. We feel like that if the students are invested in the school itself, then the culture and climate will increase because they are involved. We offer several after school activities and extra curricular activities for the students to get involved in. This helps also. Our house system, and RCA professional development, has played a huge role in creating a positive school climate. Going to RCA has allowed our entire school to get on the same page. I can honestly say that our teachers have the same goal in mind. We are on the bus! Our principal always says that if you are not on the bus and here for the right reasons, you need to find another bus. We all want to change our environment and be positive. The house system has helped in creating a sense of family, community, and helped to build relationships. It has also gotten the students involved in something and allowed them to feel a part of. We do competitions and give rewards through our house system. It has really changed the way our students feel about coming to school.

P10: The house system has been the best way to get the kids involved and care about the school. It allows them to feel a part of something.

Additional Findings

The following topics emerged from the interview data as areas pertaining to school climate that many of the participants agreed on.

Greatest Struggle Facing School Climate: Most participants agree that the biggest struggle in transforming or maintaining the school climate is complacency. School climate must be fostered; it must be worked on constantly. Negativity can creep in and have a terrible impact on the climate. Teachers and administrators must not get comfortable, not be complacent, and continuously work to find new ways to increase the climate.

P1: Climate must be continually fostered and is a huge part as to why we are so successful. I think understanding that it is something that you have to reinvent is a challenge. I started reading a book about being so prideful and not willing to change and that is not the best way to go about creating a positive school climate. We do not need to become immune. We need to always understand the purpose and do things passionately instead of compliantly. We cannot forget the passion that comes behind it.

P2: The greatest challenge facing school climate is complacency. I'm just in my third year of administration. Just through my experience with RTI, that change has had an effect. We are experiencing feet draggers. Some just want to do the same thing over and over. We must have that "us" invested attitude. That is a struggle in improving the problem. What I'm doing works and I don't need to change has a very negative impact. When something new is asked this happens sometimes.

P3: I think the administration have a burden to keep the climate inviting. They set the tone. They have to work to make sure the environment is fun and loving.

P5: It would present a challenge to make sure you continue the positivity. I think that it is crucial for the administrators to control any negatives that come up in the building immediately so that they do not impact the climate in any way. Negativity can have a ripple effect, so it must be caught and dealt with fast so that the climate is not negatively affected. Climate is something that needs nurturing. We have to keep the momentum.   We must always make it fresh and take it to the next level. Complacency is not good. Still water in a lake doesn't move, so it gets stagnant. If you go into the mountains and go in the spring, you will see fresh water. The water is continually moving in the spring, so it refreshes itself. We must constantly be moving and doing things to work on the climate in order for it to stay positive. Being open to change is also important. If a principal or a teacher is set in their ways, then new strategies are not welcome. This can decrease the climate. Being open to change and constantly working on the climate is the key to keeping it positive.

P6: It would be challenging to maintain the positive climate that we have worked very hard to create. Climate must be worked on all of the time. Positivity can run out quickly when people are tired and feeling burnt out. So it is so very crucial that the principal is the cheerleader, constantly encouraging his staff, and not letting his own bad days get in the way of continuing the climate of the school. Maintaining motivation is a challenge that should be addressed if a school wants to create a positive school climate.

P9: Being an administrator at this school would be challenging because you would constantly have to work to continue the positivity and build the school climate. However, the rewards

would be endless. The greatest challenge facing school climate is keeping it going. We have

had such a positive increase in the school climate. We have really turned our school around.

Now, we have to find ways to continue the positive movement. Positivity can get knocked down

with just a tad bit of negativity. It is crucial that the administrators and teachers are constantly

working to improve the school climate, keep the positivity present, and never let the teachers or

the student get complacent.

P10: Complacency and negativity.

Parental Involvement: Another interesting theme that emerged from this data is that

parental involvement does not impact the climate of this particular school. This school does not

have a high volume of parent involvement, but this does not have a negative impact on the

school, according to teachers and administrators. Due to the fact that they have never really had

much parental involvement, the teachers just took the responsibility of working overtime to

increase the climate and fill the void of parental involvement. However, participants agreed that

although the lack of parental involvement doesn't impact their school in a negative way, parent

involvement could only increase school climate. Therefore, parent involvement is something

that should be worked on and possible dimension that can increase school climate.

