Teachers’ Perceptions Regarding the Principal’s Capacity to Facilitate Positive Student-Learning Climates in Urban Settings

Nicole J. Martone
Lesley University, nmarton2@lesley.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/education_dissertations

Recommended Citation
Martone, Nicole J., "Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Principal's Capacity to Facilitate Positive Student-Learning Climates in Urban Settings" (2019). Educational Studies Dissertations. 147.
https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/education_dissertations/147

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School of Education (GSOE) at DigitalCommons@Lesley. It has been accepted for inclusion in Educational Studies Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Lesley. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lesley.edu.
Teachers’ Perceptions Regarding the Principal’s Capacity to Facilitate Positive Student-Learning Climates in Urban Settings

A Dissertation Presented
by
Nicole J. Martone

Submitted to the Graduate School of Education
Lesley University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

April 2019

Ph.D. Educational Studies
Educational Leadership Specialization
Teachers’ Perceptions Regarding the Principal’s Capacity to Facilitate Positive Student-Learning Climates in Urban Settings

Nicole J. Martone

Graduate School of Education
Lesley University

Ph.D. Educational Studies
Educational Leadership Specialization

Approvals
In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

John Ciesluk, Ed.D. ________________________________
Doctoral Committee Chair Date

David Nurenberg, Ph.D. ________________________________
Doctoral Committee Member Date

Julie Sochacki, J.D. ________________________________
Doctoral Committee Member Date

Stephen Gould, Ed.D. ________________________________
Director, Educational Leadership Specialization Date

Brenda Mathis, Ed.D. ________________________________
Director, Ph.D. Educational Studies Date

Amy Rutstein-Riley, Ph.D. ________________________________
Interim Dean, Graduate School of Education Date
ABSTRACT

Positive student-learning climates are known to improve student outcomes, but little is understood about how teachers perceive the principal’s capacity to do this work in Connecticut’s urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, school settings. The degree teachers perceived that creating positive student-learning climates is important to principals was examined. Leadership practices teachers perceived necessary to support positive student-learning climates were explored. Moreover, various factors and conditions teachers perceived inhibited the building of positive student-learning climates were investigated. A phenomenological research method was used. A survey was completed by 115 Connecticut, secondary, urban teachers, and interviews were conducted with 10 teachers from that participant pool. This study led to 11 findings: (a) principals frequently communicate the importance of a positive student-learning climate, (b) principals highly value supporting students’ social-emotional and physical needs, (c) more can be done by principals to improve day-to-day conversations among students, which are not always respectful, (d) more can be done by principals to include feedback and input from parents and/or community members in instructional decisions for the school, (e) in ways student misbehavior is addressed, teachers desire consistent follow-through and increases in student accountability and responsibility, (f) parental involvement can be improved to better support teacher efforts, (g) budget constraints and the number of struggling students make it difficult to engage students in real-world learning opportunities, (h) effective staff and student recognition efforts are appreciated and desired, (i) low student morale creates barriers that can negatively impact school climate, (j) too many initiatives with little to no support create barriers when it comes to successful implementation, and (k) communication barriers inhibit the ability for teachers to develop collaborative efforts with parents. These findings proffer practical and theoretical
implications for school leaders, policymakers, and researchers. Findings can support effective leadership practices with developing positive student-learning climates, and findings can influence improvements to district and school policy. Future research can include a comparison between middle school and high school student-learning climates and the ways to garner increased parental and community involvement in decision-making processes for the school.

Keywords: principals, school climate, secondary students, student-learning climate, teachers’ perceptions, urban settings
DEDICATION

To my children –

May you continue to explore until your hearts’ content and discover what lights the fire within you.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are a number of people I would like to thank and acknowledge for their support with the completion of this work. Without their support and guidance, this dissertation would not have come to fruition.

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge my doctoral advisory committee. My senior advisor, Dr. John Ciesluk, provided continued guidance and support throughout my coursework and residencies and most definitely throughout the completion of this work. His patience and commitment to me and the dissertation writing process helped to see it through. I would also like to thank Dr. David Nurenberg for his insight and perceptiveness. I knew that our similar passions as secondary educators would greatly benefit my work, and I was provided with the guidance and expertise needed for this study. Moreover, I want to thank Julie Sochacki for her constant support and ability to motivate me when research, writing, and work-life balance became arduous. Her ability to coach me through the process and to the finish line as a friend and colleague was unwavering and for that I am indebted.

I would also like to thank my mentors, both formal and informal, who helped me along the way. Dr. Susan Sylvia not only served as a mentor to me through the National Council of Teachers of English Emerging Leaders Fellowship, but she also was a cohort ahead of me in this Ph.D. program. Her guidance, expertise, and giving of time, when it came to my doctoral work and work as a department leader, assisted my efforts along the way, and she is truly an inspiration both personally and professionally. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Meghan Martins, Associate Principal for Instruction for Secondary Students for Danbury Public Schools, who connected me to the right people during the research process. Her support made daunting feats manageable. I would also like to thank Dr. Kara Casimiro, Director for Curriculum and
Assessment for Danbury Public Schools. Our conversation during one long drive to a conference, as colleagues and doctoral students, helped me to develop the organization for my research. Next, I would like to thank Matthew Gwiazdoski for supporting my first efforts to pursue educational leadership, administration, and my doctorate. Serving as my mentor when pursuing a Sixth-Year Diploma in Education Leadership, I was provided with experiences in Waterbury that developed the foundation for this study and for that I am truly grateful.

I would also like to thank my research participants. Not only was I impressed by their passion for education, expertise as practitioners, interest in my study, and service to the disenfranchised and underrepresented, I also had their voices to press me onward when the end did not seem in sight. They are truly model educators who put students and communities first, and I grateful for their contributions.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank my husband, Eric, and children, Gianna and Domenic, for their patience, understanding, and support during my doctoral studies. Their spirit and enthusiasm pushed me through and made work-life balance possible.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................... iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................ vi

TABLES AND FIGURES ............................................................................................... xv

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .............................................................................. 17

  Personal Interest Statement .................................................................................. 17
  Statement of the Problem ....................................................................................... 19
  Purpose of the Study ............................................................................................... 26
  Definition of Terms ................................................................................................. 27
  Significance of the Study ......................................................................................... 28
  Delimitations and Limitations ............................................................................... 29
  Review of the Literature ......................................................................................... 30
  Method ..................................................................................................................... 31
    Overview of the Research Design ....................................................................... 32
    Selection of Participants ...................................................................................... 32
    Study Setting ....................................................................................................... 33
    Development of Instruments ............................................................................... 33
    Data Collection Procedures .............................................................................. 34
    Data Analysis Procedures .................................................................................. 34
    Issues of Trustworthiness ................................................................................... 34
    Chapter Outline .................................................................................................. 35

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE ............................................................... 37

  Introduction ............................................................................................................ 37
  The History of School Climate .............................................................................. 39
    First Primer on School Climate ......................................................................... 39
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Welcoming Environment/Atmosphere for Parents and the Community</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment/Atmosphere of Classroom</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environments/Atmosphere as a Source of School Pride</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-Emotional Engagement and Connectedness</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Support and Engagement</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Discipline Philosophy</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety, Order, and Infrastructure</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Climate</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate Definitions, Domains, and Dimensions</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of School Climate</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate Domains and Dimensions</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of the School Leader in Facilitating Positive School Climates</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating Collaborative Stakeholder Relationships</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate Policy</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers and Supports to Student-Learning Climates</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losses in Instructional Time</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort Zones</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Practices for Student Engagement and High Expectations</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-Emotional and Cognitive Support Framework</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Belonging through Social Interactions and Supports</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: METHOD</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the Research Design</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants and Setting</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Development of Instruments ................................................................. 81
Data Collection Procedures ...................................................................... 82
Phase I: Pilot and Online Survey .............................................................. 82
Phase II: Follow-Up Interview ................................................................. 84
Processes for Data Analysis .................................................................... 86
Issues of Trustworthiness ......................................................................... 87
Delimitations and Limitations .................................................................. 89
Chapter Summary ................................................................................... 91

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS ........................................................................ 93

Introduction ......................................................................................... 93
Demographics ....................................................................................... 94

Research Question 1: To What Degree Do Teachers Believe That Creating
Positive Student-Learning Climates Is Important to Principals? ............ 95

Statement 1: Components of a Positive Student-Learning Climate are
Conveyed in Your School’s Vision, Mission, Values, and/or Beliefs ........ 96

Statement 2: Students Are Treated as Valued Members of the School
Community and Involved in Decision-Making Processes ..................... 97

Statement 3: School Climate Efforts Are a Component of Your School
Improvement Plan .................................................................................. 97

Statement 4: More Can Be Done to Include Feedback and Input from
Parents and/or Community Members into Your School’s
Instructional Decisions ........................................................................... 98

Statement 5: Professional Development Opportunities About Improving
the Student-Learning Climate Are Offered at Your School .................... 99

Statement 6: Supporting Students’ Social-Emotional Development Is a
Priority at Your School .......................................................................... 100

Statement 7: There Is Zero Tolerance for Bullying at Your School .......... 100

Statement 8: Day-to-Day Conversations Among Students Throughout the
School Are Respectful ........................................................................... 102
Statement 9: Day-to-Day Conversations Between Teachers and Students Throughout the School Are Respectful ........................................102

Examination of Open-Ended Questions 10 and 11 ........................................103

Question 10: How Is the Importance of a Positive Student-Learning Climate Communicated Regularly to the School Community by Principals? If It Isn't Communicated Regularly, in What Ways Can This Be Improved? .................................................................104

Questions 11: What Contributes to Students Feeling Socially, Emotionally, and Physically Safe at Your School? If Any Area(s) Can Be Improved, Which One(s), and Why? ..................................................109

Delineation of Findings for Research Question 1 ........................................113


Statement 12: The Student Discipline Policy Is Implemented on a Consistent and Fair Basis Throughout Your School .........................122

Statement 13: Students Are Generally Engaged (i.e., On Task, Interested) in Their Work .................................................................123

Statement 14: You Are Provided Feedback and Support with Instructional Planning ........................................................................123

Statement 15: Direct Instruction Is Commonly Used in Your School ..........124

Statement 16: Student-Centered Instruction Is Commonly Used in Your School ..................................................................................125

Statement 17: Classroom Teachers Are Encouraged to Engage Students in Real-World Learning Opportunities ........................................126

Statement 18: If Funds Are Needed for Innovative Instructional Materials, Programs, or Activities, They Are Available ................................127

Statement 19: There Is a High Level of Parental Involvement ......................127

Statement 20: Day-to-Day Conversations Between Teachers and Administrators Are Open and Respectful ........................................128

Examination of Open-Ended Questions 21 and 22 ........................................129
Question 21: If There Are Systems in Place to Get Support for Struggling Students, What Are They? If This Area Is Lacking, How Can It Be Improved? ................................................................. 130

Question 22: How Are Students and Staff Recognized on a School Level for Their Classroom Achievements? If This Area Can Be Improved, What Are Some Things That Can Be Done Differently? ...... 135

Delineation of Findings for Research Question 2 ................................................. 140

Research Question 3: What Do Teachers Report are Inhibiting Principals from Building Positive Student-Learning Climates? ................................................................. 151

Statement 23: Building Leadership Is Frequently Available/Visible .................. 152

Statement 24: Members of the School Community (e.g., Students, Parents/Guardians, Staff, and Community Members) Work Collaboratively to Build a Positive Student-Learning Climate ........................................ 153

Statement 25: Student Morale Is Perceived as High Among Faculty Members .................................................................................................................. 153

Statement 26: Your School Is Asked to Implement Too Many Initiatives at Once with Little Support and/or Resources ......................................................... 154

Statement 27: Students Lack a Sense of Belonging and Connectedness at Your School ..................................................................................................................... 155

Statement 28: Students Are Able to Build Relationships with School Personnel ...................................................................................................................... 156

Statement 29: School Personnel Are Trusted Members of the School Community ...................................................................................................................... 157

Statement 30: The Use of Individualized and Personalized Instructional Teaching Methods Is Encouraged ................................................................. 157

Statement 31: The School Is a Safe and Welcoming Environment for All Stakeholders (e.g., Students, Parents/Guardians, Staff, and Community Members) ............................................................................................ 158

Examination of Open-Response Questions 32 and 33 ................................... 159

Question 32: Describe Any Barriers That May Exist When Trying to Communicate Regularly with Parents/Guardians ........................................ 160

Delineation of Findings for Research Question 3 ............................................. 165

Chapter Summary ............................................................................................................. 172

CHAPTER FIVE: STUDY SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND FINAL REFLECTIONS ................................................................. 177

Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 177

Study Summary ....................................................................................................................... 180

Discussion ............................................................................................................................... 183

Discussion of Finding 1: Principals Frequently Communicate the Importance of a Positive Student-Learning Climate ................................................. 184

Discussion of Finding 2: Principals Highly Value Supporting Students’ Social-Emotional and Physical Needs ................................................................. 186

Discussion of Finding 3: More Can Be Done by Principals to Improve Day-to-Day Conversations Among Students, Which Are Not Always Respectful .................................................................................. 187

Discussion of Finding 4: More Can Be Done by Principals to Include Feedback and Input from Parents and/or Community Members in Instructional Decisions for the School ................................................................. 189

Discussion of Finding 5: In Ways Student Misbehavior is addressed, Teachers Desire Consistent Follow-Through and Increases in Student Accountability and Responsibility ......................................................... 191

Discussion of Finding 6: Parental Involvement Can Be Improved to Better Support Teacher Efforts ...................................................................................... 192

Discussion of Finding 7: Budget Constraints and the Number of Struggling Students Make It Difficult to Engage Students in Real-World Learning Opportunities ............................................................................ 194

Discussion of Finding 8: Effective Staff and Student Recognition Efforts Are Appreciated and Desired ..................................................................................... 195

Discussion of Finding 9: Low Student Morale Creates Barriers That Can Negatively Impact School Climate ........................................................................... 198

Discussion of Finding 10: Too Many Initiatives with Little to No Support Create Barriers When It Comes to Successful Implementation ...................... 199

Discussion of Finding 11: Communication Barriers Inhibit the Ability for Teachers to Develop Collaborative Efforts with Parents .............................. 201
Future Research........................................................................................................................................203

Comparison Between Middle Schools and High Schools.................................................................203

Comparison Between Magnet Schools and Neighborhood Schools.................................................203

Principals’ Perceptions and Students’ Perceptions..............................................................................204

Case Study Methodology ....................................................................................................................205

Garnering Parent and Community Members’ Feedback About Instructional Decisions ..........206

Final Reflections....................................................................................................................................207

References ............................................................................................................................................213

Appendix A........................................................................................................................................228

  Invitation to Participate.........................................................................................................................228

Appendix B........................................................................................................................................229

  Participant Survey...............................................................................................................................229

Appendix C........................................................................................................................................234

  Interview Informed Letter of Consent ...............................................................................................234

Appendix D........................................................................................................................................235

  Interview Protocol and Questions .....................................................................................................235

Appendix E........................................................................................................................................237

  Copyright Permissions.......................................................................................................................237
TABLES AND FIGURES

List of Figures

Figure 1. School climate top-down illustration of distribution of responsibilities. ..........61
Figure 2. Representative responsibilities of a school climate committee. ..................62
Figure 3. Safe and supportive schools model identifying conditions that support positive school climates (National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments, 2019). C....67
Figure 4. Numeric data about those who participated in Phase I, the online survey, and Phase II, follow-up interviews. .................................................................84

List of Tables

Table 1. A Comparison of the Subtest Dimensions of Halpin and Croft’s (1963) OCDQ and the Variables Associated With Likert and Likert’s (1967) Profile of a School Instrument....48
Table 2. National School Climate Center’s 13 Dimensions of School Climate..................56
Table 3. Phase II Pseudonyms for Follow-Up Interview Participant Identification...........95
Table 4. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 1............96
Table 5. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 2...........97
Table 6. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 3...........97
Table 7. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 4...........98
Table 8. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 5...........99
Table 9. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 6...........100
Table 10. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 7.........101
Table 11. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 8.........102
Table 12. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 9.........103
Table 13. Code Frequencies for Question 10 ..................................................................104
Table 14. Code Frequencies for Question 11 ..................................................................109
Table 15. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 12.......122
Table 16. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 13 ........123
Table 17. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 14 .............................. 124
Table 18. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 15 .................. 124
Table 19. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 16 ............... 125
Table 20. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 17 .............. 126
Table 21. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 18 .............. 127
Table 22. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 19 .............. 128
Table 23. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 20 ............ 128
Table 24. Code Frequencies for Question 21 .......................................................................................... 130
Table 25. Code Frequencies for Question 22 ...................................................................................... 136
Table 26. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 23 ............ 152
Table 27. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 24 ............ 153
Table 28. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 25 ............ 154
Table 29. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 26 ............ 155
Table 30. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 27 ............ 155
Table 31. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 28 ............ 156
Table 32. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 29 ............ 157
Table 33. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 30 ............ 158
Table 34. Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 31 ............ 159
Table 35. Code Frequencies for Question 32 ...................................................................................... 160
Table 36. Code Frequencies for Question 33 ...................................................................................... 163
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

**Personal Interest Statement**

As an 18-year educator, I have spent the last six years in several leadership positions. These jobs have varied in scope: English/Language Arts Department Chairperson and Instructional Leader, Summer School Principal, High School at Night Principal, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)/Safe School Climate Team Leader. Throughout these roles, a majority of efforts have involved supporting teachers in ways that can best engage students in their learning. Primarily, I have worked in urban contexts, where educators are faced with many academic and behavioral challenges, often stemming from students’ apparent lack of academic motivation and presenting learning concerns. I have found that some students lack social, emotional, and cognitive supports, whether at home or in school. As educators, it is our responsibility to keep students’ best interests a priority, engaging them socially, emotionally, and cognitively, to ensure the time they spend in school is one of the best parts of their day. DeWitt and Slade (2014) have argued that “student engagement is not just academic; it also includes the social-emotional practices we use to complement our teaching” (p. 15). I believe all students need to feel supported and find learning meaningful, through positive school and student-learning climates, so that they can meet success.

Many schools throughout Connecticut and nationally have PBIS programs. Such programs are designed to help students feel more engaged in school life, through a supportive atmosphere (Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010; Sugai, 2013). PBIS uses a schoolwide behavioral management approach, which employs positive reinforcement techniques to promote positive behavioral and academic expectations aligned to a school’s core values and beliefs (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Hubbuch & Stucker, 2015). These programs also
increase the morale for both students and teachers, through overall improved safety and recognitions for desirable behaviors that systemically become part of the school culture (Cohen, 2014; Horner et al., 2010; Sugai, 2013). In Connecticut alone, as of 2015, 107 districts and 470 schools have been trained in PBIS implementation (State Education Resource Center, 2016). Nationally, over 21,000 schools are using PBIS (Poitras, 2016).

I joined a PBIS/safe school climate committee in 2009, as a high school English teacher. When the program was introduced, I was enthusiastic about using my experiences and training to help students find success and learn the skills required for productive citizenry. I was specifically interested in getting involved in this program, because before I became a high school teacher, I taught at a private, alternative boys’ school that used similar behavioral management and psychoeducational techniques on a smaller scale. When I moved to teach at the high school level some years later, my new setting had similar behavioral and academic challenges to those I faced in the alternative, private sector. This transfer of experience created a sense of urgency for me about exploring the topic of school climate and its implications for various settings.

Whether through a prescribed program or not, for students to find school meaningful and a place where they can meet success, educators must strategize ways to engage and support them. Such efforts can help to create a sense of belonging, connectedness, and prevent students from partaking in undesirable behaviors that may result in suspensions (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Cobb, 2014; Goldweber, Waasdorp, & Bradshaw, 2013; National School Climate Center, 2010; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). This loss of instructional time, from disengagement and disciplinary infractions, can further increase the achievement gap for already struggling student populations (DeWitt & Slade, 2014; Losen, 2011; Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, & Belway, 2015).
When I served as the English/Language Arts Instructional Leader in a rural, Grades 6 through 12, Connecticut setting, I found school climate, and, more specifically, a sense of belonging, also a concern. Although there were not as many disciplinary infractions, and not as much diversity as one may see in a big city school, there was a learning-disabled population receiving support services. According to *A Report from the Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement* (2012), “the achievement gap exists in every part of Connecticut—urban, suburban and rural. In fact, some of Connecticut’s wealthiest towns have achievement gaps larger than those of the Hartford and New Haven school districts” (Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement, 2012, p. 4).

Working in districts where there is a need to improve behavioral and academic outcomes piqued my desire to engage in this study. Through this research, I sought to investigate the effectiveness of school and student-learning climate practices in urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings, hoping to improve upon my practice as a school leader and those educators with whom I collaborate in differing roles. My hope is that the findings from this study can also inform research, improve policy, and support educational leaders and teachers in decision-making processes about school and student-learning climate efforts.

Following this Personal Interest Statement, Chapter One introduces eight aspects of this study: (a) Statement of the Problem; (b) Purpose of the Study, with research questions described; (c) Definitions of Terms, (d) Significance (e) Delimitations and Limitations (f) Review of the Literature, (g) Method, and (h) Chapter Outline.

**Statement of the Problem**

The achievement gap between socioeconomically challenged subgroups, traditionally minorities, compared to their White counterparts, continues to be a concern in urban,
Connecticut settings (Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement, 2012). The concern lies in the need to improve opportunities for marginalized students, by closing learning gaps, so that they can meet success in school and in life. When students do not see learning as meaningful, they are more likely to partake in undesirable behaviors, creating barriers to future success (Losen, 2011). This requires schools to improve behavioral outcomes and achievement outcomes for all students in Connecticut’s underrepresented and underserved urban settings.

The urgency to improve school and student-learning climates stems from the need to provide all students with learning experiences that are meaningful and can propel them to higher levels of achievement and productive citizenry (Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement, 2012); this can be accomplished through effective school and student-learning climate practices. This work is important because positive school climates have been attributed to improved behavioral outcomes, such as reduced suspension rates (Gage, Larson, Sugai, & Chafouleas, 2016; Thapa, Cohen, Higgins-d’Alessandro, & Guffey, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). These improved behavioral outcomes can prevent losses in instructional time and the negative consequences that these losses can impose on achievement (Losen, 2011; Losen et al., 2015).

When it comes to marginalized students challenging themselves to interact in prosocial ways within the confines of the classroom, many tend to stay in what appears to be comfort zones (Miller & Garran, 2008). Miller and Garran (2008) define comfort zones as:

the safe places from where we feel most control. If we stay inside our comfort zones, we have little impetus for change, we surround ourselves with the well known, and we do not challenge ourselves with new information or experiences. (p. 9)
Miller and Garran (2008) have argued that moving out of one’s comfort zone can cause a person to act out or withdraw, due to the threat and anxiety the experience may impose (p. 9). A positive school and student-learning climate engages students in a safe environment where they avoid shutting down or acting out due to fear because they are supported socially, in addition to emotionally and cognitively.

A positive climate within the classroom fosters students’ social-emotional and cognitive development, in an engaging and supportive atmosphere (Thapa et al., 2012; National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments, 2017; The National School Climate Center, 2010). Such an atmosphere can be created through meaningful and supportive curricula and discourse (Bryk et al., 2010; Powell & Kalina, 2009; Vygotsky, 1962). It is important that assignments provide the appropriate level of scaffolds and rigor (Bryk et al., 2010). Moreover, students need to work on tasks that are relevant to their lives and provide an appropriate level of challenge—not too hard nor too easy (Bryk et al., 2010). Also significant is that students interact with their peers in a respectful, curious, and collaborative way, whereby they can hear, build upon, and support each other’s thinking processes and diverse perspectives (Powell & Kalina, 2009; Vygotsky, 1962; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). Supporting students’ social-emotional and cognitive development cannot happen in isolation; this work requires collaborative efforts with the school community.

Students’ social-emotional and cognitive development can be supported through collaborative school community efforts that immerse them in learning that is respectful, motivating, and supportive (DeWitt & Slade, 2014; Powell & Kalina, 2009). Such atmospheres help students feel like valued classroom members and, ultimately, valued members of society (Bryk et al., 2010). Supportive environments also reflect the interests and needs of the students
and those of the school community, demonstrating relevance to the students’ lives and interests (Bryk et al., 2010). Bryk et al. (2010) articulated the position that “the social psychology of a school is an integrated product of the beliefs, values, and actual everyday behaviors among school professionals, parents, and students. This subsystem can have profound effects on student motivation and engagement with classroom instruction” (p. 59).

Educators also struggle with improving school and student-learning climates because this work necessitates a systems thinking approach, which is not easily understood, and often necessitates facilitation by school principals or other school leaders (Allen, Grigsby & Peters, 2015; Cobb, 2014; Cohen et al., 2009; Okorji, Igbokwe & Ezeugbor, 2016; Sadlier, 2011; Ross & Cozzens, 2016). To create positive climates, the school’s leadership purposefully facilitates behaviors and conditions that ensure overall effectiveness and improvements (Cohen et al., 2009; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014; National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments, 2017). Cohen and Thapa (2017) have described the work of school climate reform and building positive school climates: “[It] is a much broader, systemic effort grounded in a democratically informed process of engaging students, parents/guardians, school personnel and even community members in being co-learners and co-leaders (under the leadership of the principal)” (p. 103).

When it comes to funding school and student-learning climate efforts, urban contexts often struggle, due to lack of local resources available to effectively do this work (Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement, 2012; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2018a; Harris, 2016). Underperforming and underfunded districts in Connecticut can apply for financial support from the state through Alliance District and Priority District programs.
Financial support offered through Alliance District and Priority District programs is used to fund reform efforts targeted at closing achievement gaps.

Funding provided through Alliance District and Priority District programs is based on financial need and student achievement. The Connecticut State Department of Education (2018a) website states, eligible districts must be one of Connecticut’s “lowest performing.” The “Connecticut General Statute Section 10-262u establishes a process for identifying Alliance Districts and allocating increased Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funding to support district strategies to dramatically increase student outcomes and close achievement gaps by pursuing bold and innovative reforms” (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2018a). Currently, 33 districts participate in the Alliance District program (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2018a; Moran, 2017, p. 1). Additionally, many Alliance Districts are also Priority Districts. The Connecticut State Department of Education (2018b) website states, “Per Connecticut General Statutes Sec. 10-266p, the State Board of Education administers a priority school district grant program to assist designated school districts in improving student achievement and enhancing educational opportunities, including early reading intervention programs.” Without this much needed financial support for bold reform efforts focused on student learning, chances for improvements are slim, which can negatively impact staff and student morale.

Research has argued that school and student-learning climates impacts staff and student morale. When the school climate is poor, morale among staff suffers (Virtanen et al., 2009). When the morale among staff is lessened, it can negatively impact student learning (van Eck, Johnson, Bettencourt, & Johnson, 2017). Negative effects on student learning can be caused by the decreased productivity and increased turnover of staff (Zullig, Koopman, Patton, & Ubbes,
2010). Moreover, research has indicated that when the school climate is positive, academic performance improves (Gage et al., 2016; Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Jones & Shindler, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Improvement in academic performance can also improve student morale (van Eck et al., 2017). Evidence suggests that positive school and student-learning climates are linked to improved morale and academic performance. It is important to better understand what is included in conditions that exemplify positive school climates.

The effects of positive school climates are interwoven into the many facets involved in the “quality and character of school life” (National School Climate Council, 2007, p. 5). The National School Climate Center provides a framework to better understand and improve upon this ‘quality and character’ using 13 dimensions that fall under 6 domains or categories: (a) Safety, b) Teaching and Learning, (c) Interpersonal Relationships, (d) Institutional Environment, (e) Social Media, and (f) Staff Only (Cohen, 2017, p. 3; Melnick, Cook-Harvey, & Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. 6). Indicators for these dimensions and domains are used to inform State of Connecticut policy on the development and sustainability of safe school climate plans required of every Connecticut public school.

In Connecticut, policy requires the development of a safe school climate plan for every public school, due to the compelling research behind its systemic ability to improve student outcomes (Cohen et al., 2009; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014; Thapa et al., 2012). This work involves collaboration efforts within the school community. To effectively do this work, the National School Climate Center (2010) has developed a framework “of five standards that support effective school climate improvement efforts” (p. 3), which currently informs Connecticut state policy. These standards necessitate that the school community (a) share a vision and plan for promoting, enhancing, and sustaining a positive school climate; (b)
set policies for social, emotional, ethical, civic, and intellectual skills, knowledge, dispositions, and engagement; and address barriers to teaching and learning and reengage those disengaged; (c) promote the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical, and civic development of students; enhance engagement in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities; address barriers to teaching and learning and reengaged those disengaged; and develop and sustain operational infrastructure and capacity building mechanisms for meeting this standard; (d) create an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically safe; and (e) develop meaningful and engaging practices, activities, and norms that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice (National School Climate Center, 2010, p. 3). The National School Climate Center (2010) has stated that these “standards present a vision and framework for a positive and sustainable school climate” (p. 3).

A positive school climate, whether suburban, rural, or urban, creates a supportive environment for students to develop the 21st century skills needed for career and college readiness and to become productive citizens in a democratic society (Cobb, 2014; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014; Jacobs, 2016). To prepare all students to compete in a global economy and to become career and college ready, the school and student-learning climate must be supported in ways that are effective and substantial. This work is especially needed in environments where students’ behavioral issues are on the rise and standardized test scores are on the decline (National School Climate Center, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Despite the extensive research about the benefits of a positive school climate, little is known about the role of principals in support of this work, particularly in Connecticut’s urban settings. How teachers view the principal’s role is critical to improving school climate work.
Important, and yet not fully understood in the research, is whether the school and student-learning climates are highly valued, or acted upon, by principals. And limited understandings exist about supports and conditions teachers perceive are necessary from principals, when working to develop positive climates. Furthermore, information regarding the barriers teachers perceive prevent principals from creating positive student-learning climates can provide insights about planning improvement efforts. This study sought clarity about the principal’s role in school climate work by soliciting the perceptions of teachers. What follows is a discussion of the purpose of the study, which includes a delineation of the three research questions that guided this study.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand the leadership practices that urban teachers perceived were necessary to facilitate positive student-learning climates. This phenomenological study examined the degree to which teachers perceived that creating positive student-learning climates was important to principals. Such conditions included effective practices that teachers have experienced with principals as well as practices that teachers may not have experienced firsthand but believed were desirable. Lastly, the study identified the various factors and conditions that teachers believed inhibited principals’ capacities to build positive student-learning climates. These inhibiting factors and conditions may have ranged from the choices made by principals, to issues teachers believed were out of the realm of the principal’s control. The following three questions guided this study:

1. To what degree do teachers believe that creating positive student-learning climates is important to principals?
2. What do teachers report are the various ways principals can support positive student-learning climates?

3. What do teachers report are inhibiting principals from building positive student-learning climates?

**Definition of Terms**

Throughout this study, the following terms have been used; the meaning of each is detailed in what follows:

**Perceptions:** Perceptions are the viewpoints, perspectives, beliefs, and professional opinions reported by teachers in Grades 7 through 12 (middle school and high school), who work in one Connecticut urban school district.

**Principals:** Principals are the Grades 7 through 12 (middle school and high school) urban Connecticut school leaders, in the highest position of authority within their buildings.

**School Climate:** School climate is the "character and quality of school life" and "is based on patterns of people’s experience of school life and reflects: norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structures" (National School Climate Council, 2007, p. 5). In accordance with Ashforth (1985), it is the overall attitude or shared perception of those who are connected to a school community.

**Student-Learning Climate:** The student-learning climate involves the climate (i.e., atmosphere or environment) in which learning takes place at the classroom level and its impact on students’ attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs, as seen through student outcomes (Caine & Caine, 1997; Marzano, 1992). According to Gordon (2013), “schools that demonstrate higher student achievement possess a climate that focuses on student learning” (p. 4).
Teachers: Teachers are certified public-school educators working in Grades 7 through 12 (middle school and high school) urban Connecticut settings.

Significance of the Study

The examination and analysis of teachers’ perceptions regarding the principal’s capacity to develop positive student-learning climates provided insights into the challenges urban teachers and school leaders face when attempting to improve school climate. This study provided a means of communication by which teachers openly shared their perceptions, beliefs, and experiences regarding the barriers that they believed exist when needing to build these climates within their classrooms. The study also identified the supports that teachers reported are necessary to establish or improve school climates. This study can be beneficial for principals because it provides insights regarding the support needs of teachers and a voice for the needs of underrepresented students in urban communities.

Since school climate significantly impacts student behavior and academic performance, and since urban, underperforming Alliance Districts and Priority Districts have been identified as struggling or in need of improvement, much insight can be gleaned from teachers’ perceptions in this study. This study was conducted with reports from those who work directly with students at the classroom level, such as teachers and certified support staff. This allowed for rich sources of information to be gleaned about the challenges that are faced and how teachers perceived improvement efforts can be better supported. Furthermore, information can be gleaned regarding the effectiveness of current policy and practice.

