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Mixed Methods Study of the Relationship Between Students' Perceptions of School Climate, Attendance, and Academic Achievement

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Mixed Methods Study of the Relationship Between Students' Perceptions of School

Climate, Attendance, and Academic Achievement

by

Danielle Nicole Carter

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education
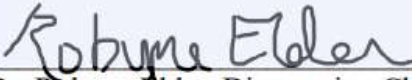
School of Education

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Dr. Robyne Elder, Dissertation Chair   4/9/21
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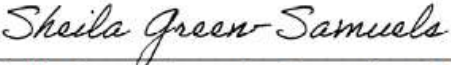
Dr. Kevin Winslow, Committee Member   4/9/2021
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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Danielle Nicole Carter

Signature: *Danielle Nicole Carter*   Date: **4/9/21**

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Abstract

As previous studies have shown a relationship between school climate, attendance, and academic achievement within public schools nationwide, the current mixed methods study of the relationship between students' perception of school climate, attendance, and academic achievement sought to explore such relationships within an urban charter high school in the Midwest. The researcher specifically examined student perceptions of teaching and learning, student-teacher relationships, school safety, and overall climate and investigated whether such perceptions were related to attendance rates or grade point average. For this study, approximately 63 participants in grades 9-12 voluntarily completed anonymous, electronic surveys (adapted from Panorama Instrument with permission). Using a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and t-test for data analysis, the research findings showed no relationship between student perceptions of teaching and learning and attendance, no relationship between student perceptions of student-teacher relationships and attendance, no relationship between student perceptions of school safety and attendance and no relationship between student perceptions of overall school climate and attendance. Additionally, results indicated no relationship between student perceptions of teaching and learning and grade point average, no relationship between student perceptions of student-teacher relationships and grade point average, no relationship between student perceptions of school safety and grade point average, and no relationship between student perceptions of overall school climate and grade point average. Although none of the categorical variables were found to be directly correlated with attendance or academic achievement, data analysis showed that students' responses to Question 3 (school safety) and their attendance rates were negatively

correlated, and Question 4 (school safety) showed that students' responses and their attendance rates were positively correlated. Quantitative and qualitative analyses provided the district, parents, students, and stakeholders with an in-depth view of student perceptions of the school climate and provided strong implications of possible ways to improve the school climate that may increase attendance rates and academic achievement.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Background

School climate, defined as "the quality and character of school life" (National School Climate Center [NSCC], 2007, para. 1), is based on individual perceptions and experiences and differs from one person to the next. As the essence of school climate is abstract, broad, and often difficult to measure, NSCC (2007) contended that school climate is "based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life; and also reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (para. 1).

As a multidimensional facet, school climate has the potential to influence factors negatively or positively, such as school attendance and academic achievement. Representing every aspect of learning, school climate shapes the degree to which students can learn within the school environment, form relationships, and develop a general sense of physical and emotional safety and security (Wang & Degol, 2015). Consequently, the current study on the relationship between student perception of school climate, attendance, and academic achievement in an urban charter high school sought to gain an understanding of whether student perceptions of the school climate were correlated with attendance rates or academic achievement. The study specifically examined student perceptions of the school climate in the areas of teaching and learning, relationships with teachers, and safety and analyzed whether such perceptions were related to attendance or academic achievement.

As most data centered on school climate focuses on students who were assigned to specific schools consistent with school zones, this study shed light on student

perceptions of school climate at a school that students and families chose to attend. In

other words, students were not forced into the school due to zip codes or school

attendance zones. Students and families chose to attend the targeted charter high school

based on personal beliefs, values, or personal experience.

Compulsory Education Law in Missouri requires all children between the ages of

seven and 17 attend school until one acquires 16 credit hours or turns 17 years of age

(National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). Although Compulsory Education Law

has always required that states mandate all children attend school, historically, there was

no direct approach to ensuring that schools established or maintained appropriate school

climates. Not until recently did the U.S. Department of Education (2015) implement a

school climate model that could be implemented in diverse environments without

compromise. To date, the U.S. Department of Education's school climate model has been

empirically validated and is linked to a wide range of behavioral and academic outcomes

(Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016).

As students are "often assigned to school by a forced choice based on residential

patterns of families, many families are not privy to selecting schools that reflect their

cultures" (Bower & Parsons, 2016, para. 7). As such, the merger of students with

differing beliefs along with diverse school personnel cultivates a complicated school

climate (Bower & Parsons, 2016). According to the Missouri Charter Public Schools

Commission (n.d.), a charter school is defined as "a free, independent public school that

operates outside of a school district, with greater flexibility in return for greater

accountability" (para. 2). Charter schools differ from traditional public school in that:

Charter schools are established by teachers, parents, principals, educational experts,

and entrepreneurs. The biggest difference is that no student is assigned to a charter

school. Families choose to enroll their children in charter schools. Charter schools

operate freed from some of the regulations of a school district. Charter schools are

accountable to achieve the same state standards as school districts but may choose

to use different measures and timelines for reaching their goals. In exchange for

flexibility, charters can be closed if they do not keep their performance promises.

Charter schools are governed by non-profit boards and must comply with the

conditions of their "charter" agreement and performance contract. Unlike elected

district boards, charter school boards are appointed and operate under Missouri

Statutes that regulate non-profit organizations. (Missouri Charter Public Schools

Commission, n.d., para. 4)

Due to the limited amount of research on perceptions of school climate among students in

urban charter schools, this research provided school personnel, students, parents, and

stakeholders with a more focused view of the needs of such populations.

Purpose of Study

The study on the relationship between student perception of school climate,

attendance, and academic achievement in an urban charter high school sought to gain an

understanding of whether student perceptions of the school climate were correlated with

attendance rates or academic achievement. For this study, the researcher examined

students' perception of teaching and learning, student-teacher relationships, and school

safety during the 2018-2019 school year. Specifically, the study focused on the extent to

which students reportedly perceived teachers were adequately trained, the extent to which

students felt supported, respected, and significant, as evidenced by interactions with teachers as well how safe students reportedly felt within the school. As a subscale of school climate, the researcher also analyzed data to determine if there was a possible relationship between perceptions of relationships with teachers, attendance, and academic achievement.

This study examined student perceptions of the school climate in the areas of teaching and learning, relationships with teachers, and safety and analyzed whether such perceptions were related to attendance or academic achievement. For this study, 63 participants attending an urban charter school in grades 9-12 voluntarily completed an anonymous, electronic 25-item survey (adapted from Panorama Instrument with permission [see Appendix A]) or a second anonymous, 8-item (open-ended), electronic survey (see Appendix B). Participants answered questions based on their perceptions of teaching and learning, relationships with teachers, and safety within the school. The information obtained from the study provided the school district with pertinent data that aided in establishing and maintaining a more supportive school climate and provided an understanding of the relationship between school climate, attendance, and academic achievement. Information obtained from the study also provided the district with insight into how students perceive their learning environment and possible ways of improving the school climate to increase attendance rates and academic achievement.

As attendance rates have been on a steady decline at the targeted high school, the researcher investigated the relationship between students' perception of school climate and attendance as a way of establishing a possible correlation and later addressing improvement strategies. The researcher also analyzed data to determine if a relationship

existed between perceptions of school climate and academic achievement. Research by

Bower and Parsons (2016) suggested that school climate has the potential to influence

and possibly improve risk factors that negatively impact achievement. As such, data

gathered aided in removing such risk factors and promoting a school climate that nurtures

academic success for all students.

Rationale of the Study

The current research was established due to the limited amount of literature and

research on understanding how student perceptions of school climate may correlate with

attendance rates and academic achievement in urban charter schools. This study added to

the current body of research by providing insight into the perceptions of school climate at

an urban charter school by assessing student views on the social dimensions of school

climate to include teaching and learning, relationships with teachers, and school safety.

Although trends in current research showed that school climate influences student

achievement, many school improvement programs ignore dimensions of school climate

while focusing on school structure and procedures (Perkins, 2006). Due to the limited

amount of research on perceptions of school climate among students in urban charter

schools, this research provided the community with a more focused view on the needs of

such populations. Furthermore, this research may shed light on successful ways to

indirectly improve attendance rates and academic achievement while directly focusing on

school climate in the areas of teaching and learning, relationships with teachers, and

school safety.

Attendance Rates

Teaching and learning, student-teacher relationships, and school safety have all been associated with attendance rates and academic achievement. As chronic absenteeism has progressively worsened in recent years, several factors have shown to have a positive correlation. School factors to include "safety, attitudes of staff and peers, and lack of consistency in attendance policies," have been linked to attendance rates (Romaine & Sinkler, 2015, p. 6). Other factors influencing student attendance rates, such as "lack of familial support, poverty and substance abuse," were attributed to family circumstances and not directly related to the school (Romaine & Sinkler, 2015, p. 6). Economic factors such as "students working and families lacking transportation or childcare resources" were also correlated with attendance rates as purported by Romaine and Sinkler (2015, p. 7), while "student factors included drug and alcohol use and well as mental and physical health concerns" (Ocak et al., 2019, p. 2) showed a correlation. Consistent with these findings, researchers purported that physical and mental illness, monetary concerns and financial responsibilities, student age, societal expectations, students home location, perceived teacher attitudes, costs associated with attending school, school policies, school environment, drug and alcohol abuse, cultural attitudes towards education, and weather condition can cause absenteeism (Ocak et al., 2019). Romaine and Sinkler (2015) categorized factors that influence student attendance as; school, family, economic, and student groups, while others grouped them as; school, teachers, parents, and psychology (Ocak et al., 2019). Although research suggested that many factors influence students' attendance rates, this study solely focused on elements of the school climate that have been shown to correlate with attendance. For the current study, the researcher investigated factors of school climate to include student perceptions of teaching and

learning, student-teacher relationships, and school safety and examined whether such

perceptions were related to attendance or academic achievement.

Academic Achievement

Adolescence comes with many challenges that may lead to less school motivation

and engagement and ultimately lower grades and test scores (Cornell, Shukla, & Konold,

2016). Family concerns, biological and psychological concerns, and societal concerns

are often incompatible with the expectations of new and challenging high school

environments. Thus, many students become disengaged, have no sense of belonging, or

perform poorly in academic areas (Cornell et al., 2016). As factors outside of the school

environments are typically beyond students' control, researchers suggest that positive

school climates can negate the effects of such stressors and shield from disengagement

and academic failure. Students with higher attendance rates have better grades and test

results, students who graduate from high school typically have jobs with higher pay, and

such students are less likely dependent on government assistance and rarely involved in

criminal acts (Romaine & Sinkler, 2015). Students who feel a sense of belonging at

school tend to have better social and behavioral interactions and perform better

academically (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015).

Teaching and learning. Teachers' beliefs about students' academic abilities and

their focus on essential classroom tasks aid in the improvement of student learning and

achievement, along with building a strong school climate (Kalinc, 2013). As teachers

play a major role in ensuring that the school climate is conducive to student learning, it is

paramount for them to provide the necessary rigor and leadership that foster student

growth and development in a supportive school climate. Current research suggested a

strong correlation between perceptions of school climate and academic performance; in

that students who perceive their school climate as unfavorable have low academic

achievement, students who perceive a typical school climate have average academic

achievement, and students who perceive having a strong and supportive school climate

have high academic achievement (Nisar et al., 2017). For this study, students' perception

of teaching and learning focused on the extent to which students perceive that teachers

encourage students to keep trying, how well teachers are trained, and methods of

instruction. This is consistent with Wang and Degol (2015), who suggested that the study

of academic climate should "focus on the overall quality of the academic environment to

include curricula, instruction, teacher training, and professional development" (p. 2).

Understanding the nature of teaching and learning practices within the school and

academic achievement is fundamental for establishing a positive school climate of

motivation, engagement, teaching, and learning in the best interest of both teachers and

students (Reno et al., 2017). Schools with "high academic rigor, organized classroom

instruction, effective leadership, and teachers who believe in themselves and promote

mastery learning goals, produce an academic climate conducive to learning and high

student performance" (Wang & Degol, 2015, p. 327).

Student-teacher relationships. Establishing and maintaining interpersonal

relationships within the school environment prompts feelings of safety and security

(Hopson et al., 2014). By forming relationships with both students and teachers within

the school community, students can feel a sense of belonging and form attachments

which greatly influence overall development (Wang & Degol, 2015). Such feelings of

safety and security within the school are positively correlated with attendance and

academic success. Research showed that students who had positive relationships and a sense of belonging within the school environment performed well academically (Hopson et al., 2014). According to Ekstrand (2015),

> the role of the teacher is incontestable. Students who believe that teachers care for and respect them tend to like school, while students who do not feel supported express dissatisfaction with teachers, typically have lower academic performance and many drop out of school. (p. 407)

How students perceive their relationships with teachers has shown to be essential in establishing the sense of confidence and motivation that helps them succeed.

Furthermore, having such interpersonal relationships with teachers provides a sense of connectedness and academic success while deterring unsafe and disruptive behaviors (Hopson et al., 2014). Students who feel supported by teachers are more likely to develop interpersonal relationships, which may allow more educational opportunities and ultimately more academic success (Benbenishty et al., 2016). Recent literature suggested that "the absence of violence in schools allows students and teachers to develop stronger interpersonal relationships and have more involvement in school related functions and that students who perceive a positive school climate perform better academically and behaviorally" (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015, p. 1). To help students succeed, it is paramount for students to develop and maintain meaningful relationships with teachers. Relationships with teachers set the tone for other important relationships that students will form and provide the support, motivation, and respect that is essential for success in school and in life.

School safety. Providing an environment where all members of the school community feel welcome, safe, and protected is pivotal to the school climate and overall school functioning. School safety represents "the degree of physical and emotional security provided by the school, and the presence of effective, consistent and fair disciplinary practices" (Wang & Degol, 2015, p. 10). Current literature on school violence and bullying suggested that the school climate plays a significant role in deterring unfavorable and unsafe behaviors and greatly impacts the overall safety of the school environment (Benbenishty et al., 2016). As perceptions of the school climate and school safety are very diverse, the availability of caring and effective staff influences the school climate in a number of ways (Benbenishty et al., 2016). With the recent increase in school shootings, reported bullying incidents and accompanying suicide rates that greatly impact the school environment, perceptions of school safety are widely regarded as fundamental constructs which help or hinder student success. Research by Benbenishty et al. (2016) confirmed a strong correlation between school violence and school climate and suggested that "students who feel safe in school may be free to attend to academic tasks rather than focus on worry about safety" (p. 198), while students who do not feel safe are unable to complete academic tasks and often have physical and emotional safety concerns.

School rules and disciplinary practices are essential in guaranteeing that members of the school community are safe and treated fairly. Although most school rules and disciplinary practices are not cookie-cutter, they provide a framework from which the general school body is able to understand school expectations and consequences of unfavorable behaviors. "The degree to which students believe in school rules and whether

they feel these rules are implemented fairly and consistently indicate the degree of order

and discipline present" (Wang & Degol, 2015, p. 10). In other words, students who

perceive school-wide discipline to be effective, consistent, and fair are more compliant

than students who perceive that the rules are not fair. As such, "schools with effective,

consistent and fair disciplinary practices typically produce a safer and more positive

school climate" (Wang & Degol, 2015, p. 10). For this study, perceptions of school safety

included: perceptions of violence and bullying, fair disciplinary practices, and availability

of caring and effective staff.

Understanding factors that influence school climate is the first step in addressing

necessary changes. As school climate is multidimensional with many positive attributes

and interwoven variables, it serves as one of the greatest determinants in improving

school attendance and academic achievement (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016).

Although safety within the physical environment is of utmost concern, emotional

safety also plays a major role in securing a safe school climate. In an emotionally safe

environment, students can openly interact with others by way of expressing feelings,

sharing concerns and opinions, and displaying thoughts and behaviors without fear of

persecution (Wang & Degol, 2015). As more school districts are becoming "trauma

informed" or "trauma sensitive" schools are better equipped at providing the emotional

support necessary in ensuring that students feel safe. Furthermore, "school-based mental

health services cultivate a school climate characterized by greater psychological health by

reducing a range of behavioral and emotional problems throughout the student

population" (Wang & Degol, 2015, p. 10). In addition to the aforementioned,

understanding school-wide disciplinary practices and students' perceptions of such

allows for greater climate control and greater feelings of safety at school.

Hypotheses

      Hypothesis 1: There is a correlation between student perceptions of teaching and

learning and attendance rates.

      Hypothesis 2: There is a correlation between student perceptions of student-

teacher relationships and attendance rates.

      Hypothesis 3: There is a correlation between student perceptions of school safety

and attendance rates.

      Hypothesis 4: There is a correlation between student perceptions of the overall

school climate and attendance rates.

      Hypothesis 5: There is a correlation between student perceptions of teaching and

learning and academic achievement.

      Hypothesis 6: There is a correlation between student perceptions of student-

teacher relationships and academic achievement.

      Hypothesis 7: There is a correlation between student perceptions of school safety

and academic achievement.

      Hypothesis 8: There is a correlation between student perceptions of the overall

school climate and academic achievement.

Research Questions

      Research Question 1: How do students perceive teaching and learning?

      Research Question 2: How do students perceive relationships with teachers?

      Research Question 3: How do students perceive school safety?

Research Question 4: How do students perceive the overall school climate?

Study Limitations

The researcher is a professional school counselor for the researched charter high school where the students attend school. As a professional school counselor, the researcher's duties include but are not limited to: (a) developing and maintaining a written plan for effective delivery of the school counseling program based on student need; (b) ensure that it is implemented with fidelity; (c) use data to develop comprehensive programs that meet student needs; and (d) promote academic, career, and personal/social development for all students. As such, the proposed research study is highly compatible with the existing responsibilities. It is in this role that the researcher was able to identify the needs of all students and provide the school district with an insight of the possible relationship between student perception of school climate, attendance, and academic achievement. This acts as a limitation in that students may not have been completely honest in their responses due to fear of lack of confidentiality or being exposed for recording unfavorable responses. Additionally, students may have felt coerced due to having a pre-existing relationship with the researcher.

Although students in grades from 9th through 12th were asked to participate in the study, 87% of participants were in ninth grade, 0% were in 10th grade, 6% in 11th grade and 7% were in 12th grade. As such, this study represented an overwhelming majority of perceptions of ninth graders and may not have accurately reflected perceptions of the student body. This limitation was partially due to the time that surveys were taken and student schedules. As many 11th and 12th grade students participated in offsite work-study programs and dual enrollment programs, they were not available on

the days selected to complete the surveys. Additionally, school attendance rates showed

that ninth grade has the highest average daily attendance rate of 60%, while 11th and 12th

grade have 43% and 46%. Thus, many 11th and 12th grade students were not present

when surveys were completed. The researcher has not identified reasons for the lack of

10th grade participation, although they were invited to participate in the study.

At the time of the study, there were a total of seven charter high schools in St.

Louis, MO; however, the researcher only focused on one high school. Therefore, data

were limited to student perceptions at the respective high school and may not accurately

reflect the perceptions of students attending other urban charter schools in the area.

Definition of Terms

Academic Achievement: For the proposed study, cumulative grade point average

as of May 2019.

Attendance Rate: For the proposed study, percentage of time (total days) student

attended school during the 2018-19 school year.

Grade Point Average:

A grade point average is a number representing the average value of the

accumulated final grades earned in courses over time. More commonly called

a *GPA*, a student's grade point average is calculated by adding up all accumulated

final grades and dividing that figure by the number of grades awarded. This

calculation results in a mathematical mean—or average—of all final grades.

GPAs may be calculated at the end of a course, semester, or grade level, and a

"cumulative GPA" represents an average of all final grades individual students

earned from the time they first enrolled in a school to the completion of their

education. (Great School Partnerships, 2013, para. 1).

School Climate: "The learning environment created through the interaction of

human relationships, physical setting and psychological atmosphere" (Perkins, 2006, p.

1). For this study, school climate referred to teaching and learning, relationships with

teachers, and school safety.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the possible relationship between

student perception of school climate, attendance, and academic achievement in an urban

charter high school. This study specifically identified student perceptions of the school

climate in the areas of teaching and learning, relationships with teachers, and school

safety and determined whether such perceptions were related to attendance or academic

achievement. Due to the limited amount of research on perceptions of school climate

among students in urban charter schools, this research provided the community with a

more focused view on the needs of such populations. The literature review in the next

chapter provides background information on the importance of establishing

attachments/relationships early in life and provides further insight into the areas of

student perceptions of teaching and learning, student-teacher relationships, and school

safety.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Organization of Literature Review

The literature review begins with an overview of Bowlby and Ainsworth's

(Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) attachment theories as both are crucial in understanding

how students perceive, understand, and respond to the world around them. While

attachment is believed to be most essential during and throughout infancy, it serves as a

blueprint for shaping perceptions of the world, developing feelings of safety and security,

the degree to which students form meaningful relationships, and ultimately, whether they

achieve academically and later in life. Although this study specifically focused on

students' perceptions of school climate, understanding the background of how such

perceptions are formed provides a working knowledge of the variable perceptions related

to teaching and learning, relationships with teachers, and school safety. The literature

review includes current findings on the relationship between student perception of school

climate, attendance, and academic achievement. As the nature of this study was to

examine the correlation between students' perceptions of school climate, attendance or

academic achievement at an urban charter school, current research will provide the basis

for understanding how students' perceptions of teaching and learning, student-teacher

relationships and school safety may influence attendance or academic achievement. The

literature review highlights recent research findings on the importance of how and what

students are taught influences their perceptions of school climate. The literature review

will also discuss the role that establishing and maintaining student-teacher relationships

plays in students' perceptions of school climate, attendance, and student academic

achievement. Furthermore, students' perceptions of school safety will describe both

positive and negative factors that influence perceptions of safety within the school.