P2: We don't have a lot of parental involvement. I really pin pointed as an area that we need to

get more parents involved. When we really look at parental involvement, I don't feel like the

lack of parental involvement was having a negative impact on us. Do I feel like it could make

our climate better? YES! Absolutely! We need to work on PTO and work on ways to get parents

more involved. I do think it could serve to strengthen our climate, but I do not think that we are

negatively impacted because we do not have a lot of parents working right now.   Our teachers

carry the weight of that lack of parental involvement.

P3: Our school climate is good despite the fact that we do not have much parental involvement.

We call parents often and communicate with them regarding their students. We work hard to

keep the parents informed. However, many of our parents are more reluctant to be involved.

P4: Unfortunately, we do not have a lot of parent involvement at our school. The parents that

are involved do greatly contribute to the climate of our school by providing extra opportunities

for students as far as dances and extra activities. I do believe that parental involvement could be

of great help to our school climate, but I do not feel that it is a key factor in the success of our

school.

P5: I don't think it affects the climate in our building. More parental involvement could

certainty help. This may be the next step to improving and maintaining our school climate.

P6: Kids are at a place that the teachers and staff's influence is the total influence when we are

here. The teachers take the responsibility for the lack of parental involvement, which is a

positive influence for the kids and the climate.

P9: Although I believe that more parental involvement would boost our school climate, I do not

believe that parental involvement really has an affect on the climate of our school. We do not

have very much parental involvement at all. The teachers work hard to communicate with

parents about grades, reading points, sports, events, etc. However, we do not have active parents in our building. This may be because of our demographics, or maybe the teachers could do more to get them involved. Even though our parental involvement is low, this doesn't negatively affect our climate. It could definitely help the climate, but it doesn't put a negative impact on it. The teachers work day in and day out to build relationships with the students and to increase our climate. Because of all the things that we are doing to increase our climate, we are building it up without parents.

P10: No. The teachers and administrators work to create a positive climate. The parents do not play a role.

This study determined several themes that are identified as factors that influence school climate in a positive way. The researcher identified the following as the most influential dimensions of school climate, according to teachers and administrators: relationships, school leadership, safety, school vision, right people, and pride. It was also determined that a low amount of parental involvement doesn't have to have a negative effect on school climate, as long as the teachers and administrators work hard to fill that void. Although, participants said that more parental involvement would only make a positive impact on the school climate. Participants also agreed that the greatest struggle related to school climate is complacency. School climate is something that should be fostered and constantly worked on in order to maintain positivity.

Chapter 5

School climate is often linked with positive student outcomes and an increase in achievement. Climate development has not been researched thoroughly; therefore, this study sought to discover the influential factors that impact school climate. Deel (2009) says too little attention has been placed on what schools can do to improve themselves from within and shape the school culture. Teachers and school leaders can benefit from research on ways to improve the school climate. Through qualitative research, 10 interviews were conducted to collect the data. Interviews were taped, transcribed, coded, and analyzed to determine common themes. The researcher sought to find the answer to the following research questions:

RQ1. What dimensions of school climate do principals and teachers perceive to be the most influential when trying to create and maintain a positive school climate?

Limitations

Several limitations in this study should be indicated. Since the sample was taken from a self-selecting group, some bias could have entered into the sample. The sample was only from one public school, which also limits the range of the conclusions.

Relation to Existing Literature

The participants seemed to be in agreement with the dimensions of what creates, or helps to maintain, a positive school climate. Their consensus was supported in the literature. The following seven themes were identified as the most influential factors effecting school climate:

relationships, school leadership, safety, school discipline, creating a school vision, the right people, and creating pride. Participants in this study, as well as exiting literature, agreed that school climate is crucial the success of the school. Participants in this study expressed agreement with Deel (2009) when he stated that school culture plays a dominant role in performance (p. 1).

Participants in this study identified relationships as an important dimension that affects school climate. According to the participants and related research, relationships should be built, fostered, and a main focus in schools. In her book *Crash Course*, Kim Bearden (2014) explained the importance of building relationships with students, "I teach to plant seeds that will one day help young men and women grow to be their best. Every word, every deed, every outpouring of love has the potential to instill something that will later empower that child and give him or her strength from which to draw. Just as the smallest of seeds can yield the most magnificent trees, so we cannot underestimate the power of the simplest gesture or comment" (p. 99).

