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Perceptions of School Climate

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PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE

by

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PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE

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This doctoral dissertation investigates the differences in perceptions of school climate among in-school stakeholders. The study focuses on how the participant's role within the school and gender impact their perceptions of school climate. Surveys were administered to students and teachers in a high school setting, with quantitative analysis revealing statistical differences in perceptions among key groups. Notably, teachers demonstrated higher perceptions of school climate than students, indicating the role within the school has the potential to influence stakeholder perceptions. Additional findings include male students demonstrating higher perceptions of school climate than female students, indicating gender plays an integral part in stakeholder perceptions. Implications of this study include the need for school administrators to examine perceptual differences between stakeholder groups and leverage this data as a means to improve school quality for all. This includes ensuring formal and informal methods for collecting perspectives and ensuring an inclusive process that is representative of the school population.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study is to identify differences in perceptions between in-school stakeholders based on their gender and role within the school. As articulated in the literature review, positive perceptions of school climate are connected with better individual and whole-school outcomes. For school leaders to foster meaningful school improvement, it is necessary to examine current stakeholder perceptions, identify areas of notable difference, and leverage this knowledge to improve school conditions. The current study is part of one administrator's action research, working towards improved school quality.

Background of the Study

School climate is an umbrella term, describing the multiple influences on a stakeholder's quality of life at a moment in time. The climate of the school is a living entity. It must be nurtured at both the macro and micro levels. Fostering an improved school climate is beneficial to students, staff, and the entire school community. Given individual and whole-group perceptions influence multiple in-school aspects, along with performance outcomes, there is tremendous importance in establishing a school climate of positivity, productivity, and genuine care for stakeholders.

This improvement process includes connecting school improvement efforts to the impact on individuals, subgroups, and the whole school. Through a less structured, but equally deliberate approach, nurturing a better school climate can be accomplished through the formation of quality relationships between students and teachers, as well as

within these groups. Interpersonal interactions, through triumphs and tribulations, are opportunities to demonstrate support and empower others to improve their circumstances. The effects of these interactions set the tone for the quality of school life. Levin-Epstein and Toner (2019) focus on school culture through the ideals of student connectedness, wellness, equity, relationships, communication, ethics, and open-mindedness. Schools identified as having positive school climates outperform those with poorer climates and often possess the same ideals identified by Levin-Epstein and Toner. In the broader context of school improvement, those who move forward and make continuous improvements are often the same that possess a strong, positive school identity.

For students, a positive school climate is linked to better results in academic outcomes, student behavior, attendance, and social-emotional aspects. Schools that are characterized as more positive places tend to have a more positive impact on whole-child development. Similarly, positive effects are found in teachers, including greater job satisfaction, higher retention, and decreased burnout.

Schools with improved conditions for staff are better equipped to meet the needs of students, and in a better position to maintain continuous school improvement efforts. An improved school climate can be leveraged to make meaningful improvements to overall school quality. To make these improvements, schools must determine stakeholder perceptions and identify areas of strength and weakness. A comparison of perceptions allows school leaders to identify areas of concern, and use this to drive necessary improvement.

A positive school climate is empowering. Those who feel safe, supported, and valued have their primary needs met, thus allowing them to ascend to more complex levels of personal growth (Maslow, 1943). While schools are often viewed as primarily academic, there is a growing body of evidence in consideration of the whole child. The concept of learners and teachers as people-first is not new or revolutionary. The idea goes back over a century, as Perry (1908) was among the first to consider the role of school climate and its impact on those inside the school. Perry (1908, p. 75) refers to the "*esprit de corps*' 'as "the strongest lever in promoting efficiency and good government amongst the boys and girls. To utilize this lever requires oversight and guidance but it must not be obtrusive or overapparant to the child." Perry's words echo as strongly as ever when he communicates that a positive school climate does not come quickly, but "It must become a matter of tradition, and, once established, be handed down from one set of pupils to another."

Most states have adopted school improvement frameworks aligned to either the Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) or Response to Intervention (RTI) (Schiller et al., 2020, p. 1). RTI is often cited as a response to closing achievement gaps, which came under great scrutiny during the Presidency of George W. Bush. Under this administration, and No Child Left Behind, the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (PCESE) was established. The commission, under the umbrella of the U.S. Department of Education, concluded that "a culture of compliance" must be replaced with "a culture of accountability" (PCESE, 2004, p. 4). As No Child Left Behind was

replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2016, MTSS became the recommended framework for assisting struggling students (Schaffer, 2022, p. 2).

MTSS charges educators with considering the impact of the school on the whole child. This involves a shift from an academic-centric focus to considering the unique needs of each student. The Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports (n.d.) states:

> Efforts to support SEL work best when they are coordinated and aligned with other programs and initiatives. Increasingly, states, districts, and schools are working to integrate SEL into multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). Embedding SEL as a universal (i.e., Tier 1) approach to supporting student well-being within MTSS encourages ongoing attention to all students' social and emotional development and creates a framework of support that considers the whole child.

An over-emphasis on academics, specifically those connected to state accountability exams, comes at a cost. Allocating resources (time, financial, human capital) towards a primarily academic focus can, in turn, attention away from what matters most: Students, staff, and their unique needs (Cohen, 2006, pp. 201-202). Most educators respect the value of understanding and meeting individual stakeholder needs. No two students or teachers are the same. They each come with their unique backgrounds, experiences, talents, and aspirations. They also come to school with unique challenges, and educational leaders are charged with supporting them toward better outcomes. Understanding these challenges and providing support is paramount to building successful futures for students, staff, and the whole school.

No one person, no matter their aptitudes, work ethic, or pedagogical skills can do this difficult work alone. Priorities must be set, and be based on what multiple sources of

data tell about individual needs. An understanding of the unique climate of the school is the energy that helps educators focus their efforts (Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 215).

While much of the prevailing literature focuses on student outcomes, there is a need to consider the impact of school climate on teachers and their invaluable roles within the school. As teachers are the adults who spend the greatest amount of time with students during the school day, they also have the greatest influence within the school (Hattie, 2003, p. 3). Teacher perceptions of their workplace are associated with retention and burnout (Koth et al., 2008; Thapa et al., 2013). The demands placed on teachers, along with the level of support provided by their administration, are key ingredients in workplace satisfaction and tenure within the school. A caution with the implementation of school improvement initiatives is consideration of the impact on teachers. The quality of any initiative largely falls on the shoulders of the adults in classrooms. Highly effective educators can make poorly designed initiatives a success. On the contrary, even the most pedagogically sound efforts can fail if teachers do not have the capacity or proper support from administrators.

The quality of support provided by administrators is a key influence on school climate. The role of the principal provides an opportunity to move efforts in a positive, productive direction (Smith et al., 2020, p. 14). As there is an opportunity to positively influence school climate, so too is the ability to inhibit progress. Pogodziński et al. (2012, p. 267) cite beginning teacher perceptions of their administration as a strong predictor of intent to remain at or leave their current schools. The leaders within the building set the tone for how others are treated and the level of support they receive

(Bartoletti and Connelly, 2013). It is a tremendous responsibility to foster and maintain a positive school climate, but it is also one of the most sound investments school administrators can make, according to the prevailing literature.

Schools seeking to make this sound investment are encouraged to begin by gathering stakeholder perceptions. Gathering the opinions of students, teachers, and other key stakeholders is a necessary starting point, as it sets the baseline. A comparison of differences in perceptions helps to identify gaps in specific areas (Bernhardt, 2013, p. 41). The current study exemplifies a similar examination of potential differences in perceptions, based on factors of gender and role within the school. The results of this study are then used to inform future administrative practices, to foster a stronger, more supportive school climate.

