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Elementary Students' Perceptions of Teachers: Factors That Influence Achievement

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by

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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.

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Abstract

This quantitative study a) examined third grade students' perceptions of teachers in relation to care, respect, help, and motivation to succeed; b) examined relationships among achievement, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity and students' perceptions of their teachers, and c) identified the relationship of students' perceptions as they relate to higher levels of achievement. The research question that formed the basis of this study was: What is the relationship among student achievement, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and third grade students' perceptions of their teachers? A correlational research design was used to identify relationships among students' perceptions of teachers, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and achievement. Third grade students from a large Midwestern metropolitan school district completed a perceptual survey designed to identify school climate from a student's perspective. Secondary source data was collected from the school district in order to ascertain student achievement gains over the course of one school year. This study revealed there was a weak relationship in cases comparing students' perceptions of teacher characteristics to higher levels of achievement. The sample of the total population compared to each of the sub groups did not demonstrate a difference in student perceptions of teachers with regard to caring, support, and respect.

While the findings demonstrated only a weak relationship between student perceptions and higher levels of achievement, additional knowledge about how students learn and interact in the classroom environment can be gleaned from the study. The important contribution of this study is the significance of developing and maintaining classroom environments that support positive relationships between young students and

teachers. The student perception data can be used as a part of the school improvement planning process, assisting school personnel in developing strategies that will lead to increased student achievement for all students. Findings can also be used to plan professional development for teachers, assist in the teacher selection process, and plan pre-service and beginning teacher development programs.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, brought about sweeping changes in education reform. NCLB was designed to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap for all students, focusing on four "common-sense pillars" (p. 1): including accountability, research-based strategies, parent options, and expansion of local control (United States Department of Education, 2004). In turn, states were required to set standards that would ensure all students were achieving at proficient levels by 2014 (United States Department of Education, 2004, p. 1). Since the inception of NCLB (United States Department of Education, 2002), school districts throughout the nation have considered and revised the educational processes in place and considered what changes would be necessary to effect the kind of achievement expected of all students as set forth in the new standards (Blum, 2005; Certo, Cauley, Moxley, & Chafin, 2008; Gordon & Crabtree, 2006).

Data, in a variety of forms, is considered as schools engage in the process of continuous improvement and implement strategies to meet the standards for achievement set forth by NCLB. The state of Missouri and the local school districts are expected to review data as part of the Missouri School Improvement Plan (MSIP) (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2010). MSIP data included student achievement, discipline history, and attendance rates, as well as a variety of information regarding the professional staff's experience, education, and compensation (United States Department of Education, 2002). For each school district in the state of Missouri, student achievement is measured by the percent of students who are considered proficient

in communication arts and mathematics as measured by the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011). In addition, each school district must also meet the state expectations for graduation rate and attendance history by demonstrating annual improvement (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2010). Districts, however, are not required to consider other forms of data, such as perceptual data. In fact, in a study conducted by Ford-Harris (2007), she pointed out that districts have focused primarily on professional development in curricular areas rather than considering the social and emotional needs of the students when striving to meet proficiency targets.

With the emphasis on data, such as that described previously, districts often overlook the affective side of teaching and learning. Even when the affective aspects of the learning environment are examined, the information is not typically gleaned from student input. Instead, schools often seek input from staff regarding perceptions of students and their learning profiles. In fact, less than one percent of U.S. school districts have invited feedback from kindergarten through 12th grade students as part of the school improvement process (Matthews, 2000).

Background of the Study

Relationships between students and teachers are embedded in the nature of teaching and learning, thus many theorists have examined the interactions between teachers and their students and the bonds developed because of these relationships. As early as the 1950s, Carl Rogers (1951), the father of client-centered counseling, believed that before humans (of all ages) can become self-actualized, they must obtain their needs of acquiring positive relationships that stem from emotions such as love and acceptance.

In his research, he defined self-actualization as obtaining a need for self-fulfillment and realizing one's potential. Thus, the importance of love, acceptance, and positive relationships becomes evident if one is seeking to reach his/her fullest potential (Rogers, 1951). Resiliency in youth is enhanced by a supportive, caring adult in the school setting. As Benard (2004) demonstrated in her research "caring and support by at least one adult within the school was a powerful predictor of positive outcomes for youth" (p. 12).

Gordon and Crabtree (2006) determined that there is more to educating students than rigor; schools must also place emphasis on relevance and relationships. The researchers defined relationships as "making sure students have a number of adults who know them, look out for them, and push them to achieve" (Gordon & Crabtree, 2006, p. 40). Benard (2004) stated, "the level of caring and support within the school is a powerful predictor of positive outcomes for youth" (p. 11). In a brief developed by Tableman (2004), she asserted that an affective environment that supports learning includes teacher student interactions that are caring, supportive, respectful, and responsive. Therefore, it seems that teachers who are successful in the teaching and learning process have positive relationships with students, believe that all students can learn, maintain a classroom environment based on trust and respect, and demonstrate the skills of a life-long learner (LaPlante, 2003).

The impact of relationships between teachers and students should be considered as schools continue on the quest for improvement. In a study by Klem and Connell (2004) on student teacher relationships, they found that students who perceive teachers care about them and have high expectations for them are more likely to be engaged in learning, leading to higher levels of achievement. As the school personnel has increased

responsibility for meeting the needs of all learners – social, behavioral, and academic – so must the school personnel know and understand all the means available for meeting the needs of each child (Hayes 1994). Libbey (2004), in a study of school connectedness stated, "Whether examining academic performance or involvement with a range of health behaviors, young people who feel connected to school, that they belong, and that teachers are supportive and treat them fairly, do better" (p. 282).

Schools continue to be more and more heterogeneous in terms of student population, in turn increasing the need for teachers with highly effective skills in all areas, including the realm of relationships with students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006). In a national survey of almost 1,000 students, 13 – 17 years of age, teachers treating students like adults, teachers relating well to students, and teachers being considerate of students' feelings were among the top ten characteristics of effective teachers as rated by students (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1997). Pape (2004) believed that "care is essential to good teaching" (p. 8), regardless of the age of the student.

In order for students to demonstrate improvement, teachers must not only refine curriculum and pedagogy, they must also consider the affective side of teaching. Pianta (1999) stated, "child competence is often embedded in and a property of relationships with adults" (p. 17). When studying resiliency, Benard (2004) derived "a caring and supportive relationship remains the most critical variable throughout childhood and adolescence" (p. 7). The findings of this study will provide additional knowledge about the relationships between students and their teachers and how these relationships affect student learning. The results of this research may then be used to influence how teachers

develop and maintain classroom environments that support positive relationships between young students and teachers. School administrators can then use student perception data as a part of the school improvement planning process, specifically to assist school personnel in developing strategies that will lead to increased student achievement for all students – the ultimate goal of NCLB legislation (United States Department of Education, 2002). In addition, school administrators can also use the findings to plan professional development for teachers, to assist in the teacher selection process, and to plan pre-service and beginning teacher development programs.

Statement of Problem

Each year in the state of Missouri, school districts are required to report the achievement of students as measured by the MAP (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2010). School districts are then measured on how well students have achieved as compared to benchmarks set by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MO DESE), either by meeting the benchmark or demonstrating an adequate amount of growth (MO DESE, 2010). The regulations established in NCLB require that state benchmarks are aligned with the requirement that all students make increases in achievement each year until 2014 when all students are expected to be proficient (MO DESE, 2010).

In the state of Missouri, each district is expected to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) by attaining the annual proficiency targets as defined by the MO DESE (2011). The annual proficiency targets are set in a manner that encourages continuous growth by the students in an effort to have 100 percent proficiency for all students by

2014. In addition, each district must also meet the state expectation for graduation rate and attendance history by demonstrating annual improvement (MO DESE, 2010).

As the bar rises each year, district officials strive to meet the standards by aligning curriculum to core standards, promoting effective teaching strategies, and utilizing standardized assessments (Bernhardt, 2004). However while focusing on the use of effective pedagogical means, often times the affective side of teaching and learning may be overlooked (Baker, 1999). School leaders will need to consider all aspects of teaching and learning, including the affective means, in order to experience a successful, continuous school improvement process (Stronge, 2002).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to (a) examine young students' perceptions of teachers in relation to caring, respect, help, and motivation to succeed; (b) to identify relationships among achievement, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity and students' perceptions of their teachers; and (c) identify the impact of students' perceptions as they relate to higher levels of achievement. Past research (Whitney, Leonard, Leonard, Carmelio, & Carmelio, 2006) has provided insight into how older students (ages 13 – 17) perceive their teachers, but this research has not been used as a part of school improvement planning, nor has it been used to change practice in the school setting (Matthews, 2000).

Specifically this study will attempt to identify the relationship among student achievement, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and third grade students' perceptions of their teachers. Student perceptions of teachers will include a measure of how they demonstrate care, show interest, show respect, allow for choices and opinions,

and support students in the learning process. Perceptions will be measured using the Education for the Future Initiative (EFF) School Climate Survey (Bernhardt, 2010).

Research Question

The research question used to guide the work of this study is as follows:

1. What is the relationship among student achievement, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and third grade students' perceptions of their teachers?

Hypotheses

The hypotheses for this study were developed based on information generated from previous studies regarding students' perceptions of teachers as it relates to caring, respect, help and motivation to succeed.

1. There is a relationship between students who perceive that their teachers have characteristics such as caring, support, and respect, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey, and higher levels of achievement as measured by the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and Developmental Reading Assessment – Second Edition (DRA2).
2. Students with higher levels of achievement, as measured by the SRI and DRA2, will demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.
3. Female students will demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey
4. Non-poor students will demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.

5. Caucasian students will demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.

Null Hypotheses

1. There is no relationship between students who perceive that their teachers have characteristics such as caring, support, and respect, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey, and higher levels of achievement as measured by the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and Developmental Reading Assessment – Second Edition (DRA2).
2. Students with higher levels of achievement, as measured by the SRI and DRA2, will not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.
3. Female students will not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey
4. Non-poor students will not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.
5. Caucasian students will not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.

Definition of Terms

Achievement. For the purposes of this study, achievement is student performance as measured by the SRI and the DRA2. Fall and spring assessment results will be examined for improvement over the course of the school year.

Adequate Yearly Progress. Expectations for growth in student achievement that is continuous and substantial, such that all students are proficient in reading and math no

later than 2013-2014, according to NCLB (United States Department of Education, 2002). All public schools and districts must make satisfactory improvement each year toward higher student performance to maintain accreditation or achieve accreditation with distinction (MO DESE, 2010; United States Department of Education, 2002).

Care. Caring was defined by Deiro (1996) as "a way of being in a relationship" (p. 54) and is characterized by empathy, understanding, and responsiveness. Noddings (1988) described caring as feeling concern about another person and being receptive to the needs of others. She further discussed caring in the context of responsibility on the part of the teacher. Specifically, she believed it was the teacher's responsibility to address the needs of the students by acting on their behalf.

Ethnicity. Asian and Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, American Indian, and White are the subgroups required to meet Adequate Yearly Progress goals as outlined in NCLB (United States Department of Education, 2002).

Gender. Gender, for the purposes of this study, refers to male and female students.

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). The state test administered to all Missouri students in grades three through eight (MO DESE, 2010).

Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP). The state guidelines used for curriculum and school operations to rate effectiveness of schools (MO DESE, 2010).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), the principal federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. The reauthorized law is built on four common-sense pillars: accountability for results, an

emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research, expanded parental options, and expanded local control and flexibility. As part of the accountability provisions set forth in the law, NCLB set the goal of having every child make the grade on state-defined education standards by the end of the 2013–2014 school year (United States Department of Education, 2004).

Non-poor. Non-poor, for the purposes of this study, refers to students who are not eligible for F/R lunch prices.

One Year's Growth. One year's growth, for the purpose of this study, will be measured as students gaining 300 Lexiles (L) on the SRI and ten levels on the DRA2 as outlined in the administration manual for each assessment (Pearson Education, Inc., 2009; Scholastic Reading Inventory, 2001).

Perceptions. Perceptions are defined by Reber (1995) as "an awareness of the truth of something; a sense largely nontechnical and connotes a kind of implicitly, intuitive insight" (p. 549). Student perceptions are defined by Bernhardt (2010) as "observation and opinion," more specifically, "what the students think about the learning environment" (Bernhardt, 2003, p. 26). She further defines the concept in multiple ways including the following:

- A view, judgment, or appraisal formed in the mind about a particular matter.
- A belief stronger than impression and less strong than positive knowledge.
- A generally held view.
- A formed expression of judgment or advice.
- A judgment one holds as true (pp. 1-2).

Socioeconomic Status. Students who are eligible to receive free or reduced (F/R) lunch prices due to the income level of the family are part of a subgroup required to meet AYP as outlined in NCLB (United States Department of Education, 2002).

Scope and Limitations

Scope. To investigate the relationship among student achievement, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and achievement of third grade students, a year-long study will be conducted. The setting for the study will be two kindergarten through fifth grade elementary schools in a Midwestern, suburban school district of approximately 12,000 students. The 2009 Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education School Accountability Report Card Data designated the district had an average per pupil expenditure of $9,267. Approximately 86.7% of the students were white and 13.3% of the students are non-white, with 18.2% of the students qualifying for Free or Reduced Lunch prices (MO DESE, 2010). The graduation rate was 87.9% with students demonstrating an average score of 22.0 on the American College Testing (ACT) examination, a national college admission and placement examination taken by 66.8% of the eligible students in the district (MO DESE, 2010).

Third grade students from the selected schools, with parent permission, completed the Education For the Future (EFF) School Climate Survey between May first and May 15th of the given school year. The researcher collected perceptual data of all third grade students, with parent permission, who complete the school year with the same teacher as one source of data. All participating students with parental permission in the selected schools were included in the study. Data from students who enrolled after September 1st

of the given school year will be reviewed for differences from those students who were a part of the classroom for the entire year.

To demonstrate growth, student achievement results from the SRI and DRA2 assessments will be collected over the course of one school year. Students who show a minimum gain of 300 L on the SRI and 10 levels on the DRA2, from the fall to spring administration, will exhibit the criteria for demonstrating achievement. The SRI measures reading comprehension skills of students by identifying details in a passage, identifying cause-and-effect relationships and the sequences of events, drawing conclusions, and making comparisons and generalizations (Scholastic Reading Inventory, 2001). The DRA2 is a reading assessment designed to assist teachers in assessing students' instructional reading levels and in identifying student's strengths and weaknesses in reading to inform instruction (Pearson Education, Inc., 2009).

Growth in achievement will be measured by SRI and DRA2 scores that show gains in reading between the fall data collection point and the spring data collection point, specifically to determine if children are making adequate reading progress following a year of instruction. The SRI results are reported as scale scores or Lexile (L) measures. In order to demonstrate one year of growth on the SRI, students must have a gain of at least 300 L (Scholastic Reading Inventory, 2001). The DRA2 results are reported as reading levels and students must attain a minimum of ten levels to represent one year's growth (Pearson Education, Inc., 2009).

Gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity will be used to categorize the participants in the study to determine if a difference exists in the perceptions of the identified subgroups compared to the study population. These categories are directly

aligned with the disaggregate groups identified by NCLB (United States Department of Education, 2002) and the assessment scores from each group are used to determine if a school district is meeting AYP (MO DESE, 2010).

Limitations. The researcher currently works for the district as the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources and works with building level principals and assistant principals with respect to supervision and retention of staff. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary. However, an unintentional bias could be perceived by the teachers with respect to job performance due to the relationship between the researcher and the teachers in the building. To reduce the likelihood of this, individual student responses will be held in confidence. In addition, the results will not be shared with the teachers' direct supervisor at the building level. The researcher made every attempt to maintain the utmost confidentiality with the information and ensure that the information was reported with care in the study. Teachers had the option of requesting summary results of his or her classroom at the end of the 2009-2010 school year.

The participants in this study are students from two of the nine elementary schools within the district. While the district has an established curriculum that all teachers are expected to implement and a common set of instructional materials, the researcher has found there are variances in instruction a student receives from classroom to classroom. A random sample of participants from the two schools was selected to ensure the participants were considered a representative sample of the two school sites in the district.

The targeted participants did not consist of a large group of students who were on F/R lunch prices, the determining criteria to identify SES. In addition, all students who

are eligible for free or reduced lunch prices, based on family income, may not participate in the F/R lunch program since it is self-reported by families. However, the sampling used in this study is consistent with the demographics of the entire population of the district.