Attachment Theories

As a pioneer of attachment theories, Bowlby's Attachment Theory contended that

babies come into the world with a predisposition to bond with others which is essential to

their survival (Bowlby, 1958; McCleod, 2017). This theory emphasized the significance

that establishing early parent-child relationships plays in forming appropriate social

bonds, developing emotional security, and ensuring cognitive development in children. It

also described ways in which the expectation for emotional connectedness in future

relationships may be based on this first relationship (Bowlby, 1958; Cortesi, 2014).

Attachment is defined as "'lasting psychological connectedness between human

beings" and has shown to be pivotal for the success of all people, regardless of age

(McCleod, 2017, para. 7). Although Bowlby's theory specifically focuses on establishing

secure and trusting relationships within a child's home during primary years, it is also

found to be highly relevant in the school environment (Harlow, 2018). Bowlby's theory

proposed that if secure attachments are not made during this time, it can negatively affect

the child's development, with such effects re-emerging during adolescence, often within

the school environment. Researchers have identified noticeable affects such as

underachievement, inability to focus, engagement in disruptive and destructive behaviors,

need for disproportionate control, withdrawal from others, higher rates of disciplinary

concerns, and frequent suspensions (Rose & Parker, 2014). As these consequences are

often imposed due to unfavorable behaviors, they also reinforce feelings of insecurity and

low self-worth. Therefore, having educators who are competent in attachment-related

areas is crucial for identifying and supporting students with attachment concerns; thereby improving students' feelings of self-esteem, security, and motivation, encouraging more appropriate behavior patterns, and ensuring more educational involvement and academic achievement (Rose & Parker, 2014). Whether such behaviors are driven by feelings of mistrust, an inability to form meaningful relationships, or a general fear of the world around them, children and adolescents must feel safe and secure before they can begin to learn (Rose & Parker, 2014).

Recent research has shown that when the school environment becomes a place of safety and security, the potential for students' learning and development is maximized. As such, one can ascertain that developing relationships which foster safety, security, and a sense of belonging is paramount for students within the education arena (Harlow, 2018). Although Bowlby's attachment theory contended that such attachments (or relationships) should be developed by the age of five to promote lifelong connectedness and positive relationships, many people do not develop such attachments during that time frame and were previously believed to have irreversible consequences such as a possible lack of intellect and increased aggression (McCleod, 2017). Having a principal understanding of how attachments may affect students' overall development provides educators with a real-world view of students' emotional needs, which is partly assessed by observing the relationships that they have formed (Harlow, 2018). Furthermore, Harlow (2018) contended that attachment theory is relevant throughout the school system and that implementation of such improves students' feelings of comfort and security and, ultimately, academic performance. Having a working knowledge of attachment theory is also relevant in that it would enable educators to respond to unfavorable or disruptive

behaviors in ways that ensure students' emotional needs are met, and disciplinary

practices (such as suspensions) could therefore be greatly reduced. Additionally, Harlow

(2018) reported that:

> …positive results may be gained when school leaders encourage a warm socio-
>
> emotional climate and a culture of respect. In order to stimulate a sense of
>
> security, continuity of people and place is important, and benefit may be gained
>
> when essential transitions (across years and schools) are facilitated. (para. 18)

As Bowlby's 1958 Attachment Theory is the basis for other attachment theories,

Ainsworth expanded his original works to include categories of attachment styles and

possible outcomes of such (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1971; Ainsworth, Bell, &

Stayton, 1978; McCleod, 2016).

Bowlby's Attachment Theory. According to Bowlby's Attachment Theory

(Bowlby, 1958; Cherry, 2019), the basis of attachment is a predisposition by which

infants are instinctively drawn to primary caregivers who can nurture in a way that

promotes safety and security through effective interactions and, therefore, allows the

infant to develop the ability to survive and self-regulate. Thus, "the caregiver provides a

sense of security which can be remembered and recalled in times of distress therefore

allowing the process of soothing to take place" (Cortesi, 2014, p. 5). As such, Bowlby

posited that nurturance and responsiveness to needs were the primary determinants of

attachment (Bowlby, 1958; Cherry, 2019). Moreover, Bowlby found that infants attach

meaning to parental responses, which creates an internal working model or working

perception of how to navigate interactions and relationships "whereby individual

development arises out of the relationship between the brain/mind/body of both infant

and caregiver held within a culture and environment that supports or threatens it"

(Cherry, 2019, p. 6). Furthermore, Sincero (2012) found that:

> Bowlby recognized that while proximity is a key part of the attachment process,
> he also expanded upon this and stated that what is most crucial is the child's
> appraisal of the caregiver's availability and emotional responsiveness. He posited
> that such a perception of security (referred to as "felt security") is a subjective
> state that hinges not on the behavior of the caregiver alone but on the child's
> internal experience as well, including his or her own mood, physical condition,
> imaginings, and so on. (p. 8)

Sincero (2012) described the four basic characteristics of attachment present in the

relationship between infant and caregiver to include: safe haven, secure base, proximity

maintenance, and separation distress.

Characteristics of safe haven determine whether the infant can rely on the

caregiver for comfort at times whenever he feels threatened, frightened or in danger.

Secure base includes the caregiver providing a decent and reliable foundation to the

infant as he goes on learning and sorting out things by himself. Proximity maintenance is

the time at which an infant/child intends to explore the world around them while

remaining near the caregiver, and separation distress describes feelings of sorrow and

distress when separated from the caregiver (Sincero, 2012, p. 2).

Consequently, Cherry (2019) reported the principal idea of attachment theory is

that "primary caregivers who are available and responsive to infant's needs allow them to

develop a sense of security; the infant knows that the caregiver is dependable, which

creates a secure base for the child to then explore the world" (para. 9).

Through various characteristics, educators develop a working knowledge of how attachments are initially formed during infancy and how such attachments may influence behavioral outcomes throughout childhood and later in life. As Bowlby's theory centered on attachments between infants and primary caregivers, Ainsworth expanded this theory to include attachment styles as observed by relationships with others which has consistently shown to impact behaviors later in life (Sincero, 2012).

Mary Ainsworth's Strange Situation. Mary Ainsworth expanded Bowlby's work to include groundbreaking theories on the effects of attachment on behavior (Ainsworth et al. 1991; Cherry, 2019). Though a supporter of Bowlby's theories, Ainsworth (1978) purported that as attachment is innately driven, it is also adaptable. (Cherry, 2019). Through research entitled "Strange Situation," Ainsworth was able to test Bowlby's hypotheses and ultimately identified three emerging attachment styles. The attachment styles are secure attachment, ambivalent-insecure attachment, and avoidant-insecure attachment (Cherry, 2019; Cortesi, 2014). Ainsworth contended that children with secure attachments "feel confident that the attachment figure will be available to meet their needs, use the attachment figure as a safe base to explore the environment and seek the attachment figure in times of distress" (McLeod, 2017, p. 4). Furthermore, they are easily pacified by the attachment figure when upset (McLeod, 2016, p. 4). After examining Ainsworth's Strange Situations experiment, other researchers concluded that, although securely attached children showed signs of distress upon being separated from their caregiver, they were quickly consoled when reunited and resumed play as usual (Cortesi, 2014) and that mothers of securely attached children showed characteristics of sensitivity and compassion to the child's needs. Behaviors were also consistent with

being open and accepting, emotionally available, and willing to meet the needs of the

child (Cortesi, 2014). These findings were consistent with Bowlby (1999), who

contended that those with secure attachments typically perceive caregivers as readily

available, supportive, and cooperative (McLeod, 2017).

      Ambivalent-insecure attachment is marked by having unsure/undecided behaviors

towards the attachment figure. As such, one typically displays clingy and dependent

behaviors while rejecting the attachment figure during interactions (McLeod, 2017).

According to Cortesi (2014), those with an ambivalent-insecure attachment display

overwhelming distress at the departure of their caregiver and reject them once they

return. As such, they are undecided and often alternate between behaviors of connection

and rejection (p. 14). "As the child fails to develop any feelings of security from the

attachment figure, they exhibit difficulty moving away from the attachment figure to

explore novel surroundings" (McLeod, 2017, p. 4). Children with ambivalent-insecure

attachments are therefore difficult to soothe and find no comfort in being near or

interacting with the attachment figure, which results from inconsistent responses on the

part of the primary caregiver (McLeod, 2017).

      According to Cherry (2019), an insecure-avoidant attachment style is present

when children avoid caregivers regardless of circumstances. As such, children with this

attachment style hold no connection to attachment figures, are both physically and

emotionally independent, and explore the world around them with little to no assistance

from others due to having developed an avoidant nature (Cortesi, 2014). As those with an

insecure-avoidance attachment style never seek the comfort of an attachment figure, it is

believed that they had a caregiver who rejected their primary needs or was unavailable

when needed. Because of the child's attachment style, the attachment figure may

ultimately withdraw from helping even during hard times, therefore reinforcing the

child's perceptions of needing to behave independently as there is no one to help

(Cortesi, 2014).

Researchers later added a fourth attachment style called disorganized attachment.

Children with a disorganized attachment often display a range of behaviors from

confused to disoriented or shocked and they may avoid or resist the parent. The lack of

specific attachment pattern is likely linked to inconsistency from caregivers in that they

have been a source of comfort and a source of fear, therefore leaving children confused

and ultimately leading to a display of disorganized behavior (Cherry, 2019; Cortesi,

2014).

Research by Ainsworth et al. (1978) proved critical to theories of attachment as it

provided the first empirical data to support and expand Bowlby's theories (McCleod,

2016). Additionally, Ainsworth's (1978) work provided the foundation for how

attachments form throughout life and behaviors that emerge because of such attachment

styles. Consistent with Bowlby, Ainsworth determined that: attachment styles were

directly correlated with early interactions with the mother or early caregiver (Ainsworth

et al., 1978; Ainsworth et al., 1991; Bowlby, 1977; McLeod, 2017); securely attached

children develop positive self-esteem, trust the world around them and establish

meaningful relationships with others (McLeod, 2017); "insecure-avoidant children may

perceive themselves unworthy and unacceptable, caused by a rejecting primary

caregiver" (McLeod, 2017, p. 5); and those with an ambivalent-insecure attachment have

a negative perception of themselves, engage in attention-seeking behaviors and are

undecided on whether they want to accept or reject others (McLeod, 2017). Further research showed that behaviors related to insecure attachment styles often manifest later in life and accompany an increased risk of social and emotional behavioral problems (Cherry, 2019).

The lack of establishing an early attachment or establishing insecure attachments can negatively influence perceptions of self, the world in general, and behaviors present in later childhood and throughout life (Cherry, 2019). Although attachment styles may change throughout the lifespan, research supports the notion that early attachments have a major impact on relationship development in later years (McLeod, 2017). As such, children diagnosed with conduct disorders often display behaviors that suggest an insecure or negative attachment is present, while those with secure attachments display behaviors that foster healthy self-esteem, strong relationships, and better quality of life (Cherry, 2019).

Understanding how attachments and relationships are formed is crucial in assessing students' perceptions of teaching and learning, relationships with teachers, and feelings of safety. Attachment styles have the potential to provide a negative or positive perception of the world through children's eyes, determine the degree to which they learn, form new relationships, engage in organizations or activities, and regulate feelings of safety. Although the presence of a negative or insecure attachment is not a mental illness, it may produce behaviors consistent with psychological and social dysregulation (Cortesi, 2014, p. 22), and the effects just as profound as some mental illnesses. Children with secure attachments tend to perceive the world through a lens that allows them the freedom to learn, and engage in meaningful activities, establish meaningful relationships,

and feel safe in all contexts. They also develop better self-esteem, are more independent,

perform better in school and experience less anxiety and depression (Cherry, 2019).

Because the transition to school marks the first opportunity to form attachments

outside of the home, establishing early and secure relationships with peers and teachers

precipitates the development of perceptions of self and others that provide the pathway

for future academic motivation, engagement, achievement, and behavioral performance.

Thus, attachment theories provide a framework for understanding how students'

perceptions are formed and how such perceptions influence the way students view school

climate in the areas of teaching and learning, relationships with teachers and ultimately,

feelings of safety (Wang & Degol, 2015).

Teaching and learning. Scholars and educators agree that "students don't care

how much you know until they know how much you care" (Theodore Roosevelt (1901)

as cited in Brown, 2014, p. 1). Although this quote originated over 100 years ago, current

research showed the relevance of it today. This quote in and of itself speaks to the

significance of establishing and maintaining relationships in the classroom to ensure that

learning can take place. Not only do such relationships promote feelings of safety and

security within the school environment, but such relationships also provide students with

the confidence and motivation to seek academic achievement. As such, Hansen (2018)

suggested that teachers who fought for and believed in students' academic abilities were

the primary catalyst for students' overall success. Teaching is no easy feat, but; through

meaningful relationships, having realistically high expectations and rigor, and engaging

curricula, students are motivated and, thus, excel (Hansen, 2018).

Academic research supports the idea that engagement and motivation are essential for establishing and sustaining academic resiliency and achievement (Strati et al., 2016). Student motivation is therefore indispensable to learning and is present in various stages along the pathway to success (Lin-Siegler et al., 2016). Students' perceptions of self and academic ability, classroom environment, teaching practices, and relationships with teachers can influence motivation and engagement and, as a result, learning. Just as positive perceptions are correlated to positive educational outcomes, "negative academic perceptions are strongly associated with maladaptive classroom functioning and negative student outcomes (e.g., classroom disengagement, superficial learning strategies, poor learning, low performance, and school drop-out" (Cheon & Reeve, 2015, p. 1). As such, shaping student perceptions through effective instructional strategies has the potential to increase academic motivation and engagement and, ultimately, performance (Lin-Siegler et al., 2016). "Engagement refers to a student's active involvement in a learning activity and functions as a student-initiated pathway to highly valued educational outcomes, such as achievement" (Cheon & Reeve, 2015, p. 100). Just as engagement is student-initiated, motivation is an isolated student experience in that teachers are unable to "see" motivation. Motivation and engagement work together, such that when a student is motivated, they will be actively involved (engaged), which can be observed (Cheon & Reeve, 2015). Similarly, high engagement is correlated with more favorable school experiences, which sets the foundations for higher self-esteem, more exploration, and better quality of life (Strati et al., 2016). Effective teachers introduce various social and environmental constructs within the classroom that evoke motivation and engagement, such as presenting prompts, providing reminders, using words of praise and

encouragement, utilizing systems of reward, providing constructive criticism, and offering to assist when needed (Reeve & Cheon, 2014). As some students lack the general motivation to engage in academic-related tasks (due to a variety of reasons), teachers must understand such perceptions and make a conscious effort to help students find the motivation to engage and succeed (Cheon, et al., 2018). In assessing student achievement, research shows that teachers' actions can move students from academic failure towards academic success (Hansen, 2018), and "without meaningful teacher-student relationships, lifetime learning will remain out of reach for many" (McKinney & Berube, 2017, p. 1).

"The academic domain of school climate, referring to the ways in which learning and teaching are promoted in the school, is perhaps one of the most prominent and significant domains of school climate" (Wang & Degol, 2015, p. 8). As such, teachers have a primary responsibility of creating classroom environments conducive to student engagement and learning (Strati et al., 2016). Such environments are evidenced by the selection of instructional materials used, employment of teaching strategies, attitude while teaching, level of rigor provided to students, and opportunities for student engagement (Strati et al., 2016). "Collectively, high academic rigor, organized classroom instruction, effective leadership, and teachers who believe in themselves and promote mastery learning goals, produce an academic climate conducive to learning and high student performance" (Wang & Degol, 2015, p. 9).

Teachers' instructional behavior/attitude can encourage or discourage student motivation and engagement at different times throughout the lesson; thus, it is vital for them to continuously maintain a high level of optimism and competency while teaching

(Strati et al., 2016). This is important as it allows for greater classroom engagement, more conceptual learning, achievement, and psychological well-being (Reeve & Cheon, 2014). Students' perceptions of teacher support and willingness to assist when needed are also related to personal wellbeing, motivation, and engagement (Strati et al., 2016). Wang and Degol (2015) suggested that while competent and highly qualified educators pride themselves on encouraging and motivating all students to succeed, they also have high expectations for themselves, are highly organized, provide assistance and positive feedback when needed, and create a classroom environment which promotes mastery. In having high expectations for self, teachers' self-efficacy plays a role in their effectiveness and competency inside the classroom. Student academic achievement is indicative of teachers' self-efficacy and effectiveness in that teachers who believe themselves capable of producing high academic outcomes have higher expectations for themselves and students and commit themselves to meet the educational needs of students (Gulistan et al., 2017). In addition, teachers also encourage learning by employing various teaching methods, which aid in students "becoming self-directed, independent, and critical thinkers" (Paolini, 2015, p. 20).

As a way of promoting motivation and mastery within the classroom, lessons should be thought-provoking, hands-on and relevant to the students, modified or adapted to meet the diverse needs and academic skill sets of students, and must be aligned with minimum standards and curriculum (Wang & Degol, 2015). As teachers gain an understanding of the various factors that contribute to student motivation and engagement, it is also paramount for them to be well versed in their respective areas so that they can prioritize material and focus on core topics while ensuring student

engagement and learning are taking place (Paolini, 2015; Strati et al., 2016).

Furthermore, researchers contended that:

> Effective teachers focus on core topics and sequence information to cover basic
>
> material before introducing new topics. Additionally, they organize activities in
>
> strands, presenting content through small segments of instruction over several
>
> days, rather than planning one activity to address the entire concept. They assign
>
> students activities that promote understanding of skills and knowledge. They
>
> focus on engaging students to build their communication and social skills, learn
>
> how to work interdependently, and enhance their self-efficacy. Effective
>
> instructors use specific praise, reinforcements, and constructive feedback to give
>
> students a holistic understanding of a topic. (Paolini, 2015, p. 20)

Classroom instructional strategies help to shape student perceptions and

motivational frameworks, in turn, predict academic achievement. Thus, teachers must

employ high academic rigor with an emphasis on improvement and progress to ensure

that students are motivated to achieve academic success (Lin-Siegler et al., 2016; Wang

& Degol, 2015). When such emphasis is placed on students' determination to succeed,

and effective strategies are applied to individual learning, teachers instill a sense of

enthusiasm in the student whereby they are confident in confronting new challenges with

a personal belief that leads to growth and enjoyment of learning (Hansen, 2018).

Research has revealed that "perceived challenge is positively associated with students'

engagement" because students who are challenged by a supportive and nurturing teacher,

tend to be more motivated, which leads to more engagement (Strati et al., 2016, p. 132).

Having high expectations and presenting challenging material can inspire students to

overcome perceived weaknesses while focusing on achieving greater academic

achievement and further facilitating confidence and academic resiliency (Hansen, 2018).

Wang and Degol (2015) further purported that teachers should facilitate "out of the box"

thinking activities that promote creativity, higher order thinking abilities and allows

students to become better stimulated and engaged in the learning process. Linking

curriculum to students' prior knowledge and implementing hands-on and tangible lessons

allow opportunities for students to creatively employ greater skill and understanding in

learning and problem solving (Paolini, 2015). Utilizing instructional practices to include

getting student input and perspective, fostering student initiative, offering relevant

learning opportunities, providing a rationale for specific tasks, and acknowledging and

accepting students' perceptions of such also increases motivation and engagement (Cheon

et al., 2018). Other instructional methods shown to increase student awareness,

engagement, and learning include but are not limited to role-playing, completing case

studies, facilitating cooperative group work, introducing thought-provoking discussion,

and encouraging critical reflections (Paolini, 2015).