American society has undergone many changes in recent years. This includes demographic changes, socioeconomic changes, and the challenge of addressing the needs of a more diverse nation. These shifts in society are reflective of a need to listen, learn, and respect others, even when disagreement exists. It is argued that these are not only necessary for the health and wellness of students and teachers, but also essential to the health and vitality of our schools, communities, and society. Trilling and Fadel (2009) write "Understanding and accommodating cultural differences and social differences, using these differences to come up with even more creative ideas and solutions to problems, will be increasingly important throughout our century" (p. 80). The students in American schools will soon be the caretakers of our society. The places where many will learn the components of a healthy society are the classrooms and halls of K-12 schools.

Schools that foster higher standards of mutual respect will encourage improved school climate and better prepare their students to meet the challenges faced as citizens.

An investment in improving school climate is sound, with numerous positive effects. Improving climate can lead to growth in academic performance, student conduct, retention of teachers, and whole child development (Thapa et al., 2013, p. 13). Habegger (2008, pp. 42-43) reiterates the importance of this investment, stating that "school culture is the heart of improvement and growth" and "A positive school culture is the underlying reason why the other components of successful schools were able to flourish."

A positive school climate is aligned with positive outcomes for the individual and the collective school (Cohen & Geier, 2010, p. 2). Obstacles are removed from the paths of students and teachers when they feel appreciated and supported. The ability to focus on positive, proactive measures vs. negative, reactive measures is a key difference between high-performing and low-performing schools. Schools mired in a quagmire of toxic school climate are on the defensive, often grasping at survival. Compare this with schools that have positive climates, and the observer will often witness greater connectedness and collaboration toward common goals.

Developing a positive school climate is about transitioning from the struggle of the individual and isolated groups to the thriving of the whole. It is leveraging the collective thoughts, emotions, and talents towards something greater. The challenge of fostering an improved school climate is that it takes time, consistency, and dedication from leaders within the school. Potential obstacles to building an improved school climate include teacher turnover, principal turnover, and changes in district leadership.

With changes in teaching staff, comes an onboarding of professionals acclimating to their new work environment. This includes teachers with experiences from prior schools alongside those who are brand new to the profession. For schools with higher turnover rates, this often leads to hiring less-qualified teachers to fill vacancies (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Ingersoll (1999) concludes that highly qualified teachers possess a better understanding of content, specific teaching methods, and how to merge these two towards the most appropriate learning opportunity for students. Similarly, when teachers with inadequate skills are hired, this can often lead to classroom management issues (Oliver & Reschly, 2007, P. 2). Disruptive student conduct is found to have a detrimental effect on teacher wellbeing (Tsouloupas et al., 2010, pp. 185-186). For students with habitual conduct concerns, this is associated with more negative perceptions of school (Gordon, 2018). Balfanz and associates (2007) found teacher turnover to be a key ingredient in perpetuating an under-qualified teaching staff, creating a more disruptive school environment, and increasing student disengagement.

With administrative turnover comes a natural change to the school climate, as each principal has her or his unique perspectives as to what is most important. As with teachers, administrators have varying degrees of proficiency. Henry and Harbatkin (2019) find that a change in administration, by itself, does not drive shifts in the school. Instead, the differences between past and current principals drive progress or regression. If a school replaces the prior principal with a more effective leader, then this can minimize the negative impact of the turnover. Identifying the net gain in administrative competency is supported by the findings of Bartanen et al. (2019), stating

> The likely disruptive effects of principal turnover might be offset or magnified depending on whether turnover leads to a gain or loss in principal quality—that is, whether, on average, turnover means the arrival of a more effective or less effective replacement.

Oftentimes, there is a desire for new leaders to put their stamp on the school, establishing their most valued initiatives. When this is aligned with existing school improvement reforms, there is a natural flow, with greater acceptance from staff. The contrary can happen when a new principal seeks too much change, especially if it is not aligned with the previously accepted values of the staff. Instead of improving the school and supporting a more positive school perception, this can foster confusion, apprehension, and stress among staff. One anecdotal perspective is of former teacher Valerie Strauss (2013), writing for the Washington Post. Strauss chronicles the challenges of adapting to a revolving door of principals

> I was tired of learning each new principal's way of management—each one had a different vision (or no vision at all), a different way of communicating with staff, a different level of professionalism. Each new principal introduced—and usually abandoned—new initiatives. Because of these changes in leadership, time and energy I should have spent on my students was instead spent trying to figure out each new leadership discourse and the unwritten rules and values of that discourse.

As an action-research study, focusing on school improvement, there is a greater aim for simplicity and direct implementation of results. The results of this study will be used to guide the professional practices of school administrators working in the field. The author of this study views climate as a window into the health of a school at a specific moment in time. In essence, the climate is a snapshot from a larger photo album. The author posits that culture is a more deeply entrenched, long-term view of the school.

While climate is a snapshot of a school at a moment in time, the established culture is a long-term view of the same institution.

Sergiovanni (1991, p. 215) concluded that a positive school climate is not a guarantee of positive school outcomes. Instead, it is "a form of organizational energy whose telling effects on the school depend on how this energy is channeled and directed." This viewpoint indicates that a positive environment for students and staff may not be enough to improve a school. As with any resource, the leveraging of the school's climate still depends on how it is used. Knowing when and where to utilize the energy is key to sustained, meaningful improvement. This is an important note for educators, especially administrators. A positive school climate is the starting point, not the destination.

Cohen et al. (2009, p. 184) defined the four tenets of school climate as safety, teaching and learning, relationships, and environmental structure. Safety is described as being both physical and social-emotional. This is an important differentiation, as schools trend towards a greater emphasis on mental health. The relationship portion of the authors' work includes interpersonal connectedness and collaboration, especially with those from different backgrounds. Administrative support is identified as an important aspect of the teaching and learning tenet. The role of the principal in establishing and nurturing a positive school climate is a recurring theme seen throughout the review of literature. While the principal is one individual in the school, they hold a tremendous amount of power, which can lead to both positive and negative outcomes.

In a large-scale study of 29 Texas Schools, involving nearly 25,000 students and over 1,700 teachers, MacNeil et al. (2009, p. 78) reported that "exemplary schools were

found to possess healthier climate than acceptable schools, which reported lower organization health scores." The authors define organizational health around 10 key constructs and determine goal focus ("clarity, acceptance and support") and adaptation ("ability of organizations to tolerate stress and maintain stability while being responsive to the demands of the external environment") are crucial areas of focus. The authors note that a limitation of the study was that no low-performing schools were included. The prevailing research in the field often draws delineations between low-performing and high-performing schools.

Problem Statement

The problem examined in the current study is the perceptual differences of students and teachers, based on characteristics of gender and role within the school. Specifically, how do the viewpoints of female students, male students, female teachers, and male teachers differ? A bevy of prior research firmly establishes a need to understand perceptions as part of continuous school improvement.

An examination of differences in gender perceptions is essential, as gender influences nearly all aspects of human life. Naturally, the school is a setting where gender can shape perceptual differences. The literature review of this study indicates that the individual's gender identity plays a key part in influencing perceptions of school climate. In turn, how students and teachers feel about their school is important to both their individual quality of life and the school as a whole.