The DRA2 and SRI are administered to all third grade students in the district. The results of these assessments for the students in the study population were used as the measure of achievement for the purposes of this study. The students were administered the assessments in various testing environments. Variance in the administration of the assessments could occur due to different physical locations and classroom settings between the schools, even though all teachers are trained on the standardized means of implementing the assessments. It is assumed that all teachers received consistent training on test administration and scoring, as well as how to administer a standardized test. It is also assumed that all the teachers administered the tests consistent with the manner in which they were trained and followed the standardized protocol for administration.

The EFF School Climate Survey was administered by the researcher in the computer lab at each of the participating school sites. Only the students with parent permission completed the on-line survey. The teachers were not present with the students, and the students met the researcher for the first time to complete the survey. The researcher provided a consistent set of instructions and visual cues for the survey responses for all participants. The researcher was present to provide direction and assist students with technical needs.

Conclusion

Schools have a legal and moral obligation to meet the learning needs of all students and ensure that each child achieves at a proficient level. The NCLB legislation is intended to support states and local districts by developing and maintaining standards that ensure student learning. Schools are measured by the academic success of students, while the literature demonstrates that there are other factors that may impact student achievement. In this study, affective teacher attributes such as caring, respect, help, and motivation, as perceived by students, will be studied for their potential influence on achievement.

Chapter Two presents a review of the related literature with respect to students' perceptions of teachers and the potential of these relationships to increase student achievement. The literature cited will provide the underpinnings for the need to consider the student teacher relationship from the students' perspective, as well as the impact of positive relationships at the classroom and school level. Chapter Three outlines the research design and methodology used in the study. A quantitative study, using a correlational research design, was conducted. A student perception survey was administered; with achievement gains determined using secondary source data. In addition, the procedures followed and the sample selection for the study will be described in detail. Chapter Four consists of a discussion of the data analysis as it relates to students' perceptions of teachers in regard to caring, respect, help, and motivation to succeed and the findings for the study population and each subgroup. Next, Chapter Five contains the summary of the research findings regarding student perceptions, conclusions of the data analysis, and recommendations for future study. The study will provide

information for school personnel to assist in developing and enhancing school climate factors that will lead to increased achievement. In addition, study results may be helpful in determining professional development programs for teachers, assist in the selection of teachers, and curriculum development. Finally, the study concludes with a bibliography and appendixes containing other information pertinent to the study.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Overview

Less than 1 % of U. S. school districts have invited K-12 student feedback in the school improvement process (Matthews, 2000). In the researcher's experience, data that is used to engage in the school improvement process is often in the form of assessment data, discipline, attendance history, and graduation rates, and it is typically reported from the teacher, administrator, or district's perspective. According to Whitney, Leonard, Leonard, Carmelio, and Carmelio (2006), it is rare for schools to elicit input from students, yet research shows that students can be a rich source of learning and knowledge for teachers. Moreover, these authors feel that it is imperative to put students back in the center of the teaching and learning process since there is an ever increasing body of research to support asking for students' perspectives (Whitney et al., 2006). The purpose of this study is threefold: (a) to examine elementary students' perceptions of teachers in relation to caring, respect, help, and motivation to succeed; (b) to identify relationships among achievement, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity and students' perceptions of their teachers; and (c) to identify the impact of students' perceptions as they relate to higher levels of learning.

Research conducted by Stronge (2002), suggested the importance of a teacher's affective characteristics. Specifically, data collected from survey responses and interviews indicated that the affective attributes have more impact on learning than the pedagogical practice of the teacher (Stronge, 2002). Jennings (2003) discussed the impact of student learning under the tutelage of a caring teacher. In the study, he pointed out that teachers promote a caring relationship by noticing students' needs and

responding accordingly, considering relevant student experiences when making decisions, listening, and giving students opportunities to interact with them outside of class (Jennings, 2003). The Search Institute (Tableman, 2004) conducted a review of studies to consider the impact of support in school and showed that a caring school climate is associated with

- higher grades, engagement, attendance, expectations and aspirations, a sense of scholastic competence, fewer school suspensions, and on-time progression through grades;
- higher self-esteem and self-concept;
- less anxiety, depression, and loneliness; and
- less substance abuse (p. 5).

The review of literature for this study provides a summary of the research on teachers' perceptions of student-teacher relationships and students' perceptions of the student-teacher relationship, as well as the attributes of caring classrooms and schools. Connections between affective teacher attributes, such as caring and the gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status of students will be explored to identify their impact on student learning and achievement.

Teacher Perception

Prior to the 1960s, research regarding academic achievement focused mainly on the teacher's ability to deliver content and knowledge with very little attention given to the affective influences attributed to positive student-teacher relationships (LaPlante, 2003). In the 1970s, effective schools research dominated the forefront with some studies starting to emerge that focused on the humanistic side of teaching and how the

relationship between teachers and students could impact student achievement (Brookover, Schweitzer, Schneider, Beady, Flood, & Wisenbaker, 1978; Brophy & Good, 1974). In the 1980s, effective schools research was still dominant but some researchers were also examining the student-teacher relationship and how it affected learning and, specifically, academic achievement (Noddings, 1988). Studies conducted in the 1990s focused mainly on the relationship aspects of secondary school students, with emergent research on early elementary students in the late 1990s and beyond (Pianta & Stuhlmann, 2004; Sullivan, Riccio, & Reynolds, 2008). More recently, the focus has been on how teacher behaviors impact student achievement at the secondary level (Stronge, 2002). Deiro (1996) concurred with these findings as well and believed, "building caring relationships is one way teachers enhance their primary responsibility for the academic development of students and, at the same time, promote the healthy social and emotional growth of students" (p. 9). A study conducted by Ding and Hall (2007), demonstrated that teacher caring was associated with perceived achievement by sixth through 10th grade students. In an even more recent study, Certo, Cauley, Moxley, and Chafin (2008) ascertained that high school students of teachers who demonstrate active communication, caring, and enthusiasm for learning are more likely to achieve at higher levels.

Throughout the literature, the characteristics of caring and nurturing are used almost interchangeably. The terms caring and nurturing are used to demonstrate teacher attributes that include "a way of being in a relationship" (Deiro, 1996, p. 54), warm, supportive relationships, knowing students as individuals, and love and belonging (Lewis, Schaps, & Watson, 1996; Rogers & Renaud, 1999). Stronge (2002) portrayed

caring "as an act of bringing out the best in students through affirmation and encouragement" (p. 14). According to Noddings (1988), caring by teachers is modeled in how they teach as well as how they interact with students. Caring teachers are concerned about academic achievement as well as the moral development of the child. Regardless of the terminology, for the purposes of this research study, the primary investigator has chosen caring to be defined as a way that teachers treat students, which in turn assists them in making connections in the classroom and bonding with his or her teachers. Pang, Rivera, and Mora (1999) indicated that caring teachers provide for the individual needs of the students.

According to Pianta (1999), relationships between children and adults play a prominent role in the development of competencies in the preschool, elementary, and middle school years and form the "developmental infrastructure" (p. 67) on which school experiences build. In addition to academic success, relationships with teachers also influence other school related outcomes such as competency with peers, academic success, and school adjustment (Pianta, 1999). "The level of caring and support within the school is a powerful predictor of positive outcome for youth" (p. 11), according to Bernard (2004) in her work on resiliency. Voekl (1995) elucidated that students who perceive their classroom is warm and supportive are more likely to be engaged, in turn increasing their achievement. Since teachers are in contact with their students six hours a day for nine months of the year, they are potentially a rich resource for rebuilding the network of supportive, caring adults needed by young people (Deiro, 1996).

Teachers serve many roles in relation to students. Students often view the teacher as adult, parent-figure, mentor, friend, disciplinarian, and keeper of academic success.

Parsley and Corcoran (2003) claimed that of all the factors affecting academic performance, teachers have the most impact on their students' school experiences. From Benard's (2004) viewpoint, outside the family, teachers can be the child's most positive role model who is not seen as just the instructor, but as someone who influences the child socially and emotionally. In the last decade, educational theorists and researchers advocated for schools to become places that focus on nurturing children and increasing positive interactions between students and teachers (Cushman, 2006; McBee, 2007). As Noddings (1992) stated in her work:

> It is time to take full account of the social charges that have swept through the second half of the twentieth century. If the traditional family is an anachronism, or if, for whatever reason, families cannot meet the needs for caring, other institutions must meet the need. I will argue that the school cannot achieve its academic goals without providing caring for its students. (pp. 13-14)

Benard (2004) later supported this notion in her work when she indicated "it is imperative that the school provide opportunities to develop caring relationships with both adults and other youth" (p. 12) when the family environment cannot provide it.

In fact, in studies conducted regarding early child development, specifically kindergarten through second grade children, researchers found that when teachers felt there was a positive relationship with students these students demonstrated both increased academic success and better behavioral outcomes (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Valeski & Stipek, 2001). Furthermore, when children make connections with teachers in the early elementary grades the positive social and academic effects often carry through subsequent years, even as late as eighth grade (Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

Baker (1999) and Information Works (2000) also found that caring student-teacher relationships are associated with resiliency in children and are related to learning outcomes by promoting personal competencies and school learning for students. Moreover, both students and teachers can enjoy learning in an atmosphere where children are well-supported and teachers are well-prepared for instruction (Information Works, 2000). In a study of middle school students, Woolley and Bowen (2007) found that students seemed to perform better when experiencing teachers who support them and hold high expectations for achievement and, when provided with supportive adults, were likely to increase their level of engagement with school. The connectedness of high school students to school increases the likelihood of academic success with this being accomplished by pairing "high academic standards with strong teacher support" (p. 17), positive and respectful relationships, and a safe school environment (Blum, 2005).

Given the available research on student-teacher relationships, it is apparent that certain characteristics or traits of said relationships are evident across various studies conducted with teachers and children in early elementary years, middle school years, and secondary school years (Baker, 1999; Brookover et al., 1978; Noddings, 1988; Pianta & Walsh, 1996). Teachers viewed the following attributes as important to fostering a positive student-teacher relationship: safety, value, success, involvement, and care for students (Rogers & Renaud, 1999). Jacobson (2000) identified similar traits: value, support, knowing students as individuals, and meaningful evaluation and feedback. Yet another researcher, Stronge (2002), stated that "effective teachers demonstrate caring, practice focused and sympathetic listening, show understanding, and know their students individually" (pp. 14-15).

Hence, student-teacher relationships have a strong influence on school-age children as a whole. Positive student-teacher relationships are characterized by caring, support, value, and respect along with knowledge of content and instructional skill. This information will be used in the next section to provide the basis for eliciting students' perceptions of teachers as a tool to improve the teaching and learning process, ultimately increasing academic achievement of all students.

Student Perceptions of Teachers

Historically student input has not been elicited as part of the education reform process in the United States. Yet, there is a wealth of research that demonstrates that the student-teacher relationship has a strong impact on academic success for children. "Students, the most legitimate stakeholders, as the clients, the group with the most experience with the teacher, should play a meaningful role in the evaluation of teachers" (Follman, 1995, p. 58). Pianta (1999) stated "teacher-child relationships influence children's competencies with peers in the classroom and their trajectories toward academic success or failure" (p. 69). Several other researchers believed that the relationships between teachers and students play a prominent role in the development of academic and social competencies in the school years (Birch & Ladd, 1996; Pianta & Walsh, 1996; Wentzel, 1997). Researchers agreed that teachers influence both the academic and social development of students (Brophy & Good, 1974); specifically the manner in which teachers and students interact influences not only the child's cognitive development but his or her ability to interact with others in socially acceptable ways. Teachers and students alike will refer to teachers as effective or good and are typically

referring to the way in which teaching and learning take place, as well as the manner in which students and teachers interact in the classroom (Whitney et al., 2006).

Whether teachers are referred to as good by the students or effective by the adults, capable teachers demonstrate mastery of the content and exhibit successful skills in the management of the classroom environment, as well as, teaching methods that lead to academic success for the students (Murphy, Delli, & Edwards, 2004). According to Parsley and Corcoran (2003), "teachers exert a powerful influence on a student's potential success or failure" (p. 1).

> At least four actions are essential for a teacher to establish a positive relationship with his or her students. First, a teacher must show students a high level of trust. Second, a teacher must show students that he or she cares about them as individuals. Third, a teacher must communicate to students that he or she is willing to help them learn by creating a learning environment in which students are not afraid to take risks. Finally, teachers must build a supportive classroom environment in which students feel that they belong. (Parsley & Corcoran, 2003, p. 2)

In another study conducted by Whitney et al. (2006), urban high school students were asked to reflect on teachers they admired and classes where they felt most comfortable. In this study, students reported that teachers should keep the class moving in a positive direction, have a caring personality, and demonstrate professionalism. In addition, these same students also felt the classroom environment should be supportive and balanced, with teachers demonstrating fairness, consistency, and control without being too strict or mean (Whitney et al., 2006). In another study conducted by Certo et

al. (2008), caring teachers are described by high school students as "relating to us," "encouraging" and "helpful" (p. 35). In a study of eighth grade students (Voelkl, 1995), teachers who were viewed as warm and affectionate by students were also considered competent and structured with this perception leading to increased engagement and, ultimately, resulting in higher levels of achievement.

It is evident from the findings stated previously that secondary students have a great deal to say about their teachers and demonstrate powerful insight in regard to them. Even university students are more likely to attend class and be more attentive when they perceive the teacher cares about them and has "their interests at heart" (Teven & McCroskey, 1996, p. 14). In fact, a summary of the student responses in the Whitney et al. study (2006) indicated that students "have a good understanding of their needs when it comes to homework, classroom management preferences, and learning styles" (p. 7). Additionally "students indicated that the teachers they value the most could be described as personally engaging, experts, reflective, responsive to diversity, and widely respected" (Whitney, et al., p.7). In a study conducted by Rubie-Davies, Peterson, Irving, Widdowson, and Dixon (2010), high school students reported academic investment when they thought the teacher cared about their learning and were willing to invest more effort to further achievement.

In summary, secondary students' perceptions are consistent across the literature. Secondary students are motivated and tend to do better academically when they perceive the teachers cares about them and supports them in the learning process. In the 2005 Gallup Youth Survey, 53 % of the 13 – 17 year old respondents give credit to the teacher for their learning (Gordon, 2006). When asked to identify the class where they felt they

learned the most the previous semester, students cited the following three reasons: first, they like the teacher; second, the teacher cares about them; and third, the teacher respects them (Gordon & Crabtree, 2006).

Historically, research in the area of student-teacher relationships has focused on secondary school students with some research being conducted with early elementary students. However, students in grades three through five, have rarely been the focus of research with respect to student teacher relationships (Gentilucci, 2004). Given what is known about the influence of positive student-teacher relationships at the secondary and early elementary levels, the researcher believes it would be beneficial to explore the perceptions of elementary student-teacher relationships to increase the likelihood of academic success. Baker (1999) supported that position when she stated "perceptions of a caring, supportive relationship with a teacher and a positive classroom environment were related to school satisfaction by as early as third grade" (p. 1).

When Weinstein (1983) set out to examine student perceptions of schooling, he asked fifth grade students to identify characteristics of a good teacher. Subsequently, students identified the following teacher traits: "warm, friendly, and supportive and motivates and disciplines students effectively" (p. 290). High school students added, "knowledge of subject matter and the ability to teach" as characteristics of a good teacher, in addition to the traits identified by fifth grade students (Weinstein, 1983, p. 290).

In a 1994 study conducted by Cabello and Terrell (1994), third through sixth grade students described the perfect teacher as one who is "happy, fair, easy to talk to, explains things clearly, likes kids, and is kind but strict" (p. 22). Davis (2003) found that

students identified good relationships with teachers to include support of motivation and learning in the classroom, caring, and concern over both the social and intellectual lives of the students. Environments where children felt that good student-teacher relationships were in place tended to have improved social interactions with peers and adults, as well as demonstrated higher levels of academic achievement (Cabello & Terrell, 1994).

The influence of schools on children is significant given the amount of time spent at school and the strong academic focus during that time. In fact, "research and experience showed that what schools do matters tremendously" (Topf, Fraizier-Maiwald, & Krovertz, 2004, p. 206). Furthermore, these same authors indicated that caring, high expectations, meaningful participation, and effective instruction will foster academic success for all students. Furthermore, good relationships tend to improve student motivation to learn and lead to increased student engagement in the classroom ultimately resulting in higher levels of academic achievement as well as a decrease in behavioral concerns. In a study conducted by Collier (2005), she found that "a caring teacher's behavior can influence and motivate caring behaviors on the part of the students" (p. 354), contributing to less behavioral problems in the classroom. Positive student-teacher relationships are viewed as a contributing factor to academic success since children who have poor relationships with teachers tend to have less contact with teachers, fewer positive interactions with teachers, and are less engaged in academics, resulting in lower levels of academic achievement (Montague & Rinaldi, 2001).