Deel (2009) believed that having a mission, or vision, is crucial to the success of a business and a school. Deel explained, "At the hub of a school's culture are its mission and purpose-the revered focus of what people do. Mission and purpose trigger intangible forces that inspire teachers to teach, school leaders to lead, children to learn, and parents and the community to have confidence and faith in their school" (Deel, p. 61). The vision reflects the purpose of the school, and what the people involved hope to accomplish. According to Deel (2009), "Most important is that people share beliefs of what the school wishes to realize" (p. 61). A shared

vision is the driving force of the school: it motivates, strengths, guides, and energizes all involved. The participants of this study agree that creating a school vision is a necessity when trying to create or maintain a positive school climate. Participants expressed that it is very important that everyone involved be on board, share the same goals and beliefs, and work together to improve the climate.

Participants' perceptions supporting the findings of Deel (2009) in regards to the struggles facing school climate. Participants agreed that complacency is the greatest struggle facing school climate. Participants expressed that school climate needs continuous work and focus in order for it to maintain positivity and improve. Deel (2009) agreed that cultural traditions can quickly weaken or stray. Deel (2009) explained this idea by discussing Starbucks when they were experiencing a downfall of success because they were not being innovative and keeping up with their competitors, "It's time to get back to the core and make the changes that are necessary to evoke the heritage, the tradition, and the passion we have for the experience" (p. 3). This scenario applies to schools as well. Schools should evaluate constantly and look for ways to improve the climate and keep the climate moving in a positive direction. If teachers and administrators become stagnant, or complacent, the climate will not improve. Finally, Deel (2009) said that the value of learning and improving is part of what keeps the school moving forward. The research and the participants agreed that continuous growth and work is crucial to school climate.

Participants expressed that a school leadership is important to the climate of a school. They also expressed that in a positive school climate, the leader will not dictate, but support and motivate. According to the participants in this study, this type of school leader will also create other leadership positions within the school and give them responsibilities to allow the teachers to be involved in the decision-making process. Deel (2009) agreed, "Ideally, everyone in a school should share leadership. Leadership in successful schools is parceled out generously to staff and community. The idea of a single omniscient leader who does it all is misleading, except when staff are unwilling or unable to pick up the slack" (p. 199).

Recommendations for Further Research

Researchers could study the topic of school climate, but they could look into areas with different populations and demographics to see what strategies are effective in those areas for increasing school climate. A study could also be completed by using surveys, including the parents and students, and quantify the data. Further research should be conducted on the effect of parent involvement and how this impacts school climate. Also, research can be completed on ways to get parents involved in improving the climate. Lastly, further research could be conducted on the areas that were found from this study to be effective in increasing school climate. Researchers could look at the dimensions found effective and research how these things could be implemented into other schools and expanded.

Based on the data collected from this study, it was discovered that parental involvement could defiantly improve school climate if the parents were involved in the appropriate ways.

More research should be conducted to find out what educators can do to get parents involved in schools and ultimately transform the school climate. Specifically, a study looking into parental involvement in schools that consist of similar demographics, low-level income families and a high percentage of free and reduced lunch would be beneficial to teachers.

Summary

This study sought to understand the phenomenon of what creates a positive school climate. The researcher followed a phenomenological approach to determine the most influential dimensions of school climate. In doing so, the researcher conducted interviews with teachers and administrators who have been in a school setting and had great detail with the phenomena it. Through multiple interviews with administrators and teachers, the researcher found the following to be the most influential factors effecting school climate: Relationships, school leadership, safety, school vision, school discipline, choosing the right people, and creating pride. The study also revealed that a low amount of parental involvement does not negatively affect the climate at this school, but more parental involvement could only help to improve the school climate. It was also discovered that the greatest struggle facing school climate is complacency and getting satisfied. School climate is something that should be worked on continually.

Chapter 5 concludes this research study. The findings produced 7 themes that influence school climate: relationships, school leadership, safety, school vision, the right people, and creating pride. This study is beneficial to educators because it identifies the key factors that

influence school climate based on the perceptions of teachers and administrators. This study

provides specific strategies that educators can implement to increase school climate.

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APPENDIX A

Information Letter

Appendix A: Information Letter

Dear (Participant's Name),

I am writing to ask for your participation in a research project that I am conducting as part of my dissertation study at Carson-Newman University. The study pertains to the factors that affect school climate based on teacher and administrator perspectives. You have been asked to participate in this study since the school in which you work has implemented strategies to improve school climate. I am attempting to investigate what factors are the most influential in creating and maintaining a positive school climate based on the thoughts and experience of teachers and administrators in this particular school. I would like to ask you about your experience with school climate. If you volunteer to participate in this study, I would schedule a time to interview you using the guided interview questions. The interview would last approximately 45 minutes. All information that you share would be kept highly confidential. Identifiable information, including your name and your school will never be disclosed.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to sign an informed consent prior to the interview, which I need to obtain for the university in order to exhibit evidence that I have described the study thoroughly to you. The consent form is attached. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you would be able to withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without penalty. The information that you give will be maintained in a secure

manner that others will not be able to access. If you should have any questions about this study please feel free to contact me. Thanks for your consideration of this request. I would be greatly appreciative of your time and effort to help me complete this study.