     In a recent study (Jang et al., 2016), researchers examined whether students were

more motivated and engaged in classroom learning based on whether they were taught in

a "student preferred" way compared to counterparts who were taught via traditional

teaching methods (non-preferred method). This research shed light on the challenge of

motivating students in the classroom and on the necessity of finding new and sometimes

unconventional teaching methods that facilitate engagement and learning. This research

showed a possible turning point for students and teachers (willing to engage in innovative

practices) as teachers are eager to expand their understanding of evidence-based best

practices that promote students' engagement and motivation and students are eager to

learn (Jang et al., 2016). Findings of the research were that "students taught via 'student

preferred methods' perceived the teacher as more supportive, reported greater satisfaction

and motivation during the lesson, were more engaged, and showed greater conceptual

understanding of material compared to those who were taught via traditional

(nonpreferred methods)" (Jang et al., 2016, p. 689). Jang et al. (2016), therefore,

contended that the increases in engagement, motivation, and conceptual learning were

due in part to having effective teachers who were able to discern student needs, employ

data-driven instructional practices, and encouraged student autonomy.

        The most effective teachers hold themselves to a high standard as evidenced by

using optimum "self-management and consultation, tracking their usage of classroom

management skills and developing action plans to modify their practices based on data"

(Paolini, 2015, p. 21). In a recent study, researchers found that many students dropped

out of school due to being disengaged, having the need to be more challenged, and due to

not having established positive and meaningful relationships with teachers (Strati et al.,

2016). The development of healthy student-teacher relationships is important as it can

ultimately determine how the student perceives instruction and whether the student is

motivated and engaged. Gehlbach et al. (2015) indicated that such relationships are

paramount from the first day of school due to being associated with valued student

outcomes of motivation, engagement, positive behavior, and supportive learning rigor.

Empirical studies on student-teacher relationships and on motivation and learning

consistently showed that positive relationships are correlated with positive student

outcomes (Strati et al., 2016). As such, it is likely that motivation, engagement, and

learning do not occur in an environment where students do not perceive positive

relationships with teachers. Thus, the following section will provide insight into students'

perceptions of student-teacher relationships and provide information on the significant

role that such relationships may play in determining academic achievement.

      Student-teacher relationships. Attachment theories, developmental theories,

motivational theories, and social theories recognize the importance of emotional

connectedness, closeness, and sensitivity as a means to foster healthy socio-emotional

development and wellbeing (Obsuth et al., 2017, p. 1). Although emphasizing different

aspects of student-teacher relationships, each theory acknowledges the importance of

such relationships in identity development, perception formation, academic achievement

and behavior, and overall success (Obsuth et al., 2017).

      Student perceptions of student-teacher relationships have proven critical to

positive and negative student outcomes (Hansen, 2018). Although teachers' perceptions

of students can play a role in academic and behavioral outcomes, most research findings

showed that students' perceptions of their relationships were more closely related to

academic and behavioral outcomes (Obsuth, 2017). This is not to say that teachers'

perceptions cannot influence academic and behavioral outcomes; it merely suggests that

students' perceptions largely shape how they view the world around them which

subsequently influences their actions and behaviors. As such, students' perceptions of

"how teachers perceive them" or "how they perceive student-teacher relationships" is a

key factor in motivation and engagement, academic achievement, and behavioral

outcomes.

Students believed to possess great academic abilities when initially starting school typically have closer relationships with teachers than their counterparts without such perceived academic abilities; while those students viewed as having lower academic performance levels when starting school reported having many conflicts with teachers (Mason at al., 2017). Thus, students perceived as having higher academic performance when starting school reported fewer conflicts and a higher degree of closeness to their teachers (Mason et al., 2017). This is partly due to the teachers' positive preconceived notions and, therefore, willingness to bond with students perceived as having a higher academic ability. Gehlbach et al. (2015) reported a correlation between student-teacher relationships and student behavior because students who perceived that their teachers cared for them were more willingly engaged in class. Consequently, students who perceived that teachers were disinterested in them or received criticism from their teachers were more likely to cause discipline problems (Gehlbach et al., 2015).

Students who come to school after dealing with circumstances that suppress the learning process are often perceived as disinterested, academically inept, or troubled (Hansen, 2018). Thus, student-teacher relationships are likely to be negatively impacted even when student behaviors are precipitated by familial circumstances (Obsuth et al., 2016). These moments prove critical because teachers have the opportunity to make a deliberate effort to learn about students inside and outside of the school environment, which opens the doors to building trusting and supportive relationships and academic achievement (McKinney & Berube, 2017). Due to various factors, many of these relationships are never established, consequently, students continue to be disengaged, or eventually drop out of school. The "achievement to relationship" theory supported

findings that show students who are perceived as more academically capable have more

contact with teachers, receive more praise from teachers, may be given preferential

treatment, and ultimately develop more meaningful relationships with teachers (Mason et

al., 2017). As such, students who are perceived as academically incapable or "at-risk"

may not be afforded the same opportunities to form meaningful relationships with

teachers as teachers often "find it easier to build relationships with those perceived as

more academically capable" (Mason et al., 2017, p. 179). McKinney (2017) purported

student-teacher relationship building to be a doable but timely process that entails

teachers:

> building students confidence and esteem, sharing your world, taking the time to
>
> smile at students, involving students in the learning process, demonstrating
>
> empathy and compassion, taking the time to listen to student needs and concerns,
>
> demonstrating high expectations, being appreciative of student effort, admitting to
>
> mistakes and recognizing students' potential. (pp. 56-59)

While studies on student-teacher relationships definitively establish that positive

student-teacher relationships are of utmost importance in ensuring student engagement

and academic achievement, current research also suggested that "at-risk" students and

students of color tend to have a lower sense of belonging and less academic engagement

due to having more unfavorable student-teacher interactions (Cook et al., 2018). Current

academic trends showed "at-risk" students and students of color having lower attendance

and graduation rates, lower grade point averages, and less academic engagement (Cook et

al., 2018).

Many "at-risk" students believe themselves incapable of grasping certain ideas or information, as evidenced by previous failures and possibly teachers' perceptions of their academic abilities (Hansen, 2018). As students' perceptions of teacher support and care for them can predict student engagement and motivation, it is likely those who understand the teachers' negative perception do not possess the same motivation and engagement as their counterparts (Gehlbach et al., 2015). Although findings support the idea that those more academically capable have greater opportunities for developing meaningful relationships, the inverse also holds as research showed many students perceived as "at-risk" thrive due to the encouragement, motivation and resiliency instilled in them by teachers with whom they had positive relationships (Hansen, 2018). Thus, building positive relationships with students (including "at-risk" students) has also shown to be essential to student success.

Alastair and Thorsen (2018) reported that "positive relationships with teachers have beneficial effects on educational outcomes and correlations between positive teacher-student relationships and academic competence and achievement are commonly found" (p. 1). Mason et al. (2017) suggested that "supportive teacher-student relationships are critical factors in creating and maintaining a sense of school belonging that encourages positive academic and behavioral outcomes" (p. 1). When a supportive relationship is developed, and the language of the teacher speaks to a student's ability to achieve academic success despite challenges faced, students thrive (Hansen, 2018). As such, it is believed that even when students enter school with higher academic abilities, they are ultimately successful due to the supportive relationships that were formed, which nurtured positive outcomes. Although academic ability may play a part in overall student

success, student perceptions of having positive student-teacher relationships are a

stronger predictor of academic achievement.

As students spend a significant amount of time in school, establishing and

maintaining relationships with teachers has shown to be of utmost importance. Some

students spend more time with teachers than any other adult throughout their primary and

secondary years (Cook et al., 2018). Thus, "strong teacher-student relationships are

considered a foundational aspect of a positive school experience" (Cook et al., 2018, p. 2)

and "teachers who have the ability to transform lives are the most positive influence in a

child's life outside of the family circle" (Hansen, 2018, p. 3). According to Harlow

(2018):

> A secure teacher-student relationship is characterized by trust and being attuned.
>
> The student would feel safe and able to seek help while the teacher would be able
>
> to console the student when required. Teachers should be educated in child
>
> development and have time to cultivate supportive relationships, but they also
>
> need to be authentic in their dealings, have high expectations of pupils, be well
>
> prepared for class, and facilitate pupil autonomy (in terms of being sensitive to the
>
> child's agenda and allowing some choice). If a child's biography has led to an
>
> insecure style of attachment, teachers may find them "hard to reach" and face
>
> challenges in building a trusting relationship. Nevertheless, efforts to build such a
>
> relationship can succeed. (para. 15)

Harlow's (2018) findings are consistent with other researchers who contended

that adults outside of the student's home play a critical role in behavioral, emotional, and

social development from childhood and through the adolescent years (Obsuth et al.,

2016). As students often perceive "outside" relationships as more significant than familial

support, relationships with teachers and other adults within the school have shown to be

one of the strongest predictors of emotional well-being (Obsuth et al., 2017). From an

attachment perspective, researchers have suggested that "having positive relationships

with teachers helps students develop emotionally and fosters a sense of safety that

enables students to confidently engage in academia" (Cook et al., 2018, p. 2).

Furthermore, the attachment theory holds that when student-teacher relationships have a

high degree of closeness with a low degree of conflict, students typically feel more

emotionally stable. Emotional support refers to the degree to which the teacher

encourages, accepts, respects, and trusts students, and the degree to which he or she

demonstrates caring for students' emotional well-being and conveys confidence in their

abilities to fulfill classroom requirements successfully (Hansen, 2018). Emotional

stability, therefore, provides students with confidence that allows them to explore the

learning environment and promotes engagement in academic tasks (Roorda et al., 2017).

Having solid student-teacher relationships, emotional security, and positive exploration

of the learning environment typically results in more engagement and higher academic

achievement (Roorda et al., 2017). Consistent with previous research, Archambault et al.,

(2017) found that "having positive student-teacher relationships centered on open

communication, warmth and affection is correlated with higher student engagement and

increased student success" (p. 3). As such, unfavorable student-teacher relationships

where conflict is present have been shown to discourage overall student engagement,

ultimately linked to truancy or avoidance of class (Archembault et al., 2017).

Furthermore, "conflictual student-teacher relationships have also been associated with the

diminishment of prosocial behaviors among students, which certainly affects their ability

to form and maintain positive relationships with others over time" (Archembault et al.,

2017, p. 3).

Positive student-teacher relationships allow students the support necessary to

overcome school demands and promote a positive learning environment while also

encouraging positive engagement and positive behaviors. It is also through such positive

interactions that students develop trust in others and the world around them, which

encourages and motivates them to succeed (Alastair & Thorsen, 2018). Mason et al.

(2017) reported that classrooms where students perceived that teachers cared for and

respected them typically resulted in more engagement and greater academic achievement.

Findings from Mason et al., (2017) are consistent with other studies which suggested that

students who feel connected to teachers via positive interactions and positive

relationships also tend to become more engaged and achieve more success over time

(Alastair & Thorsen, 2017). Although the student-teacher relationship is considered a

linchpin to student success, with many previous studies suggesting that student

achievement is directly correlated with perceptions of student-teacher relationships,

current research shows that the student-teacher relationship has the greatest influence on

student engagement which then encourages or deters student academic achievement

(Cook et al., 2018). As such, positive student-teacher relationships implant a perception

of belongingness, independence, and skill that motivates students to be more actively

engaged in academics and attend school regularly, which increases student performance

(Cook et al., 2018).

As the degree of student engagement decreases with time, establishing and maintaining early positive student-teacher relationships is essential to having early school engagement and overall academic achievement (Archembault et al., 2017). Roorda et al. (2017) purported:

Two theoretical approaches that have been especially important in research about teacher-student relationship in connection with academic adjustments are social-motivational theories and the extended attachment perspective. Both approaches assume that students' engagement plays an important role in explaining the impact of teacher-student relationships on students' achievement. Students' engagement is considered to be a multidimensional concept and can be defined as "the quality of a student's connection or involvement with the endeavor of schooling and hence with the people, activities, goals, values and place that compose it". (p. 2)

Motivation is a key factor in students' engagement and overall academic achievement. As students have basic psychological and biological needs to feel connected and a sense of belonging, having social bonds is a powerful motivator (Alastair & Thorsen, 2018). Concurrently, social motivation theorists contended that when students develop feelings of belongingness, independence, and autonomy within the classroom, they become more engaged (Roorda et al., 2017). Additional research revealed that:

In educational contexts, the need for relatedness and feelings of being connected to others can function as a powerful motivational force for acting in ways that favor interpersonal relationships. When needs for relatedness are satisfied,

students become better equipped to meet the cognitive and affective demands of

school. (Alastair & Thorsen, 2018, p. 1)

School safety. School climate, broadly defined as the quality and character of

school life, has historically gained substantial attention as researchers, educators, and the

community at large focus on ways to encourage safety and security within the school

system (Martinez et al., 2016; Petrie, 2014). "School climate is based on patterns of

student and teacher experiences of such that reveals norms, goals, values, interpersonal

relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures of schools

that support feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe in school" (Martinez et al.,

2016, p. 1; Sulak, 2016). School climate is also viewed as "the unwritten beliefs, values,

and attitudes that become the style of interaction between students, teachers, and

administrators" (Petrie, 2014, p. 1). Although dimensions and models of school climate

vary, researchers collectively agree that school climate is a combination of experiences

that reflect school standards, ideals, and practices as perceived by students, parents, and

school personnel and is evident by peer relationships, student-teacher relationships,

teaching and learning practices, administrative policies and safety and security (Martinez

et al., 2016). Research establishes that perceptions of school climate can negatively or

positively influence students' relational, academic, social, and behavioral outcomes and

provide a pathway for lifelong learning (Gage et al., 2016). As such, understanding, and

refining school climate provides an avenue for promoting and ensuring students

relational, academic, social, behavioral, and lifelong success (Sulak, 2016).

Successful schools have climates that promote positive relationships, academic

achievement, social competence, prosocial behaviors, and lifelong learning by providing

safe and secure learning environments (Gage et al., 2016). As such, students across the

world attend school each day with the expectation of being in a safe and secure

environment where they are able to have positive relationships, learn new material,

socialize with peers, and find a sense of belonging (Reno et al., 2017). Providing positive

support for student behavior has been correlated to school climates in that it also creates

perceptions and feelings of safety and security for students and allows for effective, safe,

preventive, and positive disciplinary practices within the school, thus promoting a

positive school climate supporting the relationship between students perceptions of

school climate and school safety (Gage et al., 2016). Positive behavior management and

support encompass the extent to which students perceive school disciplinary practices to

include clear and consistent rules and disciplinary policies, and students are treated in a

fair and equitable manner (Wang & Dishion, 2012; Zhang & Wang, 2020). Students who

perceive clear, consistent, and fair disciplinary practices report fewer disciplinary

concerns and greater school safety and security (Wang & Dishion, 2012; Zhang & Wang,

2020).

Research has shown school climate positively associated with numerous

relational, academic, social, and behavioral outcomes to include increased self-esteem,

student motivation and engagement, teaching and learning, student-teacher relationships,

personal attitudes, increased attendance, and feelings of safety (Gage et al.,2016; Sulak,

2016). Positive school climate is also correlated with decreased disciplinary concerns,

school violence, bullying, reported use of drugs and alcohol, victimization, depression,

and other traumas (Gage et al., 2016). Concurrently, research suggested that "boys with

positive school engagement and orientation tended to have lower levels of alcohol use,

and girls who had strong relationships with teachers tended to have lower illegal drug use" (Wang & Dishion, 2012, p. 4), thus decreasing safety concerns at school. School safety and disciplinary concerns are no new phenomena as the last 20 years have seen spikes in school fights, bullying, vandalism, truancy, and drug use (Reno et al., 2017).

Understanding students' perceptions of school safety-referring to perceptions of violence and bullying, fair disciplinary practices, and availability of caring and effective staff, are generally indicative of how they view the overall school climate (Wang & Degol, 2015). As student perceptions of school safety are highly subjective, they typically respond to unfavorable experiences as they subjectively perceive them, regardless of objective accuracy, and not necessarily in an impartial manner, thus, impacting the school climate and perceptions of safety (Gage et al., 2016; Petrie, 2014). Additional research showed a strong correlation between individuals who perceive having no attachments or meaningful relationships in school and the development of antisocial behavior; such that students who feel disconnected or unwelcomed at school are at increased risk for engaging in self-sabotaging and self-defeating behaviors, including aggression towards others (Petrie, 2014). Students have also been found to "resist rules and procedures along with the resulting disciplinary actions, if the foundation of a good relationship is absent" (Reno et al., 2017, p. 434). It is, therefore, significant to note that school safety is correlated with student attitudes and behaviors, including perceptions and prevalence of bullying- "aggressive behavior, repeated over time, which results in harm to another person, who is usually powerless to defend themselves" (Petrie, 2014, p. 26).

The United States Department of Justice and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) (as cited in Wahab et al., 2018), reported that at least 160,000 students missed school daily due to being bullied and that approximately 5% of students in North America have been victims of bullying. Bullying and cyberbullying present school safety concerns due to the serious, wide-spread, negative, and life-long consequences they can have on physical, social, and psychological health and academic performance (Giminez-Gualdo et al., 2018; Petrie, 2014). Experiences with victimization and bullying in school have also been found to be correlated with the developmental sequence that serves as indicators of delinquency and future crime (Wahab et al., 2018). As experiences with bullying and victimization disrupt the learning environment and disturb the overall quality of school life, they are in fact recognized as a significant concern for schools, immediate communities, and society in general (Wahab et al., 2018). Students experiencing bullying have been shown to be at risk of depression, suicidal behavior, at risk of absenteeism, and school dropout (Williams et al., 2018), which therefore creates concerns for individuals later in life. Bullying potentially makes the lives of its victims unbearable in that it "undermines their confidence and destroys their sense of security" and creates heightened levels of anxiety and depression and suicidal ideations (Wahab et al., 2018, pp. 2-3). Students from minority and other ethnic groups are disproportionately represented in research showing they are reportedly exposed to higher levels of bullying and cyberbullying when compared to those who are not minorities and identify as heterosexual students (Wahab et al., 2018). This is consistent with Reno et al. (2018), who noted that African American students and other students of color were steadily over punished with disproportionately more students assigned to

detention and having more overall suspensions and expulsions; while other findings

suggested that students negative behavior may be indicative of negative perceptions of

school climate due to bullying or victimization (Petrie, 2014). Additionally, Williams et

al. (2018) noted that "students at schools with higher rates of suspension and expulsion

were more fearful than students at schools with lower rates of suspension and expulsion"

(p. 2). Such findings posited that students were less fearful at school when they perceived

that school rules and discipline were consistent and fair; and that administration

communicated and enforced such rules in a clear and concise manner that they

understood well (Williams et al., 2018). Identifying those who have been bullied and

those who display bullying behaviors is not easy; however, understanding students'

perceptions of school safety as it relates to bullying can be useful in providing pertinent

information that will help to extinguish bullying behaviors, ensure students safety, and

create a more conducive learning environment (Petrie, 2014). Although there are a

variety of potential factors which can collectively result in students having unsafe

perceptions of school safety, researchers indicated that it only takes one unfavorable

incident for students to develop perceptions of being unsafe and create a reduction in

academic achievement and induction to unsafe behaviors (Wahab et al., 2018). Thus,

school disciplinary policies, and school personnel, have the potential to combat bullying

related issues by responding in a manner that not only promotes safety for all but also

discourages bullying and all other actions that cause students to disconnect from the

learning environment.

Williams et al. (2018) contended that the combination of strong disciplinary

structures and caring and effective staff (emotional support), as evidenced by having

positive student-teacher relationships, are indispensable to students' perceptions of school safety. Understanding the impact of such factors individually and collectively shed light on the role that all school personnel has in influencing the school culture and the ability to decrease bullying and victimization-related experiences greatly. As each of the aforementioned equally contributes to student perceptions of school safety, disciplinary practices can be a powerful deterrent to unfavorable perceptions and experiences or a promising predictor of positive perceptions of the school culture (Williams et al., 2018).

Although research findings showed suspensions as an over-used and unsuccessful approach to school discipline, it is still commonly used (Gregory et al., 2015). Even with the implementation of new initiatives that promote proactive approaches to student misbehavior and discipline, suspensions and other punitive practices are more widely used than any other practice (Gordon, 2018, p. 6).

Current trends showed that at least 1 in 7 students in grades K-12 face the possibility of suspension throughout their school years (Gordon, 2018, p. 6). During 2015–16, approximately 31,000 public schools in the United States used one or more school suspensions as a disciplinary measure resulting in 72% out of school suspensions for five or more days, 24% transferred to alternative schools, and the remaining 4% did not receive services (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018, p. 10). The growing body of literature on school discipline demonstrates the harmful effects that suspensions have on the school climate and on individual students; suggesting after looking at demographic features, attendance, and academic achievement rates, each suspension decreases a student's chance of graduating high school by 20% (Balfanz et al., 2014; Gordon, 2018).