Research studies supported the idea that positive student-teacher relationships impact achievement at the secondary school level, as well as provide the impetus for predicting school success in very young children (Baker, 1999; Gentilucci, 2004;

Whitney et al.). In fact, in a study conducted by Ding and Hall (2007) of sixth through 10th grade students, they demonstrated results indicating that "students who reported a higher degree of teacher caring tended to report a higher level of achievement' (p. 169). Given what is known about the opposite ends of the K-12 education spectrum in regard to student-teacher relationships, this study of third grade students' perceptions of the student-teacher relationship will only serve to further enhance academic achievement for students.

Caring School Communities

In addition to achievement data, school district officials review school level and district level data regarding discipline, attendance rates, dropout statistics, and graduation rates to determine school effectiveness and to assist with school improvement planning. As stated earlier, attendance history and graduation rates are considered as part of the MSIP review process to determine AYP (MO DESE, 2010). Past research has shown that for schools to demonstrate improvement, all aspects of the school environment must be considered. To support that notion, Benard (2004) reported that schools have very powerful influences on youth, serving as a protective factor in much the same manner as a family does for a child. In fact, she pointed out the following in her work, "among the most frequently encountered positive role models in the lives of children, outside the family circle, was a favorite teacher" (Benard, 2004, p. 12).

School community research focuses on the quality of the relationships among the members of the school community, including teachers, students, and parents (Roberts, Hom, & Battistich, 1995). An effective school includes both academic challenge and personalization. Personalization, according to Hoffman and Levak (2003), included such

things as knowing students better, trusting them, and connecting in meaningful ways. When considering what constitutes a good school climate, several researchers have provided insight. The most prevalent works were completed by the Developmental Studies Center and the Search Institute. The Child Development Center has conducted extensive work that includes longitudinal studies of students who participated in the Child Development Project (Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2003). The authors identified the key components of a caring community of learners: "Respectful, supportive relationships among students, teachers, and parents; frequent opportunities to help and collaborate with others; frequent opportunities for autonomy and influence; and emphasis on common purposes and ideals" (pp. 4-6).

Schools create caring communities by first meeting the basic psychological needs of the students. Students whose basic needs are met tend to be more engaged in school and tend to behave better (Schaps, 2005). In a summary of the Search Institute's school climate characteristics, Benard (2004) identified similar characteristics in her review of studies on the impact of school climate on student outcomes. Specifically, she reported

> A caring school climate was associated with higher grades, engagement, attendance, expectations and aspirations, a sense of scholastic competence, fewer school suspensions, and on-time progression through school in 19 of the studies reviewed. Higher self-esteem and self-concept were reported in five of the studies. Less anxiety, depression, and loneliness were reported in three studies. Less substance abuse was reported in four studies. (p. 5)

Caring, support, help, and motivation continue to emerge as themes characterizing a good school climate. Cabello and Terrell (1994) described an effective classroom as an

environment where teachers and students regularly provide emotional and academic support for each other as an integral part of the curriculum. Teachers create these warm and caring classroom environments by fostering interdependence among students, promoting peer support, making learning relevant, and encouraging mutual support and collaborative work (Cabello & Terrell, 1994). Noddings (1988) identified the need for schools to function like families where students and teachers live together and talk with each other, enjoying each other's company.

At the school and classroom level, there are factors that impact the level of engagement students may experience. In a study conducted by Roberts, Hom, and Battistich (1995), they found the following:

- Schools where teachers feel a strong sense of community are not necessarily places where students feel a strong sense of community, and vice versa.
- Females scored higher than males in the sense of school community among both students and teachers.
- Sense of community among students varied significantly by ethnicity, with Asian and Hispanic students scoring higher than White and African American students.
- Sense of community declined significantly with increasing grade.
- Both students and teachers in poor communities report school experiences that are less rewarding.

If districts across the nation are going to effectively meet the expectations set forth in NCLB, there will need to be consideration given to all aspects of teaching and

learning, including the affective components. Not only must consideration be given to individual students and teachers, but the impact of classroom and school climate must be considered as well. In the next section, affective teacher attributes of caring, support and respect will be explored for their impact on student achievement.

Affective Teacher Attributes

Caring. School-aged children spend a great deal of their time in school, interacting with peers and adults. In fact, the time spent at school and the interactions that take place are often the source of their interpersonal relationships and activities, in addition to the academic learning that occurs (Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004). Learning is a highly interactive process between the teacher and the student and tends to be enhanced with there is a strong bond between the teacher and the students (Davis, 2001). "Building caring relationships is one way teachers enhance their primary responsibility for the academic development of students" (Deiro, 1996, p. 9). Mendes (2003) indicated his belief that students must think educators care about them and like them as people. Collier (2005) stated, "Caring facilitates a sense of connection from which spring countless opportunities for learning" (p. 353).

Numerous studies point out the significance of the student-teacher relationship as it relates to achievement. Cabello and Terrell (1994) described a warm and caring classroom as one where students and teachers provide "emotional and academic support" (p. 22) consistently as a part of the curriculum. In a study by Rogers and Renard (1999), they indicated that students are motivated to learn when they feel cared about and respected by the teacher. Likewise, Stuhlmann and Pianta (2002) pointed out that early, positive relationships with teachers put students on a track to higher levels of academic

achievement while more negative relationships predict less promising results for students. In both the 1995 and 2004 Gallup Survey, the public indicated that positive student-teacher relationships and caring teachers were very important to ensure a school's success (Gordon & Crabtree, 2006). Certo et al. (2008) stated, "students are motivated to learn by teachers who care" (35).

Students desire positive student-teacher relationships that foster caring and support, with these relationships in turn bringing about higher levels of academic achievement (Davis, 2003). Caring relationships meet some of the basic psycho-social needs of students and when these needs are met, cognitive learning is enhanced (LaPlante, 2003). Specifically, when teachers act in ways that "bring out the best in students through affirmation and encouragement" (p. 2) higher levels of achievement are observed (Stronge, 2002). Jacobson (2000) stated that students' academic success could be attributed, in part, to being in a family-like classroom characterized by caring and a sense of belonging. Additionally, Parsley and Corcoran (2003) found that a teacher must show students that he or she cares about them and is willing to work with them as individuals. Middle school students reported that caring teachers did not give up on them (Davis, 2003). In a summary of the literature completed by Brophy and Good (1974), they stated, "high achieving students enjoyed more promotive and supportive contacts from their teachers, while lower achievers had a greater proportion of teacher contacts involving conflict with the teacher or domination or direction by the teacher" (p. 14). These feelings of caring, support, and encouragement tended to impact students of all ages in a positive manner.

Students who believe they are cared for and supported by the teacher tend to be more engaged, even when they are not as interested in the subject matter being presented (Davis, 2003). Engagement appears to be linked to higher levels of academic achievement. Findings of the study conducted by Klem and Connell (2004) revealed that 35% of elementary and 31% of middle school students demonstrated high levels of disengagement from school as reported by students. In this same study, teachers reported that 40% of elementary and 17% of middle school students were disengaged from learning and the authors' key findings indicated that students who perceive their teachers as caring and supportive are more likely to be engaged and therefore experience increased academic success in school (Klem & Connell, 2004). Marks (2000) stated that "engagement is an important facet of students' school experience because of its logical relationship to achievement and to optimal human development" (p. 155). Another study conducted by Valeski and Stipek (2001) demonstrated that "close, supportive relationships with teachers help children feel socially connected and are presumed to promote academic engagement" (p. 1198). It seems that students who are connected to school are more likely to experience academic success.

Support. Support by teachers was cited as another affective factor contributing to higher levels of academic achievement. Tableman (2004) identified support as one of four attributes of an affective environment that supports student learning, along with caring, responsiveness, and respect. Newman, Wehlage, and Lamborn (1992) believed that if students are to take the risks necessary to learn and make mistakes, they must feel a sense of support from teachers and peers. They go on to state "if students are to build confidence and willingness to invest themselves, their participation in academic tasks

must be accompanied by personal support from teachers and peers" (p. 22). In a study conducted by Klem and Connell (2004), students who reported high levels of support were 89 % more likely to be engaged and 69 % less likely to feel disaffected, with the majority of the students who reported having a supportive teacher demonstrating optimal engagement. The overall results of the study "indicates that teacher support is vitally important to students' engagement in school as reported by students themselves" (Klem & Connell, 2004, p. 34). In a study conducted by Libbey (2004), she reported that teacher support was the most common theme that emerged from the student survey responses to school connectedness; thus, upholding the belief that students who are connected to school feel supported by the teachers and will do better in school both academically and behaviorally.

When students were asked to define an effective teacher, they reported that they wanted a teacher who will "help students learn" (Evans, 2002, p. 55). In addition to a teacher who helped students learn, students wanted a teacher who cares about them and treats them with respect, as well (Evans, 2002). These same students desire a teacher who will work with them until they understand. The concept of "helping" showed up several times in the work of Gordon and Crabtee (2006). Students made the following statements in regard to effective teachers, "Caring teachers as those who go out of their way to help them with schoolwork and personal problems" (p. 161) and "effective teachers provided help but did not demean (students) for needing help" (p. 162).

Parsley and Corcoran (2003) believed that teachers must show students they are willing to help them learn by providing a classroom environment where students can take risks. Close, supportive relationships with the teacher help children feel socially

connected and lead to increased engagement by the students, in turn promoting academic achievement (Valeski & Stipek, 2001). Supportive relationships may also enhance motivation and participation in instruction, particularly in subjects where students previously may have little, if any, interest (Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004).

In a synthesis of research conducted by Davis (2003), the importance of teacher support was identified. Specifically, it was noted that students who feel emotionally supported by the teacher tend to value learning and have less difficulty with school transitions; students who believed they had a supportive relationship with the teacher were more likely to have a positive attitude about school demonstrating higher grade point averages at the end of the school year; and students who perceived supportive relationships had increased help-seeking behavior, again leading to higher levels of academic success (Davis, 2003). "Research suggests that by creating an environment that encourages feelings of belonging and support, teachers can simultaneously meet the academic and social needs of students" (Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004, p. 49). Thus, a supportive environment is yet another important factor contributing to academic success.

Respect. Another factor perceived by students as important for teachers is to demonstrate respect for students. Gordon and Crabtree (2006) stated, "Great teachers show they care by treating students with respect and dignity" (p. 158). According to Littky (2004), student-teacher relationships are the foundation of a caring school and relationships are built on trust and respect. A study of the work of highly effective teachers identified strong and respectful relationships as one of the characteristics needed to engage low performing students (Poplin, et al., 2011). The authors in this study pointed out that the teachers had "a profound respect for the students" (p. 42) that was far

more complex than just caring. In a study conducted by Evans (2002) children stated that they wanted teachers who care about them and treat them with respect, with six of the 14 students indicating that effective teachers were respectful of the students.

Students are motivated when teachers treat them with respect and care about them both personally and educationally (Rogers & Renaud, 1999). In a review of the literature by Parsley and Corcoran (2003), respect was cited as one of four actions considered essential in establishing positive student-teacher relationships, with the other three being care, support, and belonging. Murphy et al. (2004) also identified respect for students as a defining characteristic of a good teacher. In the work of Gentilucci (2004), three ways to improve school learning were recommended; one of those being that teachers should treat students with respect so that students feel comfortable taking risks and making mistakes.

Caring, support, and respect consistently appear throughout the literature as teacher affective factors that contribute to increased academic achievement. In a review of research conducted by Murphy et al. (2004), the value of interpersonal aspects of teaching rather than the academic goals of schooling are clearly evident. These beliefs about the characteristics of a good teacher are formed at an early age and remain consistent throughout the educational experience (Murphy et al., 2004). According to Deiro (2003), "teacher-student relationships are formed to promote learning and academic growth within students" (p. 60) supporting the importance of caring, respectful classroom environments. The next sections will explore the impacts of gender, ethnicity, and SES on academic achievement.

Gender

Teachers may benefit from a general understanding of the differences between the performance and interactions of boys and girls in the school setting. Boys tend to be more active, competitive, and boisterous, traits that tend to be in conflict with the general school atmosphere (Van Duzer, 2006). Elementary school learning environments tend to be more favorable toward girls, due to the types of instructional activities that tend to be less active and more verbally oriented (Brophy & Good, 1974). Activities, such as reading, are often viewed as more appealing to female students since school literacy tends to focus on fiction rather than non-fiction and has a tendency to place "emphasis on description and relationships rather than action and aggression" (p. 37), characteristics more likely associated with young boys (Maynard, 2002). Boys tend to choose non-fiction writing and prefer to write about characters that demonstrate power and dominance (Maynard, 2002). This may explain the reason girls are reported to be consistently more academically engaged in school than boys (Marks, 2000). In fact, "many authors suggested that elementary school is more meaningful for girls than boys" (Brophy & Good, 1974, p. 13) due to these "feminine' influences on learning activities.

Research conducted by Schief and Tatar (2003) showed that teacher's perceptions of their relationships with students vary with gender. Teachers reported more closeness with girls than with boys and teachers perceived that girls have more positive attitudes toward school than boys (Schief & Tartar, 2003). Findings from various studies indicated that teachers view girls more favorably; specifically, boys receive more teacher disapproval than girls (Hamre & Pianta, 2001), teachers are more likely to use a harsh tone when giving feedback to boys (Brophy & Good, 1974), and boys are typically given

lower grades than girls (Connell & Gunzelmann, 2004). In fact Davis (2003) stated that "black males consistently fall behind other students in early school performance and lead their peers in school infractions" (p. 521). Given this information, boys seem to be less likely to develop a close, interpersonal relationship with the teacher. Since boys are less likely to develop a personal relationship with the teacher, findings would indicate that behavioral outcomes and academic performance would be negatively affected (Brophy & Good, 1974; Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

Research would also indicate some differences in how male and female students perceive their teachers and its effect on their educational outcomes. For example, in a study conducted by Ding and Hall (2007), they found that boys reported a greater dislike for school than girls, felt more negatively about the school environment, and reported a lower degree of teacher caring than girls. When students indicated a lower degree of teacher caring and a higher degree of school dislike, they, in turn, reported lower achievement (Ding & Hall, 2007). Research results from Hughes, Gleason, and Zhang (2005) indicated that girls report having higher student-teacher support than boys and experience closer relationships with the teacher, while boys reported relationships with the teacher characterized by more conflict. Classroom observations conducted by Dee (2007) demonstrated that "teachers are more likely to offer praise and remediation" (p. 532) when boys comment in the classroom while girls will merely be acknowledged for their comments. Dee (2007) identified a number of educational outcomes affecting boys as a result of differences in perceptions, including the following: "boys are overrepresented among both high and low performers; boys are more likely to repeat a

grade in school; and boys are increasingly less likely to attend college and attain a higher degree" (p. 531).

Student perceptions may also be impacted by differences in gender between students and teachers; however, the findings are inconsistent. Brophy and Good (1974) looked at the effects of female versus male teachers to determine if this would make a difference in academic achievement. To summarize their findings, "most, if not all, of the sex differences in class data can be attributable to student sex differences in classroom behavior" (p. 238), not whether the teacher is male or female. Johnson, Crosnoe, and Elder (2001) speculated that having teachers of the same race-ethnicity may strengthen a students' sense of belonging in school but found that as a single factor it was not significant. Instead, it was the larger societal structures of gender, family structure, SES, age, and family expectations combined that attributed to belongingness and academic achievement in school (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001). In a study conducted by Dee (2007), boys were significantly more likely to be viewed as disruptive when assigned to a female teacher and boys were more likely to report "not looking forward to classes taught by a female teacher" (p. 549).

Research has suggested that gender differences may contribute to how teachers interact with and develop relationships with students. According to Tyre (2006), elementary classrooms tended to emphasize language and sitting quietly, creating a disconnect for young boys who tend to prefer movement and activity over paper-and-pencil activities. LaPlante (2003) alleged that "utilizing student perceptions and implementing small changes in how teachers interact with boys and girls may have a

potentially powerful impact in building a capacity for strong student-teacher relationships" (p. 21).