Thank you,

Crystal D. Thacker

Carson-Newman University Doctoral Student

APPENDIX B

Consent to Participate in Interview

Appendix B: Consent to Participate in Interview

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEW

Middle School Climate: Teacher and Administrator Views of Influential Factors

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Crystal Dawn Thacker from the education department at the Carson-Newman University. The purpose of the study is to identify the most influential factors that impact school climate according to the perceptions of teachers and administrators. The results of this study will be included in Crystal Thacker's dissertation. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are employed in a school that has implemented strategies in hopes of improving school climate. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

• This interview is voluntary. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time or for any reason. /I expect that the interview will take about 45 minutes.

• You will not be compensated for this interview.

• Unless you give us permission to use your name, title, and / or quote you in any publications that may result from this research, the information you tell us will be confidential.

• I would like to record this interview so that I can use it for reference while proceeding with this study. I will not record this interview without your permission. If you do grant permission for this conversation to be recorded, you have the right to revoke recording permission and/or end the interview at any time.

This project will be completed by March, 2017. All interview recordings will be stored in a secure work space until March 2018 after that date. The tapes will then be destroyed.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

(Please check all that apply)

[] I give permission for this interview to be recorded.

[] I give permission for the following information to be included in publications resulting from this study:

[] my name   [] my title   [] direct quotes from this interview

Name of Subject

Signature of Subject _____ Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____Date _____

Please contact the following if you have any questions:

Crystal Thacker 423-258-9903

Patricia Murphree (Chair) pmurphree@cn.edu

APPENDIX C
Permission to Conduct Research

Appendix C: Permission to Conduct Research

Dear Administrators,

I am writing to ask for your permission to conduct a research project and conduct interviews with the teachers at your school. The study pertains to the factors that affect school climate based on teacher and administrator perspectives. I am attempting to identify what factors are the most influential in creating and maintaining a positive school climate based on the thoughts and experience of teachers and administrators in this particular school. All information shared during the interviews and specific information about the school will be kept highly confidential. Identifiable information, including your name and your school will never be disclosed. By signing below, you agree to allow the research student, Crystal Thacker, to conduct the study.

Principal _____ Date_____

Assistant Principal _____ Date_____

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Middle School Climate: Teacher and Administrator Views

Interview Questions:

1. To what extent do you believe school climate is important at your school?

2. Tell me about the atmosphere of our school. If you were describing it to someone who has never been here, what might you say it's like to be a student, teacher, or administrator at this school?

3. How would you explain the administration leadership style and how does it impact school climate?

4. How does student discipline impact school climate? Does your school have a discipline plan and how do you feel like it influences school climate?

5. Explain a time when experienced support from the administrators at your school. Describe the situation and the actions that were taken that made you feel supported.

6. Does parental involvement affect the climate of your school? If so, how does your school work to involve parents?

7. How do you motivate, encourage and support your staff? (Principal only)

8. What do you believe would make a good teaching and learning environment for teachers and students? What are effective strategies for ensuring each student and parent is fully engaged in the school?

9. How do you motivate students to take an active role in creating a positive school climate?

10. What do you see as the greatest challenges facing school climate?

11. What is the shared vision and set of norms for your school? Describe how the vision and norms help to develop and maintain a positive school climate.

12. Tell me about a time when the school discipline process seemed to work well. How did teachers and administrators respond in this situation? How do you think this worked well for the students involved?

13. What is the role of the principal in dealing with discipline problems?

14. What do you consider to be the key elements of establishing and maintaining a safe and secure learning environment?

15. What specific strategy do you feel has been the most effective in creating a positive school climate in your school?

APPENDIX E

Demographics of Participants

Appendix E

Demographics of Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Degree	Years of Experience
P1	43	M	Masters	19
P2	40	F	Masters	17
P3	29	M	BA	3
P4	30	M	BA	5
P5	59	F	Masters	33
P6	29	M	EDS	5
P7	29	F	EDS	5
P8	35	F	BA	10
P9	40	M	BA	16
P10	42	M	BA	18