This study can be beneficial to a variety of stakeholders: principals, district leaders, researchers, policymakers, and legislators. It can inform principals and district leaders, who have the responsibility of ensuring all students have access to meaningful and engaging
curricula. It can also inform principals on the ways in which to provide students with appropriate social-emotional and cognitive supports. It can also directly benefit school principals because they can gain necessary feedback to improve their practice and leadership skills. Also, this study can inform individuals responsible for supervision regarding effective best practices that teachers perceived can improve school and student-learning climates. Moreover, researchers can become better aware of the school and student-learning climate challenges faced by educators in urban contexts. When making decisions regarding the most effective school climate practices, policymakers can also be better informed about what is needed to foster improvements. Legislators can then be better equipped to pass laws and provide the necessary funding for further research and policies in support of such efforts. Through this research, all stakeholders can obtain an insider’s perspective on the priorities, supports, and barriers to school and student-learning climates experienced by teachers working in urban contexts.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

The study was delimitated in that it examined student-learning climates in a single Connecticut, urban, public-school district, and it took into account the perceptions of teachers. This district has been identified as one of the 33 Alliance Districts and as a Priority District. Participants in this study were Grades 7 through 12 public-school teachers in those urban settings. In terms of data collection, participants who completed the surveys and those who participated in the follow-up interviews self-reported. Teachers were chosen for this study because they required the support of principals in the work that they do, so hearing their viewpoints firsthand provided insights about the supports they believed they have (or have not) received. Surveying principals themselves may not have provided insights required for this
study, in that principals may not be fully aware of how they are perceived by the teachers they supervise. Since the study focused on the teachers’ perceptions, student reports were not solicited.

There were also several limitations to this study. Email addresses for survey participants were provided to me by the Connecticut State Department of Education and included participants’ personal accounts as well as work accounts. This may have impacted response rates, due to the potential of inactive personal accounts on file and whether participants felt comfortable using their work accounts to respond to survey questions. The study was also limited by the two and a half months it took to complete the research. Three weeks were given for survey completion. Had more time been given to complete the survey, there would have been additional opportunities for participation. The last limitation concerns the grade level configurations for the schools researched. Some schools had middle school students housed in buildings with either elementary or high school students (e.g., Grades K through 8 or Grades 6 through 12) but separated by grade level. Nonetheless, only survey participants working with students in secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings were solicited.

**Review of the Literature**

The review of the literature provided a theoretical context for this study. It summarized research on school climate and its impact on the student-learning climate. Four sections were organized to “set the stage” for this study.

The first section provided an overview of the history of school climate origins, including early research concerning organizational climate and issues about race and access to high quality learning experiences.
The second section examined the literature regarding the definitions, domains, and dimensions of school climate that have been developed over time. Definitions have been traced using early understandings up to present day understandings.

The third section focused on literature about the various ways in which principals can support the development of positive school climates and student-learning climates. In particular, it examined literature on community engagement and collaborative efforts facilitated by the principal. Sources reviewed emphasized the importance of collaboration with all stakeholders, when attempting to create and sustain positive school climates and, consequently, student-learning climates.

The last section included literature on barriers that can hinder the development of positive school climates, such as discipline issues and a lack of student engagement. And it discussed supports that can develop positive student-learning climates, such as incorporating cognitive and social-emotional supports.

Method

The Method section provides a detailed description of the administration of the study. It presents the Overview of the Research Design and explains the rationale for the selection of participants and the setting of the school district that was studied. The subsequent section discusses the development of the instruments used in the data collection process, which is broken down into three phases: (a) pilot study, (b) online questionnaire, and (c) follow-up interviews. The Data Collection Procedures section chronologically explains how the data collection process was implemented. Next, the process by which data were analyzed is described, such as the tools that were used to analyze the data with regard to the guiding questions. In the next section,
Issues of Trustworthiness identified any biases held by me, the researcher, on the research topic, which were bracketed out, and how the study’s validity and reliability were ensured.

**Overview of the Research Design**

The research design chosen for this qualitative study was phenomenological (Creswell, 2013). The phenomenological study was used because it “describe[s] the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). The phenomenon researched was the student-learning climate. In essence, “The inquirer then collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon, and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). This research design examined teachers’ perceptions of the student-learning climate within their schools. A pilot study was first given to a selection of teachers, to refine the questionnaire for understanding and clarity. This was followed by an online questionnaire that was sent out to participants. A cadre of participants were then identified for follow-up interviews, from their indicated interest in participation from the questionnaire.

**Selection of Participants**

The participants selected for this study were teachers working in urban Connecticut schools. All participants in the study taught at the middle school or high school level in varying subjects. Approximately 150 teachers were anticipated to participate in the questionnaire, with 118 total responses collected. In order to saturate the codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the questionnaire, a minimum of 10 follow-up interviews were conducted with teachers who expressed a willingness to participate. These participants were categorized into heterogeneous middle school and high school groups selected by years of experience, grades taught, and thoughtfulness given to open-ended responses.
Study Setting

An urban context was chosen for this research, because school climate is often an area of focus, with initiatives in place for school and district improvements. The urban school district selected for this research was an Alliance District and Priority District identified by the state as in need of improvement. Email addresses for all secondary public-school educators in the selected setting were provided to me by the Connecticut State Department of Education. Moreover, a central office administrator supported distribution and encouraged the district’s secondary principals to have teachers complete the survey. A literacy coach within the district also supported and encouraged survey completion upon distribution.

Development of Instruments

Two research instruments were developed to gather data for this phenomenological study. First, SurveyMonkey was used to develop 33 online survey questions, consisting of 5-point Likert scales and open-ended questions aligned to the study’s 3 research questions. Four demographic-type questions were also developed that asked participants about grade levels taught, subjects taught, years of experience, and permission to use responses upon submission. There was also an option to volunteer for a follow-up interview. These questions were developed to inform the selection of follow-up interview participants. To test for clarity, a pilot survey was given to five urban educators who provided feedback regarding the length of time the survey was anticipated to take, question clarity, and alignment to the study’s research questions. The pilot survey’s primary purpose was to inform and refine the online survey before distribution. Follow-up interview questions were informed by the original survey and consisted of eight open-ended questions. The follow-up interview questions were developed to saturate the codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the original survey.
Data Collection Procedures

This section details how the data were collected. A pilot study of the initial questionnaire was given to five secondary Connecticut urban educators. An online SurveyMonkey questionnaire followed a week later, which allowed for data to be organized as needed. Follow-up interviews were then conducted after a three-week period. To allow for further analysis, follow-up interviews were recorded for future transcription and interview notes were handwritten. As the data were collected, participants’ anonymity and confidentiality were insured, by storing data on a password-protected computer and by locking it in a filing cabinet at a secure location.

Data Analysis Procedures

During the data analysis process, codes and larger categories were identified according to significant words and phrases identified for each guiding research question. The Text Analysis feature in SurveyMonkey was used to analyze the results gathered from the questionnaire. Key terms were highlighted, and open-ended responses categorized. The Cloud View feature was also used to show which words and phrases were emphasized and used most often in the open-ended responses. The follow-up interviews were then used to saturate the codes and bring clarity to questions where more information appeared needed before conclusions and themes could be drawn.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To eliminate bias when conducting the study, I bracketed myself out of the research. This effort required me to reflect on my sociocultural perspective, such as any predispositions I may hold about the topic under study. This self-reflection was intended to avoid personal bias when interpreting the data as well.
Chapter Outline

Chapter One serves as the introduction to the study. It includes my personal background, such as how I became interested in the topic of study. It also includes sections on the Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Research Questions, Definition of Terms, Significance, Delimitations and Limitations, Literature Review, Method, and Outline of Chapters.

Chapter Two provides an extensive literature review used to inform the study, which consists of three sections. The first section provides an overview of the origins of school climate, including organizational climate and access for marginalized groups. The second section discusses the various definitions, domains, and dimensions of school climate. The third section focuses on the role of the school leader (i.e., principal) as the developer of positive school climates and student-learning climates. And the last addresses the existing barriers in urban settings and supports needed when building positive school climates and student-learning climates.

Chapter Three discusses the method. It delineates the research design, the selection of participants and setting, the development of instruments, and the process of how the data were collected and how the data were analyzed in response to the research questions that guided this study. This chapter also describes the protocol used when gathering responses for the questionnaire and follow-up interviews to ensure validity and reliability.

Chapter Four discusses the results. A presentation and analysis of the qualitative data is included as well as related quantitative data gathered and analyzed. A discussion regarding the codes developed for the phenomenon and related findings is also presented for each of the three guiding research questions. The 11 findings that emerged are presented.
Chapter Five identifies conclusions drawn from the study, which include recommendations with both practical and theoretical implications for a variety of educational stakeholders. Recommendations for the educational field are also articulated regarding topics of further research, which include action steps. This section also includes final reflections about enduring understandings gleaned from the study.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

School climate has been a topic of discussion since the early 20th century. Most educators are familiar with school climate and may consider it important. However, many do not clearly understand it or the ways to improve it (Cohen, 2014). Freiberg (1999) argued that “school climate is much like the air we breathe—it tends to go unnoticed until something is … wrong” (p. 1). School climate is often referred to as “the quality and character of school life” (National School Climate Council, 2007, p. 5), and facilitating positive school and student-learning climates in urban, secondary settings is a daunting task that school leaders must undertake to make substantive improvements for students.

School climate has been an ongoing concern for many schools across the United States, due to increases in the academic demands on students to become career and college ready in environments in which behavioral issues are on the rise and standardized test scores are on the decline (Bryk et al., 2010; National School Climate Center, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Consequently, many districts and schools have made school climate efforts a component of their overall school improvement plans, due to the compelling research that positive school and student-learning climates support improved student outcomes.

Positive school climates have direct relationships with positive student behavioral and academic outcomes. Such positive outcomes include (a) improved achievement (Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Jones & Shindler, 2016; Thapa et al., 2012); (b) improved attendance rates (Hartnett, 2008; Hendron & Kearney, 2016; van Eck et al, 2017; Virtanen et al., 2009); (c) fewer instances of discipline, such as with suspensions (Gage et al., 2016; Thapa et al., 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2017); (d) fewer instances of bullying behavior (Bosworth & Judkins,
2014; Goldweber et al., 2013; Low & van Ryzin, 2014; Orpinas & Horne, 2006); and (e) fewer instances of substance abuse (LaRusso, Romer, & Selman, 2008; Reid, Peterson, Hughey, & Garcia-Reid, 2006). Jones and Shindler (2016) stated that “the quality of the climate appears to be the single most predictive factor in any school’s capacity to promote student achievement” (p. 35). There is a correlation between poor school climates and high absenteeism rates, high discipline rates, and low achievement scores, especially in the most disadvantaged and underserved schools (Maxwell, 2016).

When Congress enacted the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, it increased accountability measures and sanctions on schools that receive Title I funds and do not meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) measures (Cohen et al., 2009). According to Cohen et al. (2009), these provisions required schoolwide improvement efforts because the emphasis is on the improvement of the entire school, not students or individuals. These schoolwide improvement efforts have resulted in an increase in the implementation of comprehensive school reform (CSR) initiatives and behavioral management models (Cohen et al., 2009). Cohen et al. (2009) asserted that “school climate fits well into this policy-supported movement because climate is a holistic concept; it can only be measured or changed from all angles and elements of a school” (p. 188). Therefore, many failing schools, such as those with high discipline rates and absenteeism, as well as low achievement scores, have adopted schoolwide initiatives to improve areas of concern to foster positive school climates (Hubbuch & Stucker, 2015).

In building a theoretical foundation for this study, Chapter Two is organized according to four sections: (a) the history of school climate, including research around organizational climate and student motivation in terms of race and access; (b) the ways in which researchers have defined school climate and the common domains and dimensions that have developed over time;
(c) the role of school leaders in developing positive school and student-learning climates; and (d) the barriers and supports to developing positive school and student-learning climates.

The History of School Climate

This study draws on what early practitioners and researchers learned about school climate and the student-learning climate. The student-learning climate involves the climate (i.e., atmosphere or environment) in which learning takes place and its impact on students’ attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs, as seen through student outcomes (Caine & Caine, 1997; Marzano, 1992). Early practitioners and researchers pioneered new understandings and approaches on the ways in which to improve the climate in schools and organizations, with the intent of improving outcomes.

First Primer on School Climate

Many consider Perry’s (1908) *The Management of a City School* the primer for principals about school climate with regard to the day-to-day operations of a school. Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, and Higgins-d’Alessandro (2013) identified Perry as one of the “early educational reformers” (p. 358), explaining that he had acknowledged how a school’s distinctive culture and climate could dramatically impact its students’ lives and learning experiences. Perry’s book reflected his work as an elementary principal for Public School No. 85 in Brooklyn, New York, and no literature existed before describing the duties of a school leader. Moreover, no one had written about how to handle issues about overall school effectiveness, such as creating positive school climates (Davis & Warner, 2015; Thapa et al., 2013; Zullig et al., 2010). Perry emphasized that while “many helpful volumes” had been published on a diverse array of topics in “educational history, methods, and principles, and class-room management,” one struggled
when “assuming the duties of a principalship” to uncover “any special literature upon the subject” (pp. 1-2).

Although Perry’s (1908) work does not use the words school climate specifically, it served to inform other researchers, educators, and theorists about areas in which they could systemically examine school climate, such as differing domains (Cohen et al., 2009; Freiberg, 1999; Thapa et al., 2013; Zullig, Huebner, & Patton, 2011). The topics (or domains) Perry discussed for managing city schools support a positive school climate. Perry (1908) argued that up to his time, administrators had built “upon a broad foundation of rational philosophy a superstructure of the more important principles” (p. 3), to direct principals in the day-to-day operations of running a school.

A Welcoming Environment/Atmosphere for Parents and the Community

Perry (1908) identified how a welcoming atmosphere creates opportunities to engage with parents and to enlist their help as well as the help of community members. Perry saw this as an evident source of human, social, and political capital. Perry’s understanding of school climate was evident when he discussed the value in creating a welcoming environment for parents and community members. As Perry explained, a principal could “convince them that their interest in the school is welcomed and appreciated” (p. 38). To accomplish this, parents and community members should believe that they always have “a standing invitation to visit the school,” and those taking up this offer should receive warm greetings (pp. 38-39). Here, Perry emphasized the need to engage parents in school life. He further argued, “if the cooperation is to be intelligent and fruitful, [the principal] must take formal means of soliciting it” (p. 38), and he provided a list of ways the principal can elicit family engagement. He explained that the principal may encourage the formation of Parents’ Associations, which could work together with
the administration for the school’s benefit, and even “on occasion formally request the cooperation of the individual parent on behalf of his children” (pp. 42-43). He further called for community involvement, noting how talks from “men and women of local or other prominence” could be exceedingly useful (p. 41).

**Environment/Atmosphere of Classroom**

Perry (1908) identified how the school’s physical makeup affects the learner, and Freiberg’s (1999) interpretation supported this. Freiberg claimed that Perry emphasized the significance of the school’s surroundings. Perry noted that while it is impossible to quantify the specific extent to which the material environment impacts students, they are still “influenced by their surroundings…. [I]t becomes a duty of the school to provide something more than mere ‘housing’” (p. 303). Freiberg appeared to misrepresent the meaning of Perry’s passage to infer that it referred solely to the atmosphere (i.e., mood), when he eluded to one’s surrounding, but the quote most accurately appears earlier in Perry’s work under his writings on decoration. Perry said that “even [the] most wretched of schoolrooms admits of some decorative treatment which will reduce [the] ill effects of the cheerless atmosphere” (p. 141). In this regard, one’s surroundings should also include the environment and the need to make it more aesthetically appealing.

**Environments/Atmosphere as a Source of School Pride**

Freiberg (1999) also explained that Perry (1908) furthered his discussion of the school environment of atmosphere through “one of the most potent ideals:” that of “esprit de corps” (p. 1). Under Perry’s section on school spirit, he explained that, in terms of esprit de corps, “school atmosphere, pride in the school and thought for its name and honor … must become a matter of tradition and, once established, be handed down from one set of pupils to another” (p. 304).
Further, “It counts for much if the parents advise their friends, ‘Get your boy into No. 100 if you can; it is a great school’ … [and] the alumni think that it is a special honor to graduate from the school” (Perry, 1908, p. 304). It is evident that Perry recognized that creating an atmosphere of pride and tradition was a significant component of school climate, along with a sense of belonging and connectedness.

Social-Emotional Engagement and Connectedness

Perry (1908) also described the need for students to experience social-emotional engagement, so that they can develop connections with others and find learning meaningful. Perry explained that students benefit from “the guiding hand and personal touch of a friendly teacher who shall be all-in-all to them–who shall be as the law assumes, in loco parentis” (p. 190). *In loco parentis* is defined as, “in the place or role of a parent, as in a person acting in a parental capacity” (“In loco parentis,” n.d.). In this way, educators become mentors and advisors. Further, when it comes to grade promotion and placement, Perry argued that educators should take students’ social and emotional needs into consideration. He believed that when retaining or promoting a student, educators should consider “his sensitiveness to the fact that he is out of his social set” to whether or not he has “friends who may be a source of inspiration” (pp. 200-201). He further asserted that the student “may have a temperament that will be better understood by one teacher than by another” (p. 201).

Cognitive Support and Engagement

Perry’s (1908) work discussed the need for students to feel cognitively supported and engaged in school. In regard to the climate of the classroom and engagement to learning, Perry argued, “the very atmosphere … should be one of work” (p. 210), and he cautioned about “lessons [that] are unwisely assigned” (p. 214); or, in other words, too hard, too easy, lacks
purpose, or busy work. In this regard, he asserted that “pupils are set at work which they can regard only as a task because they see no benefit, immediate or future, which could possibly accrue from its performance” (Perry, 1908, p. 214). In other words, Perry believed that students need to engage in appropriately assigned tasks and to feel a sense of urgency, which the teacher must establish. Otherwise, teachers are disregarding student motivation, or as Perry explained, their “motives are neglected” (p. 214).

**Student Discipline Philosophy**

Moreover, Perry (1908) emphasized the importance of fostering and maintaining discipline among the student body. Perry regarded discipline as a necessary element of school life. With new students coming in and graduating students going out, educators need to establish both behavioral norms and the philosophy of the school as well as teach them to students. He discussed the need for principals to have a discipline philosophy, which they must either develop on their own or adopt from someone else. Perry suggested that every school develop “a rational system of class government, and throughout the school as a whole and unified system, of school government” (p. 243). It is evident that Perry believed that schoolwide systems for behavioral management and expectations are at the forefront when dealing with discipline issues, and he identified this work as “a continuous process” (p. 243), due to the constant change of the student body.

**Safety, Order, and Infrastructure**

Perry (1908) also argued the need to maintain safety, order, and infrastructure to create a positive school climate. Perry emphasized the importance of safety when students enter the school, exit the school, pass between classes, play on the playground, or evacuate during emergency drill procedures. For Perry, supervision and adequate procedures made for
harmonious routines in which problems are avoidable. Entering and exiting the school in an orderly manner is important. He argued, “if we are to train pupils for life we should train them to enter the school building in an orderly manner” (p. 171). He also professed that maintaining safety and order is necessary during “periodic emergency dismissals” (p. 172), which involves planning safe routes of exit for each class and having placards outlining procedures. In addition to safety during emergency drills, Perry noted the need for proper equipment and adequate space on the playground, explaining, “if there is ample playground area, great freedom may be allowed the pupils … [but] if the playground area is limited, such freedom may result in … accidents” (p. 170). Maintaining the safety, order, and infrastructure of the school appeared to ensure a positive school environment or atmosphere for Perry.

Perry’s (1908) discussion of school climate has also been used to inform the work of subsequent researchers. Freiberg (1999) argued that those within the field of education have held a “concern for the climate or atmosphere of the school” as well as its potential impact “on the student and the learning environment” for over a century (p. 1). The school atmosphere, or environment, and its impact on student outcomes underwent discussion in the early 20th century, and the topic of organizational climate gained popularity by midcentury.

**Organizational Climate**

The study of organizational climate began to emerge in the 1950s and 1960s (Argyris, 1958; Feldvebel, 1964; Halpin & Croft, 1963; March & Simon, 1958). Furthermore, this research served to inform improving outcomes not only in commercial organizations but also in schools. Through this research, there was a growing interest in the factors that influenced outcomes, such as “morale, productivity, and turnover” (Zullig et al., 2010, p. 140). What
follows is a discussion of how factors, such as relationships, social interactions, attitudes and
beliefs, access, and motivation, impact school climate.

**Relationships.** Argyris (1958) examined the climate and productivity of a bank in terms
of leadership and employee relationships as well as issues with regard to change resistance. The
hierarchical distribution of responsibility in Argyris’s study modeled the distribution of
responsibilities that often occurs in schools. Argyris explained some of the challenges in
analyzing and conceptualizing the climate of an organization, in that a formal definition would
be an oversimplification of the process, due to all its variables. He argued that one cannot
examine each variable in isolation but only together as part of the entire processes of an
organization.

Argyris (1958) also discussed how employee and leadership behaviors contribute to the
concept of morale and unwillingness to change in what may appear a stable environment. In this
instance, Argyris explained that the “right type” (pp. 2-3) in the organization is really the
contrary, but due to each constituent subconsciously maintaining the status quo, there is little, if
any, impetus for change. If a new, more productive type enters the organization, there may be
pushback from other employees because the new employee is challenging the status quo, and he
or she may come across as a bad fit. To keep everyone “at bay,” leaders do not always address
the issue with employees’ resistance to change adequately. This lack of change can impact an
organization’s full potential for growth or improved “production, [which is] usually conceived as
output of the organization” (Argyris, 1958, p. 509). When opportunities for open
communication between administrators or leaders (i.e., officials) and subordinates (i.e.,
employees) arose, Argyris found that both parties felt that there was a lack of communication,
with employees stating that they “fear the impact on the officers” (p. 513). Fear was also the
driving force in the officers’ lack of communication; thus, these behaviors caused a “decrease in] the inner complementarity and learning capacity of the organization” (Argyris, 1958, p. 516). Thus, vulnerability, trust, and accountability in the organization appeared lacking (Lencioni, 2002), which can negatively impact opportunities for growth. Argyris’ (1958) research emphasized the need to investigate interactions between superiors and subordinates (i.e., effective communication measures) for organizational growth to occur.

Social interactions. Halpin and Croft (1963) were the first to develop conceptual frameworks concerning school climate and its related social interactions using “domains or variables” (p. 1). The examination of school climate stemmed from research on organizational climate and understandings about its impact on outcomes (Anderson, 1982). Halpin and Croft (1963) were the first to conduct a study investigating the “personality” of a school (p. 1), featuring the term school climate for the first time (Ringeisen, Henderson, & Hoagwood, 2003).

Using a questionnaire, Halpin and Croft (1963) determined domains of school climate and their related characteristics. Their study involved “71 elementary schools chosen from six different regions of the United States,” in which “1,151 respondents,” who were elementary teachers, answered an Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ) (Halpin and Croft, 1963, p. 2). Halpin and Croft identified four characteristics for teachers: (a) disengagement, (b) hindrance, (c) esprit, and (d) intimacy; and four characteristics of principals, or school leaders: (a) aloofness, (b) production emphasis, (c) thrust, and (d) consideration. They also identified six predominant climates: (a) open, (b) autonomous, (c) controlled, (d) familiar, (e) paternal, and (f) closed (with an open climate being the ideal and a closed climate being the least ideal). They also conceptualized and described social interactions:
1. Authenticity: The genuineness or openness of the leaders’ and the group members’ behavior.

2. Satisfaction: The group members’ attainment of conjoint fulfillment in respect to task accomplishment and social needs.

3. Leadership Initiation: The latitude within which the group members, as well as the leaders, can initiate acts of management. (p. 5)

These frameworks and domains contributed significantly to the research on school climate, explaining how behaviors within an organization can create open or closed climates. Other researchers, such as Feldvebel (1964), built on this work.

**Systems and community approach.** Using Halpin and Croft’s (1963) OCDQ, Feldvebel (1964) stretched beyond organizational climate by taking a systems or community approach to the analysis of a school climate. He analyzed how researchers can compare the public goals of the organization to its private goals, and he took into consideration the socioeconomic status of the community. Feldvebel examined approximately 30 fifth-graders in 30 schools in the Northeastern Illinois Metropolitan Area. He explained that “data were collected with respect to the socioeconomic-status of the school’s patrons, pupil achievement, levels, and organizational climate” (p. 2), with Halpin and Croft’s OCDQ as the assessment tool.

**Teachers’ attitudes and beliefs.** Feldvebel (1964) described his approach as examining the “‘global concept’ of organizational climates” (p. 2), not just the system within the organization. Feldvebel (1964) described how the OCDQ provided implications for school improvement efforts, such as in teacher selection processes. He argued that recruiters should take teacher characteristics (e.g., attitudes and beliefs) into consideration when selecting staff. Feldvebel explained, drawing on Halpin and Croft’s (1963) study, “It was felt that [these]
important relationships might be overlooked” (p. 2). He concluded that teachers and principals may experience conflict when it comes to perceptions of tasks and that the backgrounds and the personality traits of teachers, not just the community in which the school subsides, may be significant factors when making predictions about how the group can contribute to the overall climate of the organization (Feldvebel, 1964). Thus, Feldvebel believed that one way to control the organizational climate is by looking more closely at the background and personality characteristics of teacher candidates before making hiring decisions.

**Influence of leadership on open or closed climates.** Hall (1972) also expanded on Halpin and Croft’s (1963) OCDQ. Hall compared Halpin and Croft’s work to that of Likert’s (1967), by using Likert and Likert’s Profile of a School Instrument. A comparison of the subtest dimensions of the OCDQ and the variables from the Profile of a School Instrument are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*A Comparison of the Subtest Dimensions of Halpin and Croft’s (1963) OCDQ and the Variables Associated With Likert and Likert’s (1967) Profile of a School Instrument*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire</th>
<th>Profile of a School Instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Climates</td>
<td>System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esprit</td>
<td>Intimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrust</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consideration</td>
<td>Hindrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Disengagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Aloofness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Production emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esprit</td>
<td>Intimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy</td>
<td>Hindrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aloofness</td>
<td>Disengagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production emphasis</td>
<td>Aloofness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled</td>
<td>Thrust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disengagement</td>
<td>Intimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindrance</td>
<td>Consideration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production emphasis</td>
<td>Systems III and IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aloofness</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrust</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esprit</td>
<td>Hindrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy</td>
<td>Disengagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consideration</td>
<td>Aloofness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production emphasis</td>
<td>Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems III and IV</td>
<td>Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High performance</td>
<td>Setting by students, faculty, and principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal encourages self-control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hall’s (1972) research has suggested that leadership behaviors can either help or hinder the climate of an organization. Likert (1967) identified the variables in Table 1 (i.e., behaviors and conditions) as desirable; Halpin and Croft (1963) placed them in an open climate. Similarly, the variables (i.e., behaviors and conditions) Likert identified as undesirable match those in Halpin and Croft’s closed climate. These open and closed climates significantly impacted morale and motivation.

**Staff and student morale.** Hall’s (1972) findings are consistent with current research, which has argued that when behavioral and academic performance for students are poor in an organization, there is a tendency for staff to feel the climate is poor (Virtanen et al., 2009). The same argument has been applied to students (van Eck et al., 2017). Halpin and Croft (1963) argued that when organizational morale is low, motivation reduces. They placed emphasis on the ways and means by which employee productivity can impact students’ academic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire</th>
<th>Profile of a School Instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiar</td>
<td>Disengagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paternal</td>
<td>Disengagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Disengagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systems I and II</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited supportive leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low motivation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainly downward communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little student, faculty, and principal involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little participation of faculty in decision making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational goal setting mainly by the principal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal exerts control over students and faculty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
performance (Feldvebel, 1964; Halpin & Croft, 1963; Virtanen et al., 2009). In turn, discussions on poor student outcomes impacting student morale began to emerge (van Eck et al., 2017). These early studies on organizational climate brought insights to the ways in which morale can influence outcomes so that improvement efforts could be developed. Through the growth in popularity of studies about organizational climate and behavior, studies about educational inequalities began to emerge, especially around how the environment played an instrumental role in student motivation.

**Access and motivation—race inequalities.** Coleman et al. (1966) were the first to research how race inequalities affected school climate and student motivation. Their study, which the National Center for Educational Statistics commissioned, was in response to issues regarding the segregation of schools and inequalities in conjunction with educational opportunities. It investigated educational outcomes for minority groups in America: “Negro Americans, Puerto Rican Americans, Indian Americans, Mexican Americans, and Oriental Americans” (p. 36), with particular emphasis on Negro Americans as well as issues about segregation.¹ In terms of school climate, which Coleman et al. referred to as environment, there was a discussion of many factors that influenced differences in student achievement, including access to facilities, teacher quality, student backgrounds, and motivation. Furthermore, Coleman et al. found that regardless of students’ backgrounds, the significant factors that influenced student motivation were peer social interactions and relationships within the school environment.

**Character of the school environment.** With regard to the character of the school environment, Coleman et al. (1966) explained that “the school environment of a child consists of many things, ranging from the desk he sits at to the child who sits next to him and including the

¹ To stay in line with the authenticity of the study’s text, in direct references to Coleman et al. (1966), African Americans or Blacks remain in the archaic and less politically correct form of Negro.
teacher who stands in front of his class” (p. 37). In terms of environment, Coleman et al. examined school locations by region. The researchers also examined access to facilities and resources, such as books, curriculum, playing fields, science laboratories, and specialists. In addition, they examined educators’ backgrounds, in particular White teachers’ educational backgrounds and experiences as compared to those of Black teachers and principals. In general, Coleman et al. found that minority students had less access to adequate facilities and that their teachers were Black educators with lower educational levels than both their White teacher and principal counterparts.

Coleman et al. (1966) also examined the achievement of minority students when compared to their White counterparts. With regard to student outcomes, they relied heavily on standardized tests, taking the position that “while such test results are not the only thing educators mean when they speak of the outcomes of schooling, they are a large and important part of it” (p. 218). Coleman et al. also explained the significance of family background on student achievement: “Studies of school achievement have consistently shown that variations in family background account for far more variation in school achievement than do variations in school characteristics” (p. 218). In terms of the achievement outcomes, the report noted that by Grade 12, “The Negroes’ averages tend to be about one standard deviation below those of the whites, which means that about 85 percent of the Negro scores are below the white average” (p. 219). Another way to examine achievement differences is to look at grade level differences. In this regard,

At grade 6, the average Negro is approximately 1 1/2 years behind the average white. At grade 9, he is approximately 2 1/4 years behind that of the average white. At grade 12, he is approximately 3 1/4 years behind the average white. (Coleman et al., 1966, p. 273)
Coleman et al. concluded that, as schooling progresses, the achievement gap between Black and White students steadily increases.

**Student motivation and relationships.** Coleman et al. (1966) concluded that when it comes to student motivation and “other attitudinal characteristics” (p. 218), Black students showed higher levels of motivation through their social interactions and peer relationships. Regardless of socioeconomic status and family levels of education, Coleman et al. found that Black students performed better academically when around like-minded, highly motivated, White students. Coleman et al. explained that the “beneficial effect of a student body with a high proportion of white students comes not from racial composition per se, but from the better educational background and higher educational aspirations that are, on the average found among white students” (p. 307). Coleman et al. argued that Black students, regardless of their backgrounds, aspired toward success when in environments with primarily White students with similar aspirations, and they did better academically as well as showed increases in motivation.

Coleman et al. (1966) examined social interactions, motivation, and connectedness further. “Coleman … noted that the composition of a student’s peer group was more important for learning than any other school-related factor” (Rivkin, 2017, p. 26), which is why desegregation efforts and access became so popular. Jacobs (2016) asserted, “To put it in less subtle terms, the outcomes for African American students are better when they attend more racially integrated schools” (p. 316).

**Sense of belonging and connectedness.** At the time of Coleman et al.’s (1966) report, issues concerning race appeared as Black-White, but demographics and perspectives have steadily changed. There has been “an influx of Hispanic and Asian families [which have]
transformed the composition of the schools. The result is a declining black-white exposure rate” (Rivkin, 2017, p. 30).

In the United States’ ever changing and diverse culture, there is an even greater need to acknowledge and address the diversity of its student body. Jacobs (2016) supported the views of Derrick Bell (1987), when he argued that “the Coleman Report does not recognize that white students benefit from the presence of African American students because it is premised on the inferiority of African American culture and white supremacy” (p. 318). Research has shown that no matter the environment, for students to feel a sense of belonging and motivation to learn, educators must value their presence and voice in a way that is meaningful and that reinforces their importance in democratic society (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; Cobb, 2014).

Some have argued that the Coleman Report was the first of its kind to use student outcomes to influence national policy (Jacobs, 2016). The report showed significant factors that can influence a student’s ability and motivation toward upward mobility, and this is applicable to all students today who attend schools that lack the supports and resources necessary to meet success and to compete in a global society. Jacobs (2016) stated that the findings of the report provided “the context for more philosophical recent debates over, for example, the value of a liberal education, multicultural education, luck, egalitarianism, and personal responsibility in education, the reach of parental autonomy, and the fostering of democratic citizenship” (p. 320). School climate addresses the need to understand more effectively how access and participation can impact student motivation so that success for all who desire it can become a real possibility.