Ethnicity

Children from different ethnic backgrounds make up just less than half of the students in U.S. public schools (Rabiner, Murray, Schmid, & Malone, 2004). In fact, the National Center for Educational Statistics (2006) reported that 43 % of the students in public school in the U.S. were from ethnic backgrounds other than Caucasian. Research by Rabiner et al. (2004) demonstrated that Caucasian students had higher academic achievement and behavioral ratings than African American students, who in turn, had higher ratings than Hispanic students. Yet, for all groups, students with higher grade point averages were more likely to feel close to the teacher and think that grading is fair (Ferguson, 2002).

Traditionally, African American and Hispanic students tended to score lower on standardized tests than their Caucasian counterparts, as well as demonstrate lower ability in reading proficiency (Nieto, 1996). Furthermore, "African American, Latino, American Indian, and poor children in general continue to achieve below grade level, drop out in much greater numbers, and go to college in much fewer proportions than their middle-class and European American peers" (Nieto, 1996, p. 36). Davis (2003) indicated that minority elementary students tend to be less academically engaged than their Caucasian counterparts. Ferguson (2002) reported that "while all racial groups were represented in all parts of the achievement distribution, blacks and Hispanics were underrepresented at the top and over-represented at the bottom" (p. 2). He goes on to report that Black and Hispanic students report less understanding of teachers and lower comprehension of

reading materials at school (Ferguson, 2002). Ding and Hall (2007) found that African American students tended to report more negative evaluations of the school environment and reported disliking school less than their white counterparts.

In a study reported by Brophy and Good (1974), there were significant differences in the treatment of African American and white students by a group of teachers working with fourth through eighth grade students; specifically, six of the eight measures favored white students. With respect to the African American students, they received less attention, were asked to expand on ideas fewer times, and they were criticized more and praised less than their white counterparts (Irvine, 1986). These types of student-teacher interactions lead to student disengagement and diminished school attachment (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001). Davis (2003) supported these findings when he reported that Black males fall consistently behind other students and engage in more negative school infractions. Cornbleth and Korth (1980) conducted a study to review teacher perceptions of black and while students. The authors found the following:

> The teachers rated the white students higher than black students in terms of potential achievement and classroom behavior. White students were also rated as more efficient, organized, reserved, industrious, and pleasant while black students were rated as more outgoing and outspoken. Overall, the teachers perceived the white students more favorable than the black students. (Cornbleth & Korth, 1980, p. 261)

A summary of the research shows that teachers tend to exhibit more negative behaviors toward and interactions with minority students. As early as 1974, Brophy and Good stated that teachers tend to treat minority students inappropriately in the classroom

and in turn, these interactions tended to minimize student engagement and promote social interactions in the classroom that result in behavioral interventions. In a study of student-teacher interactions, Irvine (1986) found that teacher interactions with African American students were characterized by less favorable exchanges and that they were called on less often than their Caucasian counterparts.

When Ferguson (2002) asked minority students what motivated them to work hard in school, the students reported that when teachers encouraged rather than demanded and gave full explanations rather than yes/no answers they tended to do better in class as demonstrated by grades, homework completion, and standardized test scores. Middle school African-American students were asked to rank teacher behaviors that convey caring and their responses were similar to the findings of Ferguson in that they identified "help with academic work," encouraged success and positive feelings," and responded to individual student" as the most important behaviors of the teacher (Hayes, Ryan, & Zseller, 1994, p. 15). Howard (2001) examined students' perception of differences with respect to ethnicity and found that regardless of race, all teachers can meet the academic and social needs of African American students since the characteristics described by students, caring, positive reinforcement, high expectations, and praise are not race-specific.

The student teacher relationship may be impacted by factors that are relative to similarities in SES and cultural norms between students and teachers. In the research of Hubbard and Datnow (2005), when analyzing the impact of single-sex schools, they found data that would indicate that ethnicity did not impact the student teacher relationship as much as a closer match between the SES and the backgrounds of the

students and their teachers. Hubbard and Datnow (2005) stated that "students receive the most support and elicit the highest expectations from educators when there is high degree of overlap in values and norms between the two groups" (p. 117). Saft and Pianta (2001) found that when teachers were asked to rate students they would report more positive perceptions of students with similar ethnic backgrounds than those with different backgrounds. Saft and Pianta (2001) go on to point out that this match between ethnicity of teacher and student reflects culture specific expectations of student behavior.

The research of Diamond, Corwin and Levinson (2004) demonstrated the importance of the teacher student relationship in closing the achievement gap for minority and low-income students. Students' perceptions indicated that teacher encouragement, one-one-one support and high expectations are critical to their success in school. Ferguson's (2002) findings demonstrated "the distinctive importance of teacher encouragement as a reported source of motivation for nonwhite students, specifically African American students, and the special importance of strong student-teacher relationships in affecting achievement, especially for African American and Hispanic students" (p. 14). Howard (2001) found that African American students identified teachers' willingness to care and their ability to bond with the students as the most important for the teacher. In this researcher's experience, these findings can be used to assist schools in improving student-teacher relationships in an effort to improve academic achievement for all students.

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

There are multiple factors that contribute to the student teacher relationship, one of which is SES. Hughes and Oi-man (2007) reported that children of low SES are less

likely than their white counterparts to experience supportive relationships with teachers. However, SES is a variable over which children have very little control, yet it can impact their academic achievement negatively. The poverty rate of school-aged children was reported at about 17 % in the NCES Condition on Education report (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). The poverty rate has remained fairly consistent over the last 30 years, with a slight increase from 17 % to 18 % as reported in the 2010 NCES condition of education (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). School SES is typically determined by the number of students who are eligible for the free or reduced-priced lunch programs because it is found consistently across survey collections, it has a strong correlation with district poverty, and at the student level it is correlated with measures of SES reported at the household level (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). However it can be argued that, "eligibility for the free or reduced-price school lunch program provides a proxy measure of family poverty status," since 41% of all fourth graders were eligible for the program in 2005 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006).

In the work of Ferguson (2002), he viewed SES from two perspectives that did not include measures of free and reduced-price lunch status and instead considered home intellectual resources of books and computers, as well as, the parents' education. Using this measure, his findings indicated that "high SES students achieve at higher levels than middle-SES and low-SES students among all racial and ethnic groups" (p. 3). Sirin (2005) stated "family SES at the student level is one of the strongest correlates of academic performance" (p. 438) and also points out the strong impact that family SES

has on students' academic achievement by the family's ability to provide resources at home and the type of school the student can access.

According to Brophy and Good (1974), "Socioeconomic status predicts both teachers' perceptions of their children and their treatment in the classroom" (p. 9). Brophy and Good (1974) summarized their findings in this way: teachers found that SES was an important predictive factor for school success; student attitudes toward teachers in lower class schools were poorer than those of their counterparts in middle class schools; children of lower SES tended to be placed in lower tracks with the reverse being true of higher SES students; lower class students received more dominative contacts from teachers while middle class students were treated with more supportive contacts; and middle class children tended to receive more total reinforcement than lower class children.

Another study by Brookover, Schweitzer, Schneider, Beady, Flood, and Wisenbaker (1978) found the following differences in regard to SES: teachers in higher achieving schools spent more time on instruction; teachers in lower achieving schools had lower expectations for more students; teachers in lower SES schools gave more corrections and provided more reinstruction to students; and there was no difference in reinforcement for right or wrong student responses in lower achieving schools.

Students' perceptions are very closely aligned with teachers' perceptions. Evans (2002) reported that students in middle and middle-upper class schools have high expectations for their teachers and expect to succeed, while children in urban schools appreciate good teachers rather than expect to have good teachers. Additionally, this research revealed that children in the urban public schools studied "cherish teachers who

care about them" (p. 57). Marks (2000) showed that higher SES students at elementary, middle, and high school tend to be more engaged, while lower SES elementary students are less engaged, no difference for middle school students, and lower SES high school students were more likely to be engaged. Similar results were found for middle school students by Woolley and Bowen (2007), specifically that lower SES students demonstrated lower levels of school engagement.

Sirin (2005) and Rumberger and Palardy (2005) reported that school SES, rather than family SES, directly affects academic achievement. Rumberger and Palardy (2005) pointed out four specific school variables that were significant: teacher's expectations; average hours of homework completed; average number of college prep courses taken; and percentage of students who reported feeling unsafe at school. In fact, Sirin (2005) asserted that "after controlling for the effects of school policies and practices (specifically expectations and academic climate), the socioeconomic composition had no significant impact on student learning" (p. 2021). Furthermore, when students experience an environment of high expectations and a sense of caring, academic achievement improves regardless of SES. Ferguson (2002) recommended that teachers do not assume there are motivational differences, but respond to skill deficits in a focused manner, provide plenty of encouragement, and allow for family-background differences by providing access to learning resources and experiences.

The research discussed supports the need for setting high expectations and for providing a caring environment for all students regardless of his/her socioeconomic status. The researcher's experience has shown that what is known about how students and teachers perceive differences in SES can provide information to assist schools in

implementing policies and practices that will lessen the effects of poverty on academic achievement.

Reading Comprehension

Many children still continue to have difficulty learning to read. being able to read fluently, and comprehending the information (Zimmermann & Hutchins, 2003). In fact, only 33 % of fourth graders in the nation scored at the Advanced and Proficient level in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2009), while the proficiency target for NCLB was 59.2 % in 2009 (United States Department of Education, 2004). According to Schenck, Walker, Nagel, and Webb (2005), "this failure can have tremendous long-term impact on self-confidence, motivation to learn, future performance in school, and success in life" (p. 1).

As Taberski (2011) elucidated in her work on literacy essentials, children require some fundamental needs in order to become successful readers, including (a) teachers as their advocates; (b) ample opportunities to read, write, and discuss text; (c) reading accurately and fluently with comprehension; (d) opportunities to acquire background knowledge; (e) the opportunity to extend their oral language and vocabulary; (f) engagement in reading and writing activities simultaneously; (g) having a variety of strategies to use when reading difficult text; and (h) engaging in a variety of activities including whole class, small group and individual settings (pp. 7-11). Maynard (2002) pointed out that boys are likely to underachieve in literacy due to differences in choice of materials and genres, among other attributes. Boys tend to choose non-fiction more than girls and boys prefer stories about adventure, humor, and football while girls like stories about families; with most reading materials used in the school setting mirroring the

reading preference of girls (Maynard, 2002). Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (2005) identified best practices in teaching reading, including "children learn to read best in a low-risk environment" (p. 45).

As Taberski (2011) advocated for effective teaching strategies to be used in classroom instruction, she also reminded teachers to be warm and find joy in teaching. Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (2005) pointed out "wise reading teachers are student-centered" (p. 57) . Reading is an interactive process that should be student-centered, cognitive, and social (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005); therefore a strong student-teacher relationship would serve to enhance learning for all students.

Summary

Teachers' perceptions of the impact of positive relationships with students have been supported throughout the literature as significant to improved academic achievement, as well as social adjustment to school. Furthermore, it is consistently reported in the literature that effective teachers provide a safe environment characterized by caring, support, value, and respect for students (Jacobson, 2000; Rogers & Renaud, 1999; Stronge, 2002). Students' perceptions of the teachers have not been explored as extensively. Moreover, very little, if any, research exists where the perceptions of elementary students have been elicited. Yet, Follman (1995) indicated his strong belief that because students have the most experiences with teachers, they should be given the opportunity to provide input regarding his/her teachers with that input being used as a basis of information to make improvements in the teaching and learning environment of schools and classrooms.

Gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status are factors that contribute to teachers' perceptions of students. The research clearly indicated that teachers consistently report more closeness with girls and tend to treat girls more favorably and that elementary schools tend to be more favorable to girls than boys (Brophy & Good, 1974; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Schief & Tartar, 2003). Ethnicity also impacted the student-teacher relationship, with the information being somewhat inconsistent. Some authors reported a marked difference in the treatment of minority students in the classroom (Brophy & Good, 1974; Ferguson, 2002), while others reported less of a difference in treatment when the students and teachers have similar ethnic background, as well as, similar values and norms (Hubbard & Datnow, 2005; Saft & Pianta, 2001).

Another variable which students have very little control over yet can impact the relationship between students and teachers is SES. In a study conducted by Patterson, Kupersmidt, and Vaden (1990), family income level was the strongest predictor of academic achievement and a strong predictor of behavior problems in school. Teachers tended to treat children of lower SES status differently than their middle and upper-middle SES counterparts and children know they are treated differently (LaPlante, 2003).

Teachers who are successful in the teaching and learning process have positive relationships with students, believe that all students can learn, maintain a classroom environment based on trust and respect, and demonstrate the skills of a life-long learner (LaPlante, 2003). "Students are motivated when they believe that teachers treat them like people and care about them personally and educationally" (Rogers & Renaud, 1999, p. 1). If positive student-teacher relationships are an important factor in determining learner outcomes, specifically increased academic achievement, and elementary students can

provide an accurate source of information in the same manner that secondary students have been demonstrated to provide that information, then elementary students' perceptions could be a critical piece that can contribute to improvement in teaching and learning in the elementary classroom. Given the purpose of this study: to examine elementary students' perceptions of teachers in relation to caring, respect, help, and motivation to succeed; to identify relationships among achievement, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity and students' perceptions of their teachers; and to identify the impact of students' perceptions as they relate to higher levels of learning and given the findings from the literature, it would seem that exploring the perceptions of third grade students would give teachers and administrators insight into ways to increase teacher effectiveness and student motivation to learn, ultimately improving the academic achievement of all students.

The research design in Chapter 3 addresses how third grade students' perceptions of teachers in relation to caring, respect, help, and motivation to succeed impact academic achievement. The research design will also identify relationships among achievement, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity and students' perceptions of their teachers, and the impact of students' perceptions as they relate to higher levels of achievement.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine young students' perceptions of teachers in relation to caring, respect, help, and motivation to succeed. The study was designed to identify relationships among achievement, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity and students' perceptions of their teachers, as well as identify the effect of students' perceptions as they relate to higher levels of achievement. The following research question formed the basis of this study: What is the relationship among student achievement, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and third grade students' perceptions of their teachers?

The literature review in Chapter Two developed the appropriateness of studying student perceptions of teachers, how this will serve to improve achievement, and potential strategies to support the school improvement process. Chapter Three will provide an overview of the methodology to be used to study the relationship among students' perceptions of teachers and achievement, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. In this chapter, the researcher presented the research design, identified the populations and sample, described the instrumentation, identified the data collection procedures, explained the data analysis procedures, and outlined the limitations of the study. To finalize Chapter Three, the researcher summarized the study.

Research Design

The study was quantitative using a correlational research methodology to identify relationships among students' perceptions of teachers, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and achievement. The researcher will use this methodology to identify relationships among variables and to draw conclusions that provide information to assist

administrators and teachers in the school improvement process. This study will include information that may provide insight in the hiring process, determine staff development needs, and assist school staff in addressing school and classroom climate concerns.

Hypotheses

1. There is a relationship between students who perceive that their teachers have characteristics such as caring, support, and respect, as measured by the Education for the Future Initiative (EFF) School Climate Survey and higher levels of achievement as measured by the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and Developmental Reading Assessment – Second Edition (DRA2).
2. Students with higher levels of achievement, as measured by the SRI and DRA2, will demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.
3. Female students will demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.
4. Non-poor students will demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.
5. Caucasian students will demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.

Null Hypotheses

1. There is no relationship between students who perceive that their teachers have characteristics such as caring, support, and respect, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey and higher levels of achievement as

measured by the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and Developmental Reading Assessment – Second Edition (DRA2).

2. Students with higher levels of achievement, as measured by the SRI and DRA2, will not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.
3. Female students will not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey
4. Non-poor students will not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.
5. Caucasian students will not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.

For hypothesis one, the researcher analyzed the data using a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and *t*-test for significance in order to identify the potential relationship between the student's perceptions of teacher characteristics, measured by the Likert-scale student survey, and student achievement, measured by the Scholastic Reading Inventory and the Developmental Reading Assessment. For the remaining hypotheses, the researcher analyzed data for significance using a two-tailed *z*-test for difference in proportions.

Population and Sample

The study took place in a K-12 public school district of approximately 12,000 students. The school district is located in a major metropolitan area in the Midwestern United States. The district was comprised of seven kindergarten through fifth grade elementary schools, as well as, three middle school (grades 6-8), and two high schools (grades 9-12). The population for this study included approximately 250 third grade students from two elementary schools in the district. Table 1 depicts the number of participants from the study schools that were included in the population and the sample. The total population of 223 students would be considered a high participation rate; with only 29 students not included in the sample due to either not having completed both the spring and fall SRI and DRA2 assessments or not being enrolled for the entire school year.