This quality of school life extends to aspects of safety, student conduct, academic performance, and other key characteristics that define overall school quality. Comparing

student and teacher perceptions is an equally valuable endeavor, as schools aim to ensure improved school conditions for all stakeholders. For the school leader, one could surmise there between are similar perceptions between students and staff, given that these groups spend a great deal of time in the same classrooms, common areas, and other locales on school campuses. However, assumptions like these can create blind spots in leadership. Deliberate action is needed to determine what teachers and students truly feel about their school. If perceptual differences exist between the groups, what can the administrator then do to improve conditions for the less satisfied group?

The current study adds to the existing body of knowledge as an action research design. Much of the existing research derives from a firmly academic perspective, aimed at identifying broader trends across multiple schools, school districts, states, and even the national level. As the current study is focused on the conditions of one school, written from the perspective of a current school administrator, there is an opportunity to use the results to directly impact day-to-day practices.

School climate can often be difficult to understand, and even more challenging to measure. While there have been numerous studies on the subject, the variance in what is measured and how it is measured presents unique challenges. The prevailing literature demonstrates numerous connections between a strong school climate and stakeholder outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study is to identify differences in perceptions between in-school stakeholders based on gender and role within the school. As

articulated in the literature review, positive perceptions of school climate are connected with better individual and whole-school outcomes. For school leaders to foster meaningful school improvement, it is necessary to examine current stakeholder perceptions, identify areas of significant difference, and leverage this knowledge to improve school conditions. The current study is part of one administrator's action research, working towards improved school quality.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1: To what extent is there a difference in perceptions of school climate between students and teachers?

Research Question 2: To what extent is there a difference in perceptions of school climate between female students and male students?

Research Question 3: To what extent is there a difference in perceptions of school climate between female teachers and male teachers?

Research Question 4: If question 1 found a difference between students and teachers, is there an interaction between role and gender?

Delimitations

Over 500 student and 69 teacher responses are included in this study. This study is limited to a single rural-suburban, 9-12 high school in Nebraska, with the responses collected during a window in the Spring of 2020. Only students enrolled during the survey administration window had the opportunity to participate.

The survey of teaching staff was limited to those who work directly with students and other staff at the selected high school. This study focuses primarily on individual and

school-level factors, yet classroom-level factors can play a greater role than school-level factors (Koth et al., 2008).

Another limitation of the study is that only the responses of teachers are utilized. The opinions of secretaries, school counselors, paraeducators, custodial staff and other key personnel are not included to align the study with the scope of prior research. A final limitation addressed is focusing on gender in a binary sense (male/female). This design choice is an effort to align the current study with prior research in the field. Future considerations of research may include a non-binary examination of gender perceptions alongside a beyond-teacher examination of perceptions.

Significance of the Study

The study results are significant as an action research endeavor, with direct application to day-to-day school operations. The nature of the study allows for prompt, focused intervention at the school level. Beyond the scope of the current study, the perspective of a current school principal provides an opportunity, given that much of the current research in the field comes from a strictly academic perspective. While the academic perspective offers a greater understanding of the broad concepts within the field, this can be challenging to apply at the school level, given that the broader the scope, the less aligned results are with individual school challenges. As the current study is an examination of a single high school, there is a valuable opportunity to directly improve school conditions for individual stakeholders, subgroups, and the whole school.

Definitions

School Climate—A combination of school characteristics that influences how stakeholders feel about their school. The National School Climate Center (2007) considers school climate to be a combination of the following constructs:

- Norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe.
- People are engaged and respected.
- Students, families, and educators work together to develop, live and contribute to a shared school vision.
- Educators model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning.
- Each person contributes to the operations of the school and the care of the physical environment.

Chronic Absenteeism—Excessive absence from school, often greater than 10%.

Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS)—A school improvement framework emphasizing the whole-child experience within the school. MTSS examines multiple influences on student progress, including academics, attendance, behavior, and social-emotional learning.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)—Empowering students to monitor, self-regulate, and improve their response to challenging circumstances.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

School climate is a combination of the attitudes, norms, and characteristics that shape perceptions of school quality. The stakeholders within the school, and their actions, help to shape perceptions of the school climate. This chapter examines the broad literature identifying the impact of school climate. This begins with an analysis of the staff and student factors connected to school climate. As an action-research study, these factors are selected based on their impact on students, staff, and the overall health of the school.

This chapter then directly addresses the current study's research questions by including literature comparisons of student and teacher perceptions, male and female student perceptions, and male and female teacher perceptions.

School Climate

Student Attendance Connections to School Climate

The connections between student attendance and school climate are considered, based on the direct impact on student success. Teachers and administrators can speak to the challenges faced when students are chronically absent from school. For many students, missing a significant amount of school contributes to learning barriers. For individual students, this can increase the likelihood of course failures, gaps in learning, and decreased opportunities at school.

Chronic absenteeism is a major problem for a large swath of American Students. For the 2015-16 school year, the U.S. Department of Education (2016) found that 16% of

American children missed 15 or more days of school. Per Bauer, Jordan, Chang, and Balfanz (2018), this report is important, as it marks a shift in how schools report attendance. Reporting for the Brookings Institute, the authors convey a surprising concern:

> Under No Child Left Behind, schools reported average daily attendance, but not how many students were missing so much school that they were at risk academically. Until two years ago, the national scope of chronic absenteeism had been unknown because most schools were not measuring it and few states were reporting it. Schools tracked who was absent without an excuse—truancy—without paying much attention to how much instructional time students were losing due to the combination of all absences including excused absences occurring, for example, because of illness as well as suspensions.

This recent shift demonstrates a challenge for schools, as they may not be aware of the scope of attendance woes. A key concern with focusing on average daily attendance is that it is a composite average of all students, and can therefore mask issues with specific students and subgroups of students. A consideration for future research could include the different approaches school districts take to collecting, analyzing, and responding student absences.

When attendance concerns extend to groups of students, the challenges then place more stress on the larger school setting. An important research finding is that attendance difficulties of one student can have a detrimental effect on others, as the teacher is asked to focus more attention on remediation and support of the frequently absent student. This can lead to greater unpredictability in the classroom environment (Chang & Romero, 2008, p. 7). When attendance concerns are notable, this can harm the classroom climate.

The works of Balfanz et al. (2007) examined the effects of school climate on student attendance. Whereas the prior authors concluded poor student attendance can negatively impact the classroom climate, Balfanz and associates examined the opposite, instead looking at how school climate impacts attendance. They found that higher levels of disengagement lead to poorer attendance. The school-level factors impacting this disengagement include a poorer school climate. Balfanz et al. (2007) described a negative school climate as "chaotic, disorganized, and underresourced schools characterized by high levels of teacher turnover and vacancies all combine to promote student disengagement during the middle school years."

An important discovery of this research is the need to draw on earlier evidence of student disengagement and intervene before middle school. Under this directive, aspects such as attendance, behavior, academic performance, and perceptual data could surely be utilized to identify and better serve struggling student populations. In considering the high school dropout rate, Balfanz et al. (2007, p. 233) assert that by using the above measures, identifying at-risk populations is "predictable before they have spent much time in high school." Balfanz and Byrnes (2012, p. 4) found similar links between the 6th grade attendance and high school graduation rates.

The chronic absence rates in the United States are troubling, but even more so are the negative effects on the child's life and in turn, the larger community. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) builds a disturbing series of links beginning with attendance concerns in lower elementary and ending with negative outcomes that last beyond K-12. The argument begins with chronic absenteeism leading to a negative

impact on child development. The longer-term impact of this is a reduced likelihood of high school graduation and a diminished quality of adult life. The government entity goes so far as to build the connection between attendance and poverty, decreased quality of health, and legal issues related to criminal justice. These conclusions alone warrant a need to further examine the role of school climate in school attendance. These connections indicate a need to foster stronger, more positive school climates, as a means to encourage improved attendance and outcomes.