It has been more than 50 years since the Coleman Report brought awareness to inequalities in education, such as access. Segregation of schools no longer exists in practice, but
there is much to learn about the attitudes and beliefs concerning opportunities for improved student outcomes for the United States’ underserved and disadvantaged youth. Uncovering what those issues are and their impact on school climate and the student-learning climate, respectively, can help to improve outcomes for all students. The next section discusses school climate definitions, domains, and dimensions in contemporary America, which emerged as frameworks to support successful practices.

**School Climate Definitions, Domains, and Dimensions**

From its first investigation in the early 20th century, scholars have defined school climate in multiple ways, and definitions have evolved to address the many topics researchers, scholars, and practitioners study today.

**Definitions of School Climate**

Some have described school climate as the school environment (Perry, 1908; Stringfield, 1994; Tagiuri, 1968) or atmosphere (Perry, 1908; Tagiuri, 1968). Freiberg (1999) described school climate by summarizing the views of Hoy and Miskel (1996): “school climate is a relatively enduring quality of the entire school that is experienced by members, describes their collective perceptions of routine behavior, and affects their attitudes and behavior in the school” (p. 85). Preble and Gordon (2011) explained that school “climate is about the overall life in school” (p. 101). Cohen et al. (2009) stated that school climate includes the “norms, values and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe” (p. 182), and Preble and Gordon adopted this position. Currently, the nationally recognized definition as devised by the National School Climate Council (2007) is, “School climate refers to the quality and character of school life,” and it “is based on patterns of people’s experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership
practices, and organizational structures” (p. 5; Cohen et al., 2009, p. 182). In other words, school climate is the overall attitude or shared perception of those with connections to a school community (Ashforth, 1985). According to the National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments (2017), a positive school climate can be evident at any grade level, when the environment is safe, supportive, and respectful, and is defined as:

A positive school climate reflects attention to fostering social and physical safety, providing support that enables students and staff to realize high behavioral and academic standards, as well as encouraging and maintaining respectful, trusting, and caring relationships throughout the school community. (p. 1)

Just as there are varied definitions of school climate, there are varied domains and dimensions that have been used in conceptual frameworks to measure it.

**School Climate Domains and Dimensions**

Although the identification of conceptual frameworks and dimensions began 50 years ago, domains and dimensions have developed over time to capture the needs of school climate in contemporary settings. Drago-Severson (2012) argued that “there is not one commonly accepted ‘list’ of the essential dimensions that color and shape school climate” (p. 183). Nonetheless, researchers and practitioners most commonly refer to the domains and dimensions from the National School Climate Center (Cohen, 2008, 2009, 2017; Cohen et al., 2009; Melnick et al., 2017; Thapa et al., 2013).

The National School Climate Center’s dimensions have evolved over time in response to changes in school climate issues. Four dimensions of their earlier work were (a) safety, (b) teaching and learning, (c) relationships, and (d) environmental-structural (Cohen et al., 2009). Within these dimensions there were subdimensions, which included behaviors and conditions as
indicators to support these dimensions. Due to reform efforts, the National School Climate Center then added a fifth dimension, the processes of school improvement (Thapa et al., 2012). According to Thapa et al. (2012), the National School Climate Center’s five dimensions were the following, with examples as indicators for success:

1. Safety (e.g., rules and norms; physical safety; social-emotional safety),
2. Relationships (e.g., respect for diversity; school connectedness/engagement; social support; leadership),
3. Teaching and Learning (e.g., social, emotional, ethical and civic learning; support for academic learning; support for professional relationships),
4. Institutional Environment (e.g., physical surrounding),
5. Processes of School Improvement. (pp. 2-3)

Since school reform efforts have prioritized developing and/or sustaining positive school climates, the processes of this work can have a significant impact on success. Identifying the specific areas for schools to focus on when improving school climate has yielded positive results.

Table 2 shows the National School Climate Center’s (2017) most recently revised and expanded dimensions of school climate, with six overarching categories or domains and 13 dimensions.

Table 2

*National School Climate Center’s 13 Dimensions of School Climate*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Major Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Rules and Norms</td>
<td>Clearly communicated rules about physical violence, clearly communicated rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>about verbal abuse, harassment, and teasing, clear and consistent norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and enforcement for adult intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Physical Security</td>
<td>Students and adults feel safe from physical harm in the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Dimension Learning Climates in Urban Settings

#### Dimension | Major Indicators
--- | ---
4. **Support for Learning** | Use of supportive teaching practices, such as encouragement and constructive feedback, varied opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills, support for risk-taking and independent thinking, atmosphere conducive to dialogue and questioning, academic challenge, and individual attention.
5. **Social and Civic Learning** | Support for the development of social and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions, including effective listening, conflict resolution, self-reflection, emotional regulation, empathy, personal responsibility, and ethical decision making.

**Interpersonal Relationships**

6. **Respect for Diversity** | Mutual respect for individual differences (e.g., gender, race, culture, etc.) at all levels of the school-student-student, adult-student, adult-adult, and overall norms for tolerance.
7. **Social Support – Adults** | Pattern of supportive and caring adult relationships for students, including high expectations for students’ success, willingness to listen to students and to get to know them as individuals, and a personal concern for students’ problems.
8. **Social Support – Students** | Pattern of supportive peer relationships for students, including friendships for socializing, for problems, for academic help, and for new students.

**Institutional Environment**

9. **School Connectedness-Engagement** | Positive identification with the school; norms for broad participation in school life for students, staff, and families.
10. **Physical Surroundings** | Cleanliness, order, appeal of facilities; adequate resources and materials.

**Social Media**

11. **Social Media** | Students feel safe from physical harm, verbal abuse/teasing, gossip, and exclusion when online or on electronic devices (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, other social media platforms, by e-mail, text messaging, posting photo/video, etc.).

**Staff Only**

12. **Leadership** | Administration creates and communicates a clear vision and is accessible and supportive of school staff development.
13. **Professional Relationships** | Positive attitudes and relationships among school staff that support effectively working and learning together.


Its six domains are (a) safety, (b) teaching and learning, (c) interpersonal relationships, (d) institutional environment, (e) social media, and (f) staff only—and within those there are 13 dimensions (Cohen, 2017; Melnick et al., 2017). The most evident addition is the domain of social media, which is indicative of how social media and related online activities can have a significant impact on school climate efforts.
These 13 dimensions mirror the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI), a national school climate survey schools can use to assess their strengths and needs (National School Climate Center, 2016). Schools can use this framework to measure their own school climate progress and to make informed decisions about actionable improvement efforts (National School Climate Center, 2016).

The National School Climate Center (2010) developed a framework “of five standards that support effective school climate improvement efforts” (p. 3). The following are the current standards that inform state policy, such as that of Connecticut:

1. The school community has a shared vision and plan for promoting, enhancing and sustaining a positive school climate.

2. The school community sets policies specifically promoting (a) the development and sustainability of social, emotional, ethical, civic and intellectual skills, knowledge, dispositions and engagement, and (b) a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage students who have become disengaged.

3. The school community’s practices are identified, prioritized and supported to (a) promote the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical and civic development of students, (b) enhance engagement in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities; (c) address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage those who have become disengaged, and (d) develop and sustain an appropriate operational infrastructure and capacity building mechanisms for meeting this standard.

4. The school community creates an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school: socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically.
5. The school community develops meaningful and engaging practices, activities and norms that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice. (National School Climate Center, 2010, p. 3)

Each standard has indicators and subindicators that researchers and practitioners can use to measure progress.

Since school climate is so vital to the health of a school, all school districts in Connecticut must have a school climate policy in place (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014). The National School Climate Center (2010) stated that these “standards present a vision and framework for a positive and sustainable school climate” (p. 3). The school’s principal has a key role in implementing and monitoring school climate policy, to facilitate school and student-learning climate efforts.

The Role of the School Leader in Facilitating Positive School Climates

As the educational literature and research often suggests, principals are in a key role in which they can cultivate supportive and positive school climates within their settings (Allen et al., 2015; Cohen et al., 2009; Ross & Cozzens, 2016; Sadlier, 2011). The Connecticut State Department of Education’s (2014) policy identified the responsibility for school climate as “top down.” This work starts with state mandates that district leaders such as superintendents implement. They then go to school principals. However, as the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (2014) policy has indicated, principals should establish collaborative processes to facilitate school climate efforts; otherwise, this work can lack sustainability.

Facilitating Collaborative Stakeholder Relationships

Successful implementation of school climate initiatives requires trusting, collaborative relationships among all stakeholders (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Connecticut State Department of
Researchers have argued that principals or other school leaders (Cherkowski, 2016; Gulsen & Gulenay, 2014; Urick & Bowers, 2014), such as vice/assistant principals (Dunar, 2016; Frascone, 2011, Williams, 2012), can facilitate these collaborative relationships. It is also important for teachers to be a part of collaborative school climate decision-making processes (Cobb, 2014; Dunar, 2016; Hubbuch & Stucker, 2015; Iurea, 2015). Moreover, this work requires the help of support staff, such as school counselors (Hernández & Seem, 2004; Ray, Lambie, & Curry, 2007; Rock, Remley, & Range, 2017). To reflect the needs of families within the school community, it is important for parents and community members to participate in school climate efforts (Dunar, 2016; Epstein, 1997; Ice, Thapa, & Cohen, 2015). Furthermore, successful implementation of school climate efforts requires student representation (Cobb, 2014; Di Lullo, 2004; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997). For educational leaders, such as principals, to create positive school climates within their settings, this work requires the collaboration of many stakeholders, so that improvements best reflect the needs of the communities in which schools serve (Bryk et al., 2010; Cohen et al., 2009).

**School Climate Policy**

Connecticut State Department of Education’s (2014) *Model of School Climate Policy*: *Connecticut* is a blueprint for Connecticut schools to implement school climate efforts. The policy explains that a positive school climate provides the means for all students to feel supported and to learn ways to be successful in school and beyond, through the following:

*All schools must support and promote teaching and learning environments where each and every student achieves academically and socially, has a strong and meaningful voice and is prepared for democratic life and successful transition into the 21st century*
workplace. A positive school climate is an essential element of achieving these goals.

(Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014, p. 1)

This policy has served as a guideline for schools throughout the state of Connecticut when it comes to school reform and school climate initiatives.

**School climate distribution of responsibilities.** As Figure 1 indicates, in the state of Connecticut where sanctions concerning school climate exist in the most struggling schools, policy allows for the principal to select a designee (e.g., another building administrator) to fulfil, at least in part, school climate initiatives (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014).

![Diagram of school climate distribution of responsibilities](https://www.casciac.org/pdfs/Model_CT_SC_Policy.pdf)

*Figure 1. School climate top-down illustration of distribution of responsibilities. Adapted from Model of School Climate Policy: Connecticut, by Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014. Retrieved from https://www.casciac.org/pdfs/Model_CT_SC_Policy.pdf*

As the policy also indicates, according to Figure 1, the designee can then select a cochair, such as a teacher leader, to help to fulfil the school climate committee’s responsibilities.
Figure 1 demonstrates that the safe school climate policy requires the school’s leaders to facilitate the creation of a positive school climate involving all stakeholders, such as “students, parents, and school personnel” (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014). One way that a positive school climate can be facilitated is for the principal to develop a shared vision and mission for the school around student learning to which all stakeholders can agree (Gordon, 2013). Furthermore, stakeholder personnel can include counselors, school psychologists, and even custodial staff. In essence, the principal’s role is then to ensure the fidelity of implementation of policy and practice.

**School climate distribution of responsibilities.** Figure 2 illustrates the cyclical responsibilities of a safe school climate committee. More specifically, as the policy indicates, educators must gather feedback yearly through a survey, and the school’s improvement plan must reflect any necessary changes in response to significant survey findings.

![Diagram](https://www.casciac.org/pdfs/Model_CT_SC_Policy.pdf)

*Figure 2. Representative responsibilities of a school climate committee. Adapted from Model of School Climate Policy: Connecticut, by Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014. Retrieved from https://www.casciac.org/pdfs/Model_CT_SC_Policy.pdf*
The behaviors and conditions that the school principal cultivates within his or her staff and school community regarding the safe school climate policy will help to support and sustain improvement efforts (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014). Schools, as systems, need structures, strategies, and supports in place to foster ways to create more positive school climates for all. These supports require thoughtful attention from leadership, such as principals. Although there are barriers that inhibit positive student-learning climates, with thoughtful attention on facilitating supports, these barriers can be overcome.

**Barriers and Supports to Student-Learning Climates**

To improve school and student-learning climates for underrepresented and underserved students, barriers to their growth and development must be addressed and supported. These efforts can address losses to instructional time and ensure all students can reach their full potentials. In what follows, barriers to student learning are discussed, such as losses in instructional time, due to discipline issues and lack of student engagement. Additionally, supports to student learning are delineated, through safe, supportive, and inclusive environments that have high expectations for all.

**Losses in Instructional Time**

A significant barrier when it comes to school climate and the student-learning climate, respectively, involves improving outcomes for marginalized populations, where issues concerning student discipline result in losses of instructional time. According to a video report by Losen (2011), national statistics showed that “Over 28% of black males were suspended out of school at least [some of the] time,” and he argued, “It’s a tremendous loss of instructional time.” Furthermore, Losen (2011) stated that when educators remove these students from the classroom for behavioral issues, “We’re really increasing the risk for delinquency, incarceration,
and gang affiliation, by kicking these kids out.” In terms of discipline rates, Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, and Belway (2015) said, “Black males are at the highest risk for suspension (33.8%), followed by Latino males (23.2%)” (p. 6). They also discovered that “schools suspend students with disabilities at rates that are typically two to three times higher than for their non-disabled peers” (p. 6). For students to find school meaningful and a place where they can succeed, educators need to strategize ways to engage and support them, so that they feel a sense of belonging and they avoid partaking in behaviors that may result in suspension (Bryk et al., 2010; National School Climate Center, 2010; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). This loss of instructional time further increases the achievement gap for populations that have already experienced marginalization (DeWitt & Slade, 2014; Losen, 2011). DeWitt and Slade (2014) argued that “to create a positive school climate, teachers need to develop a safe space for interactions—a community where students learn how to interact, collaborate, disagree, and debate … but ultimately stay” (p. 33).

Comfort Zones

When it comes to students, who appear marginalized, pushing themselves academically or interacting socially with their White counterparts, they tend to stay in what seems comfort zones (Miller & Garran, 2008). Miller and Garran (2008) uncovered why some people stay in their comfort zones, as opposed to moving beyond them to allow themselves the opportunity to have more diverse experiences that can foster social growth. They defined comfort zones as:

- the safe places from where we generally operate, where things are familiar and predictable, and where we feel most in control. If we stay inside our comfort zones, we have little impetus for change, we surround ourselves with the well-known, and we do not challenge ourselves with new information or experiences. Moving too far away from
our comfort zone can feel threatening and evoke a great deal of anxiety. This can lead us to withdraw or shut down. (p. 9)

It is evident that less engaged students have the potential to withdraw, or, worse, they may even show signs of learned helplessness, such as excusing themselves from class (e.g., ask to go to the nurse, to the water fountain, or to the bathroom). In this regard, students may lack a connectedness to school. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2009), students who are “‘different’ from the social norm may have difficulty connecting with other students and adults…. Strong family involvement and supportive school personnel, inclusive school environments, and curricula that reflect the realities of a diverse student body can help.” Moreover, these students may act out to the point of removal from the classroom for behavioral reasons, again possibly leading to suspension and perpetuating a loss of instructional time (DeWitt & Slade, 2014; Losen, 2011).

Supportive Practices for Student Engagement and High Expectations

Students are more likely to discover their full potentials if administrators and teachers reflect on practices that promote a positive school climate and foster student engagement and high expectations for all (Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement, 2012; Elbot & Fulton, 2008; Shindler, Jones, Taylor, & Cadenas, 2004). Bryk et al. (2010) argued that students are more likely to participate in learning when they feel a sense of security and when they find the curriculum engaging. As DeWitt and Slade (2014) stated, “whether it’s making sure all marginalized groups … feel as if they have a voice in the school or it’s turning around a building with low morale, school climate is something with which all schools have to contend” (p. 5). No matter the context, all schools are affected by school climate and need to engage all stakeholders in welcoming, safe, supportive, and inclusive environments.
Due to the unique needs of students and families, schools with positive student-learning climates strive to have welcoming, safe, supportive, and inclusive environments responsive to the diverse needs of their population and that celebrate each other’s differences (Rivkin, 2017). Due to the positive impact of such climates on student outcomes, Rivkin (2017) stated that “requirements for the reporting of extensive information on academic outcomes and basic characteristics of schools, including their demographic composition, have been embedded in federal and state laws” (p. 35). The Connecticut State Department of Education (2019) stores Strategic School Profiles (SSPs) or “snapshots” for every school and district in the state, according to its website, which provides an array of information about achievement scores, discipline rates, and “EFFORTS TO REDUCE RACIAL, ETHNIC AND ECONOMIC ISOLATION” (Capitalized in the original). This information can inform school improvement efforts. It also can inform how each school compares to those in the same District Reference Group (DRG) or those with similar demographics. When students feel isolated from others or when they do not see themselves in their learning because it lacks relevancy to their lives, they may disengage, impacting both behavioral and academic outcomes (Miller & Garran, 2008; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009).

To support and engage all students better, especially those who feel marginalized, Losen et al. (2015) argued that educators address the issues related to high student discipline rates effectively. This work is necessary so that marginalized students, such as learning-disabled students or minority students, do not lose valuable instructional time, which can negatively impact achievement or, worse yet, life-long success. One way to improve student outcomes is through the school’s positive interactions with all stakeholders; with appropriate supports, more students are apt to participate in experiences that foster their growth and development both
academically and socially. When students do not see how the learning applies to their lives or interests, or when they do not see themselves as successful, they can become disengaged and unmotivated to participate in the academic process, thereby limiting their ability to stretch their thinking beyond what is familiar. These improvement efforts require social-emotional and cognitive supports.

**Social-Emotional and Cognitive Support Framework**

The National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments (2019) also developed a Safe and Supportive Schools Model, as Figure 3 shows. These are behaviors and conditions that are most effective when creating positive school climates to support students’ social-emotional and cognitive development.

![Safe and Supportive Schools Model](https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/school-climate)

*Figure 3. Safe and supportive schools model identifying conditions that support positive school climates. From “School Climate,” by National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments, 2019, retrieved from https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/school-climate. Copyright National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments. Reprinted by permission.*
In Figure 3, the three dimensions are:

1. engagement;
2. safety;
3. environment.

Within engagement there are three subdimensions:

1. relationships;
2. respect for diversity;
3. school participation.

Within safety there are also three subdimensions:

1. emotional safety;
2. physical safety;
3. substance use.

Under the heading of environment, there are also four subdimensions:

1. physical environment;
2. academic environment;
3. wellness;
4. disciplinary environment.

The National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments (2019) contended that the three conceptual supports in Figure 3 work together to help develop and sustain healthy school climates.

**Sense of Belonging through Social Interactions and Supports**

Students need to feel a sense of belonging through social interactions, so that learning experiences become more participatory (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009;
DeWitt & Slade, 2014; Miller & Garran, 2008). Bryk et al. (2010) explained, “The social psychology of a school is an integrated product of the beliefs, values, and actual everyday behaviors among school professionals, parents, and students. This subsystem can have profound effects on student motivation and engagement with classroom instruction” (p. 59). This subsystem includes “teachers’ academic press and personalism” (p. 60). As opposed to didactic teaching and low-level learning experiences (e.g., skill and drill worksheets), academic press and personalism provide students with higher order learning experiences and personalized supports to challenge students and to make them successful (Bryk et al., 2010). These higher order learning experiences set the tone in the classroom that every student is an important member of society, and he or she is capable of achieving at high levels (Bryk et al., 2010; Cohen et al., 2009; Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement, 2012). Essentially, “improving learning means pressing all students to engage in academic work with depth and rigor” (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 60). However, if essential supports are lacking, underachieving students can experience frustration and possibly disengage (Bryk et al., 2010; Miller & Garran, 2008). Thus, a balance is necessary between high expectations of students and the appropriate personalized supports they must receive to succeed (Bryk et al., 2010; Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement, 2012). Knowing students’ strengths and needs, and how practitioners can support them in effective ways, are essential elements for creating a positive school climate of 21st century learners (Bryk et al., 2010; National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments, 2017; National School Climate Center, 2010).

**Supportive student-to-student interactions.** One way to promote increased student engagement and a sense of belonging for those who may feel marginalized is through a social constructivist approach to learning (Powell & Kalina, 2009; Vygotsky, 1962). Modern social
constructivism draws heavily on the ideas of the pioneering intellectual, Vygotsky (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Vygotsky (1962) argued that intellectual development has a relationship with the historical and cultural contexts that children experience. A child’s development thus hinges upon the sign systems (the symbols educators have developed to assist people in thinking, communicating, and solving problems) that children experience while growing up (Vygotsky, 1962). Many of Vygotsky’s ideas offered a sharp contrast to those of Piaget, including Vygotsky’s notion that cognitive development has a strong association with input from others (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Learning, in which a child acquires the signs through others and through deliberate and intentional teaching, paves the way for development; a child then internalizes these signs and can think and solve complex problems without assistance from other individuals (Vygotsky, 1962). Vygotsky also advocated a top-down, rather than bottom-up, instructional model that involved beginning with a complex task/problem to solve and then working the problem out/finding a solution to uncover the basic skills necessary to provide a solution. In fostering the idea that cognitive change can occur when prior conceptions become imbalanced due to new information, Vygotsky (1962, 1978) emphasized the social nature of learning; he, ultimately, encouraged the use of mixed-ability learning groups to nurture and scaffold conceptual change. Children learn through joint interactions, not only with adults, but also with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978). By working together in cooperative small groups, for example, children are exposed to their peers’ thinking processes, which theoretically promotes academic growth (Thapa et al., 2012; Vygotsky, 1962). Vygotsky believed that successful problem solvers generally talk themselves through complex tasks or problems. He believed that in cooperative groups, children can hear this inner speech aloud and learn how successful problem solvers are thinking through their approaches.
If student development is easiest to achieve through social interactions, as Vygotsky (1962) suggested, then a sense of belonging is important for students. Essentially, when students feel a sense of belonging, they are more engaged and motivated to participate in learning (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; Miller & Garran, 2008). Educators can engage and assist students in the completion of complex tasks, particularly through heterogeneous and cooperative learning groups. Therefore, through social interactions, children can further their cognitive development, ultimately increasing student achievement (Vygotsky, 1962). People also celebrate and learn to appreciate each other’s differences through these interactions (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). For students to learn in cooperative groups and in classrooms that are diverse in nature, environments need to be inclusive, respectful, and safe; such environments increase opportunities for academic and behavioral success (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments, 2017).

**Conclusion**

Uncovering the topic of school climate, through an examination of how it has evolved, allows for a deeper and more thorough understanding of how it influences outcomes in schools. This chapter has analyzed the work of practitioners from the 20th century to present day, by examining the following topics: (a) the history of school climate origins, including research around organizational climate, race, and access; (b) the definitions of school climate and the common domains and dimensions that have developed over time; (c) the role of the school leader; and (d) the supports and barriers to developing positive school climates and student-learning climates, respectively.
School climate plays a significant role in organizational productivity and morale, which is highly informative for schools with concerns about increasing morale to better support student outcomes (Argyris, 1958; Halpin & Croft, 1963; March & Simon, 1958; Zullig et al., 2010). The characteristics of school climate that researchers have widely studied and examined throughout history have paved the way for current practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to uncover and implement more effective practices.

School climate is a multidimensional concept with threads that run through many educational topics and areas. These topics and areas include but are not limited to safety, teaching and learning, relationships, and environment, which are vital to student learning (Cohen et al., 2009; Perry, 1908). Factors influencing school climate have had direct impacts on student achievement (Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Jones & Shindler, 2016; Thapa et al., 2012) and behavioral outcomes, such as with suspension rates (Gage et al., 2016; Thapa et al., 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The more positive the climate, the higher the rate of morale and, consequently, better student performance and lower discipline rates (DeWitt & Slade, 2014).

Whether it is supporting students’ social-emotional well-being, such as their sense of safety and belonging, inclusive learning environments that foster connectedness and engagement can ensure that all students see that they are a part of the learning process, and thus they will become more motivated to succeed (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; Cohen et al., 2009), especially in regard to underserved and underrepresented students (DeWitt & Slade, 2014; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009).

When it comes to school reform efforts and the need to address the most challenging school climate issues, Connecticut has established state policy to assist with improvement efforts (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014). From the establishment of school climate
committees and related initiatives, educators can counter these issues when they employ purposeful, research-based interventions that address, monitor, and support issues relating to school climate improvement efforts (Cohen et al., 2009; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014; Hubbuch & Stucker, 2015). Jones and Shindler (2016) asserted that “placing climate at the heart of the reform process may provide the mechanism to situate problems and solutions more effectively, so that they can be better diagnosed, assessed and mapped” (p. 36).

There is an evident need to implement effective strategies and supports for all stakeholders involved in the teaching and learning processes of schools.

As school leaders, it is critical that principals lead school climate efforts, but in the 21st century, they cannot do this work alone. They need the help and support of teachers, students, parents, and community members (Bryk et al., 2010; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014; Ice et al., 2015). There is a clear need to develop student-centered learning climates that are inclusive and engaging, ones in which all students find their experiences meaningful, and they feel capable of learning at high levels (Bryk et al., 2010; Powell & Kalina, 2009; Vygotsky, 1962). Also, there is a need to create structures and supports for administrators and teachers, so that they can incorporate student voices and the voices of families and community members in decision-making (Bryk et al., 2010; Epstein, 1997; Ice et al., 2015). These supports and structures to include stakeholder voices can create more opportunities for students to appreciate differences and diverse perspectives and to gain valuable lessons that can assist them in school and beyond (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014; National School Climate Center, 2010). To emphasize the importance of community voice, Drago-Severson (2012) cited the National School Climate Center’s (2010) position on the power of this work: “A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary
for a productive, contributive, and satisfying life in a democratic society” (p. 182). Elbot and Fulton (2008) stated that “a review of the research on the effect of school climate on student achievement shows that climate or culture has a great influence on a student’s chance for success” (p. 4).

As educators, policymakers, and researchers continue to improve upon school and student-learning climate efforts, this study can provide new insights about the current practices that support or inhibit developing these climates. It can also provide new insights regarding what school leaders highly value when developing positive student-learning climates. My hope is that what is learned from this study can inform and encourage stakeholders to reflect on current practices, so that steps toward effective improvements can be appropriately identified and remedied. What follows is a delineation of the method designed and constructed to conduct this study.
CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of middle school and high school teachers regarding the principal’s capacity to facilitate positive student-learning climates within urban settings. More specifically, the study investigated the perceptions of Grade 7 through 12 teachers working in an Alliance District that is also labeled a Priority District. According to the Connecticut State Department of Education (2018a) website, in order to be considered an Alliance District, the district must be one of Connecticut’s “lowest performing districts,” as measured by state assessments. Moreover, the “Connecticut General Statute Section 10-262u establishes a process for identifying Alliance Districts and allocating increased ECS funding to support district strategies to dramatically increase student outcomes and close achievement gaps by pursuing bold and innovative reforms” (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2018a). This process includes an application and annual review of progress, with oversight and supervision by the state’s education commissioner (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2018a). For the 2017-2018 school year, there were 33 districts participating in the Alliance District program (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2018a; Moran, 2017, p. 1). Additionally, a number of Alliance Districts are also identified as Priority Districts. The Priority District program further supports student outcomes, as indicated but the Connecticut State Department of Education (2018b) website: “Per Connecticut General Statutes Sec. 10-266p, the State Board of Education administers a priority school district grant program to assist designated school districts in improving student achievement and enhancing educational opportunities, including early reading intervention programs.” This study explored student-learning climate efforts, supports, and barriers within these urban, secondary school settings.
The following three research questions guided this phenomenological study:

1. To what degree do teachers believe that creating positive student-learning climates is important to principals?

2. What do teachers report are the various ways principals can support positive student-learning climates?

3. What do teachers report are inhibiting principals from building positive student-learning climates?

This chapter delineates the major elements of the study. It includes (a) an overview of the research design, which provides an explanation and rationale for the design approach employed; (b) a description of the sample selected, including the population and district chosen; (c) details about how the instruments were developed; (d) procedures for how the data were collected; (e) processes for data analysis; (f) issues of trustworthiness, with a statement about the role of the researcher; and (g) delimitations and limitations of the study.

**Overview of the Research Design**

The phenomenological method was chosen, due to its suitability for this qualitative study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Morgan, 2011; van Manen, 1990). The study investigated teachers’ perceptions regarding their lived experiences with the phenomenon of student-learning climates in urban settings within one district that has been identified as an Alliance District and Priority District. There is significant research on the effects of school climate, whether in rural, suburban, or urban settings; there is little research, however, on teachers’ perceptions of the student-learning climate in urban settings that are labeled as Alliance Districts and Priority Districts. In order to garner teachers’ perceptions of the factors and conditions that support or inhibit the student-learning climate in these settings, the phenomenological approach was chosen...
“to ‘borrow’ other people’s experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning” (van Manen, 1990, p. 62).

In terms of participants’ experiences, the phenomenological approach was employed, since the study “describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences [italicized in original] of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 74). Through the research process, “The inquirer [i.e., the researcher] … collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon, and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). Through this process, the researcher then identifies a “heterogeneous group … that may vary in size from 3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 74). Creswell and Poth (2018) explain that this method “would be important to understand these common experiences in order to develop practices or policies” (p. 78).

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to distill common themes from the research and provide insights from practitioners who may help in school improvement matters. By taking the perspectives of teachers into consideration, it created an avenue for them to reflect upon and express what they perceive is working and not working within their contexts. In other words, “the aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence—in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful” (van Manen, 1990, p. 36). By this, as the researcher, I was able to capture a written description of their lived experiences. As mentioned, since the phenomenological method takes into consideration the perceptions and beliefs of those who experienced the phenomenon, this method of research was deemed most appropriate.
As the researcher, I bracketed myself “out of the study by discussing [my] personal experiences with the phenomenon,” as explained in this dissertation’s introduction and later on in this chapter (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 76). In this way, readers can become cognizant of what my assumptions may be and my awareness of them, so that they can be set aside (Husserl, 1931/2012; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological philosopher Husserl (1931/2012) termed this bracketing or setting aside of assumptions as an epoché, “a certain refraining from judgment” (p. 58). LeVasseur (2003) asserted that “bracketing, which suspends one’s natural assumptions about the world, is done so that what is essential in the phenomena of consciousness can be understood without prejudice” (p. 411). This requires the researcher to become aware of his or her slant or bias on the topic under study, and although one can never completely remove himself or herself from the process, one must ensure that he or she is aware of any prior experiences that may influence the study and skew the process in any way (Heidegger, 1927/1962; Husserl 1931/2012; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990).

Through participants’ reflections on their experiences, as the researcher, I must set all assumptions aside by “suspending judgement,” which allows descriptions to unfold without bias and the reporting process to occur organically without “presuppositions” (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 48). Van Manen (1990) asserted that “phenomenological human science begins in lived experience and eventually turns back to it” (p. 35). Once I bracketed myself out of the research process, instrument development, data collection, and data analysis occurred, with the intent of gleaning the perceptions of those study participants who have had experiences with the phenomenon.

Through this process, data analysis did not occur in its entirety until all survey responses were submitted and interviews were conducted. Then the process of coding the six open-ended
questions from the online survey began, and I examined Likert scale weighted averages after all responses were collected and interviews were underway. A thorough examination could not take place until all participant data were reviewed collectively. The following process served to inform each stage of phenomenological research design: (a) survey data collection, with some analysis; (b) interview data collection, including partial analysis; and (c) full analysis of all data collection. The next section discusses the participants and setting.

**Participants and Setting**

The participants for this study were drawn from an urban Connecticut district that comprised more than 40 schools and served students in education programs from prekindergarten through adult education. The district is also home to a number of public charter and magnet schools, in addition to its traditional public-school settings. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), the city’s 2016 population estimate, based off the last 2010 census, was numbered at 124,320. In addition, the city’s last SSP, compiled by the Connecticut State Department of Education (2019), stated that in 2013 the number of students served were 21,487 and were taught by 1,350.60 general education teachers and 201.30 special education teachers. Focusing on the experiences of teachers within this large Connecticut school system helped to contain the research findings regarding the phenomenon to one district. By surveying all public-school educators who taught secondary students within this district, the large pool of respondents conveyed an array of diverse perspectives and experiences when it came to the phenomenon under study.

This district was also chosen because it was identified as in need of improvement, and it was one of the 33 Alliance Districts in Connecticut, due to the many academic and economic challenges faced by its diverse student body. The 2013 SSP stated that out of the 21,487
students enrolled in school, 18,327 received free or reduced lunch (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2019). Furthermore, there were 3,710 kindergarten through Grade 12 students who were not fluent in English (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2019). The SSP also reported that 3,060 students, from prekindergarten through Grade 12, had received special education services, and 19,078 students were minority students or, 88.8% of the student body (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2019). The SSP categorized 6,802 as identifying as Black, 10,741 as Hispanic, and 3,389 as having disabilities (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2019).