Table 1

Participant Population and Sample

Participants	Population	Sample
All	223	194
Male	106	91
Female	117	93
Free/Reduced Lunch	60	53
Nonwhite	29	27
High Achievement	29	29

The participant groups were disaggregated by subgroups used by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for purposes of determining AYP for the school district. The make-up of the schools' populations determined the selection for the study. The demographics of the students in the school, displayed in Figure 1, represent each

school's population and the total population of the district and the state of Missouri for the disaggregate groups used for determining AYP.

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

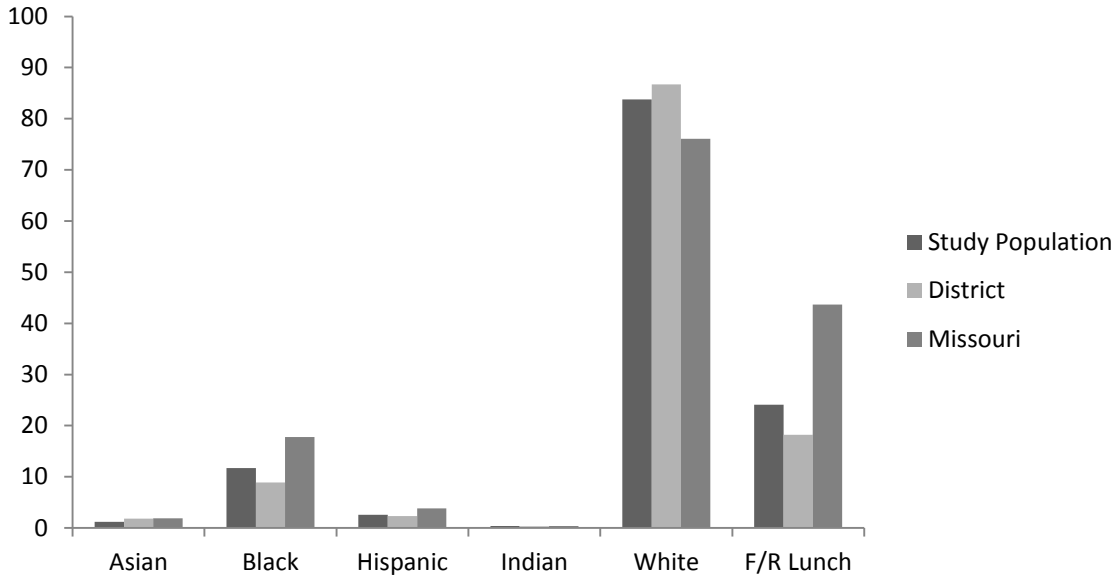


Figure 1. A comparison of the participants to the district and the state of Missouri with respect to disaggregate groups used to determine AYP.

The two elementary schools were selected for the study based on reasons that directly relate to the purpose of the study and the comparison groups. The purpose of the study was to examine young students' perceptions of teachers in relation to caring, respect, help, and motivation to succeed and to identify relationships among achievement, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. Given that, both schools are considered high poverty schools in the district based on the percentage of students who participate in the F/R lunch program when compared to the other elementary schools. The combined population from the two selected elementary schools would provide an adequate sample to complete the statistical analysis. In addition, the students in this subgroup at both

schools, failed to meet AYP on the MAP in Communication Arts. Given the study was intended to consider the effect of students' perceptions of teachers on achievement as it relates to socioeconomic status (SES), it would be appropriate to study students from schools with higher poverty levels. Second, both schools have a higher percentage of minority students when compared to other elementary schools in the district, again providing an adequate sample for consideration of students' perceptions of teachers with respect to ethnicity.

The researcher also considered the similarities that exist among all schools in the district. The teachers in all elementary schools implement the same curriculum objectives, use the same textbooks and instructional resources, and participate in the same training and staff development activities provided in the area of curriculum and instruction. Common assessments, including the SRI and DRA2, are utilized at each school. The schools have the same number of instructional days and hours, as well as opportunities for extended learning in after school tutoring programs. In addition, each school has the same resources for instructional support services provided by additional staff such as instructional assistants and special reading teachers, as well as individualized education programs. Even though all schools have access to the same resources and training, as well as the same amount of time spent on instruction, the students in the study schools demonstrated lower achievement levels overall, than the other elementary schools in the district.

The demographics of the selected schools are similar in make-up to the district, however somewhat different when compared to the population of students in the state of Missouri. The comparisons of white and non-white students are more similar, while the

percentage of students who qualify for F/R lunch (SES) are more disparate, as demonstrated in Figure 2.

COMPARISON OF POPULATIONS

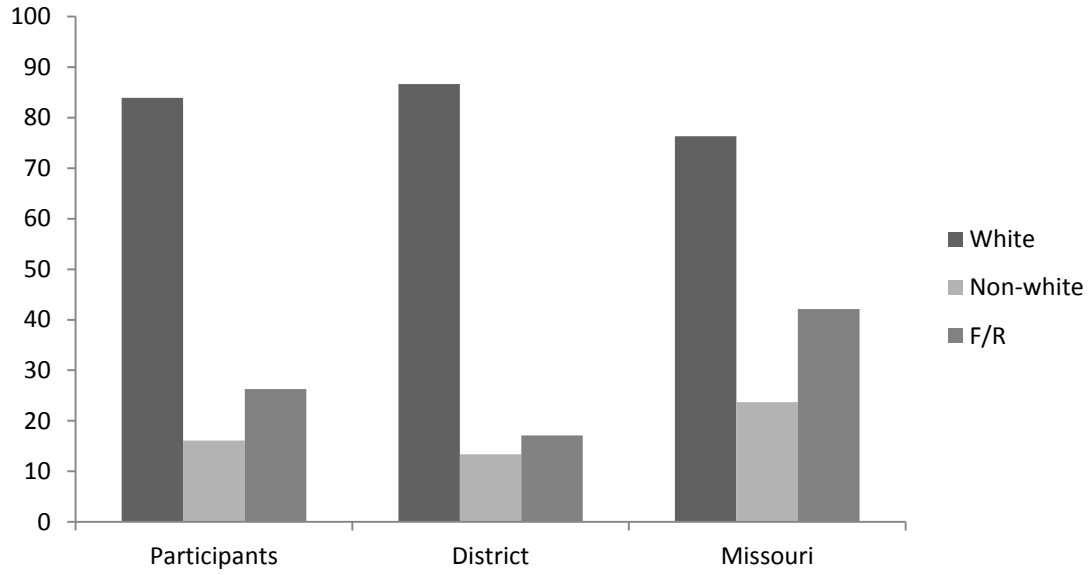


Figure 2. A comparison of the participants to the district and the state of Missouri with respect to ethnicity and percent of students who qualify for F/R lunch prices.

A total of fifteen classrooms were included in the study. The classroom teachers were predominantly female, 14 female teachers and 1 male teacher. Therefore, the majority of the participants were students in classrooms with female teachers, typical of most elementary schools.

Instrumentation

The three instruments used to collect data were The Education for the Future (EFF) School Climate Survey, The Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), and The Developmental Reading Assessment, Second Edition (DRA2). The EFF School Climate Survey is a questionnaire developed by Bernhardt (2010) to provide schools with insight

into students' perceptions of their learning environment. To establish validity, the questionnaires were designed using research about student learning and what must be in place in order for students to learn (Bernhardt, 2010). Students responded to statements that reflect their perceptions of the school, the teacher, the principal, and him or herself as a student. Research about effective schools and information gleaned from student surveys have been used to develop the items included in the survey. Bernhardt (2010) established reliability by administering the questions two times annually over a three year period in designated EFF schools participating in the research.

Reading comprehension is measured using the SRI, an interactive test administered using a computer. The computer-adapted assessment measures how well students read expository texts of varying levels. The results are reported as scale scores or Lexile (L) measures and student growth of 300 L demonstrates one year of growth in reading ability (Scholastic Reading Inventory, 2001). The SRI is a valid instrument as demonstrated by its correlation of 0.71 with the SRI print version and 0.73 with other standardized measures of reading comprehension (Scholastic Reading Inventory, 2001).

A second measure used by the district to determine growth in reading is the DRA2. The DRA2 is a diagnostic assessment tool specifically designed to assist teachers in determining a students' reading skills and designing future instruction to improve and enhance reading skills (Pearson Education, Inc., 2009). Student growth is reported by levels, with ten levels representing one year's growth (Pearson Education, Inc., 2009). The DRA2 is considered to be a valid instrument as demonstrated by its correlation with other well-known measures of reading comprehension and fluency, with correlations of 0.60, 0.65, and 0.70 (Pearson Education, Inc., 2009).

EFF School Climate Survey. The survey instrument consists of 33 statements with Likert-type scale responses ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (see Appendix C for complete survey). Student responses were coded in the following way:

Strongly Disagree	1
Disagree	2
Neutral	3
Agree	4
Strongly Agree	5

The items from the student survey are depicted in Table 2. Students responded to all 33 statements in the survey. The survey included statements from different themes including school factors, teacher factors, principal and supervisor factors, peer interactions, and home influences.

Table 2

Education for Future School Climate Survey

Survey Statements	Theme	Included
My teacher treats me with respect	Teacher	X
My teacher cares about me	Teacher	X
My teacher thinks I will be successful	Teacher	X
My teacher listens to my ideas	Teacher	X
My teacher is a good teacher	Teacher	X
My teachers believes I can learn	Teacher	X
I am challenged by the work my teacher asks me to do	Teacher	X
Students are treated fairly by teachers	Teacher	X

Student Data. Achievement and student data was obtained as a secondary source from the district's data warehouse. All data was collected during the same time, over the course of one school year. Achievement data was collected from the September 2009 administration and the May 2010 administration of the SRI and the DRA2, both considered to be valid measures of reading achievement. All third grade students in the district were given the assessments during the course of one school year, with individual scores for students participating in the study being obtained from the district data warehouse. Table 3 shows the average SRI and DRA2 scores for the population at each school, along with the total average for the population in the study. As evidenced, the average achievement is very similar in the selected schools. As well, the average student responses to the EFF School Climate Survey were closely aligned.

Table 3

Average Achievement for the Study Population

	Average SRI	Average DRA 2	Average Likert Score
School 1	489.54	33.08	4.40
School 2	461.84	35.10	4.45
Combined	482.18	33.67	4.42

Information on gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status was provided by the school district as reported to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in the October Core Data Cycle 2009. Consistent with the research in this area, the lowest achievement is demonstrated by the students who make up the low SES group, those students participating in the Free/Reduced lunch program. The achievement averages for the SRI and DRA2 for all the disaggregate groups who participated in the

study are depicted in Table 4, as well as the average Likert scores for the students in each subgroup.

Table 4

Average Achievement for the Population by Disaggregate Groups

	Average SRI	Average DRA 2	Average Likert Score
High Achievers	791.79	44.38	4.38
Female	473.76	33.64	4.39
Free/Reduced Lunch	345.75	29.17	4.46
White	508.95	34.50	4.41

To conduct the Pearson Product Moment Correlation, a random sample was selected from the total population. The achievement averages for the SRI and DRA2 for the study sample from each school and the total sample for the study are outlined in Table 5. The average achievement of the students in the study sample is consistent with the averages for the total population, as are the average Likert scores from the EFF School Climate Survey.

Table 5

Average Achievement for the Study Sample

	Average SRI	Average DRA 2	Average Likert Score
School 1	496.38	34.34	4.35
School 2	529.46	36.08	4.44
Combined	505.40	34.82	4.38

Finally, a *z*-test for difference in means was conducted on a random sample from each of the disaggregate groups. See Table 6 for the average achievement scores on the SRI and DRA2 for each of the sample groups. The average achievement of the sample groups was consistent with the average scores for the total population. The average student responses to the EFF School Climate Survey were also closely aligned.

Table 6

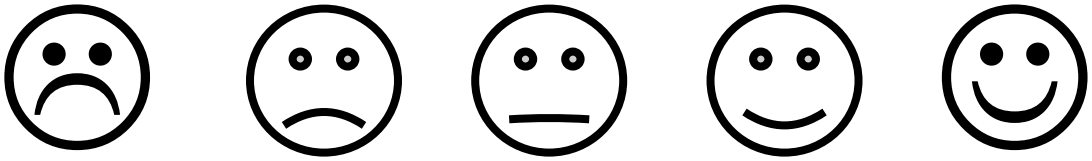
Average Achievement for the Disaggregate Group Samples

	Average SRI	Average DRA 2	Average Likert Score
High Achievers	791.79	44.38	4.38
Female	510.63	36.23	4.43
Free/Reduced Lunch	321.93	28.27	4.39
White	559.53	35.30	4.58

Data Collection Procedures

The EFF School Climate Survey was used to collect student perception data, as it relates to various school and teacher characteristics. Students willing to participate who had parent permission completed the EFF School Climate Survey at the student's home school in the computer lab. The survey was administered via an on-line method, Survey Monkey, and under the direct supervision of the researcher. Each student had access to an individual computer and completed the survey at his or her own pace. The researcher gave the oral instructions to all students simultaneously and provided a visual depiction of the Likert-scale responses as a reference for the students, see Figure 3.

LIKERT SCALE



1- Strongly Disagree	2-Disagree	3-Neutral	4-Agree	5-Strongly Agree

Figure 3. Visual representations for Likert-type responses.

For students who were unable to read all the words in the statements, the researcher read the phrases to the students. There was no explanation or interpretation provided to the students. The EFF School Climate Survey was administered to all participants in the study in May 2010 by the researcher. All 194 participants responded to all 33 items in the survey with eight items selected for inclusion in the analysis. The average Likert score for each characteristic is listed in Table 7.

Table 7

Average Likert Score Responses for Teacher Items

Survey Statements	Average Likert score
My teacher treats me with respect	4.56
My teacher cares about me	4.62
My teacher thinks I will be successful	4.54
My teacher listens to my ideas	4.25
My teacher is a good teacher	4.74
My teachers believes I can learn	4.73
I am challenged by the work my teacher asks me to do	3.63
Students are treated fairly by teachers	4.28

For the purposes of this study, the items related to teacher factors were included in the analysis since they align with Hypothesis One with respect to the teacher characteristics of caring, support, and respect. The literature review in Chapter Two specifically identified teacher characteristics that were found to promote student achievement, including respect and caring. In the survey, students are asked to directly identify if the teacher respects them and cares about them. In addition, the students are asked to identify if their teacher is a good teacher.

Several statements are directly aligned with students' perceptions of support, specifically:

- My teacher thinks I will be successful;
- My teacher listens to my ideas;
- My teacher believes I can learn; and
- Students are treated fairly by the teacher.

Students' responses to these statements indicate whether or not they believe they have teacher support for learning. Finally, the statement, I am challenged by the work my teacher asks me to do, was selected since students list high expectations as a characteristic of an effective teacher as denoted in the literature review, as well. Figure 4 shows the distribution of student responses on the eight selected survey items.