Chang and Romero (2008, p. 3), identify more damaging effects on a student's short-term and long-term achievement when they are chronically absent in lower elementary grades. A major finding of the authors' work is that chronic absenteeism in kindergarten is the strongest predictor of 5th-grade academic struggles. This is supported by Belfanz and Byrnes' (2012, p. 4) findings that poor attendance in kindergarten was associated with academic struggles in first grade, and "The impact is twice as great for students from low-income families."

The U.S. Department of Education (2016) found for the 2015-16 school year that nationally, high school students were more likely to be chronically absent than middle school students, and middle school students were more likely than elementary-aged students. One in five high school students in the analysis was chronically absent from school, compared to 14% of middle school students. An analysis of overall (K-12) shows absence rates for African-American, Hispanic, Native American, and Pacific Islander students were higher than the rates for white students.

Only Asian students had a lower chronic absenteeism rate than white students. The overall chronic absence rates (K-12, 2015-16), by race, in order from lowest to greatest were: Asian (8.6%), White (14.5%), Hispanic (17%), Two or More Races (18.4%), African-American/Black (20.5%), Pacific Islander (22.6%), and American Indian/Native American (26%).

Data from the U.S. Department of Education (2016) report shows non-significant differences in attendance rates, by gender. The overall female chronic absenteeism rate (16.1%) is slightly higher than the 15.9% reported for males. For the genders, the school level with the largest differential is high school, with females at 21.9% chronically absent compared to 20.4%. Further research may be warranted to determine the reasons for this larger gap later in K-12.

As alarming as the chronic absenteeism differences based on race/ethnicity is the gap between students with disabilities (22.5%) and their regular education classmates (14.9%). While the high school level shows the greatest disparity (27.8% Vs. 20.8%), there are also notable gaps at the elementary and middle school levels. 19.8% of elementary school students, during the 2015-16 school year, were chronically absent, compared to only 12.4% of regular education peers. A similar 7.4% gap is seen in the middle school years with 20.5% compared to 13.1%.

For the educator, there is an imperative to serve all students to help them grow, but also their families and the larger community. Helping even one student may be the necessary steps needed to break cycles of poverty. Given that "students reared in poverty benefit the most from being in schools, one of the most effective strategies for providing

pathways out of poverty is to do what it takes to get these students in school every day. This alone, even without improvements in the American education system, will drive up achievement, high school graduation, and college attainment rates (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012, p. 4)."

Allensworth and Easton (2007) identify freshman year of high school as a key transitional time for students. They recommend that educators analyze grades and attendance as predictors of future graduation. In their study of Chicago Public Schools, they found that 40% of high school students, at the time of the study, missed more than one month of school in a single school year. A connection is made between increased student independence and choice coming at the expense of positive school attendance. High school students can choose to skip individual classes or defy attendance expectations altogether. This same aversion to attendance may be less likely or even impossible during the K-8 years. On the aspect of grades' influence on education, there is a logical link, as grades are connected to credits, and credits are connected to the graduation requirements themselves. That said, Allensworth and Easton found that students with a "C" average were less likely to graduate from high school than their classmates with a "B" average. More interestingly, it was asserted that these same grades are among the strongest predictors of *college* graduation. Circling back to chronic absenteeism, 9th-graders who were absent more than two weeks of the school year, regardless of prior academic achievement, failed two classes, on average. "In fact, freshmen who arrive with high test scores but miss two weeks of school per semester are more likely to fail a course than freshmen with low test scores who just miss a week"

(Allensworth & Easton, 2007). To improve attendance, which in turn impacts positive student outcomes, Balfanz and Byrnes (2012, p. 38) advocate for schools to build school habits that support positive attendance. This includes in-school efforts, as well as improved connections to families and communities. The current study focused on in-school perceptions of school climate, yet this prior point argues for improving perceptions outside the school as well.

Habitually absent students have more negative perceptions of school climate and greater emphasis should be placed on improving school perceptions as a means to reduce chronic absenteeism (Van Eck et al., 2016, p. 98). Multiple connections between school climate and student attendance have been made in the prevailing research. Work by Brundage et al. (2017, p. 4) found that 38.8% of chronically absent students struggled to find value in attending school. Common themes included "perceptions that school is boring, no reason to come to school, belief that school will not help reach future goals, perception that parents don't care if absent from school." This was a relatively large study conducted across 8-states and involving nearly 5,800 students in grades 6-12. All participants in the study reported being chronically absent from school. Other important findings included 41.8% of students reporting social-emotional concerns related to depression, stress, and family concerns. A strength of the study is that students were asked for recommendations on how schools could better support positive attendance. Student feedback emphasized several aspects related to improving school climate. This includes providing more engaging and relevant learning experiences and also supporting improved interpersonal relationships. Students in the study sought better interactions

with both teachers and students. For the more serious issues, the students surveyed desired to see better handling of conflicts, including issues related to bullying. Beyond the school factors, student health and transportation issues were much more significant obstacles to student attendance (Brundage et al., 2017, p. 4).

Counter to the prior studies, Hamlin (2020), performed an analysis of student-reported climate surveys and their attendance. The results were negligible and even less significant as students moved into secondary schools.

Common themes for poor attendance include students and their families possessing concerns with school safety, which can include "bullying, unsafe conditions, harassment and embarrassment." On a less threatening note, another common thread is the student and family do not believe it is important or necessary to attend school. As it is not a priority, the student and family feel comfortable with investing this time in other ventures (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012, p. 4).

Student Behavior Connections to School Climate

Perceptions of students' behavior in connection with school climate are multi-directional. Undesired student behaviors are found to have a negative impact on stakeholder perceptions of school climate. On the other hand, students with conduct issues also find the school to be a more negative place than students without similar incidents. Students reporting a negative attitude towards their school were identified as having more "delinquent and aggressive behavior at school" (Van Eck et al., 2016, p. 99). This is supported by the work of Gordon (2018, p. 66), who found an inverse correlation between a student's quantity of behavior incidents and their perception of school. The

more frequently concerns were documented for a child, the more likely this child was to have a poorer view of their school.

Students with habitual behavioral struggles have similarly negative perceptions of self. Klassen and Chiu (2010, p. 741) found "The self-efficacy beliefs of students have been shown to play an important role in influencing achievement and their behavior"

Gordon (2018, p. 66) found an inverse correlation between a student's quantity of behavior incidents and their perception of school. The more frequently concerns were documented for a child, the more likely this child was to have a poorer view of their school.

A further examination of perceptions of students with past behavioral struggles shows a disparity compared to classmates without these same struggles. The National Center for Education Statistics (Yanez & Seldin, 2019). conducted a survey of students aged 12 to 18, enrolled in both public and private schools. The study examined students with past concerns of skipping class, engaging in a physical fight, or bringing a weapon to school. The results show that students engaging in these undesired behaviors expressed more negative perceptions of relationships with teachers, and enforcement of school rules in response to misbehavior. While the prior results were based on individual behavior actions, the next set of questions in the survey focused on students who had observed negative actions. Students who reported gangs existing at school had less favorable views of relationships with adults in the school and the overall school response to safety concerns. Not surprisingly, students who reported seeing a firearm at school

also carried more negative perceptions than their classmates without the same experiences.