There is ample evidence of demographic disparities in the use of out-of-school suspensions as a disciplinary measure which showed students who are "at-risk" due to race, class or socioeconomic status received more total suspensions and suspensions that were longer in duration for more minor offenses (Balfanz et al., 2014). Such findings validate the immediacy for more effective and equitable disciplinary practices. Outcry over the overwhelming negative correlates of suspensions and disciplinary practices with at-risk students being disproportionally overrepresented is not unfounded as several researchers including the United States Department of Education (2014), reported that African American students are three times more likely to be suspended than White peers with similar infractions (Gordon, 2018).

With the plethora of literature showing perpetual effects of current disciplinary practices, it is crucial for school policymakers to design and implement proactive policies that allow students to re-engage after violating a school rule or an infraction has occurred (Gregory et al., 2015). Exclusionary and harsh disciplinary practices lead to student disengagement, negative perceptions of the school climate, and unsafe feelings at school. The social control theory suggested the more safe and secure students feel at school, the more likely they are to adhere to school disciplinary policies as they develop a belief in the school's moral code (Wang & Degol, 2015). Being connected to the school community, therefore, promotes conformity to school norms and disciplinary policies and decreases the likelihood of engagement in behaviors that would result in suspension or expulsion (Wang & Degol, 2015).

Ensuring student safety is a schoolwide effort, yet teachers and other school personnel have very few researched-based best practices to aid with classroom

management and discipline (Gregory et al., 2015). Because classroom teachers have more direct contact with students than all other school personnel, they play a highly significant role in helping to ensure a safe and healthy learning environment and extinguishing problem behaviors before they threaten the safety of others or result in suspension. Teachers may reduce the impact of unfavorable behaviors for students and the school environment by first being trained on intervention strategies and disciplinary policies, which include bullying, cyberbullying, potential threats of violence, mental health-related issues, and substance abuse, and secondly, being able to identify the warning signs of such potential threats (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018).

It is also essential that other school personnel are cognizant of such factors as it takes a schoolwide effort to develop and implement effective strategies when creating a safe and secure school environment (Fronius et al., 2016). Many behavioral and disciplinary incidents and infractions negatively impact the school climate and not merely the offender, making it vital for disciplinary practices to address the needs of the victims, the offenders, and the school environment to maintain a safe and secure learning environment (Fronius et al., 2016). As researchers (Wang & Degol, 2015) suggested, the key to ensuring safe and secure learning environments comes by way of adequate teacher training. Musu-Gillette et al. (2018) recently found less than 80% of public schools trained teachers to identify bullying behaviors (to include physical, social, and verbal behaviors), while approximately 50% trained teachers to identify signs of potentially violent behaviors. Additionally, one-third of public schools trained teachers to identify signs of substance abuse, and 60% of teachers were trained on intervention techniques

and referral strategies for mental health-related concerns (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018, p. 45).

In the same study, Muse-Gillette et al. (2018) also found that about 14% of 15-year-olds perceived their learning was deterred due to witnessing intimidation or bullying of other students, and that approximately 20% of students perceived learning was deterred due to students lacking respect for teachers (p. 45).

Summary

In the current study, the researcher examined the relationship between student perceptions of school climate, attendance, and academic achievement. As previous research showed the importance of understanding how perceptions are formed, both Bowlby and Ainsworth's attachment theories shed light on the importance of establishing and maintaining relationships and how such attachments impede or encourage growth. Although the development of such attachments typically forms before one starts school, it is important to note the significance of such attachments (or lack of) when accessing how students perceive the world around them, how they relate to others and the degree to which they achieve success in life. As the nature of this study was to examine the correlation between students' perceptions of school climate, attendance, and academic achievement at an urban charter school, the current literature review provided the basis for understanding how students' perceptions of school climate to include teaching and learning, student-teacher relationships and school safety may correlate with attendance and academic achievement.

Chapter Three: Research Method and Design

Purpose

The purpose of this study on the possible relationship between student perceptions of school climate, attendance, and academic achievement in an urban charter high school was to gain an understanding of student perceptions of the school climate. Furthermore, the researcher sought to determine if such perceptions were correlated with attendance rates or academic achievement.

As attendance rates have been on a steady decline at the proposed high school, the researcher investigated the relationship between students' perceptions of school climate and attendance to establish a possible correlation and later address improvement strategies. The researcher also analyzed data to determine if a relationship existed between perceptions of school climate and academic achievement. School climate can potentially influence and possibly improve risk factors that negatively impact achievement (Bower & Parsons, 2016). As such, data gathered will aid in removing risk factors and promoting a school climate that nurtures higher attendance rates and academic success for all students.

The researcher chose to use a mixed method design due to its ability to give empirical data on both qualitative and quantitative methods and its ability to minimize limitations of both (Creswell, 2014). Thus, the researcher was able to collect students' perceptions of school climate using an anonymous, electronic 24-item survey (adapted from Panorama Instrument with permission [see Appendix A]) or a second anonymous, 8-item (open-ended) electronic survey [see Appendix B]. By comparing such findings with student attendance rates and academic achievement (qualitative data), the researcher

sought to determine if a relationship existed between students' perceptions of school climate, attendance, and academic achievement. By utilizing mixed methods, the researcher obtained a complete understanding of how student perceptions of school climate correlated with attendance and academic achievement.

The quantitative aspects of the study gave the researcher insight into students' average daily attendance rates and cumulative grade point averages for the 2018-19 school year. Information was obtained through data collection (with permission) from Tyler SIS, a district-wide student database. Qualitative data gathered via an electronic 24-item survey (adapted from Panorama Student Survey with permission [see Appendix A]) showed students perceptions of the school climate in areas of teaching and learning, relationships with teachers, school safety, and overall school climate while qualitative data from survey B (8-item open-ended, electronic survey [see Appendix B]) produced feedback on student perceptions of ways the school could help students feel safer, ways the school could facilitate better relationships between students and teachers, teaching methods, what students enjoy about school, and perceptions of disciplinary practices.

The study on the relationship between student perception of school climate, attendance, and academic achievement in an urban charter high school sought to understand whether student perceptions of the school climate were correlated with attendance rates or academic achievement. The researcher hoped that gaining a more in-depth understanding of the correlation between students' perceptions of school climate, attendance, and academic achievement would facilitate schoolwide climate improvement strategies. Student perceptions of the school environment directly influence attendance and academic achievement (Panorama Education, 2015); as such, student surveys were

pivotal in allowing students' voices to be heard. As this study shed light on several

variables within the school based on student perceptions, the researcher expected that

data gathered for this study would aid in removing risk factors and promoting a school

climate that nurtures higher attendance rates and academic success for all students.

Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted at an urban charter high school in the Midwest. The

charter school is in a network of six total schools and sponsored by the University of

Missouri-Columbia. The high school served students in grades nine through 12 and had a

population of 388 students enrolled for the 2018-19 school year (Missouri Department of

Elementary and Secondary Education, [DESE], 2018). According to University of

Missouri-Charter Schools Operations (n.d.), 100% of students at the research site met

state eligibility guidelines for free and reduced lunch, 96.4% identified as African

American, .002% identified as Hispanic and .002% identified as Other. Additionally,

16.7% of students had individual education plans. High-schools.com (n.d.) ranked the

research site as 148/615 largest high school in Missouri, reported a teacher ratio of

13.3/1, and showed a population of 51% female and 49% male students.

For this study, all participants were actively enrolled in ninth through 12th grade

at the research site and assented or received parental consent to participate in the study.

One hundred percent of participants identified as African American, (45) 71.43% of

participants were in ninth grade, (10) 15.87% in 11th grade, and (8) 12.69% were in 12th

grade. As such, this study represented an overwhelming majority of perceptions of ninth

graders and may not have accurately reflected perceptions of the entire student body.

Additionally, school attendance rates showed that ninth grade had the highest average

daily attendance rate of 60%, while 11th and 12th grade had 43% and 46%, respectively.

Thus, many 11th and 12th grade students were not present when surveys were completed.

As there were no 10th grade participants, this suggested that the sample size was not a

perfect sample, yet; it was representative of the student body, nonetheless.

A total of 63 students participated in the study. Demographic information as

presented below denotes >10% of the student population participated in the study and is,

therefore, an appropriate sample size (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

	Participants (n = 63)		Research Site (388)	
	n	%	n	%
Grade				
9	45	71.43%	104	26.8%
10	0	0	104	26.8%
11	10	15.87%	106	27.3%
12	8	12.69	74	19.0%
Race				
African American	63	100%	386	99.4%
White	0	0	0	0
Asian	0	0	0	0
Hispanic	0	0	1	.002%
Other	0	0	1	.002%

Recruitment Method

Upon receiving approval from the Lindenwood University Institutional Review

Board and permission from the proposed high school, the researcher visited eight third-

period classes to explain the nature of the study and to ask for voluntary student

participants. During this time, students were advised on the nature and purpose of the

study, length of survey completion, potential risk/benefits for participation in the study, and given the researcher's contact information should questions or concerns arise.

As attendance trends at the research site showed the highest attendance rates during third-period classes, the researcher only visited third-period classes to invite voluntary student participants. Although the researcher recruited volunteers from only eight classes, all students enrolled at the high school were eligible to participate in the study as no one was excluded. The eight specific classes were chosen due to having mixed gender and mixed grade levels during the third period. Students who expressed interest in participating in the study were given university assent/consent form(s) to be signed by their parent/guardian and were returned to the researcher within five days.

Once permission consent/assent forms were received by the researcher, participants were sent an electronic code via school email which allowed them to access the survey(s). Prior to the start of survey completion, participants were reminded of their anonymity and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice. Participants voluntarily completed one or both survey(s) during free time at home or school on a campus computer. Each survey took approximately 25 minutes to complete, and the utmost care was given to the sensitivity of establishing and maintaining participants' anonymity. All data were de-identified (via Qualtrics) to ensure complete anonymity of all participants' responses and students' confidential information. Data were also scrubbed and coded (by the researcher's advisor), so the researcher could analyze the data.

Instruments

For this study, the researcher used the Panorama Student Survey. This instrument was chosen due to being grounded in the most advanced survey methodology (Panorama Education, 2015) and its ability to efficiently capture students' perceptions of teaching and learning, relationships with teachers, and school safety. Although the original instrument assesses students' perceptions of school climate on 10 subscales and 19 key areas, the researcher adapted the survey to include only the four key areas and several free-response items essential to the study.

The Panorama Student Survey is "a series of scales and statements and questions measuring student perceptions of teaching and learning, perceptions of school climate and individual strengths and weaknesses" (Panorama Education, 2015, p. 2). The survey was developed through a rigorous six-stage process resulting in each scale showing evidence of reliability and validity. Reliability and validity were assessed in two large-scale pilot administrations throughout different regions of the United States having diverse populations. Both pilot tests established that surveys had "reliability, structural validity, and convergent/discriminant validity" (Panorama Education, 2015, p. 3). Reliability estimates for each subscale on the survey were greater than .70 for coefficient alpha (Panorama Education, 2015), therefore showing reliability consistent with Cronbach's alpha which finds reliability coefficients equal to or greater than .70 acceptable (University of California Los Angeles [UCLA], n.d.).

Subscales of the Panorama Student Survey that assess student perceptions of the classroom and teaching include: "Pedagogical Effectiveness, Classroom Climate, Classroom Rigorous Expectations, Classroom Engagement, Classroom Teacher-Student

Relationships*,* Classroom Belonging, Valuing of Subject, Classroom Learning Strategies, Classroom Mindset-Dispositional and Classroom Mindset-Behavioral" (Panorama Education, 2015, pp. 6-7). Subscales of the Panorama Student Survey that assess student perceptions of the school, in general, include: "School Climate, School Rigorous Expectations, School Engagement, School Teacher-Student Relationships, School Belonging, Valuing of School, School Learning Strategies, School Mindset-Dispositional: School Mindset-Behavioral: Grit, School Safety and Free Responses" (Panorama Education, 2015, pp. 8-9).

For this study, the researcher used subscales from perceptions of the classroom and perceptions of the school to include the following:

Pedagogical Effectiveness-*Perceptions of the quality of teaching and amount of learning students experience from a particular teacher*, Teacher-Student Relationships-*How strong the social connection is between teachers and students within and beyond the school*, School Safety-*Perceptions of student physical and psychological safety while at school*, and Overall School Climate -*Perceptions of the overall social and learning climate of the school* (Panorama Education, 2015, pp. 6-9). Utilizing subscales from both sections allowed the researcher to understand how students perceived both the classroom and overall school environments.

Study participants voluntarily completed an anonymous, electronic 24-item survey (adapted from Panorama Student Survey with permission [see Appendix A]) or a second anonymous, 8-item (open-ended, free response), electronic survey (adapted from Panorama Student Survey with permission [see Appendix B]). The first survey (Appendix A) consisted of 24 total multiple-choice questions in the areas of Teaching

and Learning (5 questions), Relationships with Teachers (6 questions), School Safety (7

questions), and overall School Climate (6 questions). Participants ranked each item on a

5-point Likert scale ranging from *1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always)* for most survey

items.

The second survey (adapted from Panorama Student Survey with permission [see

Appendix B]) consisted of eight open-ended, free response questions which assessed

students' overall perceptions of the school environment. This survey allowed the

researcher to gain a better understanding of how students viewed the school climate and

developed common themes essential to the study. The researcher expected a minimum of

100 surveys (50 for each survey); however, only 63 total surveys were completed within

the allotted time frame.

Participants responded to prompts based on their perceptions of teaching and

learning, relationships with teachers, school safety, and perceptions of the overall school

climate for the 2018-19 school year. Qualtrics was used to protect the integrity of the

study, as it assigned automatically generated codes to all confidential or identifiable

student information. As the survey completion was strictly voluntary and the research

allowed for a purposive sample to be used, students were not compensated for

participation in the study. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary, and parties

could withdraw at any time without penalty or prejudice.

Scores

Participant responses were scored using Likert-type scales ranging from 1 to 5 for

each subset. In the area of Teaching and Learning, participants ranked five prompts from

1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). In the area of Relationships with Teachers,

participants answered six questions and received scores from 1 to 5 with the numbers

representing the degree to which students felt respected by teachers. For this subscale, *1*

meant very disrespected and 5 meant very respected. Participants rated perception of

teacher concern from *1 (very unconcerned) to 5 (very concerned)*. Other perceptions of

teacher and student relationships included ratings from excitement ranging from *1 (not*

excited) to 5 (very excited), perceptions of teacher support, connectedness, and caring

ranged from *1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always)*. In the area of School Safety,

participants answered seven prompts which were scored using a 5-point Likert type scale.

For this subscale *1 meant almost never or not at all likely, and a score of 5 meant almost*

always or very likely. On the Overall School Climate subscale, participants answered six

questions which also utilized Likert type scoring methods.

     For the open-ended survey questions, participants answered free-response

questions, which facilitated the development of common themes essential to

understanding student perceptions of the school climate. To give the researcher an in-

depth understanding of students perceptions of the school environment, participants

responded to the following:

Teaching and Learning- Describe your learning since coming to high school. Do you

think your teachers are adequately trained? Are teaching methods effective?

Student Teacher Relationships- Describe student-teacher relationships at your school. Do

you feel supported by your teachers? Do you feel respected by your teachers?

School Safety- Explain how you feel about safety at your school. Do you feel safe at

school? Overall School Climate: If you were the principal, what one change would you

make to ensure that the school feels safer? What is the best idea for how groups of people at the school could get along better?

Questions were adapted from the Panorama Student Survey with permission and allowed participants to openly answer questions without selecting precoded answers. Participant responses gave the researcher insight into student perceptions and allowed the development of common themes essential to the study. Furthermore, participant responses aided the researcher in developing possible ways to improve the overall school climate.

Data Analysis

For this study, Likert type survey responses were measured and analyzed by coding each respective answer from 1 to 5. Several survey items on the perceptions of teaching and learning scale asked participants to select one answer from *almost never*, *once in a while*, *sometimes*, *frequently*, or *always*. Participants were given one point when responses indicated *almost never*, two points for *once in a while*, three points for *sometimes*, four points for *frequently,* and five points for *always*. An average was obtained for each student per item and an overall measure was obtained to provide the researcher with insight into students' overall perception of the school climate. All data were analyzed using *t*-tests, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r) as "*Pearson r* is most appropriate in expressing data for variables in terms of quantitative scores" (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. 208).

Open-ended survey response items were analyzed for common themes, similarities, and differences in students' perceptions of school climate, teaching and learning, relationships with teachers, and school safety.

Descriptive statistics were used in analyzing student attendance rates (total number of days at school) and academic achievement (grade point average) for the 2018-19 school year. All quantitative data were gathered (with permission) from school transcripts via Tyler-SIS at the end of the 2018-19 school year.

Null Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no correlation between student perceptions of teaching and learning and attendance rates.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no correlation between student perceptions of student-teacher relationships and attendance rates.

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no correlation between student perceptions of school safety and attendance rates.

Null Hypothesis 4: There is no correlation between student perceptions of the overall school climate and attendance rates.

Null Hypothesis 5: There is no correlation between student perceptions of teaching and learning and academic achievement.

Null Hypothesis 6: There is no correlation between student perceptions of student-teacher relationships and academic achievement.

Null Hypothesis 7: There is no correlation between student perceptions of school safety and academic achievement.

Null Hypothesis 8: There is no correlation between student perceptions of the overall school climate and academic achievement.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do students perceive teaching and learning**?**

Research Question 2: How do students perceive relationships with teachers?

Research Question 3: How do students perceive school safety?

Research Question 4: How do students perceive the overall school climate?

Summary

The current mixed methods study on the relationship between student perception of school climate, attendance, and academic achievement in an urban charter high school was completed at a high school in the Midwest during the 2018-19 school year. The study sought to understand student perceptions of the school climate and determine if such perceptions were correlated with attendance rates or academic achievement. Specifically, this study sought to identify how students perceived the school climate in the areas of teaching and learning, relationships with teachers, and school safety and determine whether such perceptions were related to attendance or academic achievement. For the study, attendance was measured by the number of days present and academic achievement measured by grade point average for the 2018-19 school year. The researcher analyzed student survey data, attendance rates, and grade point average to establish a correlation between such variables. Mixed methods allowed the researcher to gain impartial insight into student perceptions of the overall school climate and student perceptions of teaching and learning, relationships with teachers, and perceptions of school safety. The study also allowed the researcher to determine if a relationship existed between students' perceptions of the school climate, attendance, and academic achievement and shed light on possible ways of developing schoolwide improvement strategies. In-depth data analysis and results obtained will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Results

The current study sought to understand student perceptions of the school climate and determine if such perceptions were correlated with attendance rates or academic achievement. Specifically, this study sought to identify how students perceived the school climate in the areas of teaching and learning, relationships with teachers, and school safety and whether such perceptions were related to attendance or academic achievement.

Although all the components examined collectively contributed to student perceptions of the overall school climate, the researcher sought to gain a deeper understanding of such variables. As such, mixed methods were used to gain greater insight into student perceptions of the climate that would have otherwise been missed. To provide students perceptions of school climate, participants voluntarily completed an anonymous, electronic 24-item survey (adapted from Panorama Student Survey with permission [see Appendix A]) or a second anonymous, 8-item (open-ended, free response), electronic survey (adapted from Panorama Student Survey with permission [see Appendix B]). The first survey (Appendix A) consisted of 24 total multiple-choice prompts in the areas of Teaching and Learning (5 questions), Relationships with Teachers (6 questions), School Safety (7 questions), and overall School Climate (6 questions). Participants ranked each item on a 5-point Likert type scale.

For this study, Likert type survey responses were measured and analyzed by coding each respective answer from 1 to 5. Several survey items on the perceptions of teaching and learning scale asked participants to select one answer from *almost never*, *once in a while*, *sometimes*, *frequently*, or *almost always*. Participants were given one point when responses indicated *almost never*, two points for *once in a while*, three points

for *sometimes*, four points for *frequently,* and five points for *almost always*. An average

was obtained for each student and an overall measure was obtained to provide the

researcher a measure of students' perceptions of the school climate in each critical area.

All data were analyzed using a *t*-test and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation

Coefficient (Pearson r). Data results from the aforementioned allowed the researcher to

analyze all hypotheses and research questions.

Null Hypothesis 1

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no correlation between students' perceptions of

teaching and learning and attendance rates.

This item assessed students' perceptions of the quality of teaching and the amount

of learning students experience. For this hypothesis, the researcher examined the

relationship between students' perceptions of teaching and learning and attendance rates

using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and a *t*-test. Participants rated the

following questions using Likert scales (1-almost never, 2-once in a while, 3-sometimes,

4-frequently and 5- almost always):

1. How often does your teacher appear excited to teach class?

2. How often does your teacher make learning interesting?

3. How often does your teacher give feedback that helps you learn?

4. How often does your teacher appear knowledgeable of what he/she is

    teaching?

5. How often is subject area information presented in a way that you

    understand?