STUDENT SURVEY REPONSES – TEACHER ITEMS

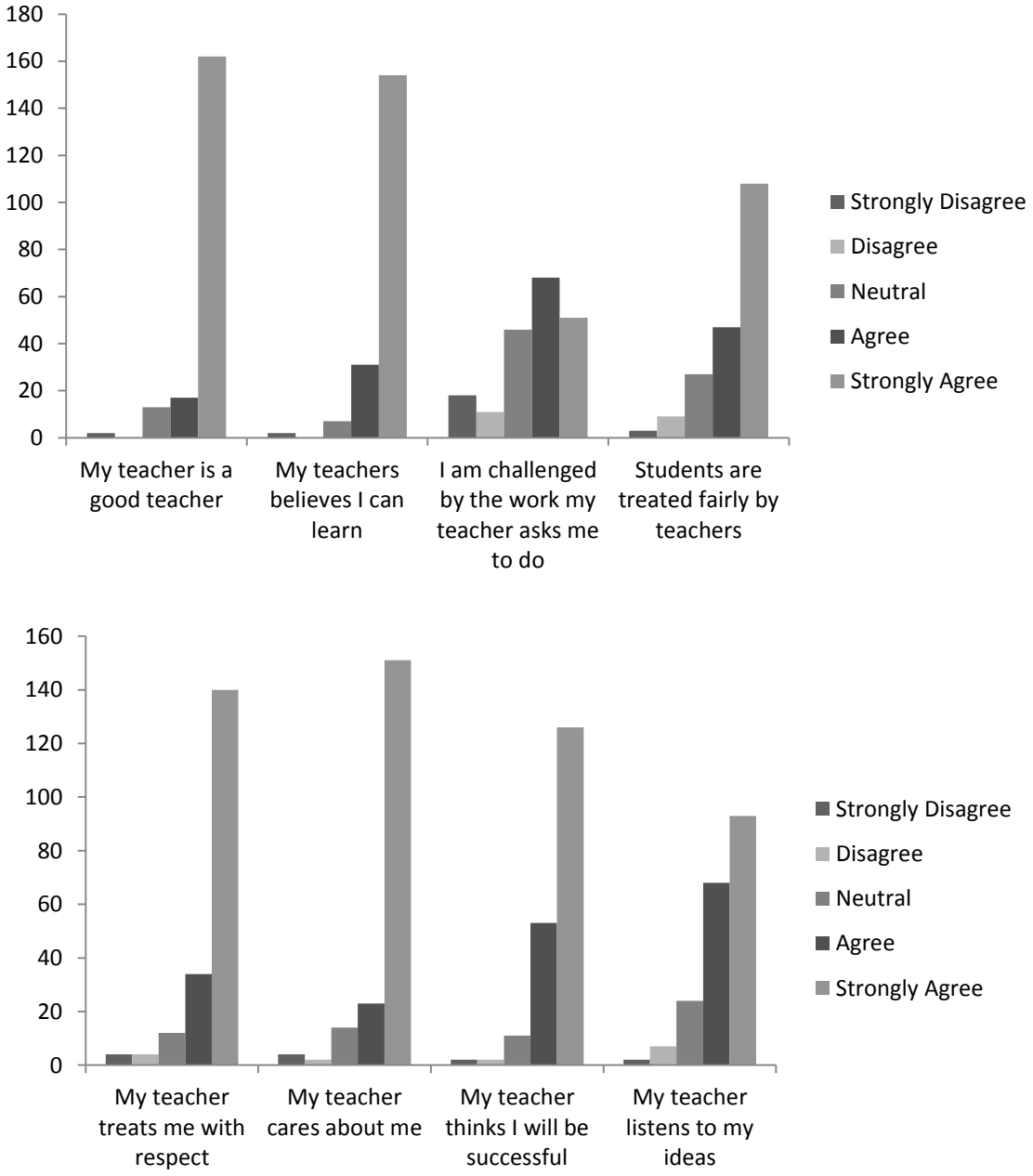


Figure 4. A representation of the participants' responses to the survey items collected for data analysis: 1 – Strongly Disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Neutral; 4 – Agree; and 5 – Strongly Agree.

Standardized achievement measures (SRI and DRA2) were administered throughout the course of the school year. Classroom teachers in the selected schools administered the SRI in September, December, and May of the 2009-10 school year. The classroom teachers administered the DRA2 during the first two weeks of September 2009 and again in a two-week time span in May 2010. Administration by the students' classroom teachers followed the school district's timeline and standardized procedures for administration. The students completed the SRI independently at a computer and were monitored by the teacher in the classroom. However, the students were not given support, other than technical needs. The DRA2 was administered by the classroom teacher individually to each student.

Data analysis. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the relationship between students' perceptions of teachers and achievement, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. It was not the intent of this study to determine a cause and effect relationship between variables.

Null Hypotheses

1. There is no relationship between students who perceive that their teachers have characteristics such as caring, support, and respect, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey and higher levels of achievement as measured by the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and Developmental Reading Assessment – Second Edition (DRA2).
2. Students with higher levels of achievement, as measured by the SRI and DRA2, will not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.

3. Female students will not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey
4. Non-poor students will not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.
5. Caucasian students will not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.

Quantitative data analysis was used to determine whether to reject the null hypotheses. An analysis of randomly sampled data, using the calculation of a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient followed by a *t*-test for significance, was conducted to test the first null hypothesis, "there is no relationship between students who perceive that their teachers have characteristics such as caring, support, and respect, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey and higher levels of achievement as measured by the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and Developmental Reading Assessment – Second Edition (DRA2)." The remaining null hypotheses, students with higher levels of achievement, female students, non-poor students, and Caucasians will demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers, were tested for differences by applying a two-tailed *z*-test for difference in proportions to the randomly selected samples of data.

Summary

As schools continue to respond to the demands of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and strive to improve student achievement, the results of this study have the potential to provide teachers, educational leaders, and policy makers with new resources for improving teaching and learning. The findings of this study will provide additional knowledge about students' perceptions of their teachers and how these relationships influence student achievement. Districts, schools, and teachers can use student perception data as a part of the school improvement planning process, assisting school personnel in developing strategies that will lead to increased student achievement for all students – the ultimate goal of NCLB legislation.

Chapter Four: Results

Overview

As school districts strive to meet the goals of NCLB, by meeting annual proficiency targets, denoted in Table 8, it is important to know and understand all the facets of teaching and learning that affect achievement.

Table 8

MSIP - Adequate Yearly Progress

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Annual Proficiency Targets
Percent of Students Scoring Proficient and Advanced

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Communication Arts	34.7	42.9	51.0	59.2	67.4	75.5	83.7	91.8	100.0
Math	26.6	35.8	45.0	54.1	63.3	72.5	81.7	90.8	100.0

This study was designed to consider affective elements that may impact student learning and achievement. Specifically, the researcher designed the study to examine young students' perceptions of teachers in relation to caring, respect, help, and motivation to succeed, to identify relationships among achievement, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity and students' perceptions of their teachers, and identify the impact of students' perceptions as they relate to higher levels of achievement. School leaders may use the results of this research to influence professional development programs for teachers, shape hiring practices, and enhance school climate.

The researcher designed this study to answer the following research question: What is the relationship among student achievement, gender, socioeconomic status,

ethnicity, and third grade students' perceptions of their teachers? The researcher was working with the assumption that there is a statistically significant correlation between student achievement and students' perceptions of their teachers (Baker, 1999; Brookover, Schweitzer, Schneider, Beady, Flood, & Wisenbaker, 1978; Noddings, 1988; Pianta & Walsh, 1996). The more positive students' perceptions are with respect to the teacher, the higher the students' achievement. In addition, the researcher was working with the assumption that other factors such as gender, socioeconomic status and ethnicity may influence the students' perceptions of the teacher in the classroom (Brophy & Good, 1974; Ding & Hall, 2007; Ferguson, 2002; Hayes, Ryan, & Zseller, 1994; Nieto, 1996).

This study focused on two elementary schools in a suburban school district of approximately 12,000 students. All third grade students in the two schools, with parent permission, participated in the study. To be included in the sample, the students were required to attend at the school for the entire school year and have completed both the pre- and post-assessment measures used in the study. Out of the total population of 223 students, with permission, 194 participated in the study.

Correlation Analysis

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the relationship between students' perceptions of teachers and achievement, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. The researcher used correlation statistics to identify relationships among students' perceptions of teachers, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and achievement. This method was selected to assist the researcher in identifying relationships among variables and to draw conclusions that provided information to assist administrators and teachers in the school improvement process.

Student perceptions of teachers. The first null hypothesis related to students' perceptions of teachers was, "There is no relationship between students who perceive that their teachers have characteristics such as caring, support, and respect, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey and higher levels of achievement as measured by the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and Developmental Reading Assessment – Second Edition (DRA2)."

An analysis of randomly sampled data using the calculation of a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient followed by a *t*-test for significance was conducted to answer the first null hypothesis. The results of the comparison of the SRI score with responses on the Likert-type survey scale (R=0.17 and R^2=0.03; *t*-test value = 0.32 and *t*-critical = 1.96) yielded a non-significant weak relationship between students' perceptions of the teacher and higher levels of achievement.

The results of the comparison of the DRA2 score with responses on the Likert-type survey scale (R= 0.05 and R^2=0.00; *t*-test value = 3.13 and *t*-critical = 1.96) showed a very weak, significant relationship between students' perceptions of teachers and higher levels of achievement. Though significant, the relationship was so weak that zero percent of the variation in DRA2 scores can be explained by variation in student perceptions of caring relationships.

Table 9

Pearson Product Correlation Statistics – Student Perceptions

Achievement	*R*	*R* Square	*t*-test value	Significant?
SRI	0.17	0.03	0.32	No
DRA 2	0.05	0.00	3.13	Yes

Note: t-critical = 1.96

As evidenced by the outcome of the calculation of the correlation coefficient, this researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. In other words, there is no relationship between students who perceive their teachers to have characteristics such as caring, support, and respect and higher levels of student achievement on the SRI and the DRA2.

To further consider the effect of students' perceptions of teachers as they impact achievement, this researcher examined differences in perception among high achievers, females, non-poor students, and Caucasian students versus the total population in the study. To make comparisons for each of the different student groups, this researcher tested the remaining null hypotheses for significance by applying a two-tailed *z*-test for difference in proportions to randomly selected samples of data.

Perceptions of high achieving students. The second null hypothesis related to high achieving students was, "Students with higher levels of achievement, as measured by the SRI and DRA2, will not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey."

The *z*-test for difference in proportions applied to the data for students with higher levels of achievement, as measured by the SRI and DRA2, did not demonstrate a difference in student perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey. Following comparison of the calculated *z* value of -0.65 to the critical *z* value of 1.96 (see Table 10), this researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. Students with higher levels of achievement, as measured by the SRI and DRA2, did not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.

Table 10

z-Test: Two Sample for Means – High Achievers

	High Achievers	Population
Mean	4.38	4.46
Known Variance	0.30	0.19
Observations	29	45
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
z	-0.65	
P(Z<=z) two-tail	0.51	
z Critical two-tail	1.96	

Note: $p \leq .05$

Perceptions of female students. The third null hypothesis relative to gender was, "Female students will not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey."

The *z*-test for difference in proportions applied to the data for female students did not demonstrate a difference in student perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey. Following comparison of the calculated *z* value of -0.46 to the critical *z* value of -1.96 (see Table 11), this researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. Female students did not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.

Table 11

z-Test: Two Sample for Means – Gender

	Females	Population
Mean	4.41	4.46
Known Variance	0.14	0.19
Observations	29	45
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
z	-0.46	
P(Z<=z) two-tail	0.64	
z Critical two-tail	1.96	

Note: $p \leq .05$

Perceptions of non-poor students. The fourth null hypothesis relative to socioeconomic status was, "Non-poor students will not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as by the EFF School Climate Survey."

The *z*-test for difference in proportions applied to the data for non-poor students did not demonstrate a difference in student perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey. Following comparison of the calculated *z* value of -0.68 to the critical *z* value of -1.96 (see Table 12), this researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. Non-poor students did not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.

Table 12

z-Test: Two Sample for Means – Socioeconomic Status

	Non-poor	Population
Mean	4.39	4.46
Known Variance	0.16	0.19
Observations	30	45
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
z	-0.68	
P(Z<=z) two-tail	0.49	
z Critical two-tail	1.96	

Note: $p \leq .05$

Perceptions of Caucasian students. The fifth null hypothesis relative to ethnicity was, "Caucasian students will demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey."

The *z*-test for difference in proportions applied to the data for Caucasian students did not demonstrate a difference in student perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey. Following comparison of the calculated *z* value of -0.08 to the critical *z* value of -1.96 (see Table 13), this researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. Caucasian students did not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.

Table 13

z-Test: Two Sample for Means - Ethnicity

	Caucasian	Population
Mean	4.45	4.46
Known Variance	0.65	0.19
Observations	30	45
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
z	-0.08	
P(Z<=z) two-tail	0.94	
z Critical two-tail	1.96	

Note: $p \leq .05$

Summary

Analysis of the quantitative data from this study resulted in the decision not to reject the null hypotheses # 1 – 5. The results of the comparison of the SRI scores with responses on the Likert-type scale, through calculation of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, yielded a non-significant weak relationship between students' perceptions of the teacher and higher levels of achievement.

The results of the comparison of the DRA2 score with responses on the Likert-type survey scale showed a very weak, significant relationship between students' perceptions of teachers and higher levels of achievement. Though significant, the relationship was so weak that zero percent of the variation in DRA2 scores can be explained by variance in student perception of caring relationships.

The *z*-test analyses demonstrated consistent results; the sample of the total population compared to each subgroup of high achieving, female, non-poor, and Caucasian students did not demonstrate a difference in student perceptions of teachers with regard to caring, support, and respect when compared to the total population.

The results presented do not support the hypotheses that a relationship would exist between perception and high achievement nor that differences in perception exist between perceptions of individual subgroups compared to the total group, when considering the impact of perceptions of third grade students regarding teacher characteristics of caring, support and respect. Implications and recommendations for future research are presented in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Overview

School district leaders are continuously seeking ways to improve student learning and achievement. They want to ensure that students are learning in ways that will assist them in being successful in post-secondary education and in the workforce. In addition, school districts have the responsibility to meet the achievement goals set forth as part of NCLB, where 100% of students must demonstrate proficiency in math and reading by 2014 (United States Department of Education, 2002). To assist in achieving these goals, school districts have sought ways to improve teaching and learning. Strategies may have included professional development in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Districts may have also enlisted the assistance of expert consultants or purchased programmed materials to enhance the pedagogy. In addition, districts could have increased student support in the areas of math and reading, reduced class sizes, and implemented additional time for learning, among other strategies.

Districts often provide professional development activities for teachers that include effective teaching methods, differentiated instruction, and technology usage, among other pedagogical strategies. In addition, districts have aligned curriculum with state and national standards to ensure the content being presented to students and the assessments are aligned to assist districts in making AYP. Also, district leaders often provide time for teachers to engage in the curriculum review and revision process, as well as time to collaborate with job-alike peers. In other words, teachers are provided time to work with other teachers who teach the same subject matter and grade level. These are all strategies identified as effective professional development for staff, but do not

typically include students in the process. However, researchers studying students in an urban high school identified a need for a meaningful curriculum in a study conducted by Cushman (2006). The students in her study were very decisive about what would get them interested in school and included the following thoughts, "a voice in course offerings; academic courses relative to things they care about; respect for their nonacademic interests; inspiring role models; and opportunities to connect with the community" (p. 34). Yet, students are often not included in the curriculum review process and the development thereof.

In an effort to support students who are not achieving at the expected levels, school districts often incorporate methods that extend the school day or provide additional instruction in math and reading during the school day. While additional time for learning may be needed, if incorporated during the school day, students may be missing other subjects or activities. While the additional time with students may support the development of positive student teacher relationships, students' connections to school may be harmed by not being included in some parts of the day in order to gain more instruction. In some cases the additional instruction may be implemented by a teacher's assistant or an instructional specialist, again interfering with the student teacher relationship. Gordon and Crabtree (2006) summarized it this way: "the emphasis moves from teaching children to teaching content" (p. 73).

Teachers provide input into the school improvement process, both formally and informally. However, school districts have rarely considered the perceptions of students as part of the school improvement process. If solicited, most input from students focuses on climate and safety aspects, with very little focus on achievement. As Matthews (2000)

pointed out, less than one percent of U.S. school districts have invited K – 12 student feedback in the school improvement process. In his work, he cited examples from school districts throughout the United States where teachers are reluctant to have student and parent feedback used as part of the evaluation process and view this as negative (Matthews, 2000). While input from the consumer is a common business practice, with customers and clients providing feedback about service, products, and climate, teachers are not comfortable with the idea of being graded by students and parents even though they are the primary customers. Matthews identified several reasons for this, including teachers' beliefs that students may be "resentful of demanding instruction" (p. 1) and parents cannot make judgments since they are not in the classroom to see what is happening (Matthews, 2000).

The purpose of this study then was to examine young students' perceptions of teachers in relation to caring, respect, help, and motivation to succeed, to identify relationships among achievement, gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity and students' perceptions of their teachers, and identify the impact of students' perceptions as they relate to higher levels of achievement. Research (Whitney, Leonard, Leonard, Carmelio, & Carmelio, 2006) has provided insight into how older students (ages 13 – 17) perceive their teachers. Gordon and Crabtree (2006) identified the students' most important factors for learning, see Figure 5.