Academic Achievement Connections to School Climate

While the current study focuses on whole-child progress, schools are often judged primarily on academic comparisons. Critical of this academic-centric focus are Preble and Gordon (2011, p. 13):

> Educators have been under increasing pressure for more than a decade to focus on student academic performance and test scores. Moving to a more balanced view of the importance of the learning environment, then, will take thoughtful advocacy. Reminding adults of the impact of stress and threat on performance, for adults in the workplace as well as students in the classroom, can help remind educators of the important connections between positive climate and performance.

Despite individual differences and past struggles in student lives, academic results should matter and do matter, as they are indicators of preparedness for K-12 success, as well as college, career, and life readiness. Thata et al. (2013, p. 13) state "Increased student learning and academic achievement, increased student graduation rates" go hand-in-hand with improved school climates.

In a multinational PISA study, the Organization for Economic Cooperation (2017, p. 118) found that "students who reported they feel like an outsider at school score 22 points lower in science than students who did not report so." The Center for Social and Emotional Education (CSEE) (2008, p. 1) concluded there is a strong relationship between school climate and the areas of academic achievement and graduation rates. The CSEE determined an even stronger relationship exists when examining high-poverty schools. The authors encourage secondary schools to provide additional opportunities for

social-emotional education, explaining that middle schools and high schools often transition to greater academic focus at the expense of whole-child initiatives emphasized more frequently in the lower grades.

Patrick et al. (2007, p. 93) connected the classroom environment to student engagement and concluded that students working with supportive peers and teachers were empowered to employ self-regulatory strategies, thus making them more independent. These conclusions are powerful support for student empowerment, growth, and efficiency within the classroom. Students with the means to troubleshoot independently are not only honing valuable life skills but also freeing up time for the teacher to work on building this capacity with differently-abled peers. The conclusions of Wang and Holcombe (2010, p. 652) align with the prior work of Patrick and colleagues, concluding that middle school students' perceptions of school influence self-regulation strategies in students. Additionally, Wang and Holcombe found academic achievement to be both directly and indirectly influenced by student perceptions of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects, with the cognitive referring to the aforementioned self-regulation practices of students.

Dotterer and Lowe (2011, Abstract) further the concept of student perceptions as a predictor of academic outcomes. Their analysis of 5th-grade students (n = 1,014) found value in qualities related to the classroom and larger school perceptions. However, the authors concluded there are limitations to the classroom's impact on struggling student outcomes. They understandably advocate for additional support for these students. This is a critical area for schools to funnel the positive energy of the school through a focused

lens. Maxwell et al. (2017, p. 15) conclude that schools should improve their climate as an efficient approach to supporting learners, given that out-of-school factors cannot be controlled or changed.

Not surprisingly, students with self-reported higher grades had more positive opinions of their school than those reporting lower grades (Gordon, 2018, p. 69). As the difference between reported grades widened, so did the differences in perceptions.

Connections Between Relationships and School Climate

Relationships matter. They have an impact on the individual and their place in the larger community. This applies to any business, team, or organization. While schools are guided by powers related to policy, law, and local control, relationships are still the driving force of either progress or regression. Within the school setting, there are an immeasurable number of interactions that have the potential to shape the school climate. Each interaction has the power to uplift and the power to discourage. Concepts of honesty, trust, open-mindedness, and respect are guiding principles in this connectivity to others. The more positive connections a student or adult has to the school, the better their quality of life. For the student, still in their formative years, their relationships can set the groundwork for their future expectations of self and others.

Freiburg (2008) articulates that

> School climate is very simple—it is about relationships: relationships among adults, relationships between adults and children and relationships among peers. It's about the quality of those relationships and in essence whether individuals inside schools treat each other appropriately. It boils down to this. (public presentation, March 27, 2008).

This sentiment is reflected in guidance from the National Association of Secondary School Principals (Spittler, 2017). In analyzing the changes brought forth by the Every Students Succeed Act (ESSA), a greater emphasis on school climate calls for educators to "instill trusting, caring relationships to promote open communication." This step then opens the door for dialogue around potentially difficult topics. The more discourse schools invite, the greater the chance for honest feedback. This honesty can be uplifting when it is complimentary. On the flip side, honesty can be difficult to swallow when it is critical. Although the topics can be challenging at times, having a conversation is an integral part of recognizing the values, beliefs, and contributions of others. For school leaders and learn and grow, it is important they exercise vulnerability, allowing others to voice even the most critical of opinions.

"School climate is a product of social interactions among students and with teachers, is influenced by educational and social values, and has been shown to relate to social situations within classrooms and to the school as a whole" (Koth et al., 2008, p. 96). In examining the most efficient path towards improving school climate, one thought is to focus more attention on building stronger connections within student groups and also between students and teachers (Koth et al., 2008, p. 102.). The authors hypothesize that this may yield greater results than school-wide efforts. Suldo et al. (2008, p. 64) connected multiple aspects of school climate to students' quality of life, including relationships with their teachers, academic outcomes, student conduct, and academic self-efficacy. The authors confirmed that students feel more supported by teachers when healthy relationships exist.

Decker et al. (2007, p. 105) found relationships to be especially important for African-American students in their study. The students in the study felt positive about their relationships with teachers but also desired more positive relationships. The authors concluded that this bond had greater importance at a younger age and laid the groundwork for improved student outcomes in multiple areas. A more concrete recommendation from the authors is for schools to work more closely with their school psychologists to build stronger, more positive relationships with students.

Reaves and Cozzens (2018, pp. 52, 58) found that "positive staff relationships emerged from a safe and supportive school climate," and that these relationships were significant predictors of a teacher's intrinsic motivation. In examining lower-performing schools, Ethier (2017, p. 82) found collaboration between teachers and students to be significantly lower than in higher-performing schools. Berg and Aber (2015, p. 1163) found that "A positive interpersonal climate may serve to protect children from risk factors faced outside of school, whereas a negative climate could exacerbate the negative effects of these risk factors."

While collaboration is a term frequently used in educational settings, there is contrarian literature showing it does not always lead to positive outcomes. In the case of work completed by Collie et al. (2012, p. 26), increased collaboration between teachers was associated with increased stress levels. However, the authors are quick to acknowledge that undetermined variables appear to be part of this surprising result. One possible explanation provided is the nature of the collaboration. It is a word of caution to administrators when constructing professional development, professional learning teams,

and other collaborative initiatives. The authors stress the importance of focusing on organic, teacher-driven efforts, in place of a top-down, distanced approach often exercised by administration. The latter approach can increase teacher demands and contribute to the stress and challenges that collaboration is meant to alleviate (Collie et al., 2012, p. 26). This underscores a challenge of leadership. Knowing when to intervene, and to what extent, can play a major role in influencing the work environment for staff. If these negative effects contribute to a more negative school climate, then this has detrimental effects on students, staff, and other in-school stakeholders.

Social-Emotional Learning Connections to School Climate

The New Teacher Project states

> As we know, kids spend more time at school than at home, so it's important that when parents drop their kids off at school, it's a place kids feel welcome and embraced and cared for and valued. Parents want a great education for their children and a holistic approach—so strong academics, but also meeting their kids' needs socially and emotionally. Parents want their kids to enjoy school. (Fullard, 2023)

Thapa et al. (2013, p. 13) articulate that "Sustained positive school climate is associated with positive child and youth development." In looking at student social-emotional well-being, Preble and Gordon (2011, p. 11) found that 20% of elementary school students feel emotionally or physically unsafe at school, and the logical conclusion is that this has far-reaching effects on their ability to develop academically, socially, and emotionally. Secondary students with lower school connectedness were more likely to experience "anxiety/depressive" symptoms, even if they had positive social experiences. Students with positive connectedness socially and to the school environment had the "best outcomes in later years" (Bond et al., 2007, Abstract).