Data analysis (as represented in Table 2) shows the question numbers (Q1-Q5), degree to which the variables were related and strength of the relationship (r), a test statistic showing distance between test data and the null hypothesis (t-test), alpha level (*alpha*) likelihood of rejecting the null hypothesis when the null hypothesis is true (or the probability of making a wrong decision) and p-value (p) which describes the likelihood of the data occurring if the null hypothesis were true. As Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) is "a numerical index expressing the degree of relationship between two quantitative variables" (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. 216), correlation coefficient r depicted the degree to which students' perceptions of teaching and learning was related to attendance rates. As such, when variables are more closely related, the values will be closer to 1, and when there is no statistically significant relationship, r values will be closer to 0 (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. 216). Data analysis showed the correlation coefficient $r = .067$; $t(30) = .367$ and $p = .716$. Since the p-value was greater than alpha (.05), the researcher failed to reject Null Hypothesis 1 and determined there was no relationship between students' perception of teaching and learning and attendance rates.

To gain a more in-depth assessment of student perceptions, the researcher analyzed each survey question individually using PPMCC and a t-test. The analysis showed no statistically significant relationship between student perceptions of teaching and learning and attendance rates.

Table 2

Results from Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient: Teaching and Learning

Questions	r	t-test	alpha	p-value
Q1	-0.02	-0.110	.05	.914
Q2	.117	.645	.05	.524
Q3	-.035	-.192	.05	.849
Q4	.043	.236	.05	.815
Q5	.175	.974	.05	.338
Overall	.067	.367	.05	.716

*Note: *p* < .05*

Null Hypothesis 2

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no correlation between student perceptions of student-teacher relationships and attendance rates.

In the current study, the researcher examined student perceptions of student-teacher relationships by assessing the perceived strength of the social connections between students and teachers within and beyond the school. For this hypothesis, the researcher examined the relationship between student perceptions of student-teacher relationships and attendance rates using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and *t*-test. Data analysis (as represented in Table 3) showed the correlation coefficient r = .052; *t* (30) = .285 and *p* = .774. Since the *p*-value was greater than alpha (.05), the researcher failed to reject Null Hypothesis 2 and determined there was no relationship between students' perception of student-teacher relationships and attendance rates.

To gain a more in-depth assessment of student perceptions the researcher analyzed each survey question individually using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and a *t*-test. The analysis showed no statistically significant relationship between students' perceptions of student-teacher relationships and attendance rates.

Table 3

Results from Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient: Relationships

Questions	r	t-test	alpha	p-value
Q1	.031	.170	.05	.863
Q2	.120	.662	.05	.513
Q3	-.056	-.307	.05	.761
Q4	.030	.170	.05	.866
Q5	.112	.617	.05	.542
Q6	-.009	-.049	.05	.961
Overall	.052	.285	.05	.774

*Note: *p <.05*

Null Hypothesis 3

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no correlation between student perceptions of school

safety and attendance rates.

For this study, the researcher examined student perceptions of physical and

psychological safety while at school. Understanding factors that contribute to feelings of

safety within the school environment is essential to establishing and promoting a positive

school climate as such factors may also cause the school to reap havoc if ignored. Gage et

al. (2016) purported that positive school climates are correlated with positive outcomes

such as higher academic achievement, higher attendance rates, better overall attitudes,

and greater feelings of safety and security. Consistent with these findings, Petrie (2014)

contended that student behaviors and attitudes are directly correlated with their

perceptions of school safety. As such, students who view the school as a safe place tend

to perform better academically and socially than those who do not feel safe within the

school.

For this hypothesis, the researcher examined the relationship between student

perceptions of school safety and attendance rates using the Pearson Product Moment

Correlation Coefficient and a *t*-test. Data analysis (as represented in Table 4) shows the

correlation coefficient r = .042; t (30) = .230 and p = .820. Since the p-value was greater than alpha (.05), the researcher failed to reject Null Hypothesis 3 and determined there was no relationship between students' perceptions of school safety and attendance rates.

To gain a more in-depth assessment of students' perceptions, the researcher analyzed each survey question individually using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and a *t*-test. Data analysis on Question 3 showed the correlation coefficient r = -.3632; t (30) = -2.13 and p = .041. Since the p-value was less than alpha (.05), the researcher rejected the null hypothesis and determined that students' responses and attendance rates were negatively correlated. The negative relationship implies that students who reportedly worried more often about physical safety while at school had higher attendance rates.

Table 4

Results from Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient: School Safety

Questions	r	t-test	alpha	p-value
Q1	.186	1.04	.05	.308
Q2	.029	.159	.05	.875
Q3	-.363	-2.13	.05	.041*
Q4	.367	2.16	.05	.039*
Q5	-.020	-.110	.05	.883
Q6	.027	.148	.05	.961
Q7	-.104	-.573	.05	.571
Overall	.042	.230	.05	.820

*Note: *p<.05*

Data analysis for Question 4 showed the correlation coefficient r = .367; t (30) = 2.16 and p = .039. Since the p-value was less than alpha (.05), the researcher rejected the null hypothesis and determined that students' responses and attendance rates were correlated. The positive relationship implies that students who reported that it was

difficult to get help from adults when students are bullied at school had lower attendance

rates.

Null Hypothesis 4

    Null Hypothesis 4: There is no correlation between students' perceptions of the

overall school climate and attendance rates.

    The researcher analyzed data to determine if a relationship existed between

students' perceptions of the overall school climate and attendance rates. The study

specifically examined perceptions of the overall social learning climate of the school to

include school energy, behaviors that help or hurt learning, whether the environment is

pleasant and whether discipline is consistent. For this hypothesis, the researcher

examined the relationship between student perceptions of the overall school climate and

attendance rates using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and a *t*-test. Data

analysis (as represented in Table 5) showed the correlation coefficient r = -.017; t (30) =

.093 and p = .927. Since the p-value was greater than alpha (.05), the researcher failed to

reject Null Hypothesis 4 and determined there was no relationship between students'

perception of the overall school climate and attendance rates.

    To gain a more in-depth assessment of student perceptions, the researcher

analyzed each survey question individually using Pearson Product Moment Correlation

Coefficient and a *t*-test. Data analysis on Question 3 showed the correlation coefficient r

= -.333; t (30) = -1.93 and p = .063 to be moderately significant. The researcher rejected

the null hypothesis and determined that students' responses and attendance rates were

negatively correlated. The negative relationship implies that students who reported that

the behavior of others at school helped their learning more often had lower attendance

rates.

Table 5

Results from Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient: Overall School Climate

Questions	r	t-test	alpha	p-value
Q1	.101	.556	.05	.582
Q2	.281	1.604	.05	.119
Q3	-.333	-1.93	.05	.063*
Q4	.058	.318	.05	.753
Q5	-.103	-.567	.05	.575
Q6	.016	.088	.05	.931
Overall	.017	.093	.05	.927

*Note: *p <.05*

Null Hypothesis 5

Null Hypothesis 5: There is no correlation between student perceptions of

teaching and learning and academic achievement.

This item assessed student perceptions of the quality of teaching and amount of

learning that students experienced and examined whether such perceptions were related

to academic achievement. For this hypothesis, the researcher examined the relationship

between student perceptions of teaching and learning and academic achievement using

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and a *t*-test. Data analysis (as

represented in Table 6) showed the correlation coefficient r = -.052; t (30) = -.285 and p =

.777. Since the p-value was greater than alpha (.05), the researcher failed to reject Null

Hypothesis 5 and determined there was no relationship between students' perception of

teaching and learning and academic achievement.

To gain a more in-depth assessment of student perceptions, the researcher

analyzed each survey question individually using Pearson Product Moment Correlation

Coefficient and a *t*-test. The analysis showed no statistically significant relationship

between students' perceptions of teaching and learning and academic achievement.

Table 6

Results from Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient: Teaching and Learning

Questions	r	t-test	alpha	p-value
Q1	.013	.071	.05	.944
Q2	-.037	-.203	.05	.840
Q3	-.131	-.724	.05	.475
Q4	.046	.252	.05	.803
Q5	-.13	-.718	.05	.478
Overall	-.052	-.285	.05	.777

*Note: *p <.05*

Null Hypothesis 6

Null Hypothesis 6: There is no correlation between student perceptions of student-

teacher relationships and academic achievement.

In the current study, the researcher examined student perceptions of

student-teacher relationships by assessing the perceived strength of social connectedness

between teachers and students within and beyond the school. For this hypothesis, the

researcher examined the relationship between student-teacher relationships and academic

achievement using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and t-test. Data

analysis (as represented in Table 7) showed the correlation coefficient r = .104; t (30) =

.573 and p = .571. Since the p-value was greater than alpha (.05), the researcher failed to

reject Null Hypothesis 6 and determined there was no relationship between student

perceptions of teaching and learning and academic achievement.

To gain a more in-depth assessment of student perceptions the researcher

analyzed each survey question individually using the Pearson Product Moment

Correlation Coefficient and a *t*-test. The analysis showed no statistically significant

relationship between student perceptions of student-teacher relationships and academic

achievement.

Table 7

Results from Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient: Relationships

Questions	r	t-test	alpha	p-value
Q1	.179	.997	.05	.327
Q2	.100	.550	.05	.586
Q3	-.004	-.022	.05	.983
Q4	.192	1.07	.05	.293
Q5	.068	.373	.05	.712
Q6	-.043	-.236	.05	.812
Overall	.104	.573	.05	.571

*Note: * p <.05*

Null Hypothesis 7

Null Hypothesis 7: There is no correlation between students' perceptions of

school safety and academic achievement.

For this study, the researcher examined student perceptions of school safety by

assessing the fairness of rules and disciplinary practices, difficulty obtaining help from an

adult, fighting at school, incidents of bullying, and perceived student disrespect. Each of

these items has been shown to promote or prevent feelings of school safety. As such,

research showed that students who perceive themselves to be safe at school have greater

academic achievement than those who perceive themselves to be unsafe (Wahab et al.,

2018). As physical and psychological safety are dually essential to school safety,

Williams et al. (2018) suggested that those who do not feel safe may be at risk of

depression, absenteeism and ultimately dropping out of school. To date, bullying has

been a major indicator of perceptions of school safety as those victimized by bullying

lose all confidence in themselves and others around them and develop feelings of

isolation, anxiety and being unsafe (Wahab et al., 2018).

For this hypothesis, the researcher examined the relationship between student perceptions of school safety and academic achievement using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and a *t*-test. Data analysis showed the correlation coefficient r = .024; t (30) = .131 and p = .896. Since the p-value was greater than alpha (.05), the researcher failed to reject Null Hypothesis 7 and determined there was no relationship between students' perception of school safety and academic achievement.

To gain a more in-depth assessment of student perceptions, the researcher analyzed each survey question individually using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and a *t*-test. The analysis showed no statistically significant relationship between students' perceptions of school safety and academic achievement.

Table 8

Results from Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient: School Safety

Questions	r	t-test	alpha	p-value
Q1	-.097	-.534	.05	.597
Q2	.053	.291	.05	.773
Q3	-.201	-1.12	.05	.270
Q4	.165	.916	.05	.367
Q5	-.020	-.110	.05	.914
Q6	.099	.545	.05	.590
Q7	.059	.324	.05	.748
Overall	.024	.131	.05	.896

*Note: * p <.05*

Null Hypothesis 8

Null Hypothesis 8: There is no correlation between student perceptions of the overall school climate and academic achievement.

The researcher analyzed data to determine if a relationship existed between students' perceptions of the overall school climate and academic achievement. The study specifically examined students' perceptions of the overall social learning climate of the

school to include school energy, behaviors that help or hurt learning, whether the environment is pleasant, and whether discipline is consistent.

For this hypothesis, the researcher examined the relationship between student perceptions of the overall school climate and academic achievement using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and a *t*-test. Data analysis showed the correlation coefficient r = -.578; t (30) = -.313 and p = .757. Since the p-value was greater than alpha (.05), the researcher failed to reject Null Hypothesis 8 and determined there was no relationship between students' perceptions of the overall school climate and academic achievement.

To gain a more in-depth assessment of student perceptions, the researcher analyzed each survey question individually using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and a *t*-test. Data analysis on Question 3 showed the correlation coefficient r = -.327; t (30) = -1.90 and p = .068 to be moderately significant. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis and determined that students' responses and academic achievement (grade point averages) were negatively correlated. The negative relationship implies that students who reported that the behavior of others at school helped their learning more often had lower GPAs.

Table 9

Results from Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient: Overall School Climate

Questions	r	t-test	alpha	p-value
Q1	.067	.368	.05	.716
Q2	-.017	-.093	.05	.926
Q3	-.327	-1.90	.05	.068
Q4	.066	.362	.05	.720
Q5	-.038	-.208	.05	.836
Q6	.093	.512	.05	.613
Overall	-.578	-.313	.05	.757

*Note: * p < .05*

Research Questions

For this mixed methods study, participants answered open-ended research questions, which gave the researcher insight into how students perceived the school environment. All questions were analyzed for common themes and possible feedback on ways to improve different components of the school environment.

Research Question 1: How do students perceive teaching and learning?

For this research question, common themes included wanting a better learning environment, low academic rigor, academic and behavioral challenges to learning, feeling encouraged by teachers, teachers being adequately trained, and having effective teaching methods.

Learning Environment

Participants suggested several changes that could improve the learning environment. Such suggestions were: "Have more interesting classes like Fashion Design and Music"; "Make learning fun and have more group work in class"; "Teach things that are more applicable to life"; "Have more Advance Placement classes"; "Change the teachers lesson" and "Change students learning styles." In addition, participants suggested that the school "Hire teachers who actually want to teach kids"; "Hire teachers who care more for education" and "Hire more engaging teachers." One participant reported that the school should "Change how teachers' pay attention to students who act up more than students who want to learn" while another indicated that "There needs to be a change in the way teachers interact with students." No explanation was given as to how the interaction should change; it was only suggested that it be changed. Numerous participants indicated that changes were needed concerning safety and discipline.

Although the two areas are different, participant concerns overlapped in these areas. As such, recommended changes were to "Remove bad kids and put them all in one room together"; "Get rid of the bad kids"; "Enforce school discipline;" and "Enforce the No Phone policy." Another recommended change was to "Allow the more distracted students to go to ACE (alternative learning program) because they might learn better in a smaller environment without distractions."

Academic Rigor

When asked to describe perceptions of learning since coming to high school, many participants reported they had learned more in middle school. One participant reported, "I feel like I am learning the same stuff I learned in middle school, just with more tests." Consistent with this, another participant reported, "I learned more in middle school because teachers helped. They don't help in high school." Many students reported learning more in middle school; however, they also reported different expectations stating, "High school has greater expectations;" and "Same stuff from middle school is overtaught in high school." More than a few students reported learning more in high school and reported taking more tests. At the same time, one participant stated, "I am not sure but feel like I am learning stuff I learned years ago and none of this will prepare me for college;" and another participant reported, "I feel like I am only reviewing middle school material." One participant who reported learning more in high school stated, "I learned a little more in high school," and "I have to take more tests in high school."

Academic and Behavioral Challenges

Participants reported many academic and behavioral challenges. One participant reported "It was a challenge to make it to my senior year because math and science

classes were hard"; while other participants reported "It was challenging to learn that I had to earn credits because I won't pass simply for attending class"; "Staying in class and getting good grades was challenging"; and "Having to do the work to earn a grade and credits was hard." Other challenges participants reported were, "Actually going to class"; "Being on top of your classes"; "Staying focused while in class"; "Having teachers who work to make sure you succeed"; and "Not being distracted because teachers can't handle the class." A few participants reported challenges due to the school having "Too many girls at school" and "Being distracted by peer groups." Other participants cited challenges as, "There are too many fights and I get distracted"; "There are too many distractions and so much negativity in the school" and "It is too easy to get distracted from what you should be doing."

Feeling Encouraged

Participants explained their perceptions of teacher encouragement, and an overwhelming majority reported that teachers encourage them to keep trying. One participant said, "My teachers encourage me to keep trying and never give up because that's where failure begins." Simultaneously, other participants said, "Yes our teachers love it when we keep pushing on to learn" and "They encourage us to keep trying about two times then they are done." One participant suggested that teachers encouraged students beyond high school and reported, "Most of my teachers encourage me to do better and to not give up on my dreams." Another participant reported, "I feel like most of my teachers encourage me because they actually help me try and do better and get my grades up." Similarly reported was, "If we give up, they encourage us to try harder and strive for our goals exclaimed another participant." While several participants reported

that teachers were helping and encouraging them to learn to stay focused in class, participants also indicated, "Some teachers are really good teachers, other teachers couldn't care less but overall, every teacher teaches the same" and "Some teachers encourage me, but most don't, some do." One participant reported, "I feel like some teachers encourage students to keep trying but other teachers don't. I'm in ACE (Achievement Commitment Excellence-alternative online learning center housed at the research site), but some of the teachers here don't do their best as teachers." Many more participants reported their perceptions as, "Some teachers encourage students to keep trying"; "Some of our teachers do encourage us to keep trying, yet they do not always have the energy to do so." The aforementioned response sheds light on the student's perception of one of the challenges teachers face in attempting to motivate and encourage students on a consistent basis. One participant did not perceive teacher encouragement and reported, "There are teachers who would rather us take notes at our desks and expect us to learn and know everything by the time a test comes around." Concurrently, another participant reported encouragement from teachers "Only if you get loud and show frustration. They don't teach, they give notes for us to take and then the teachers pass out the work and think it would be completed without help."

Teacher Training

Participants reportedly believe teachers are adequately trained to teach as evidenced by the following statements, "I think my teachers are adequately trained and I think it's hard for them to teach us how they want when there are certain students who don't want to learn"; "But when or if you're struggling my teachers are well trained and they're doing and awesome job teaching me"; "Yes, I think my teachers are adequately

trained." Consistently, another participant reported, "They are trained properly, but some kids are just crazy." One participant further supported the idea that teachers are adequately trained by stating, "I do think they're trained," and another participant suggested, "Yes, I feel as though they are adequately trained but don't show it." Additionally reported was, "I think some teachers are adequately trained, others just seem like they don't care."

Teaching Methods

Participants reported perceptions of the effectiveness of teaching methods, and results indicated that while most participants believed teaching methods were effective, just as many participants perceived them to be ineffective. Those in favor of the current teaching methods suggested, "From what I have seen teaching methods are good, I like how they have different ways of teaching you and can do a one-on-one session if they have time and if you're willing"; "The teachers at my school teach to help you understand things better" and "The teachers break the information down so that we understand." Participants who reported that teaching methods were ineffective reported, "No, the teaching methods are not effective because they teach the same way" and "The teachers say that we have to learn a certain way, most of the times their method isn't effective." Some participants were reportedly undecided on the effectiveness of teaching methods. As such, they reported, "Teaching methods are somewhat effective"; "Sometimes, they don't really teach us anything, only to certain students" and "I think it's hard for them to teach us how they want when there are certain students who don't want to learn." Others reported, "Some teaching methods are effective" and "The teaching methods at my school are sometimes not efficient."

Research Question 2: How do students perceive relationships with teachers?

To get a more in-depth view of students' perceptions of relationships with teachers, participants responded to a series of items that allowed the researcher to understand how students perceived various aspects of student-teacher relationships. Common themes were positive relationships, feeling supported, feeling respected, and perceiving their presence as important.

Student-Teacher Relationships

Results indicated that participants viewed student-teacher relationship as either positive, negative, or indifferent. Although most participants reported having positive relations with teachers, there were also reports that were not as favorable. Participants who reported positive student-teacher relationships stated, 'My relationship with my teachers is pretty healthy'; 'The student-teacher relationship is good at the school'; 'I love my teachers, some of them have one-on-one sessions and it really helped me with my work'; 'Student-teacher relationships are actually pretty good' and 'Student-teacher relationships are seen a lot and I think it helps.' Others were indifferent to the student-teacher relationship and some believed that the relationship was simply a collaboration between the student and teacher. One participant reported, 'The student, teacher relationship at our school is 50/50, the reason why is because some students feel as if the teachers don't always understand their situation.' Although this participant did not give a direct response in terms of negativity or positivity as other participants gave, this statement sheds light on the participants feelings of not being understood by teachers half of the time. Another participant reported having perceptions of being inferior and insignificant to teachers as evidenced by the following statements:

I feel a weird sense of inferiority compared to them. I am of understanding of

their position of authority but sometimes I feel like the teachers may take it too far

like hinting at the fact we are not allowed to think for ourselves, just obey.

Because of that, I think for some teachers, another student is just another student,

nothing more, nothing less.