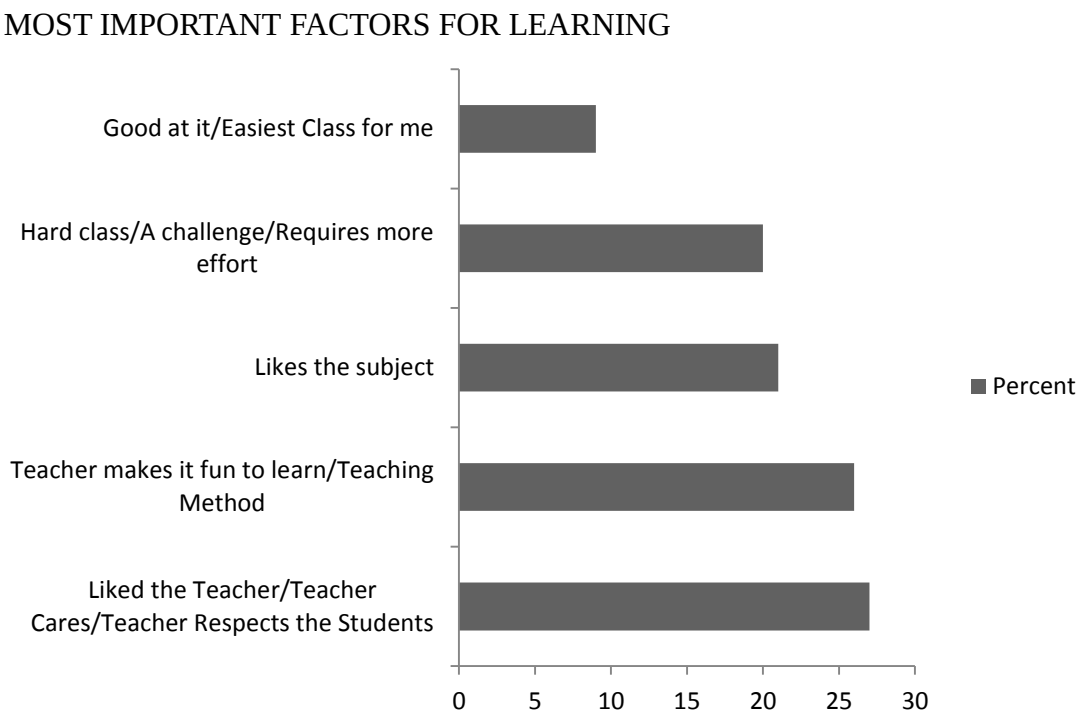


Figure 5. Students aged 13 to 17 identified the reasons they learned the most in a class from the previous semester. Adapted from "Building Engaged Schools," by G. Gordon and S. Crabtree, 2006, p. 77. Copyright 2006 by The Gallup Organization.

However, this research has rarely been used as a part of school improvement planning, nor has it been used to change practice in the school setting (Matthews, 2000). In addition, very little research has focused on elementary students below grade six. Hence, this study attempted to respond to the research question: what is the relationship among student achievement, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and third grade students' perceptions of their teachers?

To respond to the research question and identify potential relationships among students' perceptions of teachers, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and achievement a quantitative research methodology was used to analyze the data collected

from student achievement measures in reading and a school climate survey. Two different analyses were conducted. First, the researcher conducted an analysis of randomly sampled data using a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and a *t*-test for significance to seek the relationship between student perceptions of caring and high achievement. On the four subsequent hypotheses, the researcher conducted a *z*-test for differences in proportions to compare student perceptions among high achievers, females, non-poor students and Caucasian students versus the total population in the study. This research method was selected to assist the researcher in identifying relationships among variables and to draw conclusions intended to provide information to assist administrators and teachers in the school improvement process.

In summary, the researcher failed to reject null hypothesis one. The researcher failed to reject null hypotheses two through five with results showing no difference in student perceptions, as well. The identified subgroups, high achieving students, females, non-poor students, and Caucasian students did not demonstrate more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, which is inconsistent with the literature cited in Chapter Two. The analysis demonstrated consistent results; the sample of the total population, as well as the sub groups (achievement, gender, socio-economic status and ethnicity), did not demonstrate a difference in achievement when considering their perceptions of teachers regarding caring, support, and respect. The results presented were inconclusive as to the impact of perceptions of third grade students regarding teacher characteristics of caring, support, and respect and higher levels of achievement.

Research Questions

Student perceptions of teachers. In hypothesis one, the researcher stated there would be a relationship between students who perceive their teachers have characteristics such as caring, support, and respect, as measured by the Education for the Future Initiative (EFF) School Climate Survey and higher levels of achievement as measured by the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and Developmental Reading Assessment – Second Edition (DRA2). The results of the comparison of the SRI score with responses on the Likert-type survey scale yielded a non-significant relationship (R=0.17 and R^2-0.03) and the results of the comparison of the DRA2 scores with responses on the Likert-type survey scale showed a very weak, significant relationship (R=0.05 and R^2-0.00) between students' perceptions of teachers and achievement. Therefore, after conducting the Pearson Product Moment Correlation and a *t*-test for significance, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis there is no relationship between students who perceive that their teachers have characteristics such as caring, support, and respect and higher levels of achievement.

These finding were not expected given the results of research in this area that is outlined in the literature review in Chapter Two. The research found and cited focused primarily on secondary students and early elementary students, grades kindergarten through second. For example, in the study of middle and high schools students conducted by Ding and Hall (2007), students with caring teachers reported higher levels of achievement. Likewise, Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) performed a study including kindergarten and first grade students and found higher levels of achievement for those students with whom the teacher reported a close relationship. Very little research, if any,

had been conducted with students in grades three through five. The researcher's beliefs that a students' caring, supportive relationship with the teacher will lead to higher levels of achievement is supported by both the teachers' and the students' perspectives. When teachers were asked their perceptions of the attributes of caring, support and respect, they supported the importance of positive relationships with students that include caring and support, as presented in the literature review.

Secondary students (grades 6 through 12) seem to have strong opinions about the impact of teachers' attributes on their motivation to learn and how students perform. LaPlante (2003) obtained perception data of sixth grade students with respect to their teachers using the Student Speak Survey and collected math and reading achievement data from the Maine Department of Education to conduct her study. In a study of student teacher relationships of seventh through 10th grade students, Ferguson (2002) used the "Ed-Excel Assessment of Secondary School Student Cultures" (p. 3) to elicit student perceptions and for a measure of achievement, grade point average was used. In another study conducted by Ding and Hall (2007), survey data from the Health Behavior of School-aged Children study was used and the achievement level was determined by one item which "asked students to indicate what their class teacher(s) think about your school performance compared to your classmates" (p. 164). For this study, the survey was similar in content and format to that of other researchers; however different means were used to assess achievement. None of the studies used as part of the research for this study utilized ACT data as a means of determining student achievement. Regardless of the method used, secondary students pointed out the importance of caring, trust, support and subject-matter expertise as key to student learning. Similar findings were evident when

considering the perceptions of early elementary students. Students desire a teacher they believe cares about them, wants them to do well in school, and is interested in them as a person. Given the findings with respect to secondary and early elementary students, this researcher believed there would be similar findings with third grade students. However, that was not the case. The rejection of the null hypotheses in this study demonstrated no relationship with respect to third grade students' perceptions and higher levels of achievement.

Perceptions of high achieving students. Hypothesis number two stated that students with higher levels of achievement, as measured by the SRI and DRA2, demonstrated more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey. A *z*-test for difference in proportions was applied to the data for students with higher levels of achievement and compared to data from the total population. As a result of the comparison of the calculated *z* value of -0.65 to the critical *z* value of -1.96, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis, students with higher levels of achievement, as measured by the SRI and DRA2, will not demonstrate a positive difference in perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.

These findings were unexpected, as well. The research resulting from the study of students at the secondary level indicated that high achieving students tend to have a strong connection to school and positive relationships with the teachers (Ferguson, 2002). Research indicates that as students progress through the grade levels, they "tended to feel more negatively about their school environment" and "were more likely to report a lower degree of teacher caring" (Ding & Hall, 2007, p. 10). Thus it would seem there would

be a relationship between elementary student's perceptions and achievement in this study, demonstrating a trend consistent with the findings of studies conducted at the secondary level. Some of the inconsistency may be accounted for by an existing, overall positive school and classroom climate.

Perceptions of female students. Hypothesis number three stated that female students demonstrated more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey. As a result of the comparison of the calculated *z* value of -0.46 to the critical *z* value of -1.96, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis, female students will not demonstrate a positive difference in perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.

Findings with respect to gender, again, are not consistent with the results found in the literature. In this area, the research indicated that the elementary experience is much more meaningful for girls than boys due to the differences in how each group learns and the structure of the learning process in elementary school (Brophy & Good, 1974). Boys tend to favor higher levels of activity and action-oriented materials, while girls prefer activities with high levels of description and relationships, which is much more commonplace in the classroom (Van Duzer, 2006). Differences in classroom behavior of boys and girls would also point to more positive perceptions of female students as opposed to male students, as well as the fact that girls tend to develop a more personal relationship with the teacher than boys (Schief & Tartar, 2003).

Findings from studies outlined in literature would also indicate that students may do better with teachers of the same gender (Brophy & Good, 1974; Dee, 2007; Maynard,

2002; Schief & Tartar, 2003). Since the majority of the classroom teachers in this study were female, this too should have impacted the results of the study, at least with respect to gender. Yet, the results of this study demonstrated the students surveyed had a general, overall positive perception of their teachers. The lack of difference in perceptions may be explained by the schools' work in the area of character education and school climate. Both schools participate in the Caring Schools Community (CSC) program (Cooperating School Districts, 2011) and were in the first year of implementation for Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) (Lewis T. , 2011) program. Each of these programs focus on creating school and classroom climates that promote positive relationships and means to teach rather than punish to change student behavior.

Perceptions of non-poor students. Hypothesis number four stated that non-poor students demonstrated more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey. As a result of the comparison of the calculated *z* value of -0.68 to the critical *z* value of -1.96, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis, non-poor students will not demonstrate a positive difference in perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.

While the results were not expected in regard to socioeconomic status (SES), as a variable, it is viewed differently and has different impacts than those cited for male and minority students. According to the literature in this area, student and teacher perceptions are very similar. Students in middle and upper-middle class schools tend to have high expectations for teachers and expect to succeed, while students in schools with

higher poverty rates tend to appreciate good teachers rather than expect to have them. In addition research indicates it is the school SES rather than family SES that seems to directly affect achievement (Ferguson, 2002; Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001). While the two schools in this study had an average of 24% of students eligible for free or reduced lunch prices, higher than the district as a whole, with an average of 18% of the students who receive free and reduced lunch prices, these schools would not be considered to have high poverty rates when taking into account the overall make-up of schools in the state and the nation. The teachers in the school consist of predominantly female teachers, considered to be middle to upper-middle class. The average teacher salary for the district was $45,217 annually at the time of this study. The percent of teachers with advanced degrees and the average years of experience is depicted in Table 14.

Table 14

Staff Education and Experience

	Professional Staff	
	Percent with Advanced Degrees	Average Years of Experience
Study School 1	43.9	7.1
Study School 2	61.2	8.3
District	62.6	9.2
Missouri	51.3	12.3

Hence, since the population of the schools and the teachers are predominantly characterized as middle and upper-middle income status, it is likely the teachers have higher expectations for all students and in turn, students in these schools expect to have good teachers and to succeed in school.

Perceptions of Caucasian students. The final hypothesis, number five, stated that Caucasian students demonstrated more positive perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey. As a result of the comparison of the calculated *z* value of -0.08 to the critical *z* value of -1.96, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis, Caucasian students will not demonstrate a positive difference in perceptions of teachers than the total population, as measured by the EFF School Climate Survey.

Even though the literature in this area is inconsistent with respect to students' perceptions, the results with respect to ethnicity were not expected. While minority students were reported to value teacher encouragement, support and high expectations as critical to school success (Ferguson, 2002), there are other findings that contradict this belief (Howard, 2001). Other findings indicated that minority students tend to do better when the characteristics of teachers and students are more closely aligned. In other words, when there is a match between student and teacher SES rather than school characteristics, minority students tend to do better in school (Hubbard & Datnow, 2005). Teachers were reported to have more positive perceptions of students with similar ethnic backgrounds. This is contrary to the findings in this study, since the neither school make-up nor teacher background was similar for the minority students, yet all students, regardless of ethnicity, reported positive perceptions of the teachers.

Implications

School districts throughout the nation continue to review and revise the educational processes and consider what changes would be necessary to attain the kind of achievement expected of all students as set forth by NCLB. District leaders use the data

available to engage in the process of continuous improvement and implement strategies to ensure 100 % proficiency in communication arts and math by all students by 2014, as outlined by NCLB. The data available to schools and districts typically includes student achievement, discipline history, and attendance rates, as well as a variety of information regarding the professional staff's experience, education, and compensation. However, the emphasis on data often overlooks the affective side of teaching and learning. Information that is gleaned from the affective side often includes input from staff regarding perceptions of students and their learning profiles, but does not include student input. In fact, only three percent of schools used students as a source of feedback and only one percent used parent feedback as a source of data (Matthews, 2000).

Research conducted with secondary students consistently demonstrates the impact of students' perceptions on learning. In fact, secondary students who believe that teachers care about them, support them in the learning process, and hold high expectations for achievement demonstrate higher levels of achievements. Secondary students also indicated that it is important to them to have teachers who get to know them personally (Ferguson, 2002). Given what we know about the perceptions of secondary students, the study of the perceptions of elementary children may assist teachers in maximizing the performance of children as young as third grade.

The results of the study would indicate that the students in both study schools have good relationships with their teachers and are making expected achievement gains in reading as evidenced by the results of the SRI and the DRA2 assessments. However, since the study did not support the hypotheses that elementary students' perceptions of the teacher have an impact on achievement, information provided by students could be

used to further enhance the school climate. Students may be able to provide insight into how they learn, how they interact with the teacher and other students in the learning process, and what helps them achieve at higher levels. This information, along with the supporting research, can be used to plan professional development programs for existing staff and pre-service and beginning teachers with limited classroom experience. As a district or school plans teacher learning experiences, the information from the students can be used as a guide. Changes or continuation in specific programs, such as CSC and PBIS, should reflect the students' perceptions with respect to the teacher and the school, in general; and additional means should be considered that would support and enhance an environment that promotes student learning.

At the district level, this study certainly has implications for recruiting and hiring staff. Since the literature supports the idea that student teacher relationships are important to student achievement and engagement (at least at the secondary level), it would be important for district hiring practices to include a component that identifies a candidate's beliefs with respect to the affective side of teaching. There are different means to accomplish this. Districts can incorporate questions in the interview process that determine a teacher's relationship potential with students and parents. In addition, districts can implement strengths based assessments as part of the application process. This would assist in selecting potential teachers who demonstrate strong interpersonal skills along with other effective teacher characteristics.

Colleges and universities, with teacher preparation programs, could also benefit from this research. The information could assist them in the development of pedagogy and instructional methodology, as well as pre-service teacher development of classroom

management skills. Effective classroom management techniques typically include the development of a positive classroom climate, which includes strong student teacher relationships. This information could also drive recruiting efforts for the universities in their teacher development programs. Since elementary teachers are predominantly female and the literature demonstrates some same gender effects between students and teachers (Schief & Tartar, 2003), teacher development programs may want to enhance the recruitment efforts of male candidates.

At the school level, a personalized environment may also enhance student achievement. For example, Hoffman and Levak (2003) believed that administrators could build better schools by ensuring that students are connected. Districts are using character education programs such as CSC (Cooperating School Districts, 2011), to achieve personalization. Through a concerted effort by staff, students, and parents, schools are able to function as communities of support for students. Research showed that establishing a community in schools promotes many positive academic outcomes including positive attitudes toward school, expectations of success, and motivation to learn (Schaps, 2005). The results of this study would indicate that the programs such as CSC and PBIS may be positively impacting the school climate. The implications of this study would again indicate reasons for facilitating a school climate that is nurturing and supportive for all students.

A mentoring program that connects students to a caring adult may also be beneficial. Since the research indicated that the impact of a caring teacher is positive with respect to achievement, it may be beneficial to pair students with a teacher who gets to know the student as an individual, cares about them, supports them and motivates them

to do their best. Schools can examine ways to ensure that children have the support and guidance, as well as a positive school and classroom climate, needed to be successful in school.

Finally, it is important for schools to have an understanding of the needs of students with respect to student teacher relationships. This can be accomplished by implementing a means to solicit student input. The EFF School Climate Survey was developed to be used annually by students, specifically to solicit their input regarding relationships with school personnel, including teachers, the school climate, and peer relationships. The responses provided by the students can be used to assist in the school improvement process. Teachers and principals can also develop questionnaires specific to the classroom or the school to elicit students' perceptions with respect to student teacher relationship as a means to gather student input. The information collected from students may well serve to glean a great deal of insight that cannot be obtained from the results of assessments. The information may serve to inform decisions such as classroom placement of students, school-wide student management systems, and curriculum service delivery models.