To conduct this research effectively, a district needed to be selected that had been required to have a school climate plan in place and where improving school climate was seen as a necessity, in terms of school improvement efforts measured by improved student outcomes. The district was chosen because the teachers working within it would have some context of school climate, although experiences within their different settings may have varied. Participants for this study taught students in middle school and high school, Grades 7 through 12, and were certified staff, as identified by the Connecticut State Department of Education. Participants taught a range of subjects: English, social studies, math, science, English as a second language (ESL), foreign language, special education, academic support/intervention, business, art, music, and physical education. Teacher participants had years of educational experience ranging from 1 to 15 or more.

Participants were recruited for the two phases of the study: (a) the pilot survey and the online survey and (b) the follow-up interview. Participants gave consent for their information to be used anonymously by selecting “yes” on the online survey, and those who showed interest in participating in the follow-up interview provided their contact information to do so. After the
online participants were solicited, 10 educators were selected to participate in follow-up interviews. These follow-up interviews were used to saturate the categories, codes, and themes that emerged from the online survey. The number of participants needed for follow-up interviews depended on the length of responses provided to the survey. Morgan (2011) has stated that “a group of ten to twelve participants usually produces saturation,” especially when there are longer written accounts produced (p. 13). Since there were 6 open-ended questions on the survey, 10 follow-up interviews were deemed sufficient. The next section describes the development of the research instruments.

**Development of Instruments**

There were two research instruments used to guide this phenomenological study: an online survey and follow-up interview. The online survey, developed using SurveyMonkey, was piloted and refined for distribution. The pilot survey was given to five urban educators who had experience with the topic under study, due to working in three other underserved Connecticut Alliance Districts and Priority Districts that were not associated with this study. These individuals were known to the researcher and expressed an interest in the topic. They provided feedback regarding the length of time the survey was anticipated to take and examined the survey for clarity as well as alignment to the guiding research questions. Responses to the pilot were not analyzed as part of this study, as they were used to inform and refine the survey before a final version was distributed. The follow-up interview was used to help saturate the codes, categories, and themes that emerged. The codes developed from the online survey informed three categories aligned to the study’s research questions; follow-up interviews were then used to saturate themes gleaned from significant codes.
The survey included 11 questions for each of the 3 guiding research questions. These consisted of 9 multiple choice questions, using a Likert scale that ranged in points from 5 to 1 (e.g., Strongly Agree, Agree, Uncertain, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree), and 2 open-ended questions, totaling 33. There were also four demographic-type questions, which asked about grade level taught, subject taught, years of experience, and permission to use responses upon submission; there was also the option to volunteer for a follow-up interview.

The follow-up interview consisted of eight open-ended questions, which was informed by the original survey. The first interview question was worded in such a way as to capture the how and why of each participant’s lived experience with the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) contends that is what is needed in phenomenological research to capture the essence of the experience. The other remaining seven questions were then used to glean perceptions about the student-learning climate and saturate the findings as they relate to the teacher’s day-to-day activities and duties. The next section delineates the data collection procedures.

**Data Collection Procedures**

There were two distinct phases within the procedures for data collection. Phase I included piloting the online survey with five educators using SurveyMonkey; sending it out to 1670 educators in the participating district; and, finally, collecting responses from 115 participants. Phase II entailed conducting 10 follow-up interviews, which occurred several weeks after collecting data from the online survey. Each step in the data collection process—the pilot, the online survey, and the follow-up interviews—served to inform and refine the next.

**Phase I: Pilot and Online Survey**

The pilot survey was administered to five urban educators who had experience working in underserved Connecticut Alliance Districts. These individuals were known to the researcher
and expressed an interest in the topic. They provided feedback regarding the length of time the
survey was anticipated to take, and they examined the survey for clarity and understanding.
Their feedback did not count toward data collection. Upon review and revision, the survey was
then sent to the district studied.

The online survey, using SurveyMonkey, was sent to 1670 certified teachers of students
in Grades 7 through 12 in the selected district, using email addresses provided to me by the
Connecticut State Department of Education through the Freedom of Information Act. There
were 33 questions aligned to the 3 guiding research questions, 11 for each research question. Of
those 33, 6 were open-ended or, in other words, 2 for each research question. Furthermore, there
were four demographic questions and a question requesting permission for me to use responses
anonymously upon submission.

When the survey was initially administered, it was discovered that some of the middle
and high school teachers worked in buildings that also housed elementary students. The
respective grade levels—elementary, middle, and high—were designated to separate building
sections. These grade level building designations were discovered through teachers who had
contacted me, the researcher, regarding their current settings and changes from their previous
assignments. The Connecticut State Department of Education was then contacted to ensure that
the correct contact information for all public comprehensive and magnet middle and high school
teachers had been correctly provided. Approximately two weeks later, the information
verification was completed, and the survey was then sent out a second time to the email
addresses provided. The survey was also promoted through a district leader’s willingness to
have school principals share it with staff and a literacy coach’s willingness to share it with
teachers within one school. Figure 4 that follows shows data about which educators participated in each phase of the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase I: Survey</th>
<th>M.S. (7-8)</th>
<th>H.S. (9-12)</th>
<th>M.S. (7-8) &amp; H.S. (9-12)</th>
<th>Content Area Teacher</th>
<th>Special Ed. Teacher</th>
<th>Elective or Special Teacher</th>
<th>Foreign Lang. or ESL Teacher</th>
<th>Certified Support</th>
<th>1-4 YOE*</th>
<th>5-9 YOE</th>
<th>10-14 YOE</th>
<th>15+ YOE</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>115/118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase II: Interview Participants</th>
<th>M.S. (7-8)</th>
<th>H.S. (9-12)</th>
<th>M.S. (7-8) &amp; H.S. (9-12)</th>
<th>Content Area Teacher</th>
<th>Special Ed. Teacher</th>
<th>Elective or Special Teacher</th>
<th>Foreign Lang. or ESL Teacher</th>
<th>Certified Support</th>
<th>1-4 YOE</th>
<th>5-9 YOE</th>
<th>10-14 YOE</th>
<th>15+ YOE</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Years of experience

Figure 4. Numeric data about those who participated in Phase I, the online survey, and Phase II, follow-up interviews. Participants are identified in terms of grade levels taught, areas of certification, and years of experience.

The initial target was to gather 150 survey responses, but I ended at 118, after receiving a sizable number of detailed responses to the open-ended questions. Of the 118 responses, two were removed because they did not make a selection at the end of the survey to give consent to use their responses in the study, and one indicated that he or she was an administrator. Since the 115 responses that were included for participation provided candid responses to the six open-ended questions, there were substantial insights and data for analysis. Furthermore, 47 teachers offered to participate in follow-up interviews, which allowed for an array of options when selecting participants.

Phase II: Follow-Up Interview
Ten teachers agreed to participate in an anonymous follow-up interview. Morgan (2011) asserted that two criteria are necessary when conducting a phenomenological study: first, that participants have had experience with the phenomenon; and second, that they were willing and able to participate in the study (p. 12). There were eight follow-up interview questions (Appendix D), and it was evident from their detailed responses that they felt passionate about the phenomenon under study. And after providing me with their contact information, interviews were arranged.

When interviews were conducted, protocols were followed. Each participant was given an overview regarding his or her consent to participate in a follow-up interview, with the option to opt out at any point. After consent was granted, the interviews commenced. I reviewed with participants how many questions were going to be asked, the time it would take, the guiding research questions, and the purpose of the study. Interviews took approximately 45 minutes, were recorded after permission was granted, and were then transcribed. The interviews were either conducted over the phone or face-to-face, with TapeACall or a handheld recorder used for recordings; then the MP3 was sent to Rev.com to be transcribed.

As illustrated in Figure 4, a diverse group of teachers participated in the interviews. Five middle school teachers and five high school teachers were selected for follow-up interviews. Two were special education teachers, two were specials or electives teachers, five were content area teachers, and one was a certified teacher who taught career and college readiness. Further, participants were chosen by the thoughtfulness given to responses, by providing detailed answers to the open-ended questions, and by spending more than the average amount of time needed to complete the survey. The next section addresses processes for data analysis.
Processes for Data Analysis

Since the study investigated the concept or phenomenon of the student-learning climate in urban settings, the data collected were analyzed to correlate with the study’s three research questions. Data collected for the three questions were organized according to three categories: Importance to Principals, Supports from Principals, and Barriers that Exist. These three categories aligned to each research question and were developed by me, the researcher. Responses were coded under each category, and then themes or the “essence” of the experiences emerged from the codes. After the data were collected, a method delineated by Moustakas (1994) was established whereby text descriptions of experiences were analyzed, using quotes from participants, and then phrased as significant themes.

After the completion of the 10 follow-up interviews, patterns emerged from the data, and it was evident that saturation had occurred. Morgan (2011) asserted, “Some phenomenological theorists argue that there is not a set number of participants needed for a phenomenological study, in that data collection ends when the research has been saturated and no additional information can be collected” (pp. 12-13). It was determined that 10 participants provided enough data to saturate the codes and themes.

During the coding process, I had to make sense of the large amount of data collected. Creswell (2013) asserted that it is easy to have hundreds of categories, and with that large amount, have difficulty breaking them down to “five or six themes” (p. 184). According to Patton (2015), with qualitative research, the large amount of data students find themselves with at the end of data collection are “voluminous” (p. 524). It seemed that determining what “matters and what does not in the data corpus” was one of the biggest challenges (Saldana, 2016,
Information was coded for emergent patterns through the SurveyMonkey Text Analysis and Cloud View features. This enabled the metric to visually display which words were repeated most often, and these data were color-coded for readability and ease of access. Sorting through the large amount of data and choosing the correct codes was a challenge. Andrasik, Frey, and Endeshaw (2014) explained that codes are “short hand notation[s] for themes that you see in the data” (p. 8). They continued, noting that coding is “the act of linking themes/codes with passages of qualitative data” (p. 8). Themes were then gleaned from the formation of the established codes. Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software was used to ensure reliability and to create visual representations of findings. Issues of trustworthiness are discussed next.

**Issues of Trustworthiness**

For this phenomenological study on student-learning climates, I made it a point to internally acknowledge any personal bias I may have regarding my experiences with the phenomenon under study, in order to establish an environment of trust. Having been a teacher and administrator in primarily urban settings for 18 years, it can be a challenge to not let these experiences influence the research. I have also learned that school cultures can vary greatly. Throughout this study, I made my experiences evident, in order to bracket them out and conduct unbiased research.

I chose the given topic because I have considerable interest in it, after working in settings where school climate initiatives have been embedded in school improvement efforts. Not only is every school required by the state of Connecticut to have a school climate plan in place, but also every underperforming urban school must demonstrate how they are combating issues around
student outcomes, through related school programming. The latter condition is based on significant research showing that positive school climates can improve school effectiveness. As a former Safe School Climate Coach and Team Leader of an urban school’s PBIS program, I have a personal and professional connection to this area of study. Moreover, in my current role as the English Department Head and department supervisor of the largest high school in the state of Connecticut—an Alliance District and Priority District—I am even more personally invested and curious about this issue. As an evaluator of teachers within my department and as a school instructional rounds participant, developing positive and engaging student-learning climates has become a priority to improving student outcomes. Student-centered learning, through personalized learning, differentiated instruction, and small group instruction are all areas of focus in my department and school that have helped to close learning gaps.

When I have observed teachers, I find that they can sometimes struggle when it comes to targeting student deficits and creating a positive student-learning climate. I wonder why and how this work can improve. The deficits in such settings are real and seem insurmountable. So what can school leaders do to improve student-learning climates and outcomes, since, oftentimes, efforts do not necessarily produce the gains needed to ensure success for all students? Since this is a question I ponder and the methods mentioned above perceived as helpful, I need to set these aside in this study to ensure that I am not seeing things through “rose-colored lenses.” Rather, the insights, experiences, and recommendations gleaned from the teachers in the field in similar environments can help to uncover what they perceive as necessary to build such climates.

During the data collection process, I made attempts to establish a climate of trust with participants, so all participants were comfortable. Each participant was provided with the study overview and a consent to participate. They were also given the option to opt out at any point
and guaranteed that the information they provided would be used anonymously, in that their names and schools would not be identified. These steps were initiated to create a trusting atmosphere, in which participants felt comfortable about speaking freely and candidly. Participants also were able to choose where they preferred the interview to take place, whether it be over the phone or in person. Providing them with setting options allowed for them to pick which method was most comfortable and convenient for them. To add to privacy, the information collected was stored in secure locations: a password protected computer and secured filing cabinet.

When selecting participants for follow-up interviews, I did glean insights from each participant’s response, so I knew ahead of time some of their perceptions regarding the student-learning climate in their settings. As a result, I made every effort to allow them to express their beliefs without indication of this prior knowledge. I bracketed myself from the data gathering process, to ensure that my personal and professional experiences would not influence interpretations or questioning. When asking the outlined follow-up questions, if needed, additional questions were asked for clarification and to ensure that I had an accurate interpretation of what was being said and that the intent of the person being interviewed was clearly communicated. When needed, I verified notes and transcripts with participants, ensuring accuracy of the information provided. The next section identifies delimitations and limitations of the study.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

The study was delimited by the subjects chosen for participation. The study focused on the perceptions of teachers working in Grades 7 through 12 in just one urban district in the state of Connecticut. Further, it focused on teachers’ perceptions, not students’, parents’, or
administrators’ perceptions. In terms of student outcomes, including just the perceptions of teachers allowed me, the researcher, to uncover factors and conditions they perceived supported their practice or created roadblocks to their effectiveness. Also, using just one urban district in the state allowed me to create parameters concerning the demographics and population served. The insights gleaned from the research are intended to inform other districts with similar populations, even though implications can also be made for student-learning climate efforts in suburban and rural areas.

There were also some financial delimitations. All participation was completely voluntary, with no monetary incentives to participate in either the survey or follow-up interview. This was initially a concern for me, since I thought that I would have a difficult time soliciting participation, especially for the follow-up interviews; that did not turn out to be the case.

There were some limitations to the study as well. Since the survey was sent to email addresses provided to me by the Connecticut State Department of Education, based on what was on file with the state, some were teachers’ personal email addresses, and some were their work email addresses. Which account the email address was affiliated with may have had an impact on who did and did not provide responses. For example, some personal email accounts may have been old and used infrequently; or some educators may not feel comfortable using their work accounts to communicate when they want their participation to be anonymous. These factors may have contributed to the online survey participation totaling just under 10%.

A second limitation deals with the length of time for the study’s research. Participation for the online survey was sought during the month of January, over a three-week period. The pilot study had to wait until after the new year to be sent out due to the holidays and inclement weather. Had more time been given to the online survey, there may have been more
participation. Moreover, once survey participation was complete, I began to schedule follow-up interviews, which occurred during mutual agreed upon times. The first interview was conducted on February 9, 2018, and the last interview was conducted on March 14, 2018, with a total span of approximately five weeks. The total research time took two and a half months.

The last limitation concerns the grade level organization of the schools involved in the study. Some secondary teachers worked in schools that also housed elementary age students. Thus, these schools were organized with students in a variety of elementary and secondary configurations. Nonetheless, participation was solicited from those working with students in Grades 7 through 12 specifically, regardless of any other grade levels present in one building.

**Chapter Summary**

The Introduction discussed the purpose of this phenomenological study: to uncover teachers’ perceptions of their lived experiences with regard to the principal’s capacity to develop positive student-learning climates in urban settings. The study was guided by three research questions:

1. To what degree do teachers believe that creating positive student-learning climates is important to principals?

2. What do teachers report are the various ways principals can support positive student-learning climates?

3. What do teachers report are inhibiting principals from building positive student-learning climates?

The Overview of the Research Design explained the rationale behind the phenomenological research method, which addressed capturing the lived experiences of the student-learning climate by those working in these environments. The Participants and Setting
section explained that urban, public-school educators, working in Grades 7 through 12 in a Connecticut Alliance District and Priority District, were selected to participate in the study. It also described the demographics and population of the district studied. The Instrumentation section delineated how the online survey and the follow-up questions were developed and how they were organized to gather data aligned to the research questions. The section on Data Collection Procedures discussed the phases and processes in which data were collected. Phase I consisted of a pilot study to refine the survey; then the online survey was sent to participants in the designated district. Phase II entailed conducting the follow-up interviews. The Processes for Data Analysis section provided an overview of how the data were categorized and coded to glean themes. The Issues of Trustworthiness section described the ways in which trust between me, the researcher, and the participants in the study was established. It also explained attempts to bracket myself out of the study so that no outside influences would adversely skew the research process and findings. The last section, Delimitations and Limitations, included the delimitations of the population and demographics of the educators and district chosen, the financial delimitations, and the limitations of the length of time in the research process. The study’s results are discussed in Chapter Four, which follows.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter provides a presentation and analysis of the results of the study. The purpose of the study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers regarding the principal’s capacity to facilitate positive student-learning climates in urban, secondary school settings. As the researcher, I used a phenomenological research design to capture participants’ lived experiences with the phenomenon of the student-learning climate. In doing so, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. To what degree do teachers believe that creating positive student-learning climates is important to principals?
2. What do teachers report are the various ways principals can support positive student-learning climates?
3. What do teachers report are inhibiting principals from building positive student-learning climates?

Data collection for the study proceeded in two phases: (a) the online survey through SurveyMonkey, which began with a pilot study, and (b) the follow-up interviews. Five individuals piloted the survey, before it was sent to 1,670 secondary, Grades 7 through 12, public-school educators within one Connecticut urban school district. There were 115 responses collected during Phase I of the study. The pilot enabled me, the researcher, to refine the survey for clarity and understanding before distribution. Ten follow-up interviews served to saturate the codes, and three major categories emerged.

For each research question, the survey included nine multiple-choice statements, using a 5-point Likert scale, which were followed by two open-ended questions. This chapter presents
the results for the responses to the online survey and an analysis using response frequencies and Likert scale weighted averages rounded to the nearest tenth. It also reports anecdotal evidence that captures participants’ lived experiences collected from the online survey.

For Phase II, 10 follow-up interview participants were selected by grade levels taught, willingness to participate in the interview process, and varying areas of certification. Follow-up interview responses were used to capture participants’ lived experiences with the phenomenon, and they saturated the codes that emerged from the online survey for each research question. Anecdotal evidence from these interviews are reported in this chapter.

Through the data analysis process, over 96 codes emerged, which were then synthesized into the three major categories: (a) Importance to Principals, (b) Supports from Principals, and (c) Barriers that Exist. Through a presentation of data for the three major categories, the findings were identified. Key data reported were identified through a combination of the frequency of responses falling on either side of the “uncertain” selection of the Likert scale and through the codes that emerged from participant narratives. Tables are included to represent results.

This chapter begins with demographic information and is then organized according to the three research questions. The discussion for each research question includes the presentation and analysis of data for nine statements and two open-ended questions from the online survey and the delineation of major findings. The delineation of findings includes statements from online survey open-ended questions and from follow-up interviews. The chapter ends with a summary.

**Demographics**

Those who were selected to participate in the online survey for Phase I of this study and in the follow-up interview for Phase II of this study serve as educators in an urban Connecticut school district. This district is also identified as both a Priority District and an Alliance District,
consisting of disenfranchised and underserved students. Participants also work in secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings, serving either middle school students, high school students, or both. To protect participants’ identity and anonymity, Table 3 presents pseudonyms that are used when referring to participants who provided responses from the follow-up interviews.

Table 3

*Phase II Pseudonyms for Follow-Up Interview Participant Identification*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Middle School (7-8)</th>
<th>High School (9-12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Timothy</td>
<td>1. Jessica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Evan</td>
<td>2. Alan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dan</td>
<td>3. Donna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Brenda</td>
<td>4. Christopher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Michelle</td>
<td>5. Laura</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 3 shows, during Phase II of the study, there were five middle school and five high school teachers who participated in follow-up interviews. Five were content area teachers, two were special education teachers, two were special or elective teachers, and one was a career and college readiness teacher. The results of their responses are reported within this chapter.

**Research Question 1: To what degree do teachers believe that creating positive student-learning climates is important to principals?**

The first research question sought to understand the degree to which teachers perceived principals in secondary, Grades 7 through 12, schools prioritized student-learning climate efforts within their settings and the degree to which they perceived principals believed that developing positive student-learning climates was important to their work.

The data in this section include results for closed-response Statements 1 through 9 and open-response Questions 10 and 11. Phase I data for each statement are presented using table
frequencies for participant selected categories and Likert scale weighted averages. The
discussion of findings includes supportive statements from open-ended survey questions in Phase I of the study and follow-up interview responses in Phase II of the study. Data analysis focused on the major category Importance to Principals.

**Statement 1: Components of a Positive Student-Learning Climate Are Conveyed in Your School’s Vision, Mission, Values, and/or Beliefs**

Table 4 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale for components of a positive student-learning climate embedded as elements communicated within the school’s vision, mission, values, and/or beliefs.

Table 4

*Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 115)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(49) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>* 5 points</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(52) Agree</td>
<td>* 4 points</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Uncertain</td>
<td>* 3 points</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Disagree</td>
<td>* 2 points</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>* 1 point</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

485/115 = 4.20

The data in Table 4 show the degree to which the school’s vision, mission, values, and/or beliefs convey components of a positive student-learning climate. The data convey that teachers reported that they agree (52) or strongly agree (49) with this statement, totaling 101, with a Likert scale weighted average of 4.2. The data indicate that the majority of responses fell on the positive side of the Likert scale. A small number of teachers reported that they disagree (6) or strongly disagree (2), totaling 8.
Statement 2: Students Are Treated as Valued Members of the School Community and Involved in Decision-Making Processes

Table 5 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale regarding students’ involvement in decision-making processes.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants (n = 113)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(23) Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(47) Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) Uncertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(31) Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data in Table 5 give the results for whether teachers believe that students are involved in the decision-making processes when it comes to the school. The data indicate that 70 out of 113 participants reported that they either agree (47) or strongly agree (23) with this statement, with a Likert scale weighted average of 3.5. Further only 34 participants indicated that they disagree (31) or strongly disagree (3) with this statement.

Statement 3: School Climate Efforts Are a Component of Your School Improvement Plan

Table 6 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale for school climate efforts as a component in school improvement plans.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants (n = 114)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(51) Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 illustrates the degree to which participants’ school improvement plans include school climate efforts. The data indicate that teachers reported they agree (40) or strongly agree (51) with this statement, totaling 91, with a Likert scale weighted average of 4.10. The data show that the majority of responses fell on the positive side of the Likert scale. Only 10 participants indicated that they strongly disagree (3) or disagree (7) with Statement 3.

**Statement 4: More Can Be Done to Include Feedback and Input from Parents and/or Community Members in Your School’s Instructional Decisions**

Table 7 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale for including feedback from parents and/or community members in instructional decisions.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(23) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>5 points</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(63) Agree</td>
<td>4 points</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16) Uncertain</td>
<td>3 points</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) Disagree</td>
<td>2 points</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1 point</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
436/114 = 3.80
\]
Table 7 indicates whether more can be done to include input from parents and/or community members in the school’s instructional decisions. The data show that the majority of teachers reported that they agree (63) or strongly agree (23) with this statement, totaling 86, with a Likert scale weighted average of 3.80. Further, the data convey that the majority of responses support this statement. Some teachers also reported that they disagree (9) or strongly disagree (3) with this statement, totaling 12.

**Statement 5: Professional Development Opportunities About Improving the Student-Learning Climate Are Offered at Your School**

Table 8 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale for professional development opportunities offered for improving the student-learning climate.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Categories</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(19) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>* 5 points</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(52) Agree</td>
<td>* 4 points</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12) Uncertain</td>
<td>* 3 points</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(22) Disagree</td>
<td>* 2 points</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>* 1 point</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \frac{392}{114} = 3.40 \]

Table 8 illustrates the data about levels of support for professional development opportunities for improving the student-learning climate at participants’ schools. Approximately half of the participants reported that they agree (52) or strongly agree (19) with this statement, totaling 71, with a Likert scale weighted average of 3.40. The data show that responses fell on the positive side of the Likert scale. The results also indicate that some participants reported that they disagree (22) or strongly disagree (9) with this statement, totaling 31.
Statement 6: Supporting Students’ Social-Emotional Development Is a Priority at Your School

Table 9 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale for prioritizing students’ social-emotional development.

Table 9

Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 115)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(32) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(55) Agree</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) Uncertain</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>3 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14) Disagree</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>2 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
\frac{438}{115} = 3.80
\]

The data in Table 9 display the levels of support for students’ social-emotional development at participants’ schools. The data indicate that the majority of respondents reported that they agree (55) or strongly agree (32) with this statement, totaling 87, with a Likert scale weighted average of 3.80. The majority of responses fell on the positive side of the Likert scale. DeWitt and Slade (2014) stated, “Student engagement is not just academic; it also includes the social-emotional practices we use to complement our teaching” (p. 15). Some indicated that they disagree (14) or strongly disagree (6) with this statement, totaling 20.

Statement 7: There Is Zero Tolerance for Bullying at Your School

Table 10 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale for a zero tolerance for bullying.
Table 10

*Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 7*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 111)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(33) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>* 5 points</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(35) Agree</td>
<td>* 4 points</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Uncertain</td>
<td>* 3 points</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(28) Disagree</td>
<td>* 2 points</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>* 1 point</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

385/111 = 3.50

The data for Table 10 exemplify participants’ perceptions about zero tolerance for bullying. It shows many who reported that they agree (35) or strongly agree (33) with this statement, totaling 68, with a Likert scale weighted average of 3.50. The data convey that more than half of the participants reported a zero tolerance for bullying. Further, the data indicate that approximately one third reported that they disagree (28) or strongly disagree (11) that there is a zero tolerance for bullying in their settings, totaling 39.


(A) the repeated use by one or more students of a written, oral or electronic communication, such as cyberbullying, directed at or referring to another student attending school in the same school district, or (B) a physical act or gesture by one or more students repeatedly directed at another student attending school in the same school district, that: (i) Causes physical or emotional harm to such student or damage to such student’s property, (ii) places such student in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself, or of damage to his or her property, (iii) creates a hostile environment at school
for such student, (iv) infringes on the rights of such student at school, or (v) substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school. (p. 38)

Statement 8: Day-to-Day Conversations Among Students Throughout the School Are Respectful

Table 11 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale for day-to-day conversations among students with regard to the level of respect.

Table 11
Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 115)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(6) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>* 5 points</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(38) Agree</td>
<td>* 4 points</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13) Uncertain</td>
<td>* 3 points</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(40) Disagree</td>
<td>* 2 points</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>* 1 point</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

319/115 = 2.80

The data in Table 11 illuminate the perceptions of teachers regarding the day-to-day conversations among students throughout the school with regard to respect. There were participants who stated they agree (38) or strongly agree (6) with this statement, totaling 44, with a Likert scale weighted average of 2.80. The majority of responses fell on the negative side of the Likert scale. The data show that more participants reported that they disagree (40) or strongly disagree (18) with this statement, totaling 58.

Statement 9: Day-to-Day Conversations Between Teachers and Students Throughout the School Are Respectful

Table 12 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale for day-to-day conversations between teachers and students with regard to the level of respect.
Table 12

Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 114)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(25) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>* 5 points</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(58) Agree</td>
<td>* 4 points</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Uncertain</td>
<td>* 3 points</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(24) Disagree</td>
<td>* 2 points</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>* 1 point</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

418/114 = 3.70

The data in Table 12 show day-to-day conversations between teachers and students throughout the school as respectful. The data indicate that almost three fourths of participants reported that they agree (58) or strongly agree (25) with this statement, totaling 83, with a Likert scale weighted average of 3.70. There were also a number of teachers who indicated that they disagree (24) or strongly disagree (4) with this statement, totaling 28.

Examination of Open-Ended Questions 10 and 11

Open-ended Questions 10 and 11 gave educators an opportunity to provide candid responses to Research Question 1. Research Question 1 sought to understand if teachers perceived that creating positive student-learning climates as important to principals. Assessing teachers’ attitudes about how the school communicates (or does not) the importance of a positive student-learning climate and whether (or not) students receive social, emotional, or physical support provided insight into how principals prioritize their efforts.

For each open-ended question, codes that emerged were first created using the SurveyMonkey Text Analysis and Cloud features; then they were verified using the qualitative research software Atlas.ti. In a table for each question, these codes are listed from highest to
lowest frequency. Code frequencies of 10 or higher include participant narratives from open-ended responses and follow-up interviews.

**Question 10: How is the importance of a positive student-learning climate communicated regularly to the school community by principals?** If it isn’t communicated regularly, in what ways can this be improved? Table 13 shows frequencies for codes that developed from responses to online survey Question 10 regarding how the importance of fostering a positive student-learning climate is communicated regularly, and, if it is not communicated regularly, ways in which it can improve. Question 10 was two-fold: The first question sought to understand whether principals highly regard the need to communicate a desire to foster a positive student-learning climate within the school community. And the second question sought to uncover reasons why teachers may perceive these communication efforts as lacking. The second question created an opportunity for participants to provide suggestions for the areas they perceived needed improvement, and it gave them the ability to share their experiences. These codes, for areas listed as needing improvement, began with the word “Need” or “Lack.” This subsection discusses the results for code frequencies of 10 or more, with narrative examples for each.

Table 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency (f)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School program, committee</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal communication</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff meetings</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of follow-through</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Frequency (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to communicate more, better</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need shared values</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student rewards, recognition, incentives</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult-student relationships/connections</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom efforts</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily expectations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need principal to lead by example</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School theme</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student voice, leadership</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative visibility</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assemblies, school/community meetings</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values, beliefs, mission, and/or expectations</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to build relationships</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need more respect for students</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need student accountability, responsibility</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need student expectations, goals</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need whole child supports</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys/input/feedback</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for one another</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to employ more staff</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need more social activities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need student discipline</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-emotional awareness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social, emotional, or physical supports</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 13, four areas stand out, recording a 10 or higher response rate: (a) school program or committee, (b) verbal communication, (c) written communication, and (d) staff meetings.
A positive student-learning climate communicated regularly to the school community through a school program or committee rated the highest (23). This category includes participant reports for five areas: PBIS, school climate committee, restorative practices, character education, and student-led programs.

**PBIS.**

- “We are a PBIS school and take that very seriously. We have a strong, diverse team taking leadership in school climate.”
- “We are a PBIS school, and school climate has been part of our focus.”

**School climate committee.**

- “There is a PBIS system in place, culture and climate committee.”
- “Through our school climate committee”

**Restorative practices.**

- “Resources have been provided [to] teachers in developing restorative practices, such as ‘circles’ (a way for entire classes to communicate about a given issue or topic).”
- “We meet frequently to discuss restorative justice practices at staff meetings. Each class begin[s] the day with a class circle rating the prior day from a 1-5 based on their experiences and feelings.”
- “[There is] implementation of [a] Restorative Practice Program with a dedicated staff member.”

Costello, Wachtel, and Wachtel (2009) explained the following about restorative practices:

The term *restorative practices* was derived from a significant development in the criminal justice field called *restorative justice*…. Rather than simply punishing offenders, restorative justice holds offenders accountable for their crimes by involving
them in face-to-face encounters with the people they have harmed. Research in restorative justice has revealed very positive outcomes for victims and offenders alike, including the reduction in reoffending. Similar restorative practices in schools have yielded significant improvements in behavior and school climate as well. (p. 7)

**Character education.**

- “We are a magnet school with character education as our theme. Our philosophy is to teach and reach the whole child and, therefore, is an integral component of our instruction.”
- “Character lessons.”

Lickona (1991) stated, “Character education is the deliberate effort to develop the virtues that enable us to lead fulfilling lives and build a better world” (p. 228). According to Character.org (2018; formerly Character Education Partnership), “To be effective in schools, character education must involve everyone—school staff, parents, students, and community members—and be part of every school day. It must be integrated into the curriculum as well as school culture.”

**Student-led programs.**

- “It’s communicated constantly from every level, including a student run ‘Allies’ program.”
- “Ambassador programs.”

**Verbal communication.** Verbal communication came up 21 times, in the following ways:

- “Morning announcements.”
- “Core values announced every day over [the] intercom.”
• “My school includes a daily mindfulness moment as a part of the positive student-learning environment.”

**Written communication.** As for written communication, which occurred 19 times, in addition to school posters or handbooks, there were reports of:

- “Weekly newsletters sent to family and staff.”
- “Administration regularly in contact via email regarding [the] positive student-learning climate.”
- “School climate in our mission statement.”

**Verbal and written communication.** When it came to a combination of both verbal and written communication, three participants said:

- “Posters throughout classrooms and hallways…. Each component of this philosophy is announced every morning of the week.”
- “It is the basis of our school community. It is included in morning announcements [and in] student handbooks, which are reviewed and signed annually by students and parents.”
- “Verbally and written through school activities and assemblies.”

**Staff meetings.** In 10 instances, participants reported the importance of a positive school climate occurring at staff meetings, but they did not specify whether it was verbal or written in nature, such as:

- “[The] positive learning climate is conveyed regularly through staff meetings.”
- “This is discussed monthly at staff meetings.”

**Question 11: What contributes to students feeling socially, emotionally, and**
physically safe at your school? If any area(s) can be improved, which one(s), and why?