Teacher Support

Responses showed that the majority of participants felt supported by teachers as

indicated by the following comments 'I feel supported by the teachers who actually try

and put effort into teaching me in my own way of learning' while another participant

responded by saying 'Of course I feel supported by my teachers at my school because

they keep me focused on doing my work.' Another participant felt supported by teachers

due to having been at the high school for years and reported, 'Yes, I feel supported by

most of my teachers because I've known them since my freshmen year.' Other

participants reportedly felt supported by teachers and responded by stating the following,

'I feel supported by teachers, they always push me to do my best even when I am ready

to give up'; 'I do feel supported by most of my teachers because they encourage me and I

could go and talk to them at any time'; 'Yes, I feel that our teachers support us a lot on

what we want to do'; 'My relationships with my teachers are good and I feel very

supported'; 'I feel supported by my teachers'; 'Yes, I do feel supported by my teachers'

and 'I feel very supported by my teachers at my school because I open up to them and I

show them I'm more than what I seem to be' and 'Some teachers are supportive because

they understand where we're coming from.' Other participants with less favorable

perceptions of teacher support reported 'I feel like a teacher is a teacher and they are just

doing their job and I do have relationship with some of my teachers'; 'Dealing with student-teacher relationship at my school can be annoying sometimes because some teachers show favoritism'; 'In classes that I have failed, I think about two only supported me because they tried to help me get my grade up' and 'I ask for help and never get it, not supported by all the teachers.'

Teacher Respect

Many participants reported feeling respected by teachers and one participant stated, 'I feel respected by my teachers because they show me that they care and treat me fairly.' Another participant concurred reporting 'Yes, I do feel respected by my teachers because I give them respect.' Similarly, another participant reflected on the two-way dynamics of the student-teacher relationship and reported, 'I do feel respected because I give them respect.' Other responses that indicated participants felt respected by teacher were, 'Yes, I feel respected by the teachers' and 'Yes, they have never given me a reason not to feel respected.' One participant reported feeling respected due to having certain privileges and reported 'I also feel respected because they allow me to do things freely.'

Although most students reportedly felt respected by teachers in general, a few participants reportedly felt conditional respect (respected some of the time) as indicated by the following statements, 'Sometimes I feel respected by my teacher'; 'As long as you don't disrespect them'; 'Some of them, yes'; and 'Some of my teachers I do feel respect me.' In contrast to previous responses, a few participants reportedly did not feel respected by teachers. One participant viewed lack of teacher help as a sign of lack of respect and reported 'I don't feel respected because if so, I would have good grades by now but help isn't there.' One participant reflected on previous teacher interactions and reported 'I

don't feel respected because sometimes when I walk past a teacher, he/she will look at me in a funny way like I've done something wrong to them' while another reported, 'The teachers be aren't always right.'

Importance of Presence

Many participants perceived their presence to be important to teachers. One participant reported that his presence validated teachers and reported 'My presence is important and lets the teachers know that they are doing something right.' Other responses were: 'Yes, I feel like my presence is important to some of my teachers because when some of my teachers see me, I think they are proud of me for not giving up' and 'I feel like my presence is important because if I am not at school how am I am going to learn?' One participant said, 'I think my presence is important' and a different participant responded by stating, 'Yes, my presence is important because I am active.' Similarly, other participants reported, 'I think my presence is important to my teachers because they have this job to teach us' and 'Yea, I think my presence is important.' A few participants did not perceive their presence to be important to teachers as evidenced by the following statements, 'No, I do not feel like my presence is important to some teachers'; 'No I don't think it's important' and 'I don't really think my presence is important to teachers though because I just don't think they care that much.'

Research Question 3: How do students perceive school safety?

To assess perceptions of school safety, participants answered questions on perceptions of physical and emotional safety within the school. Although most participants reported feeling physically and emotionally safe within the school, the majority of participants reported safety concerns. Common themes were recommended

policy and procedural changes, physical safety, and security concerns, witnessing

violence and bullying, fair disciplinary practices, fair school rules, and having a trusted

adult to speak with. For this question, nearly all responses reflected recommended

changes to policies and procedures with limited responses reflecting changes in school

personnel.

Policy and Procedure

Participants suggested that the following were necessary to ensure the overall

safety of the school, 'I would ensure that everyone was thoroughly checked upon entering

the building daily' while another reported 'I would suspend all bullies.' Other

suggestions for changes that would be made were: 'Suspending the bad kids'; 'Removing

those who disrupt the learning environment or make it unsafe for others'; 'Having zero

tolerance for fighting' and 'Making school less accessible to outsiders'. One participant

stated, 'I would get more police officers instead of security officers'; while another stated

'I would change the rules.' Very few reported no changes would be made.

Physical Safety

When asked about feelings of physical safety at school, participants reported:

'Yeah, I guess I feel safe'; 'I kind of do feel safe'; 'For most of it I feel safe but there has

been fights but I do not have to worry because they not with me and I stay out of drama

so therefore I do feel safe'; 'Yes I feel safe at school'; 'I feel safe at school because I stay

out the way and do what I need to do'; 'Yes I feel safe at school'; 'I feel like our school is

safe because we don't have a bunch of problems here'; 'I don't think anything would

happen at this school that would cause me any harm except for the fights'; 'I feel safe

around school'; 'Yes I feel safe at school' and 'Most of the time, yes I do feel safe at school.'

Security Concern

Several participants reported that they only feel somewhat safe at schools due to various student behavior concerns or security related issues. One participant reported a security concern by stating, 'I feel safe at school to an extent because some of the security guards just let anybody into the school;' while another participant said, 'I really don't feel safe, it be random people walking into the school.' Other responses were, 'I feel safe at school but sometimes I don't because I would feel better if the guards had guns' and 'Sometimes I feel safe at school because everyone gets checked in the morning time.' Concurrently, another participant expressed concerns with morning security checks saying,

> The morning security checks are very much lacking and it would be easy for someone to bring in a weapon, which has happened before already. It does not help that most of the teenagers here seem to think that acting in such ways of drugs, weapons, and playful harassment is fun to do.

Another participant cited student behavior concerns as a reason for only feeling somewhat safe and reported "I feel safe at school but sometimes I don't because some of the students feel that they have to do bad things in order to get their way.' Additionally, a participant rated safety as 5/10 and suggested 'If I had to rate the school safety from 1-10, I would say a five because sometimes some students come into the school with guns, marijuana, and all kinds of crazy things.' One participant reported staying optimistic, thus reported, 'Yes, I feel safe at school but sometimes I don't feel safe. I feel like something

will happen but I have to stay strong and keep a positive mindset.' Other participants reported, 'I feel as if we could be protected but not if the kids here act a fool then somebody could possibly die or lose a life'; 'I do feel safe sometimes' and 'Sadly, I do not feel much safety at school.'

School Violence

Responses showed that participants had in fact witnessed violence at school. While a few participants reportedly felt uneasy due to witnessing fights and bullying, most of the participants were indifferent. One participant stated,

It has been so many fights at school that it should be known as a fighting school. But, at the same time every time there is a fight now, the school principal or one of the security guards is literally right there to stop the fight or break the fight up. It did not used to be like that, students used to just get to fighting right away during my freshman, sophomore, and a little bit there my junior year.

Other participants reported being desensitized to fights at school and reported, 'Yes, I have witnessed fights and people yelling at each other and I still feel great'; 'When I witness violence most times, I think like it has nothing to do with me but again I feel it's kind of stupid because they fight over the littlest stuff sometimes' and 'I have witnessed a lot of fights and arguments at our school, I feel like it really doesn't bother me because I'm used to seeing it happen.' One participant believed that witnessing acts of violence at school to be inevitable and reported, 'Yes, I have witnessed violence at school. Violence is everywhere especially at a school with over 300 different personalities.' Furthermore, participants reported, 'Yes, I have witnessed violence at school'; 'Yes, I have witnessed violent fights and I feel great'; 'I've seen fights that were

immature' and 'I have witnessed many, many fights, I just feel like they're all over something silly.' Other feelings associated with having witnessed violence at school were, 'I'm used to it'; 'It has nothing to do with me' and 'It doesn't bother me.' Student perceptions of bullying yielded unforeseen results as very few responded to the questions. A few students reportedly witnessed bullying at school and reported, 'I have witnessed bullying as there's always something going on and nothing happens'; 'Yes, I always see it happening but nothing happens because everybody is afraid to speak up' and 'Yes, I have seen bullying and if people would keep their comments to themselves there wouldn't be any issues.'

Discipline

Reports on participant perceptions of discipline showed that while many students believed disciplinary practices to be fair, an equal number of participants found them unfair or somewhat fair. Those who found disciplinary practices fair reported that, 'Discipline is fair as long as both people get the same amount of days'; 'Yes, I feel like it's fair because without it this school would be out of control' and 'Discipline is fair, because they give you in-school and out of school suspension.' Other participants reportedly found disciplinary practices counterproductive and one person reported, 'Discipline is not fair most of time because you can get suspended for not coming to school… like, it doesn't make sense.' A participant suggested that discipline was unfair and perceived that 'The female teachers are afraid of some of the kids here.' Discipline was found to be inconsistent as one participant reported that, 'It's fair but it's also unfair at the same time because if you didn't do anything wrong and you have evidence that you

are innocent you could still get into trouble.' Another participant reported, 'It could be better, discipline isn't always fair.'

School Rules

In assessing the fairness of school rules, the majority of participants agreed that school rules were necessary even if they did not find them fair. Participants reported, 'Yes, I feel like the rules are fair because they are there to protect us'; 'Yes, school rules are fair, without school rules there would be no order' and 'Yes, school rules are always fair.' Other findings showed that one participant reported school rules to be unfair and another reported 'They were not that bad.'

Trusted Adult

To further assess feelings of safety and having a staff member to speak to, the majority of participants reported having a trusted adult to speak with. Responses included, 'I can go to a teacher if I feel unsafe and want to talk'; 'There are a few staff members I can talk to'; 'I do think I can go to staff members although it won't make much difference overall' and "I can talk to the principal.'

Research Question 4: How do students perceive the overall school climate?

For this question, participants reported perceptions of school enjoyment. The common themes were socializing with friends and finding different ways for more socialization.

School Enjoyment

The majority of participants reported that they enjoyed school and cited 'I enjoy seeing my friends at school'; 'I come to school to work on my future and be successful'; 'I enjoy learning new things'; 'I like working alongside my friends' and 'I like joking

with friends.' One participant stated, 'I like school because I am finishing my last year'

while another reported 'Education is important.' Those who reportedly did not enjoy

coming to school reported, 'School is boring'; 'School administration has no control' and

'I am typically already in a bad mood.'

        In assessing student perception of possible changes that could make school more

enjoyable, participants suggested: 'Better classes'; 'More privileges for upper classmen';

'Having more learning methods' and 'Administration having more control.' Furthermore,

several participants reported that they would come to school more often in they, 'Had

more interesting classes' and a few indicated there was 'Nothing administration could do'

to get them to attend school more.'

More Socializing Opportunities

        Results showed that participants had a desire to establish and maintain healthy

relationships within the school and the wanted more group activities and intentional

opportunities for students to bond. One participant reported that 'We should have one

class period where students can go to a specific area to discuss concerns' and others

reported 'Students should talk about problems so they will understand each other' and

'People should communicate more.' Additional responses were, 'Having better

socialization and better communication'; 'Having more group projects'; 'Taking the time

to help others'; 'Having icebreakers and team building activities daily'; 'Having more

activities like music and sports'; 'Having inclusive school activities on Fridays';

'Grouping students according to common interests'; 'Helping each other out'; 'Having

time for students to get to know one another' and 'Having more inclusive activities and

trips.' Other reported ways to help groups get along better at school was actually the

opposite of those mentioned before. While previously mentioned strategies all favored more socialization, some students reported less socialization is best. As such, participants reported, 'Less socializing'; 'Keeping students separate from each other to make sure bullying doesn't occur' and 'Everyone minding their own business' as ways to improve the overall school climate. In addition, one participant reported that the school should control the population by 'Having less students' and another participant reported 'Making sure students understand the work so they don't get upset for not understanding' as a way to create a better school climate.

Summary

The current study examined the relationship between student perceptions of school climate, attendance, or academic achievement. The researcher examined whether students' perceptions of teaching and learning, student-teacher relationships, and school safety were related to attendance or grade point average during the 2018-19 school year. Participants answered questions in each respective category which gave the researcher in-depth analysis of such perceptions. The researcher analyzed eight hypothesis and four research questions to gain an understanding of student perceptions of school climate. Qualitative data analysis offered suggestions on areas of improvement and common themes which may be pivotal to understanding the students' experiences. Reflection, discussion, and recommendations are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Reflection, Recommendations

Overview

  The study on the relationship between student perception of school climate, attendance, and academic achievement in an urban charter high school sought to understand whether student perceptions of the school climate were correlated with attendance rates or academic achievement. For this study, the researcher examined student's perception of teaching and learning, student-teacher relationships, and school safety during the 2018-2019 school year.

  This study examined student perceptions of the school climate in the areas of teaching and learning, relationships with teachers, and school safety and analyzed whether such perceptions were related to attendance rates or grade point average. For this study, 63 participants attending an urban charter school, in grades 9-12 voluntarily completed an anonymous, electronic 25-item survey (adapted from Panorama Instrument with permission [see Appendix A]) or a second anonymous, 8-item (open-ended), electronic survey (see Appendix B). Participants answered questions based on their perceptions of teaching and learning, student-teachers relationships, and school safety. The information obtained from the study provided the school district with pertinent data that aided in establishing and maintaining a more supportive school climate and provided an understanding of the relationship between school climate, attendance, and academic achievement. Information obtained from the study also provided the district with insight into how students perceive their learning environment and possible ways of improving the school climate to increase attendance rates and academic achievement.

Null Hypothesis 1. There is no correlation between student perceptions of teaching and learning and attendance rates.

This item assessed student perceptions of the quality of teaching and the amount of learning that students experience. Data analysis determined there was no relationship between student perceptions of teaching and learning and attendance rates.

Null Hypothesis 2. There is no correlation between student perceptions of student-teacher relationships and attendance rates.

In the current study, the researcher examined student perceptions of student-teacher relationships by assessing the perceived strength of the social connections between students and teachers within and beyond the school. Data analysis showed no relationship between students' perceptions of student-teacher relationships and attendance rates.

Null Hypothesis 3. There is no correlation between student perceptions of school safety and attendance rates.

For this study, the researcher examined student perceptions of physical and psychological safety while at school. Data analysis showed no relationship between students' perceptions of school safety and attendance rates.

Null Hypothesis 4. There is no correlation between student perceptions of the overall school climate and attendance rates.

The researcher analyzed data to determine if a relationship existed between students' perceptions of the overall school climate and attendance rates. Data analysis showed no relationship between students' perceptions of the overall school climate and attendance rates.

Null Hypothesis 5. There is no correlation between student perceptions of teaching and learning and academic achievement.

This item assessed student perceptions of the quality of teaching and amount of learning that students experienced and examined whether such perceptions were related to academic achievement. Data analysis showed no relationship between students' perceptions of teaching and learning and academic achievement.

Null Hypothesis 6. There is no correlation between student perceptions of student-teacher relationships and academic achievement.

In the current study, the researcher examined student perceptions of student-teacher relationships by assessing the perceived strength of social connectedness between teachers and students within and beyond the school. Data analysis showed no relationship between students' perceptions of student-teacher relationships and academic achievement.

Null Hypothesis 7. There is no correlation between student perceptions of school safety and academic achievement.

For this study, the researcher examined student perceptions of school safety by assessing the fairness of rules and disciplinary practices, difficulty obtaining help from an adult, fighting at school, bullying incidents, and perceived student disrespect. Data analysis showed no relationship between students' perceptions of school safety and academic achievement.

Null Hypothesis 8. There is no correlation between student perceptions of the overall school climate and academic achievement.

The researcher analyzed data to determine if a relationship existed between student perceptions of the overall school climate and academic achievement. The study specifically examined student perceptions of the overall social learning climate of the school to include school energy, behaviors that help or hurt learning, whether the environment is pleasant and whether discipline is consistent. Data analysis showed no relationship between student perception of the overall school climate and academic achievement.

Discussion

Although findings of the current study were inconsistent with many previous studies and the researcher found no correlations between student perceptions of school climate, attendance or academic achievement, recent studies have shown variables of school climate (such as teaching and learning, student-teacher relationships, and school safety) to be subordinate factors of student attendance rates and academic achievements.

Teaching and learning. Ocak et al. (2017) reported that teaching and learning played only a small role in student attendance rates, and variables outside of the school climate and teaching and learning were more significant absenteeism and academic standing indicators. Illness, family concerns, emotional well-being, socio-economic status, family responsibilities, and living situations were found to be strongly correlated with student attendance rates (Ocak et al., 2017). Consistently, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2016) reported the main causes of absenteeism as bad grades, bullying, illness, family responsibilities, psychological health, and housing concerns, which further supports the notion that teaching and learning may not be as strongly correlated with attendance rates or academic achievement as previously thought.

As the current study failed to reject $H_0$1- There is no correlation between student perceptions of teaching and learning and attendance, and $H_0$5 - There is no correlation between student perceptions of teaching and learning and academic achievement, the researcher proposes that future research explores attendance, academic achievement, and perceptions of teaching and learning as separate entities. By looking at each variable independently, researchers will gain a better understanding of factors that influence each one individually and identify correlates and common themes. As this study solely focused on students' perceptions of teaching and learning as a correlate of attendance rates or academic achievement, further research should explore primary variables (outside of the school) that may influence attendance rates and academic achievement at the research site.

Student-teacher relationships. Cook et al. (2018) reported that positive student-teacher relationships implant a perception of belongingness, independence, and skill that motivates students to be more actively engaged in academics and attend school regularly; thus, establishing a correlation between student-teacher relationships and attendance. Although perceptions of student-teacher relationships are often complicated and difficult to measure, researchers (Wang & Degol, 2015; Ekstrand, 2015) found a significant relationship between student-teacher relationships and attendance rates; therefore, the findings of the present study were unforeseen and warrant further investigation. In a recent study, the U.S. Department of Education (2019) found that African American students were 40% more likely to miss three or more weeks from school than white counterparts and that 20% of high school students were absent more than 20 days per school year. Reasons for the attendance rates were attributed to poor health,

transportation concerns, or lack of safety. Similarly, Ocak et al., (2017), found that

attendance rates were more closely related to lack of essential school materials, an

obligation to work and provide financial support, family trauma such as death or

incarceration, disinterest in school due to family disapproval, sexual abuse, location of

student house from the school, transportation concerns, mental or physical illness,

relationships with peers, and community trauma. Furthermore, other studies purported

that although student-teacher relationships may correlate with attendance rates, factors

outside of the school such as family concerns, economics, and psychological health are

more closely related to attendance rates and academic achievement and have greater

influence than the student-teacher relationship (Ocak et al., 2017). As the researcher

failed to reject $H_0$2- There is no correlation between student perceptions of student-

teacher relationships and attendance rates, and $H_0$6- There is no correlation between

student perceptions of student-teacher relationships and academic achievement, the

findings indicate that perceptions of student-teacher relationships are multidimensional

subsets of the school climate and should be explored more closely. Current findings did

not suggest that student-teacher relationships were trivial; however, findings suggested

that such relationships were not correlated with attendance rates or academics

achievement at the time of the study. As such, future research exploring variables that

contribute to perceptions of student-teacher relationships will shed light on ways that

student-teacher relationships impact attendance rates and academic achievement at the

research site.

      School safety. According to Wang et al. (2020), the rate of students reported

safety concerns (fear of being attacked or harmed at school) recently decreased

nationwide; however, rates for African American students increased from 3 to 7% (p. 87).

Additional results indicated that 6% of students skipped school, cut one or more classes,

or avoided certain areas within the school for fear of being attacked or harm at school

(Wang et el., 2020, p. 90). Such findings are inconsistent with the current study, which

failed to reject H_03- there is no relationship between student perceptions of school safety

and attendance and H_07- there is no relationship between student perceptions of school

safety and academic achievement. To gain a more in-depth assessment of student

perceptions, the researcher analyzed each survey question individually using the Pearson

Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and a *t*-test. Data analysis on Q3showed that

students' responses and their attendance rates were negatively correlated. The negative

relationship implies that students who reportedly worried more often about physical

safety at school had higher attendance rates. Additional data analysis showed that

students' responses and their attendance rates were moderately correlated. The positive

relationship implies that students who reported that it was difficult to get help from adults

when students are bullied at school had lower attendance rates, which supports Wangs et

al., (2020) research findings. As such, the variability in responses warrants further

investigation.

Overall school climate. Research has shown that a positive school climate

increases attendance, academic achievement, attitudes, motivation, and self-esteem while

decreasing acts of delinquency, bullying, and behavioral concerns (Gage et al., 2016).