Recommendations for Future Study

The researcher identified several limitations in the study. Two of the limitations are the variance in instruction that may occur among different teachers and the administration of the pre- and post-assessments (the SRI and DRA2). The district has an established curriculum and common instructional materials; however teachers can determine the instructional methodology used in the classroom. The pre-and post-assessments are also the same in all seven elementary schools and all teachers are trained

on the administration of the tools; however there could be a variance in this area as well. Teachers may have different physical settings and means to administer the assessments in each classroom. The results of the SRI and DRA2 assessments are not used as part of the students' grades. Students discuss the information during reading conferences with the teacher to develop learning goals and select independent reading materials. The information is shared with parents, typically during parent teacher conferences. The information is used as consideration for additional reading support or for inclusion in before and after school tutoring programs, as well as to report reading progress. The DRA2 is specifically intended to assist the teachers in selecting reading materials to be used for instruction and to assist with the selection of reading materials at the appropriate level for each student.

For future study, it may be beneficial to review instructional practices across the selected classrooms and ensure that students are taught with similar methods and materials. It may also be beneficial to provide the teachers in the study with a consistent set of instructions for administering the assessments and require that they are followed in all test administrations. A future study could also include a survey of the teachers with a comparison of teacher and student responses. The information gleaned may provide further insight on ways to enhance classroom climate and promote higher levels of achievement.

Another limitation that could be accounted for in future studies deals with determining SES. In this study, SES was determined by students who received free or reduced lunch prices. While this is consistent with the NCLB determination for poverty status, free and reduced lunch prices are determined based on the families' self reporting

of income. That number could be much higher than 24 %, the percentage used for this study. Therefore, this may not have included all the disadvantaged students in the sample population. Future research studies may want to consider other methods, in addition to free and reduced lunch status as predictors of SES. For example, Ferguson (2002) considered factors such as computers in the home, education level of parents, access to books and print medium, and the overall SES of the school.

In this study the EFF School Climate Survey was administered by the researcher. The students met the researcher for the first time on the day they completed the survey. Since these children spend the majority of the day with the classroom teacher, non-familiarity with the researcher may have impacted the responses on the survey. While the students were assured that the responses were confidential, the lack of a previous relationship may have caused them to be apprehensive regarding the process. In addition, students may not have been comfortable using the on-line survey process. In future studies, it may be beneficial to meet the students prior to the day when the surveys will be administered to establish a relationship.

With respect to the methodology, the researcher has several recommendations for any future studies that may be conducted regarding students' perceptions. First, a larger population should be considered that would include not only the schools with the highest percentage of students with free and reduced lunch status, but also include the schools with lowest performance on achievement measures. This would provide a sample that includes larger subgroups in each of the categories and with more variance on achievement.

The five-point Likert scale may have been difficult to understand, particularly for students who were reading below grade level. This researcher recommends using a scale that has three choices – Agree, Neutral, and Disagree. Some students demonstrated difficulty during administration, despite very specific directions and pictorial images, determining the difference between Strongly Agree and Agree and Strongly Disagree and Disagree.

Finally, students self-reported responses to the survey. There was no time limit for completion. Depending on the time they met with the researcher and the activity of the students who were not participating may have determined their attention to the task. For example, some students were going to lunch immediately following the administration and expressed concerns about being late to lunch or missing some of recess. There were others who expressed concern about the location of the teacher during the administration or if the researcher knew what the students were supposed to do when finished. This researcher would recommend that the administration guidelines and schedules be set to account for these student concerns.

Discussion

The teacher in the classroom seems to be the central element in student success in school. When students, aged 13 – 17 were asked why they worked harder for some teachers over others, they responded in the following manner: a) the teacher made the lesson come alive; b) the teacher treated the students like people; and c) the teachers were more caring (Gordon & Crabtree, 2006). Gordon and Crabtree (2006) also point out that in both the 1995 and the 2004 Gallup Polls of the American public, positive teacher-student relationships and caring teachers were considered to be very important to

respondents. Given this and what is known about the perceptions of secondary students with respect to teachers' attitudes, school and district leaders must consider what young people have to say about how they learn and what motivates them to do their best in school if they want to impact student achievement for all students.

Since it is evident that secondary students believe that teachers who care, support them in the learning process, and treat them with respect are essential for them to work hard and do their best, it would seem then that this would be a key factor for elementary students, as well. An elementary student spends the majority of the day with one teacher, and that teacher is responsible for the student's learning in all the core content areas, specifically communication arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. If that child does not have a connection or strong relationship with the teacher, it may be more difficult for learning to take place. The child may be focused on how to avoid the teacher or the interactions that lead to a weakened relationship rather than working hard to meet the teacher's expectations.

Now, the more challenging issue is how to ensure that schools have teachers with all these characteristics – both effective and affective characteristics. When district officials are considering applicants, some of the first attributes to be taken into account are the pre-requisites for effective teaching such as educational preparation, certification, content knowledge, experience, knowledge of teaching and learning and specialized training. According to Stronge (2002), "the teacher's psychological influence on students has been linked to student achievement" (p. 14). It would seem imperative, then, to consider the influential factors such as caring, knowing students, and the ability to engage and motivate as well, when hiring staff. In addition, this information should assist

building level decisions such as classroom placement and teacher assignment. Yet, the application process rarely accounts for or demonstrates how the person interacts with children and will work with them in the classroom. As identified in the Implications section of this chapter, district leaders may want to consider application and interview processes that would identify affective teacher characteristics, as well.

As the result of an invitational conference of key researchers in this area, Blum (2005) summarized findings that indicate connecting students with school comes from action on the part of both teachers and administrators. School connectedness refers to an environment where students believe that teachers care about them as learners and as individuals. In turn, this connectedness likely leads to greater academic success. Knowing this would cause principals and teachers to look for ways to improve the school climate, implementing measures to ensure that students are safe, feel as if they belong, and believe that the adults care about them both as students and as individuals.

School leaders can focus on the school climate as a means to promote student achievement. Schaps (2005) conducted a review of correlational studies regarding school and classroom atmosphere and its effect on student achievement. These findings are summarized in Table 15.

Table 15

School Community and Achievement

Study 1 – Secondary Schools	Study 2 – Grades 7-12	Study 3 – Suburban Middle School	Study 4 – Grades 3-6
Findings			
Items that contributed to achievement: 1. Pleasant environment 2. Shared activities among staff and students 3. Shared responsibility	School connectedness was positively related to grade point average	When students felt belongingness they were more motivated; effort was positively related to perceived teacher support	School relatedness fostered engagement, boosting achievement

Note: Review of correlational studies conducted by Schaps, E. (2005). The role of supportive school environments in promoting academic success. In S. a. Office, Getting Results: Developing Safe and Healthy Kids, Update 5 (pp. 37-56). Sacramento: California Department of Education.

Based on these findings, the classroom environment appears essential to student success in school. Given that, principals may want to explore means of assisting teachers to develop a positive classroom climate, while ensuring that the same occurs at the school level. Schaps (2005) reported on a number of programs, at all levels, that demonstrated effective outcomes for students. Table 16 summarizes some of the programs that were developed for elementary schools, including an explanation of the purpose and the potential outcomes.

Table 16

Programs – School Community

Program	Level	Purpose	Outcomes
Child Development Project	Elementary	Influence children's social, ethical and intellectual development	Students scored better on attitudes and behavior; achieved higher grades; and demonstrated better scores on achievement tests than students who did not participate in the program.
Responsive Classroom	Elementary	Create a sense of community	Students demonstrated gains in academic and social skills and declines in problem behaviors.
School Development Program	K-12	Improve achieve by strengthening relationships and climate in school	Students demonstrated early academic gains, with diminishing gains over time.
Seattle Social Development Project	Elementary	Develop social bonds to school; learn social skills; and participate in productive activities	Students in the full intervention group scored higher on school achievement, commitment, and attachment.

Review of causal studies conducted by Schaps, E. (2005). The role of supportive school environments in promoting academic success. In S. a. Office, Getting Results: Developing Safe and Healthy Kids, Update 5 (pp. 37-56). Sacramento: California Department of Education.

Principals and curriculum leaders can also benefit from this research in other ways. The information can be used to develop learning opportunities that focus on the affective side of teaching. It would be important to provide information and training for teachers that highlight students' perceptions of how they learn and what types of teacher attributes motivate them to do their best. School and district leaders may also want to

consider implementing a system to elicit student perceptions with respect to teaching and learning and then share that information with the staff. The information can be used by individual teachers, as well as schools for continuous improvement purposes.

Conclusion

Effective teaching, along with school connectedness and high levels of engagement, are keys to student learning and achievement. Despite their age, children possess valuable perceptions of how teachers behave and interact with them. These perceptions can serve as valuable tools in the school improvement process. Students with positive perceptions of the teacher are more likely to be engaged in the learning process and have a desire to be successful in school. The information gathered from students can be used by school leaders, teachers, and policy makers to ensure that students are connected to school and engaged in the learning process.

Student perceptions can also assist school leaders and teachers as they work to provide safe and effective learning environments. Knowing how students perceive their interactions with teachers, school staff, and other students can provide information that will assist with teacher assignments, student groupings, and instructional and behavioral support systems. In addition, more detailed student information may assist school personnel by providing the information necessary to differentiate instruction for specific student needs, as well as provide additional learning opportunities such as extended day programs, home school partnerships, and adult mentors.

This study has the potential to provide insight in the area of improved teaching and learning for elementary schools. It may also serve as a guide for the development and implementation of programs that promote school and community connectedness,

both identified in the literature as factors that affect achievement at all levels. Teachers, educational leaders, and policy makers can use this information, as well, to serve as a resource to guide school and district planning in the area of professional development, community-building, recruitment, staff selection, and curriculum development.

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APPENDIX A

Dr. Terry Adams
Superintendent of Schools

Recipient of the "Distinction in Performance" Award
- 2006, 2007, and 2008 -

October 23, 2009

Lindenwood University
209 South Kingshighway
St. Charles, MO 63301

To Whom It May Concern:

Susan Hladky has permission to conduct research in the Wentzville R-IV School District as part of her doctoral program at Lindenwood University. Specifically, permission has been granted for the following:

1. School Climate Survey to select 3rd grade students
2. Secondary Source Data – Scholastic Reading Inventory and Developmental Reading Assessment results for select 3rd grade students

If you have questions or need clarification, you may contact me at 636-327-3800.

Sincerely,

Dr. Terry Adams
Superintendent of Schools

TA:ns

Wentzville R-IV School District – Administrative Office
One Campus Drive • Wentzville, MO 63385 • 636-327-3800 ext. 20322
www.wentzville.k12.mo.us • terryadams@wentzville.k12.mo.us

APPENDIX B

Lindenwood University
School of Education
209 S. Kingshighway
St. Charles, Missouri 63301

Informed Consent for Parents to Sign for
Student Participation in Research Activities

Students' Perceptions of Teachers: Factors that Influence Achievement

Principal Investigator Ms. Susan Hladky
Telephone: 636.795.2675 E-mail: skh414@lindenwood.edu

Participant _____ Parent Contact info _____

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1. Your child is invited to participate in a research study conducted by Susan Hladky under the guidance of Dr. Sherrie Wisdom. The purpose of this research is to examine young students' perceptions of teachers with respect to care, respect, help, and motivation to succeed and how the information from the study can assist teachers to develop and maintain classroom environments that support positive relationships between students and teachers.

2. a) Your child's participation will involve
   - The completion of a thirty-one question survey to be administered by Ms. Susan Hladky during the last two weeks of April 2010.
   - Ms. Hladky will administer the survey in your child's classroom at his/her elementary school.

   Approximately 300 students may be involved in this research. Students from two elementary schools, including your child's school, in the Wentzville R-IV School District are being included in the study.

   b) The amount of time involved in your child's participation will be approximately 30 minutes to complete the survey.

3. There are no anticipated risks to your child associated with this research.

4. There are no direct benefits for your child's participation in this study. However, your child's participation will contribute to the knowledge about how the positive student teacher relationship can improve school climate, improve motivation and student engagement, and ultimately increase student achievement and may help society by

providing information to assist school districts with the school improvement planning process and universities with the teacher preparation process.

5. Your child's participation is voluntary and you may choose not to let your child participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent for your child's participation at any time. Your child may choose not to answer any questions that he or she does not want to answer. You and your child will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to let your child participate or to withdraw your child.

6. We will do everything we can to protect your child's privacy. As part of this effort, your child's identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Ms. Susan Hladky at 636.795.2675 or the Faculty Advisor, Dr. Sherrie Wisdom at 636.949.4478. You may also ask questions or state concerns regarding your child's rights as a research participant to the Office of Research Administration, at 516-5897.

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 child's participation in the research described above.

Parent's/Guardian's Signature	Date	Parent's/Guardian's Printed Name	
Child's Printed Name			
		Susan K. Hladky	
Signature of Investigator or Designee	Date	Investigator/Designee Printed Name	

APPENDIX C

School Climate Survey – Elementary Student

	When I am at school, I feel:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	I belong.	○	○	○	○	○
2.	I am safe.	○	○	○	○	○
3.	I have fun learning.	○	○	○	○	○
4.	I like this school.	○	○	○	○	○
5.	This school is good.	○	○	○	○	○
6.	I have freedom at school.	○	○	○	○	○
7.	I have choices in what I learn.	○	○	○	○	○
8.	My teacher treats me with respect.	○	○	○	○	○
9.	My teacher cares about me.	○	○	○	○	○
10.	My teacher thinks I will be successful.	○	○	○	○	○
11.	My teacher listens to my ideas.	○	○	○	○	○
12.	My principal cares about me.	○	○	○	○	○
13.	My teacher is a good teacher.	○	○	○	○	○
14.	My teacher believes I can learn.	○	○	○	○	○
15.	I am recognized for good work.	○	○	○	○	○
16.	I am challenged by the work my teacher asks me to do.	○	○	○	○	○
17.	The work I do in class makes me think.	○	○	○	○	○
18.	I know what I am supposed to be learning in my classes.	○	○	○	○	○

	When I am at school, I feel:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
19.	I am a good student.	○	○	○	○	○
20.	I can be a better student.	○	○	○	○	○
21.	Very good work is expected at my school.	○	○	○	○	○
22.	I behave well at school.	○	○	○	○	○
23.	Students are treated fairly by teachers.	○	○	○	○	○
24.	Students are treated fairly by the principal.	○	○	○	○	○
25.	Students are treated fairly by the people on yard duty.	○	○	○	○	○
26.	Students at my school treat me with respect.	○	○	○	○	○
27.	Students at my school are friendly.	○	○	○	○	○
28.	I have lots of friends.	○	○	○	○	○
29.	I have support for learning at home.	○	○	○	○	○
30.	My family believes I can do well in school.	○	○	○	○	○
31.	My family wants me to do well in school.	○	○	○	○	○

Vitae

Susan Hladky earned a Bachelor of Science in Elementary and Special Education, with certifications to teach Elementary Education, Early Childhood Education, and Special Education, from Emporia State University in December 1980. After earning her degree, she taught third and fifth grade in Kansas. While teaching elementary school, Ms. Hladky earned her Master's degree in Educational Administration from Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas in 1986. Following the completion of her Master's degree, she moved to the St. Louis area and taught Middle School Special Education. She completed coursework in 1993 at the University of Missouri-St. Louis to meet the Advanced Certification Status requirements for Principal Licensure in Missouri.

In addition to teaching, Ms. Hladky has served as an Administrative Intern and Assistant Principal at Wentzville Middle School. She has been an Elementary Principal at West Elementary and Green Tree Elementary in the Wentzville School District and Ballwin Elementary in the Rockwood School District. She served as the founding principal for Green Tree Elementary with responsibility that started with building design and included all functions that led to opening the school, setting the school's culture and heritage. Following 12 years as a school principal, Ms. Hladky became Director of Human Resources for the Rockwood School District in 2006. In July 2007, she was named the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources in the Wentzville School District, and she continues to serve in that capacity.

In addition to her work as a teacher and an administrator, Ms. Hladky has taught courses at Webster University and the University of Missouri-Columbia. She also attended the Harvard Institute for School Leadership and is a member of several

professional organizations, including Phi Delta Kappa, the American Association of School Personnel Directors, and the St. Louis Human Resources and Career Specialist Association. Ms. Hladky is working towards completion of her Educational Doctorate in Administration from Lindenwood University, with an anticipated graduation date of August 2011.