Table 14 shows frequencies for codes developed from responses to survey Question 11 regarding what contributes to students’ social, emotional, and physical safety in participants’ settings and how schools can improve these areas, if necessary. As with Question 10, Question 11 was two-fold: The first question sought to identify the factors and conditions that contribute to students feeling safe in their settings, and the second question sought to uncover areas teachers perceived needed improvement. The second question allowed participants to respond to the question more fully, share their experiences, and provide suggestions, if they perceived students were not socially, emotionally, or physically safe in their settings. Codes listed for areas needing improvement began with the word “Need” or “Lack.” This subsection discusses the results for code frequencies of 10 or more.

Table 14

**Code Frequencies for Question 11**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency (f)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult-student relationships</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff support</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socially, emotionally, or physically safe environment</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sense of belonging/connectedness</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School program/committee</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of follow-through</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need student discipline</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need students to feel safe</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need students to feel a sense of belonging</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need student accountability, responsibility</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-emotional or physical support</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need improved program, system</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Frequency (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for one another</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student voice, leadership</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need more respect for students</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need shared values and beliefs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to employ more staff</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal communication</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult modeling</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clubs, groups, or activities</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community buy-in</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need more social activities</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need student expectations, goals</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need social-emotional supports</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to communicate more, better</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to limit technology</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental involvement</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small class size</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative support, visibility</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assemblies, school meetings</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of experience</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need administrative support, visibility</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need personalization, differentiation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need principal to lead by example</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to build relationships</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to support struggling students</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School theme</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values, beliefs, mission, and/or expectations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Table 14, four areas stand out, recording a 10 or higher response rate: (a) adult-student relationships, (b) staff support, (c) socially, emotionally, or physically safe environment, and (d) a sense of belonging/connectedness.

**Adult-student relationships.** Participants reported 34 times that adult-student relationships contributed to students feeling socially, emotionally, or physically safe. Teachers from the online survey reported:

- “Students know there are multiple adults they can go to if they need help with any problem.”
- “Having at least one adult that every student can meet with and speak to if needed helps students to feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe at our school. This is done during advisory groups.”
- “Setting up support groups and other means of helping students like having a teacher they feel safe to talk to.”

**Staff support.** Participants reported 18 times that staff support contributed to students feeling socially, emotionally, or physically safe at school. Educators from the online survey stated:

- “Social workers, behavior techs, administration work as a clinical team to ensure in-school and out-of-school needs are being addressed.”
- “Great staff of social workers and their interns who host work groups for various situations (i.e., students with incarcerated parents, or a death in the family, or students who are having difficulty getting along with each other).”
- “Our resource officer is always available and also has great relationships with students.”
There are security guards and other behavioral specialists patrolling the halls, and they can be summoned quickly, if needed.”

**Socially, emotionally, or physically safe environment.** Participants reported 13 times that the environment contributed to students feeling socially, emotionally, or physically safe. Educators stated in the online survey that:

- “The community [is] built by caring adults throughout the building that allow students to feel safe taking academic risks.”
- “Our school environment is very therapeutic, and students realize that their emotional well-being is first priority.”
- “Physically our building is safe, with few outbursts that distract from academic time.”

Further, participants reported policies as contributing to students feeling physically safe within their settings:

Physical safety has been worked on with policies regarding leaving classroom doors locked, the exterior doors staying locked until supervisory staff are in the building, and removing students who are physically violent and working with them to restore the harm done through their actions.

**A sense of belonging/connectedness.** Participants reported 10 times that a sense of belonging/connectedness contributed to students feeling socially, emotionally, or physically safe. Teachers from the online survey reported that there is:

- “A sense of acceptance and inclusion.”
- “A high level of diversity and inclusiveness.”
- “Zero tolerance for any activity that may be harmful to a student’s wellbeing.”
Delineation of Findings for Research Question 1

This section delineates the major findings for Research Question 1: To what degree do teachers believe that creating positive student-learning climates is important to principals? The first major category, Importance to Principals, provided a foundation for these findings. Four major findings emerged as significant themes from the data analysis process. They are based on Likert scale weighted averages from Statements 1 through 9 and informed by narrative reports from open-ended Questions 10 and 11 as well as the interview protocol.

The findings encompass ways in which (a) principals communicate the importance of a positive student-learning climate, (b) principals highly value supporting students’ social-emotional and physical needs, (c) more can be done by principals to improve day-to-day conversations among students, which are not always respectful, and (d) more can be done by principals to include feedback and input from parents and/or community members in instructional decisions for the school.

Finding 1: Principals frequently communicate the importance of a positive student-learning climate. Teachers reported that principals frequently communicate the importance of a positive student-learning climate in writing, verbally, or a combination of both (e.g., staff meetings or professional development opportunities). Kotter (2012) argued that different forms of communication and repetition must be used as methods to effectively transform an organization. He contended, some strategies include “large group meetings, memos, newspapers, posters, [and] informal one-on-ones” (p. 95) and that it “almost always relies on repetition” (p. 96).

Written communication. When it came to written communication, as Table 13 indicates, there were 19 instances of it used as a way to communicate the importance of a positive student-
learning climate to the school community. Some forms of written communication reported in this study included emails, newsletters, posters, and handbooks.

In response to Question 10 from the online survey, a teacher said that the school communicated the importance of a positive student-learning climate regularly to the school community through “Weekly newsletters sent to family and staff.”

Another teacher reported, “Administration regularly in contact via email regarding [the] positive student-learning climate.”

A school’s vision, mission, values, and/or beliefs are other written means by which the importance of a positive student-learning climate has been reportedly communicated, with participants indicating in Statement 1 that they agree (52) or strongly agree (49) their schools as having or, in other words, 88%. Eighty percent of participants also reported in Statement 3 that school climate efforts are a component of their school improvement plan, by indicating they agree (40) or strongly agree (51) their schools as using.

Further, a participant reported for Question 10 from the online survey, “School climate [is] in our mission statement.”

The results indicate that various forms of written communication have been used to convey the importance of a positive student-learning climate, such as emails, newsletters, and school improvement plans. This further indicates the degree to which educators considered school climate as necessary to improve student outcomes (Cohen et al., 2009).

**Verbal communication.** Teachers also reported that principals communicate verbally the importance of a positive student-learning climate. There were 21 instances in Table 13 for verbal communication in response to Question 10. These typically occurred during weekly or
monthly staff meetings, assemblies, announcements—oftentimes, daily morning announcements—, or during professional development opportunities.

A survey participant stated for Question 10 that the positive student-learning climate is communicated through “Morning announcements.”

Another survey participant also reported, in response to Question 10, “[The] positive learning climate is conveyed regularly through staff meetings.”

Written and verbal communication. Staff meetings, assemblies, and professional development appeared to create opportunities to communicate the importance of a positive student-learning climate verbally in addition to in writing.

A survey participant stated for Question 10, “It is the basis of our school community. It is included in morning announcements [and in] student handbooks, which are reviewed and signed annually by students and parents.”

Finding 2: Principals highly value supporting students’ social-emotional and physical needs. Dewitt and Slade (2014) stated, “The social-emotional environment has been described by [the] Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning as the missing piece in school improvement efforts…. It impacts not only how students learn but also how safe, secure, and connected they feel” (p. 31). In Table 14 for Question 11, a socially, emotionally, or physically safe environment was reported 13 times. Further, participants stated for Statement 6 that they either agree (55) or strongly agree (32) that supporting students’ social-emotional development is a school priority or, in other words, 76% of respondents. Participants responded that principals support students’ social-emotional and physical development in a variety of ways, such as through school programs/committees, staff supports, adult-student relationships, and sense of belonging/connectedness.
School program or committee. For Question 10 from the online survey, 23 teachers reported that the importance of a positive student-learning climate is communicated through a school program or committee. The premise behind school programs or committees, such as PBIS (Cohen et al., 2009), restorative practices (Costello et al., 2009), or character education (Cohen et al., 2009; Dunar, 2016), is that they serve to develop students’ skills academically, socially, and emotionally through related supports. This study suggests that PBIS programs, restorative practices, committees on school climate, character education, and Ambassador as well as Allies programs support students’ social-emotional and physical (i.e., in terms of safety) development, with the majority of responses indicating the use of PBIS or restorative practices.

A teacher reported for Question 10 from the online survey, “We are a PBIS school, and school climate has been part of our focus.”

Another teacher for the same question said, “Resources have been provided [to] teachers in developing restorative practices, such as ‘circles’ (a way for entire classes to communicate about a given issue or topic).”

During the follow-up interview, when responding to Question 6—Who is responsible for school climate efforts in your school? How does your principal facilitate school climate efforts and responsibility?—Evan stated, “We have PBIS. It teaches self-control, teamwork, respect, and safety.”

Staff support. When it came to Question 11 from the online survey, there were 18 instances reported where staff support contributed to students feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe. Staff support included social workers, behavior specialists or technicians, resource offices, administrators, clinical staff, interns, and security guards.
When responding to Question 11 from the online survey, a teacher reported, “Social workers, behavior techs, administration work as a clinical team to ensure in-school and out-of-school needs are being addressed.”

Another teacher said, in response to the same question, “Our resource officer is always available and also has great relationships with students.”

During the follow-up interview process, when responding to Question 5—Would you consider your school culturally responsive and inclusive?—Evan reported, “There are two behavioral technicians. There’s a SCSW (i.e., supervising children’s social worker) who is wonderful and has caseloads.”

It was reported that the allocation of staff support worked to provide social-emotional resources, such as social workers and clinical staff, while security guards and resource officers worked to keep students physically safe from disruptive and potentially volatile situations.

**Adult-student relationships.** For Statement 9 from the online survey, teachers reported that they either agree (58) or strongly agree (26) that day-to-day conversations between teachers and students throughout the school are respectful or, in other words, 74% were in agreement. Adult-student relationships were reported 34 times for Question 11 from the online survey as contributing to students feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe. Teachers reported for Question 11 that students have at least one adult to whom they can go to. They also reported that advisory periods provide opportunities for students to develop these relationships. Having support groups to help students feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe were also mentioned.
A teacher reported for Question 11, “Having at least one adult that every student can meet with and speak to if needed helps students to feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe at our school. This is done during advisory groups.”

Another teacher stated for Question 11 that “Setting up support groups and other means of helping students like having a teacher they feel safe to talk to” helps students feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe.

Adult-student relationships were perceived as fostered in a variety of ways. And these relationships were also perceived to help students feel a sense of belonging and connectedness, as discussed next.

*Sense of belonging/connectedness.* In response to Question 11 from the online survey, participants raised 10 instances in which a sense of belonging/connectedness contributed to students feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe. Teachers perceived that this was the result of an inclusive and diverse environment of acceptance.

When responding to Question 11 from the online survey, a participant said, “A sense of acceptance and inclusion” contributed to students feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe.

When it came to the magnet school setting, having common interests also helped students feel like they belonged and fit in, due to similar interests, hobbies, and academic pursuits.

During the follow-up interview, when responding to Question 1—Describe your current school climate situation? Are there areas that need improvement? Are there areas that are going well—Laura said, “They [i.e., the students] didn’t fit in well in the traditional school setting. They feel integrated into their own society here. Their hobbies are similar. They like anime and comics. They build games.”
During the follow-up interview, when responding to Question 5—Would you consider your school culturally responsive and inclusive?—Michelle stated, “They are surprisingly accepting of each other…. We have some kids that are a little unusual, behaviorally or whatever. Their worldview is a little slanted, but the kids kind of handle it well.”

Overall, participants described that students’ sense of belonging and connectedness within their school community supported their social-emotional and physical safety and development.

Finding 3: More can be done by principals to improve day-to-day conversations among students, which are not always respectful. Even though teachers perceived students as having a sense of belonging/connectedness, it appeared that teachers also believed that this has more to do with the relationships they have with staff and whether the school fits students’ interests than the relationships students have among themselves. When it came to Statement 8 from the online survey—Day-to-day conversations among students throughout the school are respectful—approximately half the participants reported that they disagree (40) or strongly disagree (18) with this statement, totaling 58.

During the follow-up interview, when responding to Question 7—How do you think the student-learning climate can be better fostered and supported?—Christopher stated,

Most of the fights are because of social media cell phone use. If not, they get exasperated by it, and then the police get involved. Most of the kids who run out of my room crying is because of something they read on Instagram or Snapchat while in class. If we had a blocker or you have to put your phone in your locker policy, I really think that the learning culture, and the socio-emotional health and well-being, and the overall climate
of not feeling that somebody’s going to stone you at your worst moment all the time, would be so much better.

Moreover, Michelle reported during the follow-up interview when responding to Question 8—How has your school climate affected student morale? Staff morale?—that students’ reputations and their lives outside of school sometimes turned into gossip inside of school:

Everybody knows everybody outside of school, alright? We have had kids that have gotten into really serious trouble and the other kids that are in the school know them and it’s kind of like, “Oh, this kid did something really bad….” I mean, you get into a lot of conversations about that.

Social media appeared to influence how students treated one another. Moreover, students’ reputations seemed to follow them into school, where peers would partake in gossip.

Finding 4: More can be done by principals to include feedback and input from parents and/or community members in instructional decisions for the school. There appeared to be a lack of parental involvement when it came to instructional decisions. Since researchers have found that parental involvement can support positive student outcomes (Dunar, 2016; Epstein, 1997; Ice et al., 2015), schools and districts, oftentimes, have a component of parental involvement as part of their school or district improvement plans. Although there is a fuller discussion of parental involvement in the results for Research Question 2, again, in terms of Supports from Principals and in Research Question 3, in terms of Barriers that Exist, a lack of parental involvement around instructional decisions emerged for Research Question 1.

All teachers reported that parental and/or community input around instructional planning is not solicited. In regard to the results for online survey Statement 4—More can be done to
include feedback and input from parents and/or community members into your school’s instructional decisions—many teachers perceived this as the case, with two thirds reporting that they agree (63) or strongly agree (23) with this statement.

During the follow-up interview, in response to Question 4—Are students and families involved in educational decisions, such as with curricula development?—Timothy stated,

We’re going through a NEASC evaluation, and we do have parents in to give input on many different parts of the school. But I can’t think of an instance where they got into actual curriculum development. I don’t think that’s happened.

Moreover, in terms of the amount of involvement from stakeholders regarding curricula development and decisions, Alan said in response to the same question, “There is no feedback from parents. I constantly ask myself, how can I make that [i.e., lesson] better?”

Christopher said for the same question, “Not as honestly or intensely as we could. The only feedback that really gets put in is, if I had so many students, and I know a unit didn’t work with them, then I go back to the drawing board, and I change the unit.” He further explained, “It’s really on the individual teachers.”

More often than not, the input that teachers reported receiving was from their students, which they used to inform instructional planning. Aside from an occasional survey, parent and/or community input around teaching practices did not appear sought out.

**Research Question 2: What do teachers report are the various ways principals can support positive student-learning climates?**

The second research question sought to understand what teachers perceived principals could do to support positive student-learning climates in urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12,
settings. These supports could either have been what teachers had experienced or what they perceived they would like to experience from principals.

The data presented in this section include closed-response Statements 12 through 20 and open-response Questions 21 and 22. Phase I data are presented for each statement using table frequencies for participant selected categories and Likert scale weighted averages. The discussion on the findings includes supportive statements from open-ended survey questions in Phase I of the study and follow-up interview responses from Phase II of the study. Data analysis focuses on the major category Supports from Principals.

**Statement 12: The Student Discipline Policy Is Implemented on a Consistent and Fair Basis Throughout Your School**

Table 15 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale regarding consistent and fair implementation of the student discipline policy.

Table 15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 114)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(10) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>* 5 points</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(40) Agree</td>
<td>* 4 points</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16) Uncertain</td>
<td>* 3 points</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(23) Disagree</td>
<td>* 2 points</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(25) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>* 1 point</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
\frac{329}{114} = 2.90
\]

The data in Table 15 illustrate to what degree the discipline policy is implemented consistently and fairly in participants’ settings. It conveys that teachers reported that they agree (40) or strongly agree (10) with this statement, totaling 50, with a Likert scale weighted average of 2.90. The data, however, indicate that the majority of results fell on the negative side of the
Likert scale. Teachers also reported that they disagree (23) or strongly disagree (25) with this statement, totaling 48.

**Statement 13: Students Are Generally Engaged (i.e., On Task, Interested) in Their Work**

Table 16 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale regarding the degree to which students are engaged in work.

Table 16

*Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 13*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 114)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(3) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(65) Agree</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13) Uncertain</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>3 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(23) Disagree</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>2 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data in Table 16 exemplify the degree to which students are generally engaged (i.e., on task, interested) in their work. The data convey that nearly half of teachers reported that they agree (65) or strongly agree (3) with this statement, totaling 68, with a Likert scale weighted average of 3.30. Further, teachers reported that they disagree (23) or strongly disagree (10) with this statement, totaling 33.

**Statement 14: You Are Provided Feedback and Support with Instructional Planning**

Table 17 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale regarding the degree to which teachers receive feedback and support when planning their instruction.
Table 17

Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 113)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(19) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>* 5 points</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(43) Agree</td>
<td>* 4 points</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14) Uncertain</td>
<td>* 3 points</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(24) Disagree</td>
<td>* 2 points</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>* 1 point</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
\text{370/113} = 3.30
\]

The data in Table 17 reveal the levels of feedback and support available for instructional planning. The data indicate that teachers reported that they agree (43) or strongly agree (19) with this statement, totaling 62, with a Likert scale weighted average of 3.30. Teachers also reported that they disagree (24) or strongly disagree (13) with this statement, totaling 37.

Statement 15: Direct Instruction Is Commonly Used in Your School

Table 18 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale identifying the degree to which direct instruction is a common teaching practice within participants’ settings.

Table 18

Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 115)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(14) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>* 5 points</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(67) Agree</td>
<td>* 4 points</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16) Uncertain</td>
<td>* 3 points</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(17) Disagree</td>
<td>* 2 points</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>* 1 point</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
\text{421/115} = 3.70
\]
The data for Table 18 elucidate the degree to which direct instruction is commonly used in participants’ settings. The data convey that over half of participants reported that they agree (67) or strongly agree (14) with this statement, totaling 81, with a Likert scale weighted average of 3.70. To clarify the meaning of direct instruction, it can be didactic in nature, in that “It is skills-oriented, and the teaching practices it implies are teacher-directed” (Carnine, Silbert, Kame’enui, & Tarver, 2004, p. 11). The results show that some teachers reported that they disagree (17) or strongly disagree (1) with this statement, totaling 18.

**Statement 16: Student-Centered Instruction Is Commonly Used in Your School**

Table 19 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale regarding student-centered instruction as common practice in participants’ settings.

Table 19

*Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 16*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 114)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(17) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>* 5 points</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(62) Agree</td>
<td>* 4 points</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18) Uncertain</td>
<td>* 3 points</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(17) Disagree</td>
<td>* 2 points</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>* 1 point</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[\frac{420}{114} = 3.70\]

The data in Table 19 indicate the degree to which student-centered instruction is common in participants’ schools. The results demonstrate that more than half of participants perceived that instruction is student-centered, by indicating they agree (62) or strongly agree (17) with this statement, totaling 79, with a Likert scale weighted average of 3.30. According to Kaput (2018), when it comes to student-centered learning, “the unifying theme is that … the model shifts from being adult-centered [as with direct instruction] and standardized to student-centric and
individualized” (p. 10). It is also possible to have a lesson that includes both direct instruction and student-centered instruction, such as at the beginning of the lesson with whole group learning, before students move into small groups to participate in more student-centered and personalized work. A lesser number of teachers also reported that they disagree (17) with this statement, but none reported that they strongly disagree.

**Statement 17: Classroom Teachers Are Encouraged to Engage Students in Real-World Learning Opportunities**

Table 20 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale regarding whether teachers receive encouragement to engage their students in real-world learning experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Participants (n = 115)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(29) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>* 5 points</td>
<td>145</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(65) Agree</td>
<td>* 4 points</td>
<td>260</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Uncertain</td>
<td>* 3 points</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12) Disagree</td>
<td>* 2 points</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>* 1 point</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data for Table 20 show the degree to which classroom teachers are encouraged to engage students in real-world learning. The data indicate that teachers reported that they agree (65) or strongly agree (29) with this statement, totaling 94, with a Likert scale weighted average of 3.90. The data show that the majority of responses fell on the positive side of the Likert scale. A smaller number of teachers reported that they disagree (12) or strongly disagree (2) with this statement, totaling 14.
Statement 18: If Funds Are Needed for Innovative Instructional Materials, Programs, or Activities, They Are Available

Table 21 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale regarding funds being available for students to participate in innovative learning experiences.

Table 21

*Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 18*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 115)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(6) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>* 5 points</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14) Agree</td>
<td>* 4 points</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(17) Uncertain</td>
<td>* 3 points</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(47) Disagree</td>
<td>* 2 points</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(31) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>* 1 point</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

257/115 = 2.30

The data in Table 21 demonstrate the degree to which funds are available for innovative instructional materials, programs, or activities. The data indicate that teachers reported that they agree (14) or strongly agree (6) with this statement, totaling 20, with a Likert scale weighted average of 2.30. The data convey that results fell on the negative side of the Likert scale. The majority of teachers reported that they disagree (47) or strongly disagree (31) with this statement, totaling 78.

Statement 19: There Is a High Level of Parental Involvement

Table 22 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale regarding whether there is a high level of stakeholder involvement from parents in participants’ settings.
Table 22

Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 115)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(3) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18) Agree</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(17) Uncertain</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>3 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(49) Disagree</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>2 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(28) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

264/115 = 2.30

The data in Table 22 present the degree to which there is a high level of parental involvement. A small number of teachers reported that they agree (18) or strongly agree (3) with this statement, totaling 21, with a Likert scale weighted average of 2.30. The data indicate that results fell on the negative side of the Likert scale. Teachers also reported that they disagree (49) or strongly disagree (28) with this statement, totaling 72, or more than half of survey respondents.

Statement 20: Day-to-Day Conversations Between Teachers and Administrators Are Open and Respectful.

Table 23 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale regarding how open and respectful daily conversations are between teachers and administrators.

Table 23

Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 114)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(33) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(46) Agree</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12) Uncertain</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>3 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data in Table 23 display the degree to which day-to-day conversations between teachers and administrators are open and respectful. The data indicate that teachers reported that they agree (46) or strongly agree (33) with this statement, totaling 79, with a Likert scale weighted average of 3.70. The data also convey that more than half of the responses fell on the positive side of the Likert scale. Some teachers reported that they disagree (18) or strongly disagree (5) with this statement, totaling 23.

**Examination of Open-Ended Questions 21 and 22**

Open-ended Questions 21 and 22 served to give educators an opportunity to provide personal responses to Research Question 2. Research Question 2 sought to understand the supports teachers perceived are provided by principals or desired from principals to develop positive student-learning climates within their settings. Assessing teachers’ attitudes about which systems are in place (or not) that support struggling students and how students and staff do (or do not) receive recognition on a school level for their classroom achievement provided insight into how principals can best develop these climates within their schools.

For each open-ended question, the SurveyMonkey Text Analysis and Cloud features created the codes that emerged; then they were verified using the qualitative research software Atlas.ti. These codes are listed from highest to lowest frequency in a table for each question. Code frequencies of 10 or higher include participant narratives from open-ended responses and follow-up interviews.
Question 21: If there are systems in place to get support for struggling students, what are they? If this area is lacking, how can it be improved? Table 24 shows frequencies for codes that developed from responses to survey Question 21 about systems that are in place to get support struggling students and, if lacking, how this area can improve. Question 21 was two-fold: The aim of the first question was to identify these systems, if any, and the aim of the second question was to uncover areas teachers perceived needed improvement. The second question allowed participants, if they perceived that systems to support struggling students were lacking in any way, to respond more fully to the question, share their experiences, and provide suggestions. In most cases, codes for areas needing improvement or lacking began with the word “Need” or “Lack.” This subsection discusses the results for code frequencies of 10 or more.

Table 24

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency (f)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic/cognitive supports</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to support struggling students</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff support</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiered interventions</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need improved program, system</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-emotional or physical supports</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRBI process</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to employ more staff</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget constraints</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club, group, or activity</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of follow-through</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social promotion</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below grade level</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community resources</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Frequency (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need smaller classes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need student accountability, responsibility</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need student discipline</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher efforts</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative visibility</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need collaboration</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need social-emotional supports</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalization, differentiation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School program, committee</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult-student relationships, connections</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need administrative support, visibility</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need improved parental involvement</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need personalization</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need shared values and beliefs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need students to feel a sense of belonging</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to limit technology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling issues</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student voice, leadership</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 24 lists seven areas as either in place or needing improvement, recording a 10 or higher response rate. The seven are (a) academic/cognitive supports, (b) need to support struggling students, (c) staff support, (d) tiered interventions, (e) need for improved program(s)/system(s), (f) social-emotional or physical supports, and (g) SRBI process.

**Academic/cognitive supports.** There were 45 instances whereby participants identified academic/cognitive support systems to support struggling students:

- “Intervention time on Thursdays [and] before and after school tutoring.”
• “Intervention classes for reading and math.”

• “After school office hours for all subject areas.”

• “[X school] offers tutoring to struggling students every single morning for the first half hour of the school day. In addition, teachers have an activity period each morning in which students are encouraged to come in for extra help to complete homework or practice concepts.”

• “Voluntary Saturday school is available.”

• “Credit recovery after school.”

• “We provide modified assignments for some students and lots of scaffolds and modeling.”

Need to support struggling students. There were also 23 instances for the need to support struggling students. Reports included:

• “There are intervention classes and many special education teachers. However, there are so many struggling students who are many years behind by the time that they get to high school. More supports are needed; however, due to financial strain, it is not possible.”

• “This area of concern could be addressed with smaller intervention class sizes, improved intervention resources, and collaboration time with grade level and department teams to further develop strategies to support students who struggle.”

• “My school has only one opportunity for struggling students, and that is to come on Saturdays for extra help.”

Staff support. Various examples of staff support were reported 23 times, when responding to the online survey. Reports included:
• “We have several social workers, a psychologist, and a clinician on staff.”

• “Student support center.”

• “Guidance, social workers, deans, school psych, [and] cultural center.”

• “Paraeducators.”

**Tiered interventions.** Tiered interventions were reported 17 times as ways to support struggling students. Interventions noted were:

• “At the school level, struggling students are provided with tiered interventions built into their school day as well as differentiated instruction within their regular classes.”

• “We have lots—Extended Learning class – Tier II intervention – a structured study hall-type class where students can help in completing work; Strategic Reading – low readers; math lab; our 9th graders are teamed; and there is a common period for extra help.”

**Need improved program, system.** Teachers reported 13 times the need to improve programs or systems to better support struggling students:

• “Students can turn to a SPED coordinator or sign up for tutoring. There is also a flex period every day that they can go to get extra help, but it is poorly organized.”

• “Students with an IEP receive specialized instruction. I don’t feel there are many other supports in place for other students. We have an SRBI committee that is supposed to speak with staff about the different tiered interventions to utilize with kids that are struggling. However, the committee has yet to explain those steps and provide examples, and we are already in January.”

• “There are some supports, but the school needs to put further effort into developing a comprehensive and effective SRBI program.”
• “We need an intervention program expansion, we need more paras, we need to cipher through data, then put a plan in place to close the gaps rather than just keep pushing struggling students through to the next school year.”

• “We also need to better place students in classes – We have students who barely pass prerequisite courses in the next course at the honors level.”

• “Special ed. intervention programs had little student interest.”

• “There are no systems in place. When systems are put in place, they are not followed or end up at a dead end.”

• “This area is definitely lacking. We are in a school that will not allow ‘study halls’ and have replaced them with useless ‘College & Career Readiness’ busy work.”

Social-emotional or physical supports. Participants mentioned social-emotional or physical supports in 13 instances. Teachers reported:

• “Individual and group counseling.”

• “Social workers go out of their way to service any student at any time…. They do not just deal with their case load.”

• “SRBI Team currently meeting on 64 regular-education students who have been identified by teachers, parents, administration, themselves as needing assistance in academics, attendance, behavior, social-emotional well-being, physical and mental health, family environment, community environment, homelessness, etc.”

• “We are a magnet school that accepts students that do not fit in to their home school.”

• “Struggling students work on mindfulness, group dynamics with our social workers and highly trained interns.”
**SRBI process.** Lastly, participants mentioned the SRBI process 11 times as a means to support struggling students. The tiered interventions elaborated on previously and discussed in some detail specify the supports in place as a result of the SRBI process. According to the Connecticut State Department of Education (2008), “Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) encompass behavior and social-emotional functioning as well as an array of academic domains (e.g., reading, writing, mathematics) central to students’ school progress” (p. 14). In this study, participants reported a variety of social-emotional, academic, and behavioral interventions as “Tier 2 & Tier 3 interventions based on SRBI,” as described by one respondent, such as:

- “SRBI for both reading/math."
- “It [the SRBI process] involves a written referral and then a meeting with school personnel, parents, and the student.”
- “Students can be recommended to a review by anyone on staff. Review consists of support staff and recommender.”

**Question 22: How are students and staff recognized on a school level for their classroom achievements? If this area can be improved, what are some things that can be done differently?** Table 25 shows frequencies for codes from responses to survey Question 22 about how both teachers and students receive recognition and thus support for their classroom efforts. Question 22 was two-fold: The first question sought to identify how staff and students receive recognition, and the second question sought to uncover areas teachers perceived needed improvement. This allowed participants to respond to the questions more fully, share their experiences, and provide suggestions, if there were areas they perceived as needing improvement or needing to happen differently. In most instances, codes for areas needing improvement begin
with the word “Need” or “Lack.” This subsection elaborates on the results for code frequencies of 10 and higher.

Table 25

*Code Frequencies for Question 22*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency (f)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student recognition, rewards, incentives</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff recognition</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assemblies, school meetings, celebrations</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of staff recognition</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal communication</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of student recognition</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need improved program, system</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff meetings</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School program, committee</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom efforts</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of follow-through</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget constraints</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demanding, challenging job</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement efforts, goals</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low morale</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need administrative support, visibility</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need shared values, beliefs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent outreach, involvement</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talents showcased in community</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 25, eight areas stand out as noteworthy, recording a 10 or higher response rate: (a) student recognition, rewards, and incentives; (b) staff recognition; and ways in which forms of positive reinforcement are received (or not), such as (c) assemblies, school meetings, and
celebrations, (d) verbal communication; (e) written communication; (f) lack of staff recognition; (g) lack of student recognition; and (h) need for improved program, system.

**Student recognition, rewards, and incentives.** Student recognition, rewards, and incentives came up frequently, with 74 instances. Various examples included:

- “Students of [the] month.”
- “Every marking period, eight students per grade receive awards based on our Core Values, eight students (one per class) receive class awards, perfect attendance awards are given, and honors/high honors awards are given.”
- “Students are also recognized for their perfect attendance and exemplary behavior by being allowed to participate in field trips and activities (The Big E, Winter Festival, Valentine’s Day Dance, Six Flags, Field Day, etc.).”
- “PBIS room—fun space that is earned.”
- “Students are provided with ‘bucks’ for a variety of reasons. Can be used at the school store.”
- “Ambassador status.”
- “National Honor Society.”
- “Athletic awards.”

**Staff recognition.** Instances of staff recognition were reported 42 times. Some ways in which staff were reported as being recognized included:

- “Teacher of the Month.”
- “Artist of the Moment.”
- “Staff awards every two months and peers nominate peers for that.”
- “Staff breakfast once per month.”
• “Teacher of the Year.”

• “Recognition also occurs in the Weekly Updates sent by the administration.”

• “Staff are recognized for their dedication and commitment at staff meetings and are able to share their special skills with other staff members.”

• “Trophies at staff meetings.”

**Assemblies, school meetings, and celebrations.** Assemblies, school meetings, and celebrations were reported 27 times as places in which both students and staff received recognition:

• “Monthly assemblies for attendance and student achievement in academics and behavior [and] weekly student of the week celebrations every Friday.”

• “Attendance celebrations.”

• “Students of the week and month and award assemblies a few times per year.”

• “We are a PBIS school, so we hold monthly assemblies to recognize students and staff who exemplify the specific character traits outlined in our PBIS matrix.”

• “We have a microsociety-themed magnet school, so there is a town hall every month where students are recognized for being employee or citizen of the month.”

Staff and students received several forms of recognition in a variety of ways, which were communicated verbally (16), in writing (11), or a combination of both.

**Verbal communication.**

• “Individual verbal and written compliments are also given to students/staff for achievements.”

• “Staff are recognized by staff-to-staff ‘shout-outs’ at the beginning of staff meetings.”

• “We have teacher to teacher acknowledgements during our staff meetings.”
• “Verbal praise one-on-one and sometimes shout-outs during meetings and/or presentations occur.”

**Written communication.**

• “Individual verbal and written compliments are also given to students/staff for achievements.”

• “We have shining students and faculty of the moments walls with a photo, nice write up, and a pizza party, but this only happens maybe twice a year.”