Although school climate has been regarded as the foundation on which attendance and

academic achievement are formed, Jones and Schindler (2017) found that the quality of

the school climate greatly diminished from primary to secondary school. Thus, a higher

quality school climate produces students who are more academically sound compared to those attending a lower quality school climate, and elementary schools typically have higher quality school climates than high schools. The current study failed to reject $H_0 4$- there is no relationship between student perceptions of the overall school climate and attendance, and $H_0 8$- there is no relationship between student perceptions of overall school climate and academic achievement. To gain a more in-depth assessment of student perceptions, the researcher analyzed each survey question individually using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and a *t*-test. Data analysis on Question 3 showed the students' responses and attendance rates were negatively correlated. The negative relationship implies that students who reported that others' behavior at school helped their learning more often had lower attendance rates. Data analysis on Question 3 also showed students' responses and academic achievement were negatively correlated. The negative relationship implies that students who reported that others' behavior at school helped their learning more often had lower grade point averages. As the two findings are inconsistent, the degree to which "the behaviors of others helped" their learning was not fully explored and warrants further investigation.

Research Question 1: **How do students perceive teaching and learning?**

To assess students' perceptions of teaching and learning, participants were asked to rate questions specifically related to changes needed to create a better learning environment, perceptions of learning since entering high school, challenges since entering high school, views on teaching methods, encouragement from teachers, teacher training, and effectiveness of teaching methods. Results showed that common themes included wanting a better learning environment, low academic rigor, academic and

behavioral challenges to learning, feeling encouraged by teachers, teachers being adequately trained, and having effective teaching methods. Most participants reported they would like to see changes made to academics that reflect having more interesting classes and a better selection of elective classes. Participants would like the school to offer classes more applicable to life and classes that encourage more group work. Several participants also noted that they would like to see more advanced placement classes, while other participants would like teaching styles to change. Participants suggested that they would like to have teachers who care about students and teachers who care more about education. Several participants also noted changes needed in how teachers interact with students and teachers with better classroom management. As such, discipline was a concern, with participants reporting that school discipline should be better enforced and those who do not obey school rules should not be allowed in class.

The majority of participants reportedly felt like they learned more in middle school, although they reported having higher expectations in high school. They also reported that they take more tests in high school but did not feel like they will be prepared for college. Although more than a few participants believed they learned more in high school, participants were not confident that they were learning on a high school level, with many of them reporting that high school was a review of material learned in middle school.

Participants believed a major challenge since coming to high school was earning credits towards graduation as high school does not offer social promotion. Many participants found it very hard to adjust to the idea that they had to attend class, complete all assignments, pass the class, and earn a credit to graduate from high school. In

addition, attending classes consistently proved to be a challenge for many, while staying

focused in classes was hard for others. Participants reported often being distracted by

peers, who made it difficult to learn at times. Concurrently, participants reported

numerous fights and negativity within the class, which further distracted them from

learning.

   The consensus among most participants suggested that teachers encourage

students to keep trying. As participants reported that teachers encourage them to achieve

success in high school and beyond, they perceive that teachers ultimately want them to be

successful. Some participants reported that teachers offer more encouragement when they

recognize that students are frustrated, and others suggested that although teachers want

them to succeed, some students rejected the offers and did not want to be in school.

Based on participants' responses, they were aware of some of the challenges teachers face

when motivating students, managing classes, and working to ensure that individual

student needs are met. Although challenges were noted, most participants perceive

teachers to be adequately trained and doing an awesome job in the classroom.

   While many participants reported teaching methods were effective, some

participants reportedly found them ineffective. This is somewhat inconsistent with the

aforementioned, which suggested that teachers were adequately trained, that teachers

encouraged students, and were doing an awesome job teaching. As many participants

only perceived *some* teaching methods to be effective, this may account for the

inconsistency in participant responses. Those who reported teaching methods were

effective noted "one-on-one teaching" and "after school tutoring" proved beneficial in

"helping them learn." In contrast, those who reported that improvements were needed

suggested that teachers should use differentiation as students learn in different ways.

Student perceptions of teaching and learning suggested that the school offer more

engaging classes, incorporate different teaching styles, and enforce disciplinary practices

to make a better learning environment. Although students perceived teachers as effective

overall, they would like to have more academic rigor to include more advanced

placement classes and distraction-free classrooms. Participants were challenged with the

notion of earning high school credits and having several distractions in the learning

environment. Though teaching methods were reportedly effective, participants suggested

that teachers could be more effective as they perceived them to be adequately trained.

Additionally, teachers were very encouraging and showed that they wanted students to

succeed.

Data analysis indicated no correlation between student perception of teaching and

learning and attendance, and there was no relationship between student perceptions of

teaching and learning and academic achievement. However, the qualitative analysis

indicated that participants were confident in teaching and learning as most responses

were positive. Although no correlation was established, results showed that teaching and

learning were a positive aspect of the school climate. Future research should focus on

ways to continuously improve the school climate in the area of teaching and learning,

therefore enabling a more conducive learning environment for all.

Research Question 2: **How do students perceive relationships with teachers?**

To assess students' perceptions of relationships with teachers, participants were

asked to rate questions related explicitly to feeling supported by teachers, feeling

respected by teachers, and whether they perceived their presence to be important to

teachers.

      Results showed that participants felt supported by teachers. Participants reported

that teachers motivated them and encouraged individuality. Many participants reported

feeling supported and understood by teachers and perceived that teachers could easily

relate to students. Simultaneously, participants with less favorable perceptions indicated

that teachers were not supportive, only doing their jobs and that some of the teachers

showed favoritism towards certain students. A few students reported that they were not

supported because they did not receive help when asked and, as a result, had failed class.

Those who reported that they were not supported by teachers reported having positive

relationships with *some* of their teachers, and one participant reported feeling a sense of

inferiority to teachers.

      Participants reported feeling respected by teachers as evidenced by how they were

treated (given extra privileges, being treated fairly, and being able to do things freely). As

most participants reportedly felt respected, others reportedly felt like they were not

respected or conditionally respected. Participants reported they were respected *if* they

respected teachers, and one participant felt no respect because 'teachers didn't help when

needed.' Other participants reportedly perceived they were not respected due to language

used by teachers when addressing students and how teachers reportedly "looked" at them.

      Participants reportedly perceived their presence was important as teachers cannot

do their job if students are not at school. Several participants reported that their presence

was important because it validated teachers in doing their jobs well, and others perceived

that teachers were proud of them for attending school. Only a few participants perceived

their presence was not important and reported, "No, I do not feel like my presence is important to some teachers"; "No I don't think it's important" and "I don't really think my presence is important to teachers because I just don't think they care that much."

Participants perceived relationships with teachers to be supportive, respectful, and reported their presence was important to teachers. Most participants reported that they were supported by teachers and that teachers showed them individual attention and motivated them. Having supportive teachers is pivotal to having a positive school experience as such relationships establish the foundation of a positive learning environment and the foundation of future relationships (Cook et al., 2018). As many students spend more time with teachers than any other adults, establishing and maintaining relationships with teachers paves the way for successful school experiences (Cook et al., 2018). Researchers (Obsuth et al., 2017) suggested relationships with teachers to be one of the strongest predictors of emotional well-being, giving students feelings of self-worth and respect. Consistent with such findings, participants in the current study reportedly felt respected when they were granted autonomy and were treated fairly. Additionally, participants reported their presence was important to teachers, which further supports perceptions of positive relationships with teachers in that satisfying students' needs for relatedness establishes motivation and encouragement, which prepares students to meet the social-emotional and academic demands of school (Alastair & Thorsen, 2018).

Although the current study failed to reject $H_0 2$-there is no relationship between student perceptions of student-teacher relationships and attendance and $H_0 6$- there is no relationship between student perceptions of teaching and learning and academic

achievement, qualitative data suggested that participants perceived positive student-

teacher relationships. As previous research supported the notion that positive student-

teacher relationships allow for increased attendance and academic achievement, the

current study showed that positive relationships existed, albeit not related to attendance

or academic achievement. As such, this is consistent with other studies which suggested

student-teacher relationships were highly significant yet secondary regarding attendance

and academic outcomes (Ocak et al., 2017).

Research Question 3: How do students perceive school safety?

Attachment theories provide a framework for understanding how students'

perceptions are formed and how such perceptions influence feelings of safety and

security (Wang & Degol, 2015). Having a working knowledge of attachment theories is

relevant in that it would provide educators with a real-world view of student's needs and

enable educators to nurture and respond to unfavorable or disruptive behaviors in ways

that ensure students' emotional and safety needs were met (Harlow, 2018). Recent

research has shown that when the school environment becomes a place of safety and

security, the potential for students learning and development is maximized. As such, one

can ascertain that developing relationships that foster safety and security and having a

school environment that produces a sense of safety, security, and belonging are

paramount for students within the education arena (McCleod, 2017).

Responses to research question three suggested that although students felt safe at

school, there were quite a few concerns about fighting, having adequate security officers

in the school, security practices, and the possibility of weapons being brought into the

school. The reported safety concerns were significant and possibly annulled statements of

being safe. Participants who reportedly felt safe were few, while most participants

reportedly felt safe sometimes. Participants reported they were concerned for their safety

due to not having enough security guards, security guards needing to carry guns, random

people being allowed to come into the building, morning security checks not being

thorough, and students thinking it is "cool" to bring weapons to school. Many of the

participants who reportedly felt safe also reported concerns indicating that they are "safe

as long as they aren't in the way of others" and "the only thing that may harm them

would be a fight." As participants reported that the school has a lot of fights, this was a

major safety concern. Such findings were consistent with previous studies (Wahab et al.,

2018), which reported that student behaviors and characteristics of the communities

served may produce vulnerabilities in school safety and security.

Participants reported witnessing violence at school, with some students reportedly

being desensitized. Most participants reported witnessing fights and yelling amongst

other students. Although all participants reportedly witnessed fights and arguments,

several believed such incidents to be "petty," "senseless" or "silly." Some participants

reportedly felt fine witnessing fights as long as it had nothing to do with them. One

participant explained that conflict is inevitable due to the number of people and different

personalities within the school and, therefore, perceived such incidents as common for a

school.

Many participants believed discipline to be fair as they perceived students were

given equal consequences for similar behaviors. Several participants reported the need for

discipline in the school but noted that it is only fair *if* students are treated the same. As

such, several participants spoke to the unfairness of disciplinary practices in that students

are suspended for things they did not do and reported that students were sometimes

suspended for missing too many days of school. Other participants reported inconsistent

disciplinary practices and favoritism towards certain students.

As participants reported the need for school rules, they also found them to be fair.

Although participants reportedly disliked some of the school rules, they reported that

"rules were there to protect us" and "without school rules there would be no order."

When questioned about witnessing bullying at school, very few participants

responded. Those who answered reported that although they had witnessed several

incidents at school, nothing was done in response. Other participants reported that

students were afraid to speak up when they witnessed bullying, and nothing happened

when they informed school staff. Interestingly, none of the participants reported feelings

associated with bullying incidents, although they were specifically asked to rate how they

felt. However, most participants reported having a trusted adult to speak with if they felt

unsafe or needed to talk, while a few reported that speaking with staff would not help.

As bullying has gained national attention and poses a threat to victims, witnesses,

and the school climate in general, research findings from the current study are consistent

with Petrie's (2014) findings. Most participants only felt safe sometimes due to real or

perceived threats by other students. According to Petrie (2014), students' perceptions of

school safety are directly correlated with reported perceptions and prevalence of bullying

and violence. As such, most participants reported feeling somewhat safe while suggesting

a plethora of activities that posed threats to student safety and numerous changes needed

to ensure the safety of students. All participants reportedly witnessed acts of violence at

school, and few reported that they were desensitized or not bothered. Although

participants were reportedly desensitized, they listed an overabundant number of concerns relating to school safety overall. As responses proved inconsistent and few students reported feelings associated with school safety, violence, and bullying, data suggested that students did not feel safe at school and were reluctant to provide additional information about bullying. Participants reportedly believed disciplinary practices and rules to be somewhat fair and reported having trusted adults to speak with, yet they did not perceive that current security measures or school staff could ensure their safety. Participants were willing to discuss perceptions of overall school safety, violence, disciplinary practices, and rules but unwilling or unable to discuss bullying. These findings were consistent with other researchers who purported such challenges in identifying and extinguishing bullying behaviors (Petrie, 2014).

Quantitative data analysis showed no correlation between student perceptions of school safety and attendance and no correlation between student perceptions of school safety and academic achievement. However, quantitative analysis showed that students who reportedly worried more about safety at school had a higher attendance rate. Those who reported that it was difficult to get help when someone was bullied at school had lower attendance rates. Although the findings were somewhat inconsistent and warranted further investigation, the latter was consistent with previous findings indicating the emergent need to fully explore the many facets of bullying to improve the school climate and eliminate safety concerns.

Research Question 4: How do students perceive the overall school climate?

Results showed that an overwhelming majority of students reported having positive perceptions of the overall school climate. Most participants reportedly favored

the socialization aspect of school more than academics. The majority of participants

reported that having more socialization opportunities would motivate them to attend

school more often, and a few reported having better classes would motivate them. One

student reported having a bad mood when coming to school and feeling unmotivated,

while others thought education was important and looked forward to graduating high

school. As participants reported that groups of students would get along better if they had

more opportunities for appropriate interactions, suggestions included having more

activities that intentionally bring students together and having more sports and music

activities. Other suggestions encompassed promoting positive communication among

students and having an office where students could mediate as needed. A few participants

suggested that less socialization would keep conflicts down and ensure that students got

along better, while another participant reported that the school simply had too many

students.

Although the current study failed to reject $H_0 4$-there is no correlation between

student perceptions of overall school climate and attendance and $H_0 8$-there is no

correlation between student perceptions of school climate and academic achievement,

additional analysis showed that those who reported the behaviors of others at school

helped them learn more had lower attendance rates (negative correlations) and those who

reported the behaviors of others helped them at school had lower grade point averages

(negative correlation). Such inconsistencies are not clearly understood and therefore

warrant further investigation. It is worth noting that participants reported several

unfavorable events and safety concerns and wanted more positive interactions within the

school. There may be a correlation between negative behaviors of others and attendance

rates and academic achievement that has not been explored.

Reflections

The current study examined the relationship between student perceptions of

school climate, attendance or academic achievement in an urban charter school. The

researcher examined whether students' perceptions of teaching and learning, teacher-

student relationships, and school safety were related to attendance or grade point average

during the 2018-19 school year. Participants answered questions in each respective

category which gave the researcher an in-depth analysis of such perceptions. Qualitative

data provided suggestions on improvement and common themes, which may be pivotal to

understanding the students' experiences. For this study, attendance was measured by the

number of days present and academic achievement measured by grade point average for

the 2018-19 school year. The researcher analyzed student survey data, attendance rates,

and grade point average to establish a correlation between variables. Mixed methods

allowed the researcher to gain impartial insight into student perceptions of the overall

school climate and students' perceptions of teaching and learning, relationships with

teachers, and perceptions of school safety. The study also allowed the researcher to

determine if a relationship existed between students' perceptions of the school climate,

attendance, and academic achievement

For this study, 65 surveys were completed by participants (with parental consent).

Participants voluntarily answered survey questions that were adapted from the Panorama

Students Survey (with permission). Overall participation was satisfactory and survey

completion time was adequate. Although the researcher hoped to obtain results from 100

surveys, adequate data were extracted from the 63 completed. All surveys were

completed on time, and participants answered all questions on the multiple-choice

surveys. However, items were skipped on the open-ended survey. As most participants

were in their first year of high school, the researcher believes that results may be skewed,

and future research should be more inclusive of the entire student body. In the area of

teaching and learning, participants were forthcoming and answered all questions on both

surveys. Qualitative data showed that most participants wanted changes in class

offerings. Many students suggested that classes were not engaging or applicable, and they

would prefer fashion design, music, and home economics classes. The researcher did not

find these results shocking as past research has shown that students are more engaged in

classes they like or to which they can relate. As participants noted several distractions

within the classroom, it came as no surprise that students also desired teachers to have

better classroom management. However, the researcher was shocked by responses

indicating that participants perceived learning more in middle school than high school.

Although responses indicated that high school demanded more tests, most participants

believed the content to be very similar. Additionally, students did not hold back

expressing academic and behavioral challenges in the learning environment. Participants

reported that they were off-task and often distracted by negativity and fights, even when

they were not directly involved. As most participants noted numerous safety concerns,

such findings shed light on the fact that most participants did not feel safe at school. This

caused a great deal of reflection as some participants also reported that they were

unbothered by such incidents and not have been forthcoming in their responses. As very

few students answered questions pertaining to bullying and feelings associated with

witnessing bullying, it is strongly recommended that future research focuses on bullying

behaviors and implementation of bullying rules and laws within the school.

Recommendations

As the current study found no correlations between students' perceptions of school

climate, attendance, or academic achievement, future research should examine the

relationship between bullying, attendance, and academic achievement. The current study

found that participants who reported difficulty getting help from an adult when students

are bullied showed lower attendance rates, therefore establishing a relationship between

the two variables. Participants willing to discuss perceptions of overall school safety,

violence, disciplinary practices, and rules but unwilling to discuss bullying findings were

consistent with other researchers who purported such challenges in identifying and

extinguishing bullying behaviors (Petrie, 2014). These conflicting findings should be

explored more thoroughly.

By examining the relationship between bullying, attendance rates, and academic

achievement, future researchers and stakeholders could employ methods to combat

bullying behaviors while increasing attendance rates and grade point averages.

Furthermore, such research should include participants from various grade levels and

those attending several local charter schools, which would optimize the generalizability

of results. Although the current study did not focus on bullying specifically, the results of

this study shed light on student experiences with bullying and their perceived help from

adults, which may be a missing link to thoroughly understanding how students perceive

the school climate. By taking a closer look at bullying and the school climate, and the

implementation of anti-bullying rules and laws, future researchers could extend the

limited body of research by examining all possible variables that contribute to student

success and the degree to which each item hinders or encourages student success.

Researchers could gain a better understanding of the variables that ensure a positive

school climate and more opportunities for optimum success.

Conclusion

In the current study, the researcher examined the possible relationship between

students' perceptions of school climate, attendance, and academic achievement. Although

quantitative results showed no correlation between the variable subsets, data analysis

showed a relationship between student perceptions of bullying and attendance rates. In

contrast, qualitative results showed participants' reluctance to discuss bullying-related

issues. These findings shed light on necessary future research that can address systemic

attendance, academic, safety, and bullying-related concerns within the school. With

national suicide rates on a steady rise and increased technology use to include social

media exposure, it is imperative that educational institutions become more aware of

variables that contribute to negative perceptions of the school climate and experiences

that may have life-altering effects for students. Furthermore, as future research maintains

consistent reporting positive relationships between perceptions of school climate,

attendance, and academic achievement, it becomes more pertinent to examine and fully

understand the extent to which bullying may shape student perceptions and the effects of

bullying within the school environment.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Panorama Student Survey

Directions: Please answer sections A and B based on your experiences with one (1) current teacher of your choosing.

Grade: _____

A. Perceptions of teaching and learning

  1. How often does your teacher appear excited to teach class?
     Almost never   Once in a while   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost always
  2. How often does your teacher make learning interesting?
     Almost never   Once in a while   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost always
  3. How often does your teacher give feedback that helps you learn?
     Almost never   Once in a while   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost always
  4. How often does your teacher appear knowledgeable of what he/she is teaching?

     Almost never   Once in a while   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost always
  5. How often is subject area information presented in a way that you understand?
     Almost never   Once in a while   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost always

B. Perceptions of student-teacher relationships

  1. How respectful is your teacher (towards students) at your school?
     Very disrespectful   Somewhat disrespectful Neither   Somewhat respectful   Very respectful
  2. If you came to class upset, how concerned would your teacher be?
     Very unconcerned   Somewhat unconcerned   Unsure   Somewhat concerned   Very concerned
  3. If you came back to visit the school three years from now, how excited would your teacher be to see you?
     Not at all excited   Slightly excited   Neither   Somewhat excited Very excited
  4. How often do you feel that your teacher genuinely cares about you?
     Almost never   Once in a while   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost always
  5. How often do you feel that your teacher supports students in your school?
     Almost never   Once in a while   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost always
  6. How often do you feel connected to your teacher?