Thapa et al. (2013, pp. 13-14) reflect on the importance of risk prevention within policy, as nearly all states in America have put forth structured anti-bullying initiatives. This is a swift change from just 4-years prior, when Cohen et al. (2009, pp. 187-188) wrote about the inadequacies of climate efforts driven by state departments of education. The authors indicate that a lack of clarity and coherence between various entities is concerning.

Cohen and Geier (2010, p. 2) concluded "In America and around the world, there is growing interest in school climate reform and appreciation that this is a viable, data-driven school improvement strategy that promotes safer, more supportive and civil K-12 schools."

This is a single example of reform efforts related to school climate. Other emerging initiatives include enhancing social-emotional and mental health support. Cohen and Freiberg (2013, pp. 3-4) concluded that numerous improvements to alleviate bullying in schools are essentially school climate initiatives, with an emphasis on social-emotional awareness and fostering positive relationships.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) acknowledges the importance of schools instilling social-emotional skills in children. The CDC conveys that social-emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of individual student growth and preparation for a diverse society. Not surprisingly, emphasis is placed on improving interpersonal relationships and showing value for others, especially those with different backgrounds. An additional piece of guidance from the CDC includes informing families of the school's SEL practices.

Teachers, naturally also have social-emotional needs, especially in the face of shifts in society. In the results of a 5,000-teacher survey from the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, Brackett & Cipriano (2020) found the most commonly expressed sentiments were "anxious, fearful, worried, overwhelmed and sad. Anxiety, by far, was the most frequently mentioned emotion." Interestingly a similar survey conducted by the center in 2017, led to many of the same conclusions about teacher social-emotional well-being. In this survey conducted before the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers described similar themes of "frustrated, overwhelmed, stressed, tired." An important takeaway from the earlier survey is that teachers identified the source of their angst as the principal of the school. They reflected on feeling unsupported in an environment of increased demands and unreasonable expectations. In examining concerns of teacher mental and physical safety, an important finding of Huang et al. (2020, Abstract) is

> Although school climate has been shown to have a positive effect on student outcomes, the current study also suggests that school climate, characterized by consistent rule enforcement and supportive administrators and teachers, may play a role in reducing the likelihood of teacher victimization.

Huang and associates (2020) note this a concern of great importance, given that approximately 1-in-10 teachers in a 2011-12 nationwide survey reported being the victims of threats or threatening behavior in the prior year.

In the same work from Yale (2020), themes related to toxic-positivity come to light. That is, administrators convey care through words, but actions not being aligned with the words. In many cases, teachers experience language of care and concern, but the demands of their jobs continue to increase. This is a counterintuitive approach that

shows a disconnect between teachers and the person with tremendous influence over their workplace conditions.

While much of the current research focuses on the impact of SEL on students, the work of Collie, Shapka, and Perry (2012, p. 24) found that social-emotional influences have a bearing on multiple aspects of a teacher's role, including job satisfaction, stress, and personal beliefs of competency. For these reasons, the authors encourage more research to be done, focusing on teacher aspects of SEL. An interesting finding of this work is that as SEL competency increases, so too did teacher perceptions of stress. A possible conclusion from the authors is that with new pedagogical training, teachers have a greater understanding of where they lack competency, thus creating more stress (Collie et al., 2012, p. 24). It is assumed that part of the stress can be explained by the implementation process and will potentially improve over time.

Teacher Recruitment, Retention, and Connections to School Climate

It is interesting to read the guidance of Perry (1908, p. 75), who had a grasp of the challenges many decades ago when he wrote of the principal as "He must establish himself such a reputation for ability, and especially for just and kindly treatment, that teachers will, when they have an option, choose to work in the school over which he presides." In these writings, Perry understands the principal's influence over teacher retention. As a side note, the use of the pronoun "he" in referring to the principals indicates it was a role often reserved for males, although there were earlier examples of female education leaders before Perry's work. Future recommendations for research in the field include a discussion of female school administration in the United States and the

impact this has on school climate. In modern times, the School Superintendents Association (AASA) finds a large majority of educators in the United States are female (72%), yet only 13.2% of superintendents are female. A look at principal gender shows a majority are female, but that there are contrasts between school levels. A large majority of elementary school principals, nationally, are female, while the opposite is true for secondary schools. In hiring superintendents, school districts often look for administrators with backgrounds focused at the secondary level, which may be responsible for part of this large gender disparity (Glass, 2000). As the current study is written by a male administrator, the concept of gender, leadership, and their influences are frequently considered in day-to-day operations. Future studies may consider gender representation in educational leadership and the possible connections to teacher satisfaction and retention.

High rates of teacher turnover have been shown to have negative academic consequences for students, especially in more diverse and higher-poverty schools (Ronfeldt et al., 2013, p. 30). High turnover rates have been connected to "lower perceptions of order and discipline (Koth et al., 2008, p. 101), indicating school climate and health are dependent on continuity of staff.

The consequences of struggling to retain teachers also present a negative impact on school finance. The cost of recruiting, replacing, and training a new teacher can cost upwards of $20,000 (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. 30). Common reasons for leaving a school, as reported by the authors, include increasing demands of the role, and the frequently reported concept of poor administrative support. Carver-

Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017, p. 29) find teachers reporting the lowest levels of administrative support are more than twice as likely to leave their schools than teachers reporting even moderate levels of administrative support.

The financial impact of teacher turnover should be important to school employees, but also to boards of education and the communities they represent. An understanding of how teacher turnover shapes finance is of great interest, given that resources are finite. A sound argument can be made that an investment in improved principal-teacher relationships is also a sound financial investment, given the increased likelihood that teachers will remain in their current schools. Phillips and Ingersoll (2015) believe that schools do not have a true understanding of what teacher turnover costs them. Ingersoll states that in conversations around this issue, school leaders are often able to identify what is being saved, but do not often have a grasp of the costs, thus not fully recognizing the net cost of recruitment and retention.

Phillips and Ingersoll (2015) state that characteristics of teachers likely to leave the profession include minority teachers, teachers dissatisfied with their compensation, and also teachers graduating from more prestigious universities. As with the prevailing research, Ingersoll states that school conditions are the primary reasons teachers leave. These include struggles with administrative support and a perceived lack of value for their opinions. A vital finding from Ingersoll is that while student behavior can have a negative effect on teachers, there are schools that do a better job of addressing concerns, thus leading to better work conditions and high levels of teacher retention. It is argued

that an approach grounded in the inclusion of teachers will itself help to improve teacher perceptions of support.

Teacher turnover and retention can vary greatly between schools, even when they are in proximity to each other or reside in the same school district. Significant differences in teacher turnover rates are often indicative of unique school characteristics, such as socioeconomic status. Ingersoll et al. (2018) find that a quarter of all schools in the United States are responsible for nearly half of all teacher turnover. These schools tend to have higher poverty rates. It is troubling to see children living in poverty tend to experience less staff stability in their schools.

While teacher recruitment and retention are often mentioned synonymously. retention is often a bigger problem. Those who stay in the profession often begin at higher-poverty schools, only to move on to lower-poverty schools. The workplace environment is cited as a major contributing factor to these employment shifts (Darling-Hammond & Ducommun, 2007, p. 2).

Anhorn (2008, p. 15) points out that negative teacher workplace environments often throw new teachers in with a "sink or swim" mentality. This is attributed to a combination of high demands and the struggle to obtain quality support. While items such as salary cannot easily be controlled by building administration, other factors can be reasonably influenced by the principal. Anhorn points to examples of supporting teachers with difficult situations involving students and parents.