Participants perceived staff recognition as lacking 24 times, and they perceived student recognition as lacking 15 times, as their reports indicated:

**Lack of staff recognition.**

• “Overall, my personal perspective is that teachers and students alike feel overworked and underappreciated by administration.”

• “We don’t do this.”

• “There is no longer a program in place for this.”

• “There could be more recognition from administration, including downtown towards teachers that work so hard.”

• “More should be said about the teacher’s achievement by the administration.”

• “We aren’t really acknowledged for our efforts or successes except for a few staff.”

• “They aren’t recognized. Our administration adopted a divide and conquer strategy to subdue and intimidate staff. Years ago we lauded the work of colleagues in weekly staff meetings.”

• “There is little individual recognition, and administration is not overtly supportive of recognizing individual employees. That having been said, efforts to recognize
individual employees in the past have ended up with a ‘clique’ mentality about who was selected.”

**Lack of student recognition.**

- “Overall, my personal perspective is that teachers and students alike feel overworked and underappreciated by administration.”
- “We have very irregular honor roll assemblies and students of the month honors. Again, this is very irregular, cancelled at the last minute with no make-up date.”
- “No recognition. We had student of the month award in the past.”
- “There is no longer a program in place for this.”

Teachers also reported the need for an improved program or system 14 times. Reports included:

- “Student of the Month nominations are nice, but insufficient.”
- “Teachers are constantly dumped on and then given hollow words of appreciation.”
- “[It] would be nice to have teachers present at staff meeting about instructional strategies that went well, accomplishments of their clubs, etc.”
- “We used to offer a [school mascot] award. But a lack of time/funding for this has stopped its existence. We offer honor roll ceremonies…. Honor roll ceremonies should be in front of the whole school/grade instead of just in front of other honor roll students. Students and teachers should vote each marking period to recognize one student who is hardworking, successful, etc.”

**Delineation of Findings for Research Question 2**

This section delineates the major findings for Research Question 2: What do teachers report are the various ways principals can support positive student-learning climates? Likert
scale weighted averages and code frequencies that emerged for the second category, Supports from Principals, informed these findings. The major findings are the significant themes, and they include the subcategories that emerged from the coding process. The areas in which teachers perceived could best support them include (a) consistent follow-through and student accountability, responsibility regarding disciple efforts, (b) parental involvement, (c) financial and academic supports for struggling students, which in turn could support innovative instructional efforts, and (d) meaningful recognition for students and staff.

**Finding 5: In ways student misbehavior is addressed, teachers desire consistent follow-through and increases in student accountability and responsibility.** Although participants reported positive experiences with student discipline, the preponderance of evidence suggests that there are ongoing issues with student discipline efforts. When responding to Statement 12, concerning the student discipline policy being implemented on a consistent and fair basis, less than half of the participants indicated that as the case; participants reported that they agree (40) or strongly agree (10) with this statement, totaling 50. The evidence indicates that discipline efforts can be more consistent and fair, with improved follow-through and increases in student accountability and responsibility.

**Lack of consistent follow-through.** There were reports of a lack of consistent follow-through when it came to student discipline.

When responding follow-up interview Question 7—How do you think the student-learning climate can be better fostered and supported?—Christopher reported inconsistency around how his school handles discipline, as his school has no cell phone policy:

I write a kid up and send him out because they’ve blatantly refused to put their cell phone away four times, and just told me to ‘F’ off, and then I don’t get backed [up] from that.
They’ll say, ‘Well, Ms. So and So lets me have it out.’ The whole thing just kind of falls apart.

Christopher went on to elaborate further on the issues he and his colleagues have experienced, due to lack of consistency and not having a cell phone policy:

It’s really a lack of consistency, but I think the reason why I feel that teachers … feel like the middleman … students complain and tell us. We see what’s working and what’s not working. Then we go to admin or come together collectively and say this is what we need. I wish that I could say it was more student input, but it’s only student input in the fact that I’ve had conversations with my students, and I see what’s working and what isn’t, because at the end of the day, if I ask the students if they want a cell phone policy, I don’t know how many of them would agree.

Donna stated, when responding to Question 8 from the follow-up interview—How has your school climate affected student morale? Staff morale?—that the “dean doesn’t return referrals, but the high-school administrator does.”

Participants reported inconsistencies in the manner in which different administrators handled discipline issues.

Need for better student accountability and increased responsibility. In addition to reports of teachers feeling unsupported when having concerns about students’ behavior, students were not being held accountable or responsible for their misconduct, whereby their behavior went unchecked or unsanctioned.

When it came to students who participants frequently perceived as misbehaving, Alan reported for follow-up interview Question 7—How do you think the student-learning climate can be better fostered and supported?—that his school is “Trying to hire someone for discipline.
They are the same group of kids doing the same things every day, the same 30 kids out of 500. It’s around uniforms and skipping.”

Also, in response to Question 7, Christopher reported some of the challenges he has faced around absent or truant students:

We have one of the worst absenteeism rates of any of the [X] schools, and it’s abhorrently worse than any school I’ve ever been to. Because we in effect do not have an attendance policy, our truancy rates are incredible. That affects the culture and climate, because you haven’t seen a student in a month.

Evidence from the study suggests that a lack of policy, such as around cell phone use and attendance, made classroom management efforts difficult, as did inconsistencies when dealing with referrals, which created a lack of accountability and responsibility for student behavior.

Finding 6: Parental involvement can be improved to better support teacher efforts.

Research has suggested that increased parental involvement can produce positive student outcomes (Bryk et al., 2010; Di Lullo, 2004; Dunar, 2016; Epstein, 1997; Ice et al., 2015). As with the results for Research Question 1, overall, parental involvement was reported as lacking throughout the district, although there were instances in which some engagement efforts were successful. When responding to online survey Statement 19, on whether there is a high level of parental involvement, most participants indicated this not the case, reporting that they agree (18) or strongly agree (3) with the statement, totaling 21 or, in other words, 18%.

Lack of parental involvement. Overall, teachers reported a lack of involvement from parents. Those who were more involved in their children’s education were suburban parents with children attending magnet schools or those who seemed well educated. During the follow-up interview, in responses to Question 4—Are students and families involved in educational
decisions, such as with curricula development?—Donna said, “People who are well educated are hyper involved.”

During the follow-up interview, also in response to Question 4, Christopher reported which parents he perceived as the most involved:

The parents that have been more involved are often the suburban parents and not the urban parents, who might live only a mile or two from our actual location. They seem to be always the most difficult ones to get to come into the building.

Although improvement is necessary to get both suburban and urban parents more involved in school life, urban parents were reported as most difficult to get to the school, regardless of how close they lived to the building.

Christopher continued by explaining how his school has had some success with increasing parental involvement:

I had a mom last year come to the bingo/ice-cream social with her five children, not just the two that attend our school, but all five. We fed all five, and they played bingo, and we had a babysitting room for the younger ones, who wanted to color and watch TV instead of sitting in a bingo room. It was a really well-attended event, and last year was our first year.

This suggests that often additional concessions are necessary to get parents to the school. Incentives, such as food and prizes, have helped these efforts to some degree, but improvements are still needed.

**Finding 7: Budget constraints and the number of struggling students make it difficult to engage students in real-world learning opportunities.** The data from the online survey indicates that teachers were encouraged to engage students in real-world learning to help
prepare students for career and college readiness. However, the online survey also indicates that funding for such learning was limited, and it was often limited due to the need to address learning gaps experienced by struggling students.

Real-world learning opportunities. The online survey results indicate that teachers were encouraged to have students participate in real-world learning opportunities. When responding to online survey Statement 17, classroom teachers are encouraged to engage students in real-world learning, the majority of participants indicated they agree (65) or strongly agree (29) with this statement, totaling 94 or, in other words, 82%.

In response to Question 3—Is the school’s curriculum engaging for students? If yes, explain. If no, how can it be improved?—Jessica reported, “Students built a man/self-propelled machine and went to a national competition in Alabama. Students made a windmill-powered station in Tibet. These are national stories. The robotics team goes to the Nationals.” She also said, “There is a Law Academy, nursing and engineering schools.”

Also, in response to Question 3, Christopher reported how his students can earn college credit at the high school level, giving them a head start when it comes to real-world career options:

They graduate from their public high school, but they earned extra [credits], so our kids have an extra graduation credit number requirement, and that’s because we give them requirements per every art class. But it’s not always necessarily collegiately recognized unless they’re applying into a fine arts program at an arts school, which most of them do. So most of our kids, or at least our top-performing kids, go on to places like the Boston Conservatory, the Berkley School of Music, Juilliard, Parsons, Pratt. They go for whatever they’ve been studying. If it’s theater and they want to be on Broadway, they’re
going to go to that sort of school. If it’s photography, they go into a prestigious
photography program, et cetera. Most of them. Or they go, if they’re in music, they go
to the Harp School of Music, et cetera.

Laura said, in response to the same question, “They learn about the solar system,
asteroids, creating a bunker in case of an asteroid impact. There’s programming and video game
design, graphic design.”

For Statement 18—If funds are needed for innovative instructional materials, programs,
or activities, they are available—only a few teachers indicated they agree (14) or strongly agree
(6) with this statement, totaling 20 or, in other words, 17%.

The evidence shows there were opportunities for students to engage in real-world
learning experiences, but that funding for any necessary or additional materials, programs, or
activities appeared lacking.

**Struggling students.** Teachers reported feeling overwhelmed by the number of
struggling students they served. For Question 21 from the online survey—If there are systems in
place to get support for struggling students, what are they? If this area is lacking, how can it be
improved?—participants indicated 45 times that there were academic/cognitive programs to
support struggling students. One response for Question 21 was that students can participate in
“Intervention time on Thursdays [and] before and after school tutoring.”

During the follow-up interview process for Question 5—Would you consider your school
culturally responsive and inclusive?—Laura reported what her school has done to support
struggling students academically/cognitively:
Once a week we have office hours one hour after school. The teacher will not hunt you down. It’s unofficially on Wednesdays. They decide time when they need extra help.

During the 8th block on Wednesdays, students can get extra help.

For Question 21, participants indicated 23 times that there was a need to support struggling students, with students being below grade level, sometimes by several years. For Question 21, a teacher stated,

There are intervention classes and many special education teachers. However, there are so many struggling students who are many years behind by the time that they get to high school. More supports are needed; however, due to financial strain, it is not possible.

During the follow-up interview for Question 3—Is the school’s curriculum engaging for students? If yes, explain. If no, how can it be improved?—Dan said, “Academically, their grade levels are probably … at least four grades behind what they should be.”

Evidence from the study suggests that there were a number of academic/cognitive supports in place to support struggling students who were reported as below grade level by several years or more.

**Budget constraints.** Budget constraints were also a concern for teachers. When it came to innovative activities that support classroom efforts, teachers reported how they needed to be creative. For Statement 18—If funds are needed for innovative instructional materials, programs, or activities, they are available—only a few teachers indicated they agree (14) or strongly agree (6) with this statement, totaling 20 or, in other words, 17%.

In response to follow-up interview Question 3—Is the school’s curriculum engaging for students? If yes, explain. If no, how can it be improved?—Michelle went on to report,
We have to get a little bit creative, so I will go get library passes because of the libraries in Connecticut have free passes to museums. So, I can get passes for four people. So, they’re free…. [We] hunt out free things like crazy. Sometimes the financial burden fell on teachers who sought out free activities, if necessary and when budgets lacked.

Christopher also mentioned in the follow-up interview for Question 3 how he felt regarding extending classroom efforts out into the community as innovative learning opportunities:

We try to reach out to the community…. But it’s really all teacher based. If a teacher takes the initiative to take a risk and try something, it’s like some things for burning brings the fire sometimes to try to get those things approved by admin. Participants also mentioned budget constraint when it came to staffing, in that teachers reported feeling understaffed when needing to support innovative initiatives or that budget cuts negatively impacted progress.

When responding the online survey, a teacher reported for Question 21, “Due to budgetary issues, we have lost our intervention staff and much of the intervention is placed on our already taxed special education instructors.”

Timothy reported for Question 7—How do you think the student-learning climate can be better fostered and supported?—a desire for more staff, so that more students can be supported and served:

Well, the other thing I didn’t mention is that we’re an early college school. We’re actually owned by [X] College. So if you’re a student in good standing who has potential to do college level work by junior year, you’re actually traveling from our building across
campus to the college buildings, and then they can take up to, I think, eight free college courses. And so we have a support that’s built in for them. So it’s kind of a long way around saying that I wish we could offer that level of individual support to every student. Because I think that would help everything. But that would commit 8 or 10 teachers to it, which we don’t have budget to do.

When engaging students in real-world learning opportunities, teachers needed to be creative and to take the initiative to make efforts happen, due to budget constraints regarding programming and staffing and apparent learning gaps.

**Finding 8: Effective staff and student recognition efforts are appreciated and desired.** There were overall inconsistencies across the district between how schools recognized both teachers and students. Teachers shared that schools that had a recognition program in place were oftentimes running a PBIS program. There were also schools that did not have a recognition program in place but had avenues for student and/or staff recognition. Moreover, participants perceived that there was a lack of staff recognition (24) and that there was a lack of student recognition (15).

When it came to the absence of staff and student recognition or reward ceremonies at the schoolwide level, Michelle reported for Question 7—How do you think the student-learning climate can be better fostered and supported?—the reason for the absence:

It really came down to, you know, the sense of having a recognition assembly was…. The importance of that was kind of undermined by the fact that we were going to break up two fights while it went on. [It was] that sort of thing.

Some reasons why recognition events no longer took place were due to student behavior at assemblies that undermined the purpose for the events. Nonetheless, while in some settings
there were few to no recognition systems in place, evidence suggests that in other settings practices were imbedded into school life and more highly regarded.

**Student recognition, rewards, and incentives.** For Question 22, participants reported student recognition, rewards, and incentives 74 times. A teacher reported in the online survey that there were “Students of the week and month and award assemblies a few times per year.”

When it came to recognition and incentives in terms of a PBIS program, another teacher said for Question 22 from the online survey,

> We are a PBIS school, so we hold monthly assemblies to recognize students and staff who exemplify the specific character traits outlined in our PBIS matrix. Students are also recognized for their perfect attendance and exemplary behavior by being allowed to participate in field trips and activities (The Big E, Winter Festival, Valentine’s Day Dance, Six Flags, Field Day, etc.).

Teachers shared that they believed more consistency and public opportunities to share staff and student accomplishments would improve the student-learning climate. Where there were systems in place, participants mentioned that better incentives would provide more motivation for students to want to achieve recognition and rewards.

Brenda reported a desire to improve the PBIS incentives at her school: “It should be an ice cream social, faculty versus students sporting event. There is no incentive for those who don’t get them [i.e., incentives]. Events are lame.” Brenda said, “Have something cool for kids. [And] if kids shouldn’t be there, they shouldn’t get in.” She also stated, “It falls short of its goal. You would want everyone to get it.”

Participants reported improving student recognition efforts as desirable, and they stated that such efforts would further support an improved student-learning climate.
Staff recognition. Teachers also reported that the most common recognition opportunities were Staff Member of the Month, Employee of the Month, and Artist of the Moment. These appeared to coincide with Student of the Month recognition opportunities.

For Question 22 from the online survey, a teacher stated that teachers received recognition as “Teacher of the Month” and “Teacher of the Year.”

Teachers also reported that there were often shout-outs of praise during staff meetings from administration: “Staff are recognized for their dedication and commitment at staff meetings and are able to share their special skills with other staff members.”

Regardless, feelings of underappreciation resonated with some. For Question 22, a participant reported, “More should be said about the teacher’s achievement by the administration.”

Further, in some settings there were no instances of teacher recognition, or there had been in the past but no longer. Michelle reported in the follow-up interview for Question 7—How do you think the student-learning climate can be better fostered and supported?—“We used to do an Employee of the Month. They don’t do that anymore. It’s unfortunate.”

Research Question 3: What do teachers report are inhibiting principals from building positive student-learning climates?

The third research question sought to understand what teachers perceived as barriers inhibiting principals from developing positive student-learning climates in urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings. Examining perceived barriers made it possible to identify some of the factors and conditions, whether in principals’ control or not, that may be preventing principals from fostering positive student-learning climates in their settings.
The data in this section include closed-response Statements 22 through 31 and open-response Questions 32 and 33. It presents Phase I data for each statement using table frequencies for participant selected categories and Likert scale weighted averages. The discussion on findings includes supportive statements from open-ended survey questions in Phase I of the study and follow-up interview responses in Phase II of the study. Data analysis focused on the major category Barriers that Exist.

**Statement 23: Building Leadership Is Frequently Available/Visible**

Table 26 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale regarding the availability and visibility of participants’ building leadership.

Table 26

*Table 26: Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 23*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 114)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(16) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>* 5 points</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(49) Agree</td>
<td>* 4 points</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14) Uncertain</td>
<td>* 3 points</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(29) Disagree</td>
<td>* 2 points</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>* 1 point</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

382/114 = 3.40

The data in Table 26 indicate the degree to which building leadership is frequently available/visible. The data demonstrate that teachers reported that they agree (49) or strongly agree (16) with this statement, totaling 65, with a Likert scale weighted average of 3.40. The data also show that more than half the responses fell on the positive side of the Likert scale. Further, some participants indicated they disagree (29) or strongly disagree (6) with this statement, totaling 35.
Statement 24: Members of the School Community (e.g., Students, Parents/Guardians, Staff, and Community Members) Work Collaboratively to Build a Positive Student-Learning Climate

Table 27 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale regarding members of the community (i.e., all stakeholders) working together to support a positive student-learning climate.

Table 27

*Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 24*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants ((n = 114))</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(14) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>* 5 points</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(48) Agree</td>
<td>* 4 points</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20) Uncertain</td>
<td>* 3 points</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(24) Disagree</td>
<td>* 2 points</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>* 1 point</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[378/114 = 3.30\]

The data for Table 27 show the degree to which members of the school community (e.g., students, parents/guardians, staff, and community members) work collaboratively to build a positive student-learning climate. The data indicate that teachers reported that they agree (48) or strongly agree (14) with this statement, totaling 62, with a Likert scale weighted average of 3.30. The data show that more than half of the responses fell on the positive side of the Likert scale. Teachers also indicated that they disagree (24) or strongly disagree (8) with this statement, totaling 32.

Statement 25: Student Morale Is Perceived as High Among Faculty Members
Table 28 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale regarding whether faculty members perceive the morale of students as high in participants’ settings.

Table 28

*Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 25*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 115)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(6) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(38) Agree</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(26) Uncertain</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>3 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(33) Disagree</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>2 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data in Table 28 demonstrate the degree to which faculty members perceive student morale as high. The data convey that teachers reported that they agree (38) or strongly agree (6) with this statement, totaling 44, with a Likert scale weighted average of 2.90. The data show that the majority of responses fell on the negative side of the Likert scale. Participants also indicated that they disagree (33) or strongly disagree (12) with this statement, totaling 45.

Statement 26: Your School Is Asked to Implement Too Many initiatives at Once With Little Support and/or Resources

Table 29 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale indicating whether participants are asked to implement too many initiatives with little support or resources.
Table 29

Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 26

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 115)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(40) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>5 points</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(36) Agree</td>
<td>4 points</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(17) Uncertain</td>
<td>3 points</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18) Disagree</td>
<td>2 points</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1 point</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[\frac{435}{115} = 4.00\]

The data for Table 29 present the degree to which participants are asked to implement too many initiatives at once with little support and/or resources. The data show that teachers reported that they agree (36) or strongly agree (40) with this statement, totaling 76, with a Likert scale weighted average of 4.00. The data convey that more than half the participants believed that was the case, with responses that fell on the positive side of the Likert scale. A lesser number of teachers claimed to disagree (18) or strongly disagree (4) with this statement, totaling 22.

**Statement 27: Students Lack a Sense of Belonging and Connectedness at Your School**

Table 30 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale regarding a sense of belonging and connectedness participants perceived students to have in their settings.

Table 30

Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 27

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 115)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(9) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>5 points</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(32) Agree</td>
<td>4 points</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants \((n = 115)\) | Points | Total
---|---|---
(14) Uncertain | *3 points | 42
(49) Disagree | *2 points | 98
(11) Strongly Disagree | *1 point | 11

\[
\frac{324}{115} = 2.80
\]

The data for Table 30 illustrate the degree to which students lack a sense of belonging and connectedness in participants’ settings. The data indicate that teachers reported that they agree (32) or strongly agree (9) with this statement, totaling 41, with a Likert weighted average of 2.80. The data demonstrate that responses fell on the negative side of the Likert scale. Further, the data show that teachers reported that they disagree (49) or strongly disagree (11) with this statement, totaling 60.

**Statement 28: Students Are Able to Build Relationships with School Personnel**

Table 31 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale for students’ ability to build positive relationships with school staff.

Table 31

*Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 28*

| Participants \((n = 113)\) | Points | Total |
---|---|---|
(46) Strongly Agree | *5 points | 230
(58) Agree | *4 points | 232
(5) Uncertain | *3 points | 15
(4) Disagree | *2 points | 8
(0) Strongly Disagree | *1 point | 0

\[
\frac{485}{113} = 4.30
\]

The data for Table 31 display the degree to which students can build relationships with school personnel in participants’ settings. The data show that many teachers reported that they
agree (58) or strongly agree (46) with this statement, totaling 104, with a Likert scale weighted average of 4.30. The data illustrate that the majority of responses fell on the positive side of the Likert scale. There were a small number of educators who reported that they disagree (4), and no one selected strongly disagree.

**Statement 29: School Personnel Are Trusted Members of the School Community**

Table 32 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale for the level of trust school personnel are perceived to have within the school community.

Table 32

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 29</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants (n = 115)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(38) Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(54) Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) Uncertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data for Table 32 indicate the degree to which school personnel are trusted members of the school community. It reveals that the majority of teachers reported that they agree (54) or strongly agree (38) with this statement, totaling 92, with a Likert scale weighted average of 4.00. The data convey that more than three fourths of responses fell on the positive side of the Likert scale. There were also a few who reported that they disagree (9) or strongly disagree (4) with this statement, totaling 13.

**Statement 30: The Use of Individualized and Personalized Instructional Teaching Methods Is Encouraged**
Table 33 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale regarding if teachers are encouraged to incorporate individualized and personalized teaching methods into their instruction.

Table 33

**Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 30**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 114)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(31) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>* 5 points</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(64) Agree</td>
<td>* 4 points</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11) Uncertain</td>
<td>* 3 points</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Disagree</td>
<td>* 2 points</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>* 1 point</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

459/114 = 4.00

The data for Table 33 reveal the degree to which individualized and personalized instructional teaching methods is encouraged. The data show that the majority of teachers reported that they agree (64) or strongly agree (31) with this statement, totaling 95, with a Likert scale weighted average of 4.00. The data also convey that the majority of responses fell on the positive side of the Likert scale. Further, the data show that few indicated that they disagree (7) or strongly disagree (1) with this statement, totaling 8.

**Statement 31: The School Is a Safe and Welcoming Environment for all Stakeholders (e.g., Students, Parents/Guardians, Staff, and Community Members)**

Table 34 presents response frequencies for each category on a 5-point Likert scale regarding whether participants’ schools are safe and welcoming environments for all stakeholders.
Table 34

Response Frequencies and Likert Scale Weighted Average for Statement 31

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (n = 115)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(37) Strongly Agree</td>
<td>* 5 points</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(51) Agree</td>
<td>* 4 points</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14) Uncertain</td>
<td>* 3 points</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) Disagree</td>
<td>* 2 points</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>* 1 point</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>453/115 = 3.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data for Table 34 exhibit the degree to which participants perceive their schools are safe and welcoming environments for all stakeholders. The data show that teachers reported that they agree (51) or strongly agree (37) with this statement, totaling 88, with a Likert scale weighted average of 3.90. The data demonstrate that the majority of responses fell on the positive side of the Likert scale. Although three fourths of participants perceived their settings as safe and welcoming, some reported that they disagree (9) or strongly disagree (4) with this statement, totaling 13.

Examination of Open-Response Questions 32 and 33

Open-response Questions 32 and 33 gave educators an opportunity to provide qualitative responses to Research Question 3. Research Question 3 sought to understand barriers that teachers perceived prevented the building of positive student-learning climates within their settings. Assessing teachers’ attitudes about communication efforts with stakeholders and leadership efforts regarding school climate provided insight about the principal’s capacity to build positive student-learning climates within the school.

For each open-response question, codes emerged from the SurveyMonkey Text Analysis and Cloud features; then they were verified using the qualitative research software Atlas.ti.
These codes are listed from highest to lowest frequency in a table for each question. Code frequencies of 10 or higher include participant narratives from open-response questions and follow-up interview questions.

**Question 32: Describe any barriers that may exist when trying to communicate regularly with parents/guardians.** Table 35 shows frequencies for codes that developed from responses to online survey Question 32 regarding any barriers that teachers perceived when trying to communicate with parents/guardians. This subsection discusses the results for code frequencies of 10 or more.

Table 35

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency (f)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of parental contact information</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and/or cultural barriers</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of parental responsibility</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of parental availability</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of parental attendance, involvement</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation issues</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of parental trust, hope, confidence</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transience</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic barriers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need administrative support, visibility</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to communicate more, better</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 35, five areas stand out, recording a 10 or higher response rate. These areas are (a) lack of parental contact information, (b) language and/or cultural barriers, (c) lack of parental responsibility, (d) lack of parental availability, and (e) lack of parental attendance/involvement.
Lack of parental contact information. Participants mentioned lack of parental contact information 63 times. These involved not having contact information at all and having incorrect information. Reports from the online survey included:

- “Phones being turned off. Not having the correct phones numbers because they change frequently.”
- “Listed phone numbers are no longer in service.”
- “Their contact info. changes frequently and they have intermittent access to email.”
- “Absence of email use.”
- “Records aren’t regularly updated, so phone numbers don’t work, emails are invalid, etc.”
- “Transient populations, frequently changing addresses and phone numbers.”
- “Lack of updated information in PowerSchool.”

Language and/or cultural barriers. Language and/or cultural barriers were another area of concern when trying to communicate with parents, as participants mentioned 30 times. Reports from the online survey included:

- “Language is the first common barrier, as about 1/3 of our students are English learners, and more parents than students are not fluent in English. While we have an incredible staff including several who are bilingual, it can make regular communication difficult.”
- “Language and cultural differences.”
- “Language is the greatest barrier, as many parents do not speak English.”
- “Teachers do not regularly use [the] Language Line to communicate with non-English speaking families.”
**Lack of parental responsibility.** Another barrier for participants in the study was a lack of parental responsibility, which occurred 27 times. Some reports from the online survey included:

- “Many parents don’t want to help or be bothered as [it] is related to the child. That is [a] school responsibility.”
- “Many parents of students in our school don’t really seem to care much about what goes on there.”
- “Lack of parental interest.”

**Lack of parental availability.** Another barrier that participants indicated 14 times was lack of parental availability. They stated in the online survey:

- “Parents who work 2nd or 3rd shift aren’t available when teachers are.”
- “Lack of free time during the day.”
- “Most parents also work multiple jobs and don’t have time to talk on the phone.”
- “Most parents work or have other children that prevents them from attending school functions.”

**Lack of parental attendance/involvement.** The last major barrier reported regarding communicating regularly with parents was a lack of parental attendance/involvement, which participants mentioned 10 times in the online survey. Participants stated:

- “We find that some parents will set up meetings and repeatedly cancel or not show up.”
- “Parents don’t show up to open houses or parent teacher conferences.”
- “Poor parent attendance at meetings.”
- “Lack of parent involvement.”
• “Parents not being involved in child’s education.

**Question 33: Who in your building takes responsibility for school climate efforts?**

Table 36 shows frequencies for codes that developed from responses to online survey Question 33 regarding who in participants’ buildings takes responsibility for school climate efforts. Question 33 sought to understand whether there were any existing barriers in terms of leadership concerning school climate efforts. This subsection discusses the results for code frequencies of 10 or more.

Table 36

*Code Frequencies for Question 33*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency (f)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative support, visibility</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School community</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School program, committee</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher efforts</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff support</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students leadership, voice</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community resources</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 36, five areas stand out, recording a 10 or higher response rate: (a) administrative support and visibility, (b) school community, (c) school program or committee, (d) teacher efforts, and (e) staff support.

*Administrative support and visibility.* When responding to open-response online survey Question 33, participants indicated 36 times that various building administrators supported and visibly lead school climate efforts. These administrators included:

• “The principal.”

• “Admin. and leadership team.”
• “Principal leads.”
• “Administration.”
• “Principal and Assistant Principals.”
• “Our principal is responsible for our school climate.”

School community. Participants also reported 31 times that the school community took responsibility for school climate efforts. In the following, many participants stated that no one person was solely responsible for such efforts:

• “Everyone.”
• “We all do.”
• “All staff members.”
• “The entire school.”
• “Everyone is responsible. Administration sets the tone, but all are involved in creating a positive climate. It is top down and bottom up.”

School program or committee. Participants also reported 22 times that school climate efforts comprised a school program or committee. The following programs or committees were indicated:

• “PBIS committee.”
• “PBIS leaders, culture and climate committee.”
• “PBIS team.”
• “Our ‘School Climate’ team.”
• “A committee that includes admin, social workers, school counselors, and teachers.”
• “Cheer committee, discipline committee.”
• “We have a school climate committee comprised of faculty and other staff members.”
Teacher efforts. Teacher efforts were also indicated 12 times as a means of taking responsibility for school climate efforts. Some reports said:

- “Teachers.”
- “To the best of their ability, teachers take responsibility for school climate efforts.”
- “Lead teacher/theme coach.”

Staff support. Lastly, participants perceived staff support as responsible for school climate efforts 10 times, including the following individuals:

- “Social worker.”
- “Family resource.”
- “The ELL Coach.”
- “Principal, dean, teachers, social workers, and behavior tech.”
- “Reflection Room personnel, paras, teachers, social workers, administration, parents, community members.”

Delineation of Findings for Research Question 3

This section delineates the major findings for Research Question 3: To what degree do teachers believe that creating positive student-learning climates is important to principals? Likert scale weighted averages and code frequencies that emerged for the third category, Barriers that Exist, informed these findings. Major findings are communicated as significant themes, and they include the subcategories that emerged from the coding process: (a) low student morale, (b) too many initiatives with little funding and support, and (c) parental communication barriers.

Finding 9: Low student morale creates barriers that can negatively impact school climate. Positive student morale has links to improved student outcomes, and it fosters a
positive school climate (DeWitt & Slade, 2014). For online survey Statement 25— Student morale is perceived as high among faculty members—44 participants stated they agree (38) or strongly agree (6) that this is the case or, in other words, 38%. Further, 8 out of 10 follow-up interview participants perceived student morale as low.

In response to follow-up interview Question 8—How has your school climate affected student morale? Staff morale?—Donna stated, “The morale is appalling.… Kids who lost hope gang bang. There’s thug behavior to survive. They’re not happy. They’re sad, needy.”

For the same question, Laura said, “I’d give the student morale a ‘C.’ They’re moving along. They lack school connections. They need more connections. There are no competitive sports. There’s not a lot of outpouring of people rooting for robotics.”

In terms of how staff turnover impacts student morale, Evan reported for the same question:

New teachers leave in the first 3 years. This leaves stability problems… In the past 6 years, 20 staff members have left. The entire 7th and 8th grade team left in one year. There have been two new social workers and three new principals.

Additionally, Michelle stated also for Question 8, “I would say, you know, by rating morale on a 0 to 100 right now, our school would be probably in the 60s…. We deal with a population that has never really been very successful in school.”

Turnover issues, lack of school connections, and students with social-emotional or academic difficulties contributed to low student morale, which consequently created barriers that negatively impacted the student-learning climate.

**Finding 10: Too many initiatives with little to no support create barriers to successful implementation efforts.** Teachers also perceived there were too many initiatives
with little or no support. When responding to online survey Statement 26—Your school is asked to implement too many initiatives at once with little support and/or resources—participants stated that they agree (36) or strongly agree (40), totaling 76 or, in other words, nearly 70%.

Teachers reported initiatives regarding academic programs for Research Question 2 that support students predominately in reading and math and where concerns arose regarding budgets and staff. For Research Question 3, participants reported 22 times for Question 33—Who in your building takes responsibility for school climate efforts?—that there were school programs, committees, to support students’ social-emotional, physical, and cognitive/academic needs, but they also reported 21 times for the same question that the school community takes responsibility for such efforts, not solely principals.

A teacher reported for Question 33, “We have a school climate committee comprised of faculty and other staff members.”

Another teacher reported for the same question, “Everyone is responsible. Administration sets the tone, but all are involved in creating a positive climate. It is top down and bottom up.”

During the follow-up interview in response to Question 6—Who is responsible for school climate efforts in your school? How does your principal facilitate school climate efforts and responsibility?—Donna said, “There’s PBIS in the middle and high school. [However,] the principal is not around because she runs a certified IB program in the middle school.”

In response to the same follow-up question, Brenda stated, “The administrators do not do it, so teachers do. The principal is not visible. Administrators are bogged down with observations instead of school climate.”
Although participants perceived that principals led school climate efforts, teachers reported that facilitation of such efforts took place through school programs or committees run by teachers and other staff members, due to other competing commitments that created barriers for more extensive involvement.