Almost never   Once in a while   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost always

C. School Safety

1. How often are students disrespectful to others at your school?
Almost never   Once in a while   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost always

2. How likely is it that someone from your school will be bullied online?
Very unlikely   Somewhat unlikely   Neither   Somewhat likely
Very likely

3. How often do you worry your about physical safety while at school?
Almost never   Once in a while   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost always

4. If a student is bullied at school, how difficult is it to get help from an adult?
Very difficult Slightly difficult   Neither   Somewhat difficult
Not difficult

5. How often do students get into physical fights at your school?
Almost never   Once in a while   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost always

6. How fair are the rules for students at your school?
Very unfair   Somewhat unfair   Neither   Somewhat fair Very fair

7. How fair is discipline at your school?
Very unfair   Somewhat unfair   Neither   Somewhat fair Very fair

D. Overall school climate

1. How positive or negative is the energy of your school?
Very negative Somewhat negative   Neither   Somewhat positive   Very positive

2. At your school, how often does the behavior of others *hurt* your learning?
Almost never   Once in a while   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost always

3. At your school, how often does the behavior of others *help* your learning?
Almost never   Once in a while   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost always

4. How pleasant is the physical environment at your school?
Very unpleasant   Somewhat unpleasant   Neutral   Somewhat pleasant
Very pleasant

5. How consistent is the overall discipline at your school?
Very inconsistent   Somewhat inconsistent   Neither   Somewhat consistent   Very consistent

6. How often do you feel an overall sense of belonging at your school?
Almost never   Once in a while   Sometimes   Frequently   Almost always

Appendix B: Open Ended Survey Questions

1. If you were principal, what one change would you make to ensure that the school

   feels safer?

2. What is the best idea for how groups of people at the school could get along

   better?

3. What could the school change to make a better learning environment?

4. Describe your learning since coming to high school

   a. Do you feel like you learned more in middle school?

   b. What are some of the challenges to learning in high school?

5. Explain your view on teaching methods at your school.

   a. Do your teachers encourage you to keep trying?

   b. Do you think your teachers are adequately trained?

   c. Are teaching methods effective?

6. Describe student-teacher relationships at your school.

   a. Do you feel supported by your teachers? Why or why not?

   b. Do you feel respected by your teachers? Why or why not?

   c. Do you think your presence is important to your teachers? Why or why not?

7. Explain how you feel about safety at your school.

   a. Do you feel safe at school?

   b. Have you witnessed violence (fights, arguments) at school? How did you feel?

   c. Is discipline fair? Why or why not?

   d. Are school rules fair? Why or why not?

   e. Have you witnessed acts of bullying? If so, how did you feel?

    f.   Is there a staff member who you can talk to if you feel unsafe?

8. Do you enjoy coming to school? Why or why not?

    a.   If you enjoy school, what are some things you enjoy?

    b.   If not, what could make it more enjoyable?

    c.   Is there anything school administration could do take get you to come to school daily?

Appendix C: Parent Consent Letter

LINDENWOOD

Research Study Consent Form

Mixed method study of the relationship between student perception of school climate, attendance and academic achievement in an urban charter high school

Note: "You" in this form refers to the minor participant. If an activity or requirement refers to the parent or guardian consenting on behalf of the minor, this will be clearly indicated.

Before reading this consent form, please know:

- Your decision to participate is your choice
- You will have time to think about the study
- You will be able to withdraw from this study at any time
- You are free to ask questions about the study at any time

    After reading this consent form, we hope that you will know:

- Why we are conducting this study
- What you will be required to do
- What are the possible risks and benefits of the study
- What alternatives are available, if the study involves treatment or therapy
- What to do if you have questions or concerns during the study

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Basic information about this study:

- We are interested in learning about students' perceptions of the school climate in areas of: teaching and learning, relationships with teachers and safety and whether such perceptions are related to attendance or academic achievement.
- You will answer a 25-item electronic survey or an 8-item electronic, open ended survey
- There are minimal risks of participation

LINDENWOOD

Research Study Consent Form

Mixed method study of the relationship between student perception of school climate, attendance, and academic achievement in an urban charter high school

You are asked to participate in a research study being conducted by Danielle Carter under the guidance of Robyne Elder at Lindenwood University. Being in a research study is voluntary, and you are free to stop at any time. Before you choose to participate, you are free to discuss this research study with family, friends, or a physician. Do not feel like you must join this study until all your questions or concerns are answered. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form.

Why is this research being conducted?
We are doing this study to identify how students perceive the school climate in areas of: teaching and learning, relationships with teachers, and safety and whether such perceptions are related to attendance or academic achievement. We will be asking about 60 other people to answer these questions.

What am I being asked to do?
Step 1- The researcher will visit classes and ask for student volunteers to participate in the study.
Step 2- Interested students will receive consent forms to be signed and returned to the researcher as soon as possible.
Step 3- Upon returning consent forms for participation in the research, the researcher will email the Qualtrics survey(s) link to participants.
Step 4- Student volunteer will complete one or both surveys at his/her availability and convenience at home or at school (using a school computer).

How long will I be in this study?

Survey completion will take approximately 30 minutes. Survey collection will continue until a minimum of 50-60 surveys have been completed, with the study scheduled to conclude in July 2019. Student participation in the study will conclude once the survey is completed (30 minutes for one survey or 1 hour for both surveys).

What are the risks of this study?
Risks of the study may include unfavorable findings for school community (including teachers, administrators, non-participating students and the researcher). However, only important findings relating to students' perception of school climate, attendance and academic achievement in an urban charter high school will be shared with the school and community. No surveys will be used for teacher or school evaluations. Because the

surveys contain questions that are sensitive, Qualtrics will be used to make sure that no identifiable information is released.

What are the benefits of this study?
Although there is no direct benefit for participation in the study, the school/district will benefit by learning how students perceive the school climate which will assist in creating a more conducive learning environment in the future.

Will I receive any compensation?
No

What if I do not choose to participate in this research?
It is always your choice to participate in this study. You may withdraw at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions or perform tasks that make you uncomfortable. If you decide to withdraw, you will not receive any penalty or loss of benefits. If you would like to withdraw from a study, please use the contact information found at the end of this form.

What if new information becomes available about the study?
During this study, we may find information that could be important to you and your decision to participate in this research. We will notify you as soon as possible if such information becomes available.

How will you keep my information private?
We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. We do not intend to include information that could identify you in any publication or presentation. Any information we collect will be stored by the researcher in a secure location. The only people who will be able to see your data are: members of the research team, qualified staff of Lindenwood University and representatives of state or federal agencies. All information will be obtained via anonymous-electronic format using Qualtrics automatically generated coding to code respondent identities and pertinent information.

How can I withdraw from this study?

Notify the research team immediately if you would like to withdraw from this research study.

Who can I contact with questions or concerns?

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in this study, you may contact the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board Director, Michael Leary, at (636) 949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu. You can contact the researcher, Danielle Carter directly at 314-372-9683 or Dnc289@lindenwood.edu. You may also contact Robyne Elder, Relder@lindenwood.edu .

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

_____   _____

Parent or Legally Authorized Representative's   **Date**
Signature

_____

Parent or Legally Authorized Representative's
Printed Name

_____   _____

Signature of Principal Investigator or Designee   **Date**

_____

Investigator or Designee Printed Name

Appendix D: Student Assent

LINDENWOOD

Research Study Assent Form

What is research?

We are going to do a research study. A research study is when a researcher or doctor collects information to learn more about something. During this research study, we are going to learn more about students' perceptions of the school climate in areas of: teaching and learning, relationships with teachers and safety and whether such perceptions are related to attendance or academic achievement. After we tell you more about this study, we would like to ask you about being part of it.

We also will be asking about 50-60 other people to be part of this study.

What will you ask me to do?

Step 1- The researcher will visit classes and ask for student volunteers to participate in the study.
Step 2- Interested students will receive consent forms to be signed and returned to the researcher as soon as possible.
Step 3- Upon returning consent forms for participation in the research, the researcher will email the Qualtrics survey(s) link to participants.
Step 4- Student volunteer will complete one or both surveys at his/her availability and convenience at home or at school (using a school computer).

Will I be harmed during this study?

You will not be harmed during the study. Some of the questions are sensitive but you will not be harmed in any way by participating in the study. All of your answers will be strictly anonymous and confidential. Qualtrics will be used to make sure that none of your identifiable information is released.

Will I benefit from being in this study?

You will not get anything special if you decide to be part of this study. We hope what we learn will help other children.

Do I have to be in this research?

No, you do not. If you do not want to be in this research study, just tell us. You can also tell us later if you do not want to be part of it anymore. No one will be mad at you and you can talk to us at any time if you are nervous.

What if I have questions?

You can ask us questions right now about the research study. You can ask questions later if you want to. You can also talk to someone else about the study if you want to. In addition, you can change your mind at any time. Being in this research study is up to you.

If you want to be in this research study, just tell us. Or you can sign your name in the blank below. We will give you a copy of this form to keep.

By clicking the link below, I confirm that I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above.

_____   _____
Minor Participant's Signature   **Date**

_____
Minor Participant's Printed Name

_____   _____
Signature of Principle Investigator or Designee   **Date**

_____
Investigator or Designee Printed Name

Appendix E: Adult Student Consent

LINDENWOOD

Research Study Consent Form

Mixed method study of the relationship between student perception of school climate, attendance, and academic achievement in an urban charter high school

Before reading this consent form, please know:

- Your decision to participate is your choice
- You will have time to think about the study
- You will be able to withdraw from this study at any time
- You are free to ask questions about the study at any time

After reading this consent form, we hope that you will know:

- Why we are conducting this study
- What you will be required to do
- What are the possible risks and benefits of the study
- What alternatives are available if the study involves treatment or therapy
- What to do if you have questions or concerns during the study

---

Basic information about this study:

- We are interested in learning about students' perceptions of the school climate in areas of: teaching and learning, relationships with teachers and safety and whether such perceptions are related to attendance or academic achievement.
- You will answer a 25-item electronic survey or an 8-item electronic, open ended survey
- There are minimal risks of participation

LINDENWOOD

Research Study Consent Form

Mixed method study of the relationship between student perception of school climate, attendance, and academic achievement in an urban charter high school

You are asked to participate in a research study being conducted by Danielle Carter under the guidance of Robyne Elder at Lindenwood University. Being in a research study is voluntary, and you are free to stop at any time. Before you choose to participate, you are free to discuss this research study with family, friends, or a physician. Do not feel like you must join this study until all of your questions or concerns are answered. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form.

Why is this research being conducted?

We are doing this study to identify how students perceive the school climate in areas of: teaching and learning, relationships with teachers, and safety and whether such perceptions are related to attendance or academic achievement. We will be asking about 60 other people to answer these questions

What am I being asked to do?

Step 1- The researcher will visit classes and ask for student volunteers to participate in the study.
Step 2- Interested students will receive consent forms to be signed and returned to the researcher as soon as possible.
Step 3- Upon returning consent forms for participation in the research, the researcher will email the Qualtrics survey(s) link to participants.
Step 4- Student volunteer will complete one or both surveys at his/her availability and convenience at home or at school (using a school computer).

How long will I be in this study?

Survey completion will take approximately 30 minutes. Survey collection will continue until a minimum of 50-60 surveys have been completed, with the study scheduled to conclude in July 2019. Student participation in the study will conclude once the survey is completed (30 minutes for one survey or 1 hour for both surveys).

What are the risks of this study?

- Privacy and Confidentiality

We will be collecting data that could identify you, but each survey response will receive a code so that we will not know who answered each survey. The code connecting you and your data will be destroyed as soon as possible.

We are collecting data that could identify you, such as average attendance rate and grade point average. Every effort will be made to keep your information secure. Only members of the research team will be able to see any data that may identify you.

What are the benefits of this study?

You will receive no direct benefits for completing this survey. We hope what we learn may benefit other people in the future.

What if I do not choose to participate in this research?

It is always your choice to participate in this study. You may withdraw at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions or perform tasks that make you uncomfortable. If you decide to withdraw, you will not receive any penalty or loss of benefits. If you would like to withdraw from a study, please use the contact information found at the end of this form.

What if new information becomes available about the study?

During the course of this study, we may find information that could be important to you and your decision to participate in this research. We will notify you as soon as possible if such information becomes available.

How will you keep my information private?

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. We do not intend to include information that could identify you in any publication or presentation. Any information we collect will be stored by the researcher in a secure location. The only people who will be able to see your data are: members of the research team, qualified staff of Lindenwood University, representatives of state or federal agencies.

How can I withdraw from this study?

Notify the research team immediately if you would like to withdraw from this research study.

Who can I contact with questions or concerns?

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in

this study, you may contact the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board
Director, Michael Leary, at (636) 949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu. You can contact
the researcher, Danielle Carter directly at 314-372-9683 or Dnc289@lindenwood.edu.
You may also contact Robyne Elder, Relder@lindenwood.edu .

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will
also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in
the research described above.

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   **Date**

_____

Participant's Printed Name

_____   _____

Signature of Principle Investigator or Designee   **Date**

_____

Investigator or Designee Printed Name

Appendix F: Research Approval Documentation

Permission to conduct research at school:

CC Candice Carter-Oliver | Danielle Carter   12:

RE: Dissertation Review

Sounds good. Thanks.

From: Danielle Carter
Sent: Monday, August 20, 2018 12:27 PM
To: Candice Carter-Oliver <CCarter-Oliver@confluenceacademy.org>
Subject: RE: Dissertation Review

This is correct. None of the information will be identifiable. Thanks and I will send you the final IRB approval as soon as I get it back from them.

From: Candice Carter-Oliver
Sent: Monday, August 20, 2018 12:16 PM
To: Danielle Carter <Danielle.Carter@confluenceacademy.org>
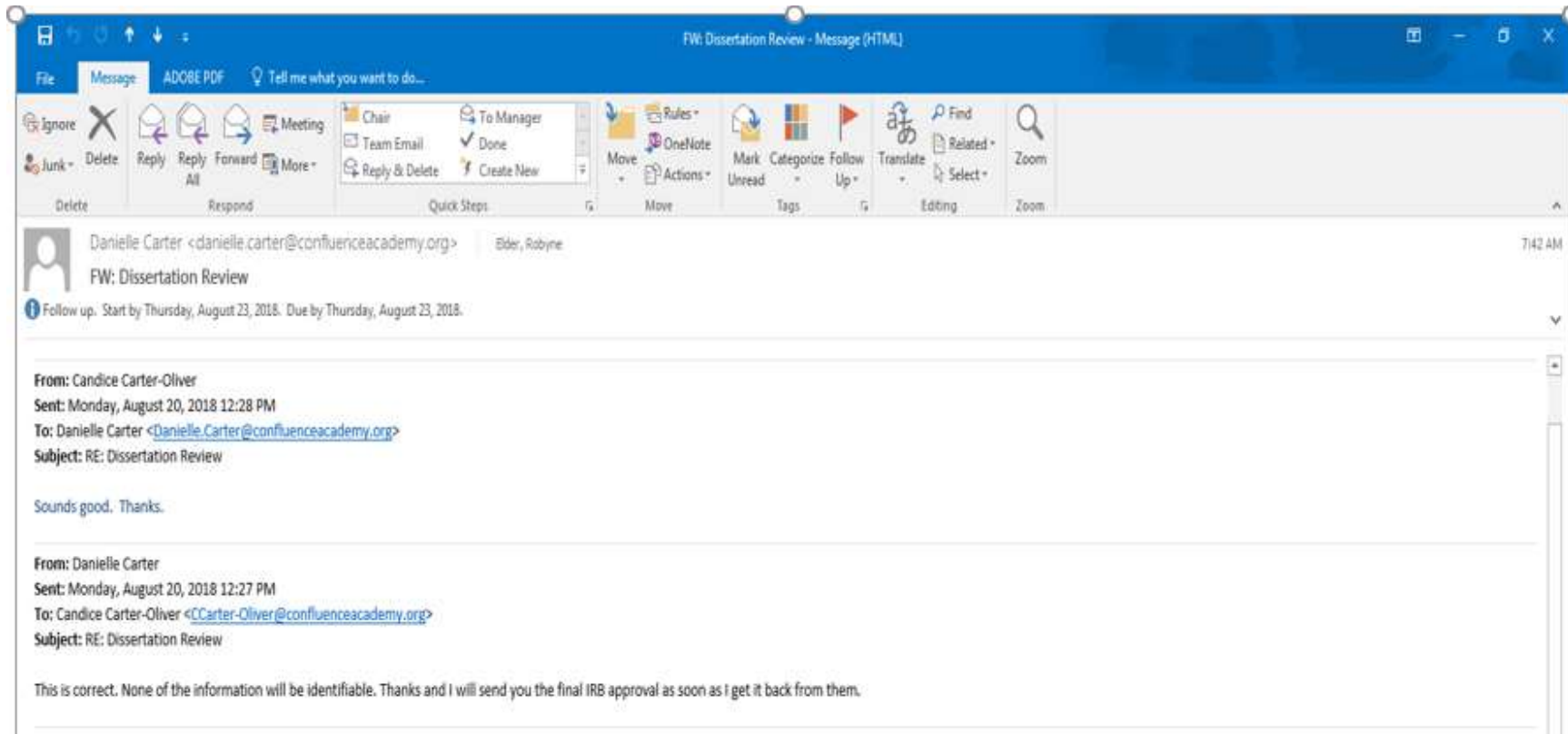**Subject:** RE: Dissertation Review

Good Afternoon Ms. Carter,

Yes, I am granting permission for you to use such data in your study. It's my understanding that the data will be non-identifiable/anonymous as it pertains to individual students' names, addresses, etc. Please confirm. Thanks.

Candice

Appendix G: Updated Consent for Disaggregated Data

From: Candice Carter-Oliver
Sent: Monday, August 20, 2018 12:16 PM
To: Danielle Carter <Danielle.Carter@confluenceacademy.org>
Subject: RE: Dissertation Review

Good Afternoon Ms. Carter,

Yes, I am granting permission for you to use such data in your study. It's my understanding that the data will be non-identifiable/anonymous as it pertains to individual students' names, addresses, etc. Please confirm. Thanks.

Candice

From: Danielle Carter
Sent: Monday, August 20, 2018 11:45 AM
To: Candice Carter-Oliver <CCarter-Oliver@confluenceacademy.org>
Subject: RE: Dissertation Review

Good morning Dr. Carter-Oliver,

FYI- The IRB granted a conditional approval pending your approval of my access and use of disaggregated data. For the study, I will be looking for a correlation between student perception of the school, grade point average, attendance. As the required secondary data will be in sis, the IRB is asking that you specifically grant permission for me to access and use disaggregate data. Thanks in advance and please let me know if you have any questions.

From: Candice Carter-Oliver
Sent: Tuesday, May 1, 2018 8:05 AM
To: Danielle Carter <Danielle.Carter@confluenceacademy.org>
Cc: Sheila Green-Samuels <Sheila.GreenSamuels@confluenceacademy.org>
Subject: Re: Dissertation Review

Good Morning Danielle,

Congratulations on your study! I'll be interested in reading the final document. I approve of you conducting your study in our school system. Please forward a copy of your approved IRB to my attention to keep on file. Thanks.

Candice Carter-Oliver, Ph.D.

Jack McDermott <info@panoramaed.com>
To: drdaniellecarter@yahoo.com

Mar 5 at 2:28 PM

Hi Danielle,

Thanks for downloading our student survey! I'm Jack, an outreach manager at Panorama Education. We're really excited about the survey and hope you will find it useful. Do you have any thoughts on how you might use it?

We're always sharing additional resources on our blog and we've even created a sample email for you to share with administrators interested in capturing student feedback.

Best,

Jack

Jack McDermott <jmcdermott@panoramaed.com>   Mar 6 at 9:44 AM
To: Danielle Carter

Hi Danielle,

Yes, you may use and modify the survey to your needs!

Best,

Jack

> Show original message

--

Jack McDermott
Marketing Director
(617) 631-8746
panoramaed.com

Danielle Carter <drdaniellecarter@yahoo.com>   Mar 6 at 8:57 AM ⭐
To: Jack McDermott

Good morning Mr. Dermott,

Thanks for such a timely response. I am interested in learning more about student perceptions of teaching and learning, school safety and relationships with teachers at our school. Your tool includes all of these items and appears user friendly. Please advise on how I may obtain permission to use the survey and if it ok to edit.

Danielle Carter

> Show original message

Appendix H: NIH Certificate

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Danielle Carter** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 01/25/2017.

Certification Number: 2288601.

Vitae

Education

TBD	Lindenwood University	Doctorate of Education in Instructional Leadership
2012	Lindenwood University	Master of Arts in School and Prof Counseling
2006	Wright State University	Master of Arts in Applied Behavioral Science
2003	Wilberforce University	Bachelor of Science in Psychology

Employment

2018 to present	Crisis Clinician	Behavior Health Response, MO
2017 to present	School Counselor	Confluence Academies, MO
2012-2018	School Counselor	St. Louis Public Schools, MO
2009-2011	Program Director	Make a Difference Center, MO
2006-2009	Adjunct Instructor	Wilberforce University, OH
2007-2009	Adjunct Instructor	Kaplan University, OH
2003-2008	Assessment Specialist	Montgomery Juvenile Court, OH

Membership Affiliations

American School Counselor Association

National Association of College Admission Counselors

Higher Education Consultants Association

Awards

2015	Pettus Award for counselor of the year
2014	Educator of the year
2006	Distinguished Service Award
2004	Distinguished Service Award