Reaves and Cozzens (2018, p. 57) conducted an independent sample t-test to examine differences in intrinsic motivation between teachers who feel safe and

supported, and those who do not. The authors found that the difference was statistically significant, with the teachers feeling a greater sense of safety and support also feeling higher levels of motivation in the workplace. A similar independent samples t-test was performed in the same study, this time examining differences in self-efficacy, based on the teacher's perceived level of safety and support. Again, teachers who perceived a better school climate reported higher levels of self-efficacy than their counterparts with more negative perceptions. This concept of school climate and teacher motivation being connected is further supported by MacNeil et al. (2009, p. 77).

Collie et al. (2012, p. 22) found that as teacher comfort with social-emotional learning aspects improved, so did their job satisfaction and perception of professional abilities. It can be argued that increased teacher competency with social-emotional learning is a sound investment in supporting teachers with student behavior concerns. Teacher perceptions of student behavior are an important part of teacher retention and well-being. Adults working in classrooms are more prone to "emotional exhaustion" when they have a negative perception of student conduct (Tsouloupas et al., 2010, pp. 185-186). The authors encourage school leaders to provide social-emotional professional development to staff to acknowledge stressors and also provide coping strategies. For administrators serving teachers, time must be taken to listen to teacher concerns, show validity for their perspectives, and then work collectively to shape more positive viewpoints. The prevailing literature demonstrates that an investment in improving perceptions of student conduct is an investment toward greater academic achievement. Collie et al. (2012, p. 22) found an association between teachers' focus on improving

social-emotional learning and student conduct. As teacher commitment increased, student conduct was found to improve. In the same study of school climate, teacher perceptions of student behavior motivation were found to be the strongest predictors of workplace stress, job satisfaction, and perceptions of personal competency. The authors believe this makes a great deal of sense, as teacher's perceptions of students influence the level of expectations. A strong argument is made for administrators to support teachers by building more positive perceptions of their students (Collie et al., 2012, p. 24).

The Role of the Principal in Shaping School Climate

The difference in how these potentially difficult administrator-teacher interactions are received may depend largely on the quality of workplace relationships, notably trust between the teachers and their principal. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015, p. 267) find that with increased trust for the principal, comes higher teacher enthusiasm, shared self-efficacy, openness, and commitment.

The prior example is a "catch-22," as the quality of these interactions is based largely on the existing climate of the school, yet the climate of the school is influenced by the same interactions. This single example shows the complexity of school climate and the inherent challenges faced with positively influencing it at the administrative level. School climate is not influenced in a single direction, but through an immeasurable number of influences, flowing in all directions through the organization. This thought could be discouraging to some, given the complexity. Yet, the principal still has tremendous power to improve the school climate. Through each decision and interaction, they can choose to contribute positive or negative energy.

There is a great deal of responsibility and influence held by administrators working in schools. An understanding of the administrator role is of great importance for current principals and those seeking to enter the profession. Some of the disconnect between what is done and what should be done may lie in misconceptions of the role. Kate Rousmaniere (2013), writing for *The Atlantic* explores the dynamics of the principalship:

> In American public schools, the principal is the most complex and contradictory figure in the pantheon of educational leadership. The principal is both the administrative director of state educational policy and a building manager, both an advocate for school change and the protector of bureaucratic stability. Authorized to be an employer, supervisor, professional figurehead, and inspirational leader, the principal's core training and identity is as a classroom teacher. A single person, in a single professional role, acts on a daily basis as the connecting link between a large bureaucratic system and the individual daily experiences of a large number of children and adults. Most contradictory of all, the principal has always been responsible for student learning, even as the position has become increasingly disconnected from the classroom.

Given the misconceptions of the role, some prospective administrators do not comprehend the challenges before them. Further adding to the complexity is that each school and community differs in norms, customs, values, and traditions. The title of "Principal" can hold different expectations and responsibilities between school buildings and districts. The title may be the same, but the expectations and challenges can differ significantly.

It is highly recommended that educational prospective leaders gain a clear understanding of what actually takes place and determine if this is the correct role for their aptitudes and interests. While there are understandable variances in administrator preparation programs and experiences leading to the principalship, Whitaker (2015, p. xi)

asserts “The difference between more effective principals and their less effective colleagues is not what they know, it is what they do.” While the specific needs of schools may vary, each school will benefit from an improved perception of school quality. The principal serves as the greatest advocate for improving perceptions of the school.

The role of the principal has evolved in recent years. Lead administrators in schools are charged with the oversight of numerous areas impacting students, staff, and the school community. Leveraging a more positive school climate for the sake of school improvement is the most meaningful and sustainable investment that the principal can make. “Education research shows that most school variables, considered separately, have at most small effects on learning. The real payoff comes when individual variables combine to reach critical mass. Creating the conditions under which that can occur is the job of the principal” (Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 2). While the role of the principal can be difficult to encapsulate in a few sentences, the Wallace Foundation (2011) determined the most essential functions include building a positive school climate and empowering others.

To make this vision a reality, there must be “Collaborative leadership, innovation, human capital management, equity, global-mindedness, and more,” with the principal supporting the diverse needs of individuals (Epstein & Toner, 2019, p. 45). The key word in this prior statement is “collaborative” as the principal is unable to accomplish this in isolation. The collective efforts of the team are needed to leverage growth for the team. In reflecting on school improvement in her struggling school, former principal,

Carol Conklin-Spillane (2018, p. 35) stated “It was the ability to understand the school culture, then harness the power of distributed leadership and shared accountability that made the essential difference in making and sustaining change.” Given that positive school attitudes lead to more motivated teachers, which in turn sparks improved student outcomes, MacNeil et al. (2009, pp. 77-78) encourage principals to use school climate as a lens to focus on academic achievement. In essence, improving school climate *is* academic leadership.

Portugal and Ahn argued that

> All too often, we ask our leaders to know everything, fix every problem, and tell us what to do. This is an unrealistic standard. Our principals face a growing number of challenges and it is impossible to know everything. It is no wonder that principal turnover is a challenge nationwide. (2021, p. 42)

As a single leader cannot do the lifting alone, distributed leadership is necessary. For students and staff to take part in the heavy lifting, they must feel valued. They must know that they are trusted and that their perspectives will be heard. “Empowering students (and teachers) to feel valued for their input in policy making, management, and improvement of the school and the surrounding community raises commitment and motivation” (Preble & Taylor, 2011, p. 16). A challenge of sharing leadership is that administrators report there are often tasks that they must complete alone, and cannot be shared with others (Klocko & Wells, 2015, p. 340). A counter to this argument is that principals could more effectively identify items to be delegated and ensure that these are passed into the capable hands of others.

Given the literature in the field continues to demonstrate the influence of the principal on the well-being of students and staff, it is interesting to see much of the same

literature describe the struggles of the lead administrator. Reasons for these struggles could be attributed to many factors. Wise (2015, pp. 112-113) cites overwhelming demands and not enough resources as contributing factors to administrator challenges, concluding that many struggle to do the work, and even more struggle to do it well. While Horng et al. (2009, p. 26) cite prior research indicating that principals should spend a great deal of time on improving instruction, they also observe "some evidence that a single-minded focus on principals as instructional leaders operationalized through direct contact with teachers (e.g., classroom visits) may be detrimental if it forsakes the important role of principals as organizational leaders." Skilled school administration requires situational awareness, and understanding of when and where to best invest time and energy, given present circumstances and potential issues that could disrupt school operations (Marzano et al., 2005).