**Finding 11: Communication barriers inhibit the ability for teachers to develop collaborative efforts with parents.** Research has indicated that parental involvement can positively impact student outcomes (Bryk et al., 2010; Dunar, 2016; Epstein, 1997; Ice et al., 2015). However, in participants’ settings, teachers reported having difficulty when trying to communicate regularity with parents, creating barriers for student success. Although they made efforts to increase parental attendance and involvement at school related events, hectic work schedules, multiple jobs, and childcare issues were also factors contributing to a lack of attendance and involvement in school related activities. More specifically, the barriers for Finding 11 were (a) lack of parental contact information, (b) language and/or cultural barriers, (c) lack of parental responsibility, (d) lack of parental availability, and (e) lack of parental attendance, involvement.

**Lack of parental contact information.** When responding to online survey Question 32—Describe any barriers that may exist when trying to communicate regularly with parents/guardians—teachers reported parents’ lack of contact information 63 times. This included a lack of reliable contact information to communicate by email or by phone.

For Question 32, a teacher reported, “Records aren’t regularly updated, so phone numbers don’t work, emails are invalid, etc.”

Another teacher stated for the same question, “Transient populations, frequently changing addresses and phone numbers.”
During the follow-up interview for Question 1—Describe your current school climate situation? Are there areas that need improvement? Are there areas that are going well?—Dan stated, “It’s a transient community. We have kids from Puerto Rico because of Hurricane Maria. It’s tumultuous.”

It is evident that issues around having the correct contact information or having updated contact information in the school’s data-keeping system created barriers to fostering a positive student-learning climate.

**Language and/or cultural barriers.** Participants mentioned language and cultural barriers when trying to communicate with parents. For online survey Question 32, participants referred to language and cultural barriers to communication with parents 30 times. They reported that many of the students came from Spanish-speaking homes or were bilingual. For example, for Question 32 from the online survey, a teacher reported:

Language is the first common barrier, as about 1/3 of our students are English learners, and more parents than students are not fluent in English. While we have an incredible staff, including several who are bilingual, it can make regular communication difficult.

Some perceived the school’s Language Line as underutilized, when trying to communicate with parents. A teacher stated for Question 32, “Teachers do not regularly use [the] Language Line to communicate with non-English speaking families.”

During the follow-up interview in response to Question 1—Describe your current school climate situation? Are there areas that need improvement? Are there areas that are going well? Explain.—Christopher explained how his school is grappling with the diverse cultures within one city:
Within the urban culture, there’s so many subcultures. In [X city], you have West Indian Caribbean subculture. You have Puerto Rican subculture. You have South American Hispanic subculture. It’s not like I can say it’s all one culture, except that it’s cultural of the city…. So one of the things we did was create that new position, you know, the Parent Family Engagement Specialist. And yes, we have two. That’s one, and the other one is the Family Outreach Coordinator.

The diversity of the city made for regular communication with non-native English-speaking families more challenging, which created barriers to fostering a positive student-learning climate.

*Lack of parental responsibility.* Also, for online survey Question 32, participants reported a lack of parental responsibility 27 times. Teachers stated that their phone calls and emails did not always receive replies.

A teacher reported for Question 32, “Many parents don’t want to help or be bothered, as [it] is related to the child. That is [a] school responsibility.”

In response to follow-up interview Question 2—Is your school welcoming to all stakeholders, such as students, parents, and community members?—Timothy stated,

So, one thing we’re doing differently this year and I’m not sure how it all is working out but we’re making a ton of personal outreach phone calls. We actually hired two people to just randomly call parents to try to build a little bit more connections. But the calls that have been made, a lot of them have gone to emails and voicemails, and I don’t know how effective it is.

Evidence suggests that parents appeared apathetic when it came to their children’s schooling, as they ignored outreach attempts, which created barriers to fostering positive student-
learning climates. For example, also in response to Question 2 from the follow-up interview, Christopher reported:

Some parents have … said, “I don’t even answer calls from your school anymore cause you either only call me when my kid’s in trouble,” or it’s almost like a boy who cried wolf that they’ve been so trained throughout their kid’s educational career to think that [a] phone call or outreach from a school is always negative. That when we try to do it for a positive thing, they feel like it’s like we’re tricking them to get them there, and then we’re going to tell them something bad about their kid.

Evidence also suggests that parents may have assumed the worst when school personnel attempted outreach, due to past negative experiences, which may have contributed to ignored communication attempts.

**Lack of parental availability.** Lack of parental availability also created issues when communicating with parents or developing any school-level collaboration efforts.

A participant said in response to online survey Question 32, “Parents who work 2nd or 3rd shift aren’t available when teachers are.”

A lack of availability was also reported as due to parents having other children to care for. Another teacher said for the same question, “Most parents work or have other children [which] prevents them from attending school functions.”

Timothy also reported the following, in response to follow-up interview Question 2:

[A] lot of the urban families are working two jobs, or they have other things going on and they just don’t come in … so we’re really, really trying to increase parent involvement. It’s one of our goals this year.
Barriers appeared to exist when attempts were made to foster a positive student-learning climate, in terms of parents’ availability to visit the school. They were reported as unavailable, due to working multiple jobs, working second or third shift, or caring for other children.

**Lack of parental attendance or involvement.** There were 10 reports for online survey Question 32 for lack of parental attendance and involvement at such things as parent-teacher conferences, meetings, and school events. Teachers noted that parents would schedule conferences or meetings and then need to reschedule.

A teacher reported for Question 32, “We find that some parents will set up meetings and repeatedly cancel or not show up or cancel.”

For follow-up interview Question 4—Are students and families involved in educational decisions, such as with curricula development?—Michelle said, “Parents, we will ask for involvement in terms of, you know, ‘What do you kids like to do?’ We have a lot of parents who are just completely disinterested.”

In addition to a lack of availability, parents often needed to cancel or reschedule, or they were disinterested in becoming involved with their child’s school life, which contributed to barriers in fostering a positive student-learning climate.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter Four presented demographic data, discussed results from the two phases of the study according to the three research questions, and delineated 11 findings. The use of tables for questions provided a detailed data presentation, which led to analyses and findings.

Data were collected through Phase I of the study, which included a pilot study with five teacher volunteers and an online survey sent to one district. Participant follow-up interviews encompassed Phase II of the study. Data were collected from the online survey and follow-up
interviews. Descriptive data were presented from participants’ lived experiences with the phenomenon of the student-learning climate. Codes were then organized into three major categories: (a) Importance to Principals, (b) Supports from Principals, and (c) Barriers that Exist, with qualitative results presented according to the three guiding questions.

The data indicated that 118 educators completed the survey and 115 were eligible to participate in the study. Forty-one middle school teachers, 71 high school teachers, and 3 middle school and high school teachers participated in Phase I of the online survey. There were 47 teachers who volunteered to participate in follow-up interviews, and 10 were selected based on thoughtfulness given to survey responses and range of experiences both in years and areas of certification. Five of the follow-up interview participants worked in the middle school setting, and five worked in the high school setting.

Research Question 1 sought to uncover what teachers perceived urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, principals placed importance on or valued. The responses indicated that the majority of principals valued a positive student-learning climate and communicated this importance to the school community verbally, in writing, or both. Principals also put forth efforts to support students’ social-emotional and physical needs, such as by incorporating school climate programs. Although school programs were reported in place to support students’ social-emotional and physical needs, improving positive student-to-student discourse was not perceived as a priority for principals. Further, creating opportunities for parents to have explicit input into the school’s instructional decisions, when it came developing curricula and related efforts, was not perceived as a priority for principals, as little to no opportunities, aside from an occasional survey, asked for parental input into such efforts. Research Question 1 led to four findings regarding teachers’ perceptions of what principals place importance on in this study: (a)
principals frequently communicate the importance of a positive student-learning climate, (b) principals highly value supporting students’ social-emotional and physical needs, (c) more can be done by principals to improve day-to-day conversations among students, which are not always respectful, and (d) more can be done by principals to include feedback and input from parents and/or community members in instructional decisions for the school.

Research Question 2 sought to uncover the supports teachers perceived they needed from principals to foster positive student-learning climates in urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings. The responses indicated that teachers would feel more support if student discipline was dealt with consistently and fairly. Teachers also felt that such supports would promote student accountability and responsibility. Further, teachers perceived that developing conditions for parental involvement, such as offering incentives to attend school events, would support their classroom efforts. A preponderance of evidence suggests that parental involvement was lacking, especially for urban families living nearby to the school. Moreover, teachers reported that they were encouraged to engage students in real-world learning experiences, but these efforts would be better supported with improved funding, due to the large number of struggling students needing academic support. Students with academic deficits were reported as being several years below grade level, and supporting their improvement academically posed more challenges when it came to needing additional staff members and resources. Lastly, teachers reported that they felt supported, and that they perceived students felt supported, through frequent and meaningful recognition efforts done by administration. The study indicated that existing recognition efforts were infrequent and that developing conditions for public recognition efforts were desirable, especially for students. Research Question 2 led to four findings regarding teachers’ perceptions of supports needed from principals in this study: (a) in ways student misbehavior is addressed,
teachers desire consistent follow-through and increases in student accountability and responsibility, (b) parental involvement can be improved to better support teacher efforts, (c) budget constraints and the number of struggling students make it difficult to engage students in real-world learning opportunities, and (d) effective staff and student recognition efforts are appreciated and desired.

Research Question 3 sought to identify the barriers teachers perceived as inhibiting principals from developing positive student-learning climates in urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings. Student morale was consistently perceived as low by teachers. Factors relating to difficult home life conditions appeared to contribute to low student morale as well as issues around student engagement, such as a lack of sports. Next, teachers reported on the many cognitive and social-emotional initiatives in place to support struggling students, but due to the high demands already placed on school principals, teachers often led related school climate efforts associated with a school program or committee, such as PBIS. Lastly, there were a number of factors that impeded communication with parents. They included lack of contact information on file for parents, incorrect information on file, or information not available due to lack of phone or email use. There were language and/or cultural barriers to communicating with parents, where English was not the spoken language in the home. Parental apathy or lack of responsibility was also reported by teachers, who perceived that there were parents who did not take an interest in their child’s education. Moreover, lack of parental availability appeared to hinder communication with parents, due to hectic work schedules and children to care for, which also contributed to a lack of attendance and involvement in school activities, such as conferences. Research Question 3 led to three findings regarding teachers’ perceptions of barriers inhibiting the development of student-learning climates in this study: (a) low student
morale creates barriers that can negatively impact school climate, (b) too many initiatives with little to no support create barriers when it comes to successful implementation, and (c) communication barriers inhibit the ability for teachers to develop collaborative efforts with parents.

Chapter Five includes the (a) summary of the study, (b) discussion of the 11 findings, (c) possible research topics stemming from this study, and (d) final reflections.
CHAPTER FIVE: STUDY SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND FINAL REFLECTIONS

Introduction

When I first began teaching 18 years ago at an alternative boys’ school, I learned the value of school climate and student engagement. In the small setting in which I taught, I quickly discovered, if my students were not engaged and did not value the learning, I might not survive my first year. I began to tailor my instruction to each student’s interests and instructional level. I further went on to complete my master’s research project on teaching exceptional students through Lev Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development, using my own students in my study. I learned early on that to develop a positive student-learning climate for adolescents, especially those who have been particularly unsuccessful in a traditional school setting, I had to uncover and tap into their interests and abilities in order to engage them in the learning process. Perhaps it had something to do with my learning about Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences theory in my teacher preparation program—a theory that has since lost some traction in the education realm—but it went further than that.

In addition to my attempts to tailor my instruction, I needed to find successful ways to manage student behavior. Having not had a classroom management course in my teacher preparation program, I felt ill-prepared for the dynamic challenges I found myself contending with in the classroom. The school in which I worked had a behavioral management system in place, but that alone did not prove enough to garner student interest. I needed to find creative ways to engage them in the process. Getting to know my students, personalizing and differentiating the learning, and creating ways in which they saw me as an ally who truly cared for their learning as well as their well-being became profitable.
When I moved on to teach English in a large, urban high school, I had experienced similar challenges, but I had a greater number of students to prepare for. Several years into my tenure at the school, I became a team member, coach, and, eventually, chair of the school’s PBIS/Safe School Climate Committee, where the behavioral management system and incentives were schoolwide. A behavioral program seemed very much necessary, since suspension rates were incredibly high in this setting. It became evident that students could benefit from clear expectations for positive behavior as well as the ability to earn incentives to make it all seem worthwhile.

Through my doctoral studies, I came to learn that programs like PBIS and character education can misguide practitioners into thinking that these programs alone can solve the behavioral and academic engagement problems necessary to improve student outcomes. Philosophically, on the surface, promoting positive behavior through these programs made successful implementation seem possible. I gained a better, much needed understanding of why these programs alone cannot produce the desired long-term, systemic results without collaboration and engagement from all stakeholders.

Schools need to engage students at a deeper, curricular level, where they see their experiences reflected in what they are learning, which requires involvement by and feedback from all stakeholders. Schools need to develop collaborative relationships with parents and community members who will work together to support and ensure student success. Furthermore, students need rich, rigorous, and supportive learning environments and experiences that will excite them and help them to see that what they are experiencing in school extends beyond the walls of the classroom. Students and their families need a voice in what learning should look like, and that is just not happening enough in schools.
The student-learning climate continues to be an area of concern for many school leaders, such as principals, who value the importance of fostering academic and social-emotional excellence for all students. Developing positive student-learning climates can lessen achievement gaps. However, to foster conditions for student success, school leaders need to uncover ways in which students feel supported and have learning experiences that are relevant to their lives. I have spent a good amount of time during my career wondering how I can ensure engagement, as opposed to compliance. And for those who were not compliant, I often questioned how I can ensure engagement so that students buy into what I am teaching and want to stay engaged in the learning process.

I was able to take my first experiences in the classroom and apply them to my practice in the years that followed as a teacher, teacher leader, administrator, and, even more so, with my work today as an educational leader in the largest urban high school in the state of Connecticut. I do not have all the answers on how best to foster positive student-learning climates and have since learned along the way that perhaps it is better for those around me to help answer those questions rather than just me.

Chapter Five begins with this personal introduction; then a summary of Chapters One through Four is presented. The Discussion section explains the findings of this study and how they were both interpreted and connected to comprehensive conclusions that have practical as well as theoretical implications in the field of education. There are also recommendations in the Future Research section, with regard to the study’s findings, delimitations, and limitations. Lastly, my personal takeaways and enduring understanding from this study are discussed in the Final Reflections section.
Study Summary

Chapter One introduced a study that investigated the importance of principals developing positive school and student-learning climates and, more specifically, how it contributed to new understandings of the student-learning climate for urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings.

I argued that school climate or “The character and quality of school life” (National School Climate Council, 2007, p. 5) greatly influences student outcomes. Teachers’ perceptions regarding the principal’s capacity to develop and improve school and the student-learning climates, specifically, can provide much insight. This study provided an examination and analysis of the priorities, supports, and challenges that urban educators face—teachers and principals alike—when attempting to improve student-learning climate efforts.

I argued further that positive student-learning climates contribute to improved student outcomes, which have significant implications for leaders in urban settings. There are significant gaps in achievement among the state’s urban, underrepresented student populations, when compared to their White, suburban, and rural counterparts. Uncovering ways to close learning gaps is vital to improving outcomes for students who struggle academically, socially, and emotionally.

In the state of Connecticut, 33 urban public-school districts have been identified as underperforming Alliance Districts and in need of improvement (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2018a; Moran, 2017, p. 1). School climate efforts and programs, such as developing safe school climate committees and related programs, have been sought to combat the academic and behavioral needs in these settings.
In this study, the research questions have revealed teachers’ perceptions regarding the principal’s capacity to facilitate positive student-learning climates within their settings. The study sought to identify ways in which teachers perceived that school leaders, such as principals, placed importance on school climate efforts that directly have an impact on classroom behaviors and conditions. The study also sought to identify and understand the supports that teachers perceived were necessary for them to build positive student-learning climates successfully within their classroom settings. Moreover, the study sought to identify the barriers that teachers perceived as inhibiting the building of positive student-learning climates within their settings.

Three research questions guided this study:

1. To what degree do teachers believe that creating positive student-learning climates is important to principals?
2. What do teachers report are the various ways principals can support positive student-learning climates?
3. What do teachers report are inhibiting principals from building positive student-learning climates?

Chapter Two presented a review of literature on school climate and the student-learning climate specifically. The literature included the historical development and understandings of school climate over time, as it relates to influencing student motivation and outcomes. Definitions, domains, and dimensions as frameworks for school climate efforts were also presented. The review argued that positive student outcomes can be best supported through collaborative efforts by district leaders (e.g., principals) with community stakeholders. This literature also included state of Connecticut policy around school climate efforts and approaches. Moreover, it presented the supports and barriers to developing school and student-learning
climates that are inclusive and engaging, where students are socially, emotionally, and cognitively safe and where they find their experiences in school meaningful.

Chapter Three described the rationale for choosing a phenomenological research approach to conduct the study. First, participants were surveyed, and then follow-up interviews were conducted to saturate the results of the survey. The phenomenological research approach was chosen to capture the lived experiences of teachers about the phenomenon of the student-learning climate in urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings. Survey questions were organized to align with each research question.

Chapter Four presented and analyzed data from the surveys and interviews. The codes, major categories, and themes resulted in 11 findings from this study:

Finding 1: Principals frequently communicate the importance of a positive student-learning climate.

Finding 2: Principals highly value supporting students’ social-emotional and physical needs.

Finding 3: More can be done by principals to improve day-to-day conversations among students, which are not always respectful.

Finding 4: More can be done by principals to include feedback and input from parents and/or community members in instructional decisions for the school.

Finding 5: In ways student misbehavior is addressed, teachers desire consistent follow-through and increases in student accountability and responsibility.

Finding 6: Parental involvement can be improved to better support teacher efforts.

Finding 7: Budget constraints and the number of struggling students make it difficult to engage students in real-world learning opportunities.
Finding 8: Effective staff and student recognition efforts are appreciated and desired.

Finding 9: Low student morale creates barriers that can negatively impact school climate.

Finding 10: Too many initiatives with little to no support create barriers when it comes to successful implementation.

Finding 11: Communication barriers inhibit the ability for teachers to develop collaborative efforts with parents.

The next section discusses the implications of these findings for educational leaders, policymakers, and future researchers. It also suggests ways to apply and build upon these findings.

Discussion

As this dissertation presents, the principal holds a key position within his or her setting, when it comes to fostering and developing supportive, positive school climates and the student-learning climate respectively. In Connecticut urban school settings, where there is an urgent need to close achievement gaps, developing positive student-learning climates poses challenges for teachers and school leaders. Demands to close these gaps and challenges to uncover the ways and means to do so, often with few resources, compounds the problem. In my experience, even the most well-intended initiatives and approaches—with the most talented and experienced staff—do not always produce the kind of results desired. The delineation of the 11 findings informs and supports this important work. Findings were based on Likert scale weighted averages from the online survey and on narrative reports from open-ended questions and the interview protocol. Each finding entails a discussion of practical and theoretical implications.
Discussion of Finding 1: Principals Frequently Communicate the Importance of a Positive Student-Learning Climate

The results presented and analyzed in Chapter Four indicate that principals frequently communicate the importance of a positive student-learning climate in urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings.

**Practical implications.** For Finding 1, the majority of teachers who participated in this study reported that principals communicate the importance of a positive student-learning climate, using both verbal and written communication methods. Teachers reported that principals communicated the importance of a positive student-learning climate in writing such as emails, newsletters, posters, handbooks, and mission statements. They also reported that principals communicated the importance of a positive student-learning climate verbally, such as at staff meetings, at assemblies, at professional development, and in announcements. The majority of teachers also reported that school climate efforts are a component of their school improvement plans and part of their school’s vision, mission, values, and/or beliefs. Evidence from these findings suggests that principals can effectively use these methods to communicate the importance of positive student-learning climates within their settings.

The results may have been indicative of the fact that all Connecticut schools are required, according to Section 10-222(d) of the Connecticut General Assembly and the District Board of Education’s Regulation Section 5131.911, to have school climate as part of their school improvement plans and to have safe school climate committees within their buildings (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014). It seems as if schools in the district selected for this study are following these mandates and communicating the importance of a positive student-learning climate within their settings.
Theoretical implications. In terms of theoretical implications, as Chapter Four has stated, Kotter (2012) argued that to transform an organization, communication of messages, such as the organization’s mission, should be done using a variety of written and verbal means and repeatedly (pp. 95-96). In terms of Kotter’s research and this study, principals who want to communicate the importance of a positive student-learning climate will need to consider the most effective use and frequency of verbal and written messages. They may also want to consider embedding these messages in their schools’ mission, vision, values, and beliefs, as well as in improvement plans. Principals will want to ensure that their communication methods produce a clear vision (National School Climate Center, 2017), with consistent messages around the organization’s student-learning climate efforts.

Principals may also want to consider relevant and innovative practices that promote and communicate a positive student-learning climate within their school communities. The use of social media has grown in popularity, as an effective form of communication by district and school leaders, and it is another method by which principals can communicate with stakeholders (Cox & McLeod, 2014). Research in this study also suggests that promoting positive happenings, such as rewards and recognitions, to the school community can foster and support a positive school climate (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014; Jones & Shindler, 2016). In my current setting, the superintendent, principal, clubs, sports, and groups often use Twitter as a way to promote positive happenings within the school community. Finding relevant ways to communicate with stakeholders, such as with the use of social media like Twitter and Facebook, can help to support student-learning climate improvement efforts.
Discussion of Finding 2: Principals Highly Value Supporting Students’ Social-Emotional and Physical Needs

Results presented and analyzed in Chapter Four indicate that principals highly value supporting students’ social-emotional and physical needs in their urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings.

**Practical implications.** Finding 2 indicates that the majority of teachers in this study reported that principals highly value supporting students’ social-emotional and physical development and safety needs through school programs and committees, staff supports, adult-student relationships, and sense of belonging/connectedness. Many teachers reported that their schools use PBIS, restorative practices, committees on school climate, character development, Ambassador programs, and Allies programs, to support students’ social-emotional and physical development. Adult-student relationships were also reported as a means to support students’ social-emotional development, with students having at least one adult to talk to when there is a problem, which included social workers, behavior specialists or technicians, resource offices, or through advisory periods. Since underperforming districts must adopt programs that can help to improve student outcomes and thus students’ social-emotional and physical development, many principals may wonder which ones can produce the most significant gains. School leaders, such as principals, may want to look at the results for Finding 2 for ways in which to foster improvements within their own organizations.

**Theoretical implications.** Finding 2 aligns with the research that suggests that programs such as PBIS (Cohen et al., 2009), restorative practices (Costello et al., 2009), and character education (Cohen et al., 2009; Dunar, 2016) support students’ social-emotional and physical development, by creating safe environments that promote prosocial behaviors. This also aligns
with the National School Climate Center’s (2017) 13 domains that can act as a framework for schools to support school climate efforts and positive outcomes concerning students’ social-emotional and physical development (Cohen, 2017, p. 3; Melnick et al., 2017, p. 6). The first three dimensions fall under the category of safety, namely “Rules and Norms,” “Sense of Physical Security,” and “Sense of Social-emotional Security” (Cohen, 2017, p. 3; Melnick et al., 2017, p. 6). The third category, interpersonal relationships, includes the seventh dimension, “Social Support–Adults” (Cohen, 2017, p. 3; Melnick et al., 2017, p. 6). Moreover, the fourth category, institutional environment, includes the ninth dimension, “School Connectedness/Engagement” (Cohen, 2017, p. 3; Melnick et al., 2017, p. 6). Evidence suggests that each dimension elucidates the need to support students’ social-emotional and physical well-being through safety, adult-student relationships, and connectedness, in order to foster positive student-learning climates (Cohen, 2017, p. 3; Melnick et al., 2017, p. 6). Research also suggests that investing resources in relation to these dimensions can help to support improved student outcomes and a positive student-learning climate.

Discussion of Finding 3: More Can Be Done by Principals to Improve Day-to-Day Conversations Among Students, Which Are Not Always Respectful

Results presented and analyzed in Chapter Four indicate that more can be done by principals in urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings to improve day-to-day conversations among students, which are not always respectful.

Practical implications. Results for Finding 3 indicate that in this study more can be done by principals to improve the day-to-day conversations among students, as conversations are not always respectful. The evidence indicated that a number of concerns stemmed from students’ conversations due to hurtful comments said online. For example, during the follow-up
interview, a participant from this study, Christopher, stated, “Most of the fights are because of social media cell phone use.” He further reported, “Most of the kids who run out of my room crying is because of something they read on Instagram or Snapchat while in class.” Moreover, Christopher suggested, “If we had a blocker or you have to put your phone in your locker policy, I really think that the learning culture, and the socio-emotional health and well-being, and the overall climate … would be so much better.” The National School Climate Center’s (2017) 11th dimension for supporting positive school climates includes Social Media use, where, according to the indicator, “Students feel safe from physical harm, verbal abuse/teasing, gossip, and exclusion when online or on electronic devices (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, other social media platforms, by an email, text messaging, posting photo/video, etc.)” (Cohen, 2017, p. 3; Melnick et al., 2017, p. 6). Principals wanting to improve conversations—and interactions in general—among students can research ways to combat the negative use of social media that disrupts the teaching and learning process. This may include lessons teachers deliver through a school program on how to use social media more responsibly.

**Theoretical implications.** Although evidence indicated that the majority of teachers reported zero tolerance for bullying, disrespectful conversations among students often occurred online, and they appeared to contribute to negative student-to-student discourse and a disruption to the learning process. Research suggests that positive school climates contribute to fewer instances of bullying-type behaviors (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; Connolly & Corcoran, 2016; Goldweber et al., 2013; Low & van Ryzin, 2014; Orpinas & Horne, 2006; Sadlier, 2011), which can also include bullying through social media. The U.S. Department of Education’s (2018) *Connecticut Compilation of School Discipline Laws and Regulations* defines online behaviors as they apply to issues around bullying to include, “the repeated use by one or more students of a
written, oral or electronic communication, such as cyberbullying, directed at or referring to another student attending school in the same school district” (p. 38). Although these conversations did not appear to constitute bullying within the laws and regulations, due to the negative impact they can have on the student-learning climate, principals can consider developing their own discipline policies on electronic use within the confines of the classroom.

**Discussion of Finding 4: More Can Be Done by Principals to Include Feedback and Input from Parents and/or Community Members in Instructional Decisions for the School**

Results presented and analyzed in Chapter Four indicate that more can be done by principals to include feedback and input from parents and/or community members in instructional decisions for the school in urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings.

**Practical implications.** For Finding 4, evidence from the study’s online survey and follow-up interviews suggest that schools do not solicited input from parents and/or community members around instructional and curricular decisions. Teachers reported that aside from the occasional survey, parents and/or community members did not receive the opportunity to provide feedback or input regarding curricular decisions. Teachers reported that they often made instructional decisions about their students by asking themselves how they can make their instruction better or by getting input from their students. Bryk et al. (2010) contended that to make learning relevant to students, it must reflect their lives, interests, and needs, as well as those of their community, which ultimately promotes student engagement and improved student outcomes. The National School Climate Center (2010) developed five standards that support a positive school climate, and Standard 3 suggests creating opportunities to “enhance engagement in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities” (p. 3). Principals may want to ask themselves how they can develop and facilitate collaborative ways in which not only students and teachers,
but also parents and community members, can come together to determine the instructional needs of the school community. Moreover, principals may want to ask how what students learn in school can best reflect their experiences, community, and lives beyond the classroom walls, so that there is improved student engagement. Bryk et al. (2010) argued that students are more likely to participate in learning when they find the curriculum engaging (pp. 107-108), which requires input from all stakeholders. Perhaps the development of a curriculum night at the school or a curriculum committee consisting of students, teachers, parents, community members, and administrators is something for principals to explore. When I worked as an ELA Instructional Leader, we developed an Innovation Night to share our expertise around some of the technology we were using in the classroom and to elicit expertise from the community. Principals may want to consider providing parents and community members with opportunities to come into the school to share their expertise through presentations and in lessons.

**Theoretical implications.** As stated in the review of literature, research suggests that school climate improvement efforts require involvement and collaboration all by stakeholders, such as parents and community members (Bryk et al., 2010; Di Lullo, 2004; Dunar, 2016; Epstein, 1997; Ice et al., 2015). Moreover, if principals are interested in developing positive student-learning climates, they will want to uncover ways to develop curriculum that is meaningful, engaging, and fosters positive discourse within classrooms; this, in turn, will support not only students’ cognitive development, but also their social-emotional development (Powell & Kalina, 2009; Vygotsky, 1962). To do this work, principals may want to consider ways to create the necessary structures and supports for student, parents, and community members to provide input, feedback, and expertise on the school’s instructional and curricular decisions. Research
suggests that principals should work with parents and community members as “co-learners and co-leaders” to develop positive school climates (Cohen & Thapa, 2017, p. 103).

**Discussion of Finding 5: In Ways Student Misbehavior Is Addressed, Teachers Desire Consistent Follow-Through and Increases in Student Accountability and Responsibility**

Results presented and analyzed in Chapter Four indicate that teachers desire consistent follow-through and increases in student accountability and responsibility, in ways student misbehavior is addressed in urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings.

**Practical implications.** For Finding 5, teachers reported in this study inconsistencies in follow-through and student accountability and responsibility when it came to administration dealing with student misbehavior. Some teachers reported a lack of accountability and responsibility for student behavior due to a lack of policy around attendance and cell phone use as well as inconsistencies when various administrative staff dealt with referrals. There were also reports of this finding negatively impacting the school climate and, ultimately, the student-learning climate, when it came to teaching and learning. Schoolwide behavioral management programs like PBIS align academic and behavioral expectations with the school’s core values and beliefs, which support positive school climates and student outcomes (Cohen et al., 2009; Hubbuch & Stucker, 2015). Principals who want to improve climates within their settings and who have adopted schoolwide school climate programs (or are interested in doing so) can examine how their school’s academic and behavioral expectations are impacting teaching and learning and whether there are any inconsistencies or improvements that can be made, such as around policy. They can assess progress by getting yearly feedback from all stakeholders, such as teachers, students, parents, and community members, through a school climate survey.
Theoretical implications. Research from this study’s review of the literature suggests that schools with negative school climates tend to have high discipline and absenteeism rates and lower achievement scores, especially with urban, underrepresented populations (Maxwell, 2016). To combat these issues, underperforming schools have adopted programs like PBIS and restorative practices to improve school climate and to develop positive student outcomes (Hubbuch & Stucker, 2015). Evidence suggests that principals who adopt these programs (or have already done so) may want to ensure clear expectations and policies for student behavior, with consistent consequences and rewards around said expectations and policies. When I was chair and coach of a PBIS program, for students to earn quarterly rewards and be eligible for additional incentives, they needed to meet predetermined attendance, academic, and behavioral expectations: have no more than two absences, pass all classes, and have no discipline referrals. Principals interested in improving the student-learning climate within their settings may want to consider how school climate programs with clear and consistent expectations can better support their work around student behavior and discipline. If schools have school climate programs already in place, principals may want to consider whether their current discipline policies and practices are supportive of classroom conditions that are conducive to teaching and learning.

Discussion of Finding 6: Parental Involvement Can Be Improved to Better Support Teacher Efforts

The results presented and analyzed in Chapter Four indicate that parental involvement can be improved to better support teacher efforts in urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings.

Practical implications. For Finding 6, teachers in this study reported an overall lack of parental involvement throughout the district, when it came to participation in school-related
events. Reports suggest that such parents involved were often suburban, more educated parents whose children attended magnet schools within the district. Urban parents living close by to the school often attended school events, such as conferences, less often. During the follow-up interview, Christopher reported:

The parents that have been more involved are often the suburban parents and not the urban parents who might live only a mile or two from our actual location. They seem to be always the most difficult ones to get to come into the building.

Although attendance from parents who lived more locally was lacking, there were some successes when there were incentives and accommodations to attend school events, such as food, prizes, and even childcare. To foster parental participation, principals may want to consider making their schools more welcoming (Cohen, 2017; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014; Perry, 1908). Principals may want to consider investing more resources around incentives and childcare, to create a more welcoming, supportive environment and to garner more involvement from parents who live locally. This will, in turn, create more opportunities for parents to work more closely with teachers on supporting positive student-learning climates and, ultimately, student outcomes.

**Theoretical implications.** Research from the review of literature has argued that parental involvement has links to positive student outcomes (Bryk et al., 2010; Di Lullo, 2004; Dunar, 2016; Epstein, 1997; Ice et al., 2015; Perry, 1908). Again, principals will want to identify the ways in which they can foster increases in parental involvement. The Connecticut State Department of Education (2014) asks that safe school climate committees have parental representation. One way to ensure parental involvement is to solicit parental representation as safe school climate committee members and to create opportunities for parents to assist in the
planning of schoolwide events where they can share their desires and their perceived needs of the community. This will also create opportunities to ensure that improvements to school climate efforts reflect said needs of the community (Bryk et al., 2010; Cohen et al., 2009). This will also foster the development of trusting and collaborative relationships with stakeholders, such as parents (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

Discussion of Finding 7: Budget Constraints and the Number of Struggling Students Make It Difficult to Engage Students in Real-World Learning Opportunities

The results presented and analyzed in Chapter Four indicate that budget constraints and the number of struggling students make it difficult to engage students in real-world learning opportunities in urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings.

Practical implications. Although evidence in this study suggests that teachers were encouraged to engage students in real-world learning opportunities, limited funds and the number of struggling students created barriers to doing so. Teachers reported being creative in how they gained and used funds or having compelling cases for administrators when wanting to fund innovative activities and experiences for their students. Teachers also reported that there were a number of struggling students who could be several years behind grade level, so supporting students’ cognitive needs while trying to engage them in real-world learning opportunities posed additional challenges. Principals may consider ways that they can support engagement efforts, while contending with struggling students and a lack of funding.

In my current setting, each English teacher received a Chromebook cart through a Low Performing Schools Bond Funding Grant from the Connecticut State Department of Education, which have been used improve student outcomes. Students now have more opportunities for personalized and differentiated learning experiences and can work in collaborative digital spaces
that can target learning deficits and promote student engagement. Principals and school leaders may want to consider seeking out available grants or encourage their staff to do so, which can support students’ cognitive development, while also providing students with real-world learning experiences.

**Theoretical implications.** Real-world learning provides students with opportunities to prepare for career and college, and they can further support student engagement, especially for marginalized students who have not experienced much success educationally (Bryk et al., 2010; National School Climate Center, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). As the review of the literature indicated, increases in student motivation and engagement have occurred when students view learning as inclusive and relevant to their lives (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; Cohen et al., 2009), which is necessary to close learning gaps. This is especially the case for vulnerable underserved and underrepresented populations (DeWitt & Slade, 2014; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009).

Research in the review of the literature has argued that there is a correlation between poor school climates and schools that serve students in underserved communities (Maxwell, 2016). School leaders, such as principals, can also consider advocating to policymakers the need to continue to make schools in underserved and underrepresented communities more equitable through increased Education Cost Sharing (ECS), a process whereby funding goes to underperforming districts to employ reform efforts that increase student outcomes (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2018a).

**Discussion of Finding 8: Effective Staff and Student Recognition Efforts Are Appreciated and Desired.**
The results presented and analyzed in Chapter Four indicate that effective staff and student recognition efforts are appreciated and desired in urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings.

**Practical implications.** For Finding 8, teachers reported in this study that they appreciated and desired more frequent and consistent staff and student recognition opportunities. They also reported that if there were recognition efforts in place, they usually occurred within the parameters of a PBIS program. The underlying premise of PBIS is to reinforce positive behaviors, aligned to the school’s core values and beliefs, using positive reinforcement techniques, which, in turn, work to support students both behaviorally and academically (Cohen et al., 2009; Hubbuch & Stucker, 2015). Teachers also receive recognition for modeling positive behaviors. Overall, teachers reported the desire for improved student and staff recognition efforts, due to inconsistencies with implementation across participants’ schools.

Although student recognition efforts happened more frequently than staff recognition efforts, participants made recommendations for improvement. When it came to student recognition, a teacher reported from the online survey that there were “Students of the week and Month and award assemblies a few times per year.” However, some teachers also reported that there were recognition efforts in place in the past but that they had stopped, due to student misbehavior at assemblies. Moreover, participants reported that rewards could improve, which would increase student motivation to attain them.

There were also some reports of staff recognition efforts. Participants stated that there were opportunities for Teacher of the Month or Teacher of the Year, and, in some instances, teachers received recognition at staff meetings. Regardless, there were reports of teachers
believing recognition of staff should occur more often or that such things as Teacher of the Month had occurred in the past but no longer.

Since Finding 8 suggests that the student-learning climate can improve with more consistent opportunities to share staff and student accomplishments publicly, principals may consider creating more opportunities to do so. If managing student behavior during assemblies is a concern, perhaps exploring conditions in which these assemblies can occur through programming is something to consider. Moreover, staff appeared to desire more instances of recognition beyond, for example, Teacher of the Month or Teacher of the Year. Instances where there were “shout-outs” from administration and colleagues at staff meetings and through email seemed appreciated. Creating opportunities for verbal and written praise for staff accomplishments can be something for principals to consider incorporating into practice more frequently.

**Theoretical implications.** Schoolwide behavioral management programs like PBIS serve to support student engagement (Horner et al., 2010; Sugai, 2013). Moreover, it is important for students to feel supported in an atmosphere that is meaningful to their lives and one in which they feel valued by educators, such as principals. With this in mind, school leaders, such as principals, may want to assess how effective chosen reward and recognition efforts are with regard to the student-learning climate and thus student outcomes. Since sanctions have been placed on underperforming schools in the state of Connecticut to improve student outcomes and essentially standardized test scores, principals may consider how they can get students to buy into reward and recognition programs chosen and the school’s core values and beliefs. One way to do this work is to ensure reliable feedback about school climate programming from stakeholders, such as students and staff. Since teachers work directly with students, they can
provide insights into the experiences students have with said programs. This will also provide teachers with the opportunity to share their perceptions of said program’s effectiveness. School climate committee members can work to ensure that all stakeholders have access to the school’s school climate survey and that actionable steps are made as necessary based on feedback and updated in improvement plans (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014).

**Discussion of Finding 9: Low Student Morale Creates Barriers That Can Negatively Impact School Climate**

The results presented and analyzed in Chapter Four indicate that low student morale creates barriers that can negatively impact school climate in urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings.

**Practical implications.** Evidence for Finding 9 in this study shows that only 44 participants from the online survey perceived the student morale as high within their settings. Moreover, during the follow-up interviews, 8 out of 10 responses perceived it as low. The results for Finding 9 suggests that the rates of staff turnover, the need for school connections among students, and the social-emotional and academic difficulties experienced overall by students contributed to low student morale and created barriers to developing positive student-learning climates, respectively.

To make improvements to student morale, principals can consider how best to support staff and students, as there was no single thing that impacted student morale but instead a combination of factors. The results suggest that the retention of staff could help improve student morale. Moreover, the results suggest that helping students to develop school connections, such as through clubs, sports, or groups could help improve student morale. Lastly, the results suggest that supporting students struggling socially, emotionally, and academically could also
help to improve student morale. The National School Climate Center’s (2017) ninth dimension of school climate, “School Connectedness-Engagement,” under the category of institutional environment, includes the indicator that there is “Positive identification with the school; norms for broad participation in school life for students, staff, and families” (Cohen, 2017, p. 3; Melnick et al., 2017, p. 6). Principals can work to identify the factors and conditions that are inhibiting positive identification with the school and work to make corrective actions, with the ultimate goal of improving student morale and thus the student-learning climate.

**Theoretical implications.** Research from the review of the literature has argued that poor student outcomes have links to low student morale (van Eck et al., 2017) and that positive school climates have links to positive morale and improved student outcomes in terms of academics and behavior (National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments, 2017; DeWitt & Slade, 2014). Since school climate is an area with which all schools must contend, especially underperforming urban districts, principals may want to be cognizant of the ways to improve student morale. For example, schoolwide school climate programs serve to improve the morale of both staff and students (Cohen, 2014; Horner et al., 2010; Sugai, 2013). With this research in mind, principals can conduct program evaluations to determine the needs of the school and to develop action steps to ensure successful implementation.

**Discussion of Finding 10: Too Many Initiatives with Little to No Support Create Barriers When It Comes to Successful Implementation**

The results presented and analyzed in Chapter Four indicate that too many initiatives with little to no support create barriers when it comes to successful implementation in urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings.
**Practical implications.** For Finding 10, too many initiatives with little to no support created barriers to successful implementation in this study. Seventy-six participants, or 70%, indicated that there were too many initiatives with little to no support. A prominent example that arose for Research Question 3 was about leadership efforts when it came to school climate programs and committees. Although there was some evidence of administrative involvement in school climate efforts, as a teacher reported in the online survey—“Everyone is responsible. Administration sets the tone, but all are involved in creating a positive climate. It is top down and bottom up”—there were reports of that not always being the case. Evidence suggests that principals did not always lead school climate efforts, due to other responsibilities. Brenda stated during her follow-up interview that “The administrators do not do it, so teachers do. The principal is not visible. Administrators are bogged down with observations instead of school climate.” Evidence suggests that teachers and other staff members appeared to take responsibility for such efforts.

In a practical sense, developing positive school climates should be a collaborative process that involves all stakeholders (Cohen & Thapa, 2017; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014). Some programs aligned to school climate are top-down, but Cohen and Thapa (2017) argued that stakeholders should work together as “co-learners and co-leaders (under the leadership of the principal)” (p. 103). Evidence for Finding 10 suggests that not all stakeholders engaged in school climate efforts and that perhaps principals have removed themselves from leading these efforts, due to competing commitments, which created barriers to successful implementation. Principals may want to consider how they can create a culture in which school climate efforts are a collaborative, co-led process of which they are also a part.
Theoretical implications. As mentioned, although principals have theoretically led school climate efforts, research from the review of the literature argues that this work requires involvement from all stakeholders (Bryk et al., 2010; Cohen et al., 2009; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014; Di Lullo, 2004; Dunar, 2016; Epstein, 1997; Ice et al., 2015). Furthermore, research from the review of the literature has argued that improvement and sustainability efforts around school climate require trusting and collaborative relationships among stakeholders (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014). In order for stakeholders to work collaboratively, principals must establish this kind of relationship within the communities in which they serve. They must also be part of the school climate improvement process, to ensure implementation, to ensure buy-in, and, moreover, to serve as a professional capital resource as needed. Principals can consider ways in which they can support school climate efforts and, more specifically, student-learning climate efforts with increased fidelity, while also establishing trusting, collaborative relationships within the school community.

Discussion of Finding 11: Communication Barriers Inhibit the Ability for Teachers to Develop Collaborative Efforts with Parents

The results presented and analyzed in Chapter Four indicate that communication barriers inhibit the ability for teachers to develop collaborative efforts with parents in urban, secondary, Grades 7 through 12, settings.

Practical implications. For Finding 11, communication barriers in this study were reported as inhibiting teachers’ ability to develop collaborative efforts with parents. These barriers included lack of parental contact information, language and/or cultural barriers, lack of parental responsibility, lack of parental availability, and lack of parental attendance and
involvement. The lack of correct contact information and language and/or cultural barriers emerged as creating difficulty when teachers made communication attempts with the home. In order to foster a positive school climate and to engage participation from parents, the school should be welcoming (National School Climate Center, 2010; Perry, 1908), and it should show respect for diversity (National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments, 2017). Principals can consider how they can develop a system of record keeping that is up-to-date and accurate. These records can ensure correct email addresses and phone numbers as well as information about the spoken language in the home. Furthermore, principals can take advantage of Language Lines for translation services, so that phone calls home use parents’ native languages. Although there were various reasons why parents did not communicate effectively with the school, issues around effectively communicating with families from diverse backgrounds emerged.

**Theoretical implications.** The review of the literature has shown that parental involvement is integral to the student-learning climate improvement process (Bryk et al., 2010). Moreover, since research from the review of the literature has also argued that effective school climate efforts require collaboration with parents (Bryk et al., 2010; Cohen et al., 2009; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2014; Di Lullo, 2004; Dunar, 2016; Epstein, 1997; Ice et al., 2015), it is in the leadership’s best interest to limit the inhibiting factors and conditions that prevent parental communication and involvement. As with Finding 6—parental involvement can be improved to better support teacher efforts—uncovering effective ways to communicate and engage parents in trusting, collaborative efforts with the school can be at the forefront of improvement plans. Within the review of the literature, the National School Climate Center’s (2017) ninth dimension “School Connectedness-Engagement” argues that a positive
school climate supports “Positive identification with the school; norms for broad participation in school life for students, staff, and families” (Cohen, 2017, p. 3; Melnick et al., 2017, p. 6). Principals may want to consider how they can decrease school connectedness and engagement barriers for parents, so that they have increased positive identification with the school.

**Future Research**

What follows are five topics for future research proffered with regard to the study’s delimitations, limitations, and findings. The delimitations address the various settings that can be used in future research and perceptions that researchers can consider. Furthermore, the study’s limitations include a research method that can be employed for future research. And lastly, a significant future research topic emerged from the findings.

**Comparison Between Middle Schools and High Schools**

Possible grade level options emerged for future research from the delimitations. This study focused on students in Grades 7 through 12, and it considered both middle school and high school teachers’ perceptions together. A topic for future research can be a comparison between middle school (i.e., Grades 7 and 8) and high school (i.e., Grades 9 through 12) teachers’ perceptions of the principal’s capacity to facilitate positive student-learning climate in urban settings. Through this research, factors and conditions at the middle school and high school levels can be uncovered separately that impact student outcomes differently, such as social-emotional differences. Since students are at different stages of development at the middle school level compared to the high school level, differences in findings may emerge that researchers can explicitly separate out.

**Comparison Between Magnet Schools and Neighborhood Schools**
Possible setting options emerged from the delimitations for future research. One option can be a comparison between secondary teachers’ perceptions of the principal’s capacity to facilitate a positive student-learning climate in secondary urban magnet school settings and in secondary urban neighborhood school settings. Magnet schools in this study were organized by field of study, such as the arts or sciences, and students attended based on interest. This was not the case for neighborhood schools. Moreover, these schools differed in the percentage of students who attended based on race. Researching such differences can provide important insights about the factors and conditions that can help or hinder the development of positive student-learning climates.

**Principals’ Perceptions and Students’ Perceptions**

Perception options for future research emerged, due to the delimitation of this study by teachers’ perceptions. One option is to concentrate on researching principals’ perceptions of the student-learning climate in urban, secondary settings. Another option is to research the student-learning climate in urban, secondary settings using students’ perceptions. Any of the previously mentioned iterations (e.g., middle schools to high schools, magnet schools to neighborhood schools) are also usable with either principals’ or students’ perceptions.

Researching principals’ perceptions can provide information about their firsthand experiences with the topic. Since teachers’ perceptions of the principal’s capacity to facilitate positive student-learning climates is based on attitudes, belief, assumptions, and experiences within their settings, researching principals’ perceptions will enable the researcher to uncover information about their experiences that teachers or students might not know. Seeking honest and candid responses about principals’ leadership capacities is highly desirable. Communicating
participant anonymity, confidentiality, and the purpose of the study can help to ensure participants are comfortable enough to reflect honestly on their practice.

Student perceptions can also be useful when examining the student-learning climate in urban, secondary settings. This can allow the researcher to gain results solely from the purview of the student. Since students are the very subjects in which outcomes are affected by the student-learning climate, researchers can gain much insight from their experience on the factors and conditions that either support or inhibit improvements. Garnering the perceptions of students requires additional safeguards for minors when getting approval from the Institutional Review Board at any university; but if the researcher’s objective is to gain information about students’ experiences, it is worth the approval complexities. Nonetheless, as with any perception, especially that of students, they may not know what they do not know, so to speak, which researchers will need to take into consideration. For example, additional scaffolds, such as definitions for educational jargon, may need consideration.

Case Study Methodology

This phenomenological research study was limited by the timeframe it took to conduct. The case study method can also be an effective method for conducting a study on student-learning climates in urban settings albeit longer to conduct. Such an approach may entail repeated site visits to saturate findings through observations, interviews, and artifacts. Nonetheless, it can provide the researcher with the opportunity to narrow the study to “one bounded case” (Creswell, 2013, p. 99), perhaps with either a middle school or high school or both housed within one building.
Garnering Parent and Community Members’ Feedback About Instructional Decisions

An avenue for future research can include ways in which to create structures so that parents and community members can provide feedback and expertise with regard to decisions about curriculum and instruction. The findings from this study indicated that schools rarely, if ever, solicit feedback from parents and community members on instructional decisions. The research argues that this is a significant component for student engagement (Bryk et al., 2010), yet, it often does not occur. Identifying the practices to do this work more effectively can positively support student-learning climate efforts and student outcomes.

Since there was little evidence of parental and community engagement with respect to instructional decisions, I have identified possible action steps that can be used to improve upon this. The following five action steps can assist in garnering feedback and support from parents and community members about curricular and instructional decisions.

1. Elicit parental and community involvement on a school climate committee made up of all stakeholders. Or, in conjunction with parental and community involvement on a school climate committee, develop a subcommittee that focuses on student engagement as it applies to teaching and learning. This can ensure that parents and community members have a voice in decisions.

2. Through committee attendance, teachers and instructional leaders can share curricula and syllabi with attendees. This process will enable parents and community members to learn more about what teachers teach in school, ask questions, and provide feedback.

3. Have teachers communicate with parents and community members about upcoming units of instruction and related projects. Create opportunities for parents and
community members to come into the school to share their expertise around said units. Some schools have flex or advisory periods in which students can gain enrichment experiences; offer parents and community members the opportunity to come in and share their expertise during this time.

4. So that soliciting parental involvement is a positive experience, schools can showcase student work at a school event. Schools can then invite parents to see it. If attendance is still lacking, get permission to house it at an alternative location, such as a café, town hall, or church. Parents can then visit the site at a time convenient for them. Upon attendance, schools can ask parents to fill out a feedback form.

5. After a year of implementation, evaluate the effectiveness as a committee. During this process, ensure that there is representation from teachers, support staff, students, parents, and community members. Identify next steps in the process.

Researching the effectiveness of the preceding action steps can provide much insight into impactful ways to engage parents and community members about teaching and learning. What follows are my final reflections regarding this study.

**Final Reflections**

I have served as an educator in urban settings for the majority of my career, and the last six years as an educational leader, so the findings of this study held strong personal interest for me. My colleagues and I often contend with the need to improve the student-learning climate to improve student outcomes. I work with talented and dedicated faculty; often, however, we contemplate how we can narrow the achievement gap so that all students can become career and college ready and have the 21st-century skills necessary to compete in a global society. In particular, as members of the school’s leadership team, we continually ask ourselves: What can
we do better to improve student outcomes across the school and for courses in the English department? Much of this work requires meeting the varying social-emotional and cognitive needs of all learners. That work can become a complex process, especially when class sizes extend upwards of 30 students and prep time just does not seem like enough to plan for it all. Nonetheless, my commitment to working in underperforming schools has punctuated a desire to make the “playing field” more equitable for all students, so that they can have access to the same high-quality learning experiences as their suburban and rural counterparts.

Since teachers are at the front lines every day working with students, unpacking and unveiling their perceptions about the development of positive student-learning climates led to findings that other educators, researchers, and policymakers may not have considered. This study also provided insights about what teachers perceived principals as doing or not doing to facilitate and improve student-learning climates. Moreover, since the schools in this study must have school climate efforts as part of their school improvement plans, further insights were gleaned about fidelity of practice and the effectiveness of efforts on student outcomes. I hope that what I learned from this study’s findings can provide new insights and specific understandings to the field of educational leadership—insights that educators, researchers, and policymakers can use to make improved and informed decisions about leadership practices.

It is evident that principals in this study frequently communicate the importance of a positive student-learning climate within the school, but new insights may be available about expanded efforts to reach the diverse needs of the school community. Evidence from this study suggests that principals often communicate a positive student-learning climate, both in writing and verbally. However, principals may also want to consider the use of social media, which was not reported in the study’s findings. Moreover, evidence suggests that communication barriers
exist when English is not the spoken language in the home. Principals can lessen communication barriers by consistently using translation services when making phone calls home and in translating written materials on district or school websites, sent through email, or posted on social media. School leaders can create conditions for increased parental engagement for all families through communication that reflects the diverse needs of the urban settings they serve.

Since findings from this study also suggest that schools rarely solicit feedback from parents and community members concerning instructional decisions, new insights can be found about lessening communication barriers and creating collaborative opportunities to seek feedback. Educational leaders need to be smart in the ways they garner feedback from parents and community members. Such efforts by leaders involve not only ensuring effective and appropriate translation services but also cognizance regarding competing commitments. Parental and community involvement can be a challenge in urban districts due to socioeconomic factors, such as job commitments or childcare. These factors can interfere with parental or community member attendance at school-related events. Offering incentives, such as food or childcare, are ideas to explore. Improving the student-learning climate requires the need for transparency about instructional decisions, so that what teachers teach in school is meaningful and reflects the diversity of the students and their communities. Finding avenues to engage families more effectively requires educators to be reflective and creative practitioners who can reframe their current situations and “think outside of the box.”

This study shows that principals highly value supporting student’ social-emotional and physical development through adult-student relationships and programming. New insights, however, can be gleaned about improving student-to-student discourse. School climate programs, such as PBIS and restorative practices, are often used to teach prosocial behaviors.
Furthermore, advisory periods can be a means by which students develop relationships with staff. However, more emphasis can be placed on how these programs can improve issues among students stemming from hurtful discourse. Issues reported about social media occurred when negative comments about students were posted online, negatively impacting the student-learning climate. Additionally, there were reports that student behaviors did not constitute bullying, but they caused disruption. Lessening issues related to negative student-to-student exchanges can support increases in student accountability and responsibility, and it can improve morale.

New insights can also be garnered about ways to improve student accountability, increase responsibility for behavior, and employ recognition opportunities that positively impact student morale. Participants perceived the ways misbehavior was handled as an area of concern, especially when it came to lack of policies about cell phone use and attendance. Collaboratively developing consistent discipline policies with regard to these areas of concern can help to build a positive school environment. School climate programs can also reinforce positive behaviors through recognition efforts, which were also reported as appreciated and desired. With more accountability for student misbehavior and increases in recognition efforts, student motivation and morale can improve. It is possible to reduce the barriers to learning that low student morale creates through consistent policies concerning student misbehavior and consistent recognition efforts that celebrate student successes.

Budget constraints, struggling students, and initiatives with little to no support, were concerns reported by teachers. New insights can be gleaned about how better to address improvement work. Whether it is engaging students in real-world learning opportunities or supporting school climate programs such as PBIS or restorative practices, tapping into the professional, social, and human capital of the school community can help to support these
efforts. It is important for principals to lead these efforts, but they cannot do this work in isolation; they need to engage teachers as partners. Principals also need support from stakeholders within the school community to ensure sustainability and success. This involvement may entail recruiting volunteers to provide students with real-world internships or tutoring and soliciting financial support for programming. A broader view of supports can also include stakeholders volunteering time to assist in school and student-learning climate initiatives. Creating collaborative relationships with stakeholders can have a lasting positive impact on the school and students. These efforts can also help to lessen achievement gaps, and they can provide students with 21st-century skills necessary for career and college readiness.

Educators, researchers, and policymakers can view this study with the understanding that there is still much work to do to improve school and student-learning climates. This work is necessary to help to close achievement gaps in this nation’s and each state’s most struggling, urban schools. It is a duty to engage students socially, emotionally, and cognitively in safe and supportive environments that can propel them to higher levels of understanding and productive citizenry. It is not possible to do this work in a vacuum. It requires collaboration from all stakeholders, and improvements are not possible without intentional planning and structures in place that support fidelity of practice and successful implementation.

I end this Final Reflection with a message for educational leaders in urban, secondary schools. Facilitating and sustaining positive student-learning climates in those settings is complex and hard work; yet it is incumbent upon them to persevere with such efforts. Research clearly indicates that positive learning climates support better student outcomes. Improving school climate entails more than addressing initiatives as part of an improvement plan, mission
statement, or committee goal. The day-to-day practices of the entire school community must reflect this work, with everyone working together in the best interests of all students.
References


Feldvebel. A. M. (1964). *Organizational climate, social class, and educational output*. Chicago, IL: Midwest Administration Center.


Sugai, G. (2013, Mar. 30). *Key PBIS concepts, principles, and terminology* [Presentation].

Tagiuri, R. (1968). The concept of organizational climate. In R. Tagiuri & G. H. Litwin (Eds.), *Organizational climate: Exploration of a concept.* Boston, MA: Harvard University, Division of Research, Graduate School of Business Administration.


Appendix A

Invitation to Participate

I am a doctoral student specializing in Educational Leadership at Lesley University, working on a dissertation about building positive school climates in urban settings. I am seeking your participation in the completion of the following questionnaire. Its major purpose is to gain understandings about the practices teachers perceive are necessary to develop positive student-learning climates. Your participation will inform my dissertation research about developing such climates. I anticipate it will take approximately 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Participation is completely voluntary, and you may decide to opt out at any point. The information obtained will be used anonymously. You are asked to indicate consent at the end of this questionnaire.

The online questionnaire and option to consent to participate can be found at the following link:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/V5NPTK6

For questions about this study, you can contact me at (203) 687-0203 or nmarton2@lesley.edu. You may also contact Dr. John Ceisluk, Dissertation Senior Advisor, at (413) 544-8192 or jciesluk@lesley.edu and/or IRB. There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu.

Thank you,

Nicole J. Martone
Appendix B

Participant Survey

1. Components of a positive student-learning climate are conveyed in your school’s vision, mission, values, and/or beliefs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. Students are treated as valued members of the school community and involved in decision making processes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. School climate efforts are a component of your school improvement plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4. More can be done to include feedback and input from parents and/or community members into your school’s instructional decisions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5. Professional development opportunities about improving the student-learning climate are offered at your school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

6. Supporting students’ social-emotional development is a priority at your school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

7. There is zero tolerance for bullying at your school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
8. Day-to-day conversations among students throughout the school are respectful.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  Uncertain  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

9. Day-to-day conversations between teachers and students throughout the school are respectful.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  Uncertain  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

10. How is the importance of a positive student-learning climate communicated regularly to the school community by principals? If it isn’t communicated regularly, in what ways can this improve?

11. What contributes to students feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe at your school? If any area(s) can be improved, which one(s), and why?

12. The student discipline policy has a consistent and fair basis throughout your school.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  Uncertain  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

13. Students are generally engaged (i.e., on-task, interested) in their work.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  Uncertain  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

14. You are provided feedback and support with instructional planning.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  Uncertain  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

15. Direct instruction is commonly used in your school.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  Uncertain  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

16. Student-centered instruction is commonly used in your school.
17. Classroom teachers are encouraged to engage students in real-world learning opportunities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

18. If funds are needed for innovative instructional materials, programs, or activities, they are available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

19. There is a high level of parental involvement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

20. Day-to-day conversations between teachers and administrators are open and respectful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

21. If there are systems in place to get support for struggling students, what are they? If this area is lacking, how can it be improved?

22. How are students and staff recognized on a school level for their classroom achievements? If this area can be improved, what are some things that can be done differently?

23. Building leadership is frequently available/visible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

24. Members of the school community (e.g., students, parents/guardians, staff, and community members) work collaboratively to build a positive student-learning climate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
25. Student morale is perceived as high among faculty members.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

26. Your school is asked to implement too many initiatives at once with little support and/or resources.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

27. Students lack a sense of belonging and connectedness at your school.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

28. Students are able to build relationships with school personnel.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

29. School personnel are trusted members of the school community.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

30. The use of individualized and personalized instructional teaching methods is encouraged.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

31. The school is a safe and welcoming environment for all stakeholders (e.g., students, parents/guardians, staff, and community members).

Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

32. Describe any barriers that may exist when trying to communicate regularly with parents/guardians.

33. Who in your building takes responsibility for school climate efforts? Explain.
34. Are you a high school or middle school teacher?

   High school
   Middle school

35. How long have you been teaching?

   1-4 years
   5-9 years
   10-14 years
   15 or more years

36. Which subject do you teach?

   Content area course (e.g., English, math, science, social studies, etc.)
   Elective/special course (e.g., art, music, physical education, business, etc.)
   Other (please specify)

37. If you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview (your name and school would not be identified (i.e. named) in the study) and greatly contribute to this research, please provide an email and/or a phone number that is best to reach you. Thank you.

38. By submitting this questionnaire, you give the researcher permission to use your responses anonymously.

   Yes
   No
Appendix C

Interview Informed Letter of Consent

I am a doctoral student specializing in Educational Leadership at Lesley University, working on a dissertation about building positive school climates in urban settings. I am seeking your participation in the completion of a follow-up interview. Its major purpose is to gain understandings about the practices teachers perceive are necessary to develop positive student-learning climates. Your participation will inform my dissertation research about developing such climates. I anticipate it will take approximately 45 minutes to complete the interview.

Participation is completely voluntary, and you can decide to opt out at any point. The information obtained will be used anonymously.

For questions about this study, you can contact me at (203) 687-0203 or nmarton2@lesley.edu. You may also contact Dr. John Ceisluk, Dissertation Senior Advisor, at (413) 544-8192 or jciesluk@lesley.edu and/or IRB. There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu.

Thank you,

Nicole J. Martone

_________________________________________  _______________________
Participant’s Signature                     Date
Appendix D

Interview Protocol and Questions

Protocol:

- Welcome introduction and overview of purpose for study
- The interview process will include 10 participants who will be interviewed separately
- The interview will be recorded and transcribed later, whether interview is in person or on the phone
- The interview will take approximately 45 minutes
- Participation is confidential, and participant identity will remain anonymous
- Participants may withdraw at any time
- The interview will include the Guiding Research Questions, as follows:

  Guiding Research Questions:
  
  1. To what degree do teachers believe that creating positive student-learning climates is important to their principals?
  2. What do teachers report are the various ways principals can support positive student-learning climates?
  3. What do teachers report are inhibiting principals from building positive student-learning climates?

Questions:

1. Describe your current school climate situation? Are there areas that need improvement? Are there areas that are going well? Explain.

2. Is your school welcoming to all stakeholders, such as students, parents, and community members? Explain.
3. Is the school’s curriculum engaging for students? If yes, explain. If no, how can it be improved?

4. Are students and families involved in educational decisions, such as with curricula development?

5. Would you consider your school culturally responsive and inclusive? Explain.

6. Who is responsible for school climate efforts in your school? How does your principal facilitate school climate efforts and responsibility?

7. How do you think the student-learning climate can be better fostered and supported?

8. How has your school climate affected student morale? Staff morale?

- Additional follow-up questions may be asked for clarification

- Closing statement and thank you
Appendix E

Copyright Permissions

To: permissions@sagepub.com <permissions@sagepub.com>
Sent: Saturday, December 8, 2018, 1:36 PM EST
Subject: Copyright Permission to Reproduce Request

To Whom It May Concern:
I'm unsure on how to proceed, but I'd like permission to reproduce this table (see attached) from Administrative Science Quarterly in my dissertation that I'm currently writing on school climate. May I do so? And please advise on how to proceed.

Thank you,
Nicole J. Martone

---

To: Nicole Martone
Dec 20, 2018 at 4:05 PM

Dear Nicole Martone,

Thank you for your request. I am pleased to report we can grant your request without a fee as part of your thesis or dissertation.

Please accept this email as permission for your request as you’ve detailed below. Permission is granted for the life of the edition on a non-exclusive basis, in the English language, throughout the world in all formats provided full citation is made to the original SAGE publication. Permission does not include any third-party material found within the work.

If you have any questions, or if we may be of further assistance, please let us know.

Kind Regards,

Mary Ann Price
Rights Coordinator
SAGE Publishing
2600 Virginia Ave NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20037
USA
To: info@schoolclimate.org <info@schoolclimate.org>
Sent: Saturday, February 16, 2019, 12:25:18 PM EST
Subject: Copyright Permission Request

Hello,
I'm a doctoral candidate through Lesley University and writing a dissertation about the principal's capacity to facilitate positive student-learning climates in urban settings. I'm emailing to seek permission to use NSCC's School Climate Dimensions Chart within my literature review. May I have permission to do so?


Thank you,
Nicole J Martone

---

Amanda Weitzel <aweitzel@schoolclimate.org>
To: Nicole Martone

Hi Nicole,

You can use the chart you mentioned as long as it is cited. Thanks!

Show original message

Amanda Weitzel
Senior School Support Coordinator
National School Climate Center (NSCC)
223 West 39th Street
PO Box 490 11018
New York, NY 11374
Ph: 212 707 8799 ext. 25 Fax: 212 957 6616
http://schoolclimate.org

Social Media:
https://facebook.com/upstandfor
https://facebook.com/schoolclimate
https://twitter.com/school_climate
https://twitter.com/BullyBust
https://www.instagram.com/schoolclimate
Sent: Saturday, December 08, 2018 1:21 PM
To: NCSSLE <ncssle@air.org>
Subject: Publication Permission- Permission to Reproduce

To Whom It May Concern:

I'm not sure whom to contact from your organization, but I'm in the process of writing my dissertation, which explores the topic of school climate, and I'd like to use this flowchart (attached) from your site in my literature review, with your permission and with credit given to your organization. May I do so?

Thank you,
Nicole J. Martone

---

On Monday, December 10, 2018, 6:03 PM, Colombi, Greta <gcolombi@air.org> wrote:

Good evening,

Thank you for contacting the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE). You are more than welcome to reference the U.S. Department of Education Safe Supportive Schools (EDSCLS) model. Over the years, how we have cited it has changed. Page 83 of the following document (https://saftesupportivelaerning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/EDSCLS_UserGuide_Nov2018.pdf) includes information on the model which might be helpful to you. It also includes probably the best citation you can use. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Best of luck in your important work. We welcome hearing/reading about what you learn.

Kind regards,
Greta Colombi
National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments
American Institutes for Research
1000 Thomas Jefferson Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007
Phone: 800.250.8413