The literature supports the conclusion that many administrators across the United States struggle to effectively support others. The demands of the role may complicate this, especially as administrators report increased responsibilities, stress levels, and difficulty with delegating responsibility to others (Klocko & Wells, 2015, p. 340). Perhaps narrow attention to academics and accountability has come at a tremendous price, detracting from a focus on scores-first, instead of people-first (Cohen, 2006, pp. 201-202; Preble & Gordon, 2011, p. 13). There is only so much that can be done in a school day, but an investment in the well-being of students and teachers is shown to pay incredible dividends for individuals and the whole school community (Thapa et al., 2013, p. 13).

There may be other barriers at play. Challenges may emerge when the attitudes and practices of adults are not aligned closely with those of the student population. In the doctoral work of Bates (2018, p. 217) they find that "The experiences of youth in schools are influenced by not only their cultural norms, but also the cultural norms of their schools. When the prevailing norm of a school, defined by the cultural norms of the high school principals, mismatch with the norms of youth, risks for school dropout are exacerbated." This conclusion is powerful, as it presents the school climate as being driven by the principal's interests, skills, and attitudes. The qualities and approach of the principal can be aligned or misaligned with the students of the same school. Closer alignment will likely lead to improved student circumstances, while a misalignment will likely encourage more student challenges.

For a principal to make the kind of meaningful, sustained progress that schools need, there is a necessity in gathering high-quality data, from multiple measures and using this to implement change that works. An examination of the perceptual data, and differences in opinions, has tremendous power in school improvement. What students and staff feel about their school is invaluable. It can be clear, and direct, and lead to swift action. Successful administrators cannot do it alone, but they should be the leaders in the school improvement process grounded in clarity, honesty, and openness. As Stover (2005, p. 32) surmised "Forget about fancy programs or interventions. Attitudes and behaviors in a school are not going to change unless the principal understands how to work with the existing culture—and knows how to help it evolve into a healthier one."

Acknowledging that the demands placed on American Schools have increased dramatically over time, a need for clarity emerges. Determining what matters most and where to make the correct investments can be the difference between a school that improves and one that is stuck. Fullan (2010, p. 16) expertly defines the challenges, yet with an inspiring tone for improving schools through a strong sense of purpose: "There is too much overload on the current change journey. The skinny is about finding the smallest number of high-leverage, easy-to-understand actions that unleash stunningly powerful consequences."

"Reforms done piecemeal, one isolated program at a time, were not likely to bring about change" (Ross & Lowther, 2003, p. 16). Real school improvement involves gathering data from multiple sources to form a clearer picture of the whole child and the whole school. Utilizing multiple data sources is supported by Bernhardt (2018), who reflects on data dives with staff as a form of empowerment and meaningful discovery. The principal may be the lead in compiling the data, but significant discoveries can be made when others are provided the opportunity to examine.

> Without creating a more positive school climate, most efforts to institute change will flounder-maybe never getting off the ground, or lasting only as long as the program funding, or at best, being an isolated bright spot out of step with other parts of the school program. (Preble & Gordon, 2011, p. 12)

> Whether aiming to prevent bullying, increase attendance, lessen disciplinary incidents, or improve academic performance, the umbrella of school climate offers a comprehensive framework for real problem solving and organizational capacity building. (Preble & Gordon, 2011, p. 12)

Given perception differences between subgroups in a school, greater investment may need to take place with individuals having the most negative perceptions of school

climate (Koth et al., 2008, p. 102). As perceptions are often connected to outcomes, improving these negative perceptions can support individual and whole-school growth. The authors articulate that an emphasis on building healthier interpersonal skills is a sounder investment than larger efforts, as this keeps the emphasis closer to the classroom level.

The necessity of examining perceptual differences can be found in perceptions of school problems. For example, if adults see bullying as a minor issue in their school, while children see it as a major problem, this disconnect serves as a warning of a larger issue, with the need for greater attention (Cohen et al., 2009, p. 199).

Cohen (2006, pp. 201-202) argues that schools have operated in stark contrast to the desires of parents and educators. While these adults have articulated a desire to foster a love of learning in preparation for life, schools have instead placed increasing emphasis on core academic instruction. It is argued that this is placing academic-centric needs before the more basic, primary needs of learners.

Later writings from Cohen (2014, pp. 1-2) point to further counterintuitive approaches to school climate. While it is no secret that school climate is connected to numerous outcomes, administrators often struggle to evaluate and implement meaningful changes to drive improvement. This is one of the most significant problems facing school administrators. Many understand the importance of school climate but struggle to properly identify problems and come up with proper solutions. While the climate of the school is woven into the fabric of all school operations, relationships, and interactions,

this can create ambiguity in how to respond. Forming a positive climate can appear both simple and complex at the same time.

As Cohen states (2006, p. 202), the social-emotional investments that are being pushed aside are the same efforts that could develop a love of learning in students. The challenge is for schools to identify how much investment needs to be made, and where. Whole-child education is an emphasis on examining multiple aspects of learning, which extends well beyond academic performance. Levin-Epstein and Toner (2019, p. 45) advocate for urgency in addressing "A student's intellectual capacity, emotional and social development, and sense of place and potential in the wider world." This is a tremendous undertaking, with the principal curating the vision and ensuring involvement from all stakeholder groups.

Ideally, schools can be more proactive than reactive in their approach to school improvement. Continually reacting to and combating interpersonal, academic, and behavioral struggles is draining. Preble and Taylor (2011, p. 16) believe schools can make greater progress by communicating the positive, demonstrating genuine value for others, and instilling a shared commitment towards common goals. As this is a shared commitment, even the most well-intentioned leaders will need staff and students on their team to make meaningful, sustained growth happen.

Teacher and Student Perceptions of School Climate

Kenneth Smith (2020) conducted a study incorporating over 10,000 responses across dozens of schools in the United States. The findings conclude that teachers have higher perceptions of school climate in the areas of *people, places, processes, policies,*

and programs. These domains encompass the dimensions of the Inviting School Survey-Revised (ISS-R). This study found teachers had significantly higher perceptions than students in each of the previously mentioned areas. Smith (2005, pp. 35-37) explains the value of each component in the ISS-R. The *people* section of the survey refers to the value shown for others. *Places* identify the level of respect for facilities, which can include items such as cleanliness and safety. *Processes, policies, and programs* refer to the established routines, guidance, and opportunities available.

The work of Mitchell et al. (2010) found that teacher and student perceptions of climate were significantly different and important for future scholars to consider. On the contrary, Jacobs (2018, p. 2) found no significant difference in perceptions between students and teachers. Jacobs added the additional level of parents to his study, again showing no significant difference in perceptions between the studied groups.

The classroom environment has a greater impact on teacher perceptions of school climate than students, with student conduct as a major predictor of teacher perceptions. Students are more likely to be impacted by schoolwide factors than their teachers (Mitchell et al., 2010, Abstract). One possible explanation at the secondary level is the structure of student schedules. Students moving between multiple classrooms in a school day will encounter various teachers, structures, and different expectations. For the teacher, their environment is more consistent. The same study found no correlation between student and teacher perceptions.

Preble and Taylor (2008, p. 39) found teachers reported higher levels of agreement than students in areas of physical safety, student-to-student support, fairness,

and adult intervention to support students. Areas, where students reported higher scores than adults, included respect between genders, and student empowerment in school decision-making. However, the latter indicator was low for both students and teachers. A notable difference in these results was non-college track students reporting more negative perceptions in all but one indicator. A word of caution from the authors is provided (Preble & Taylor, 2008, p. 40) in that positive perceptions can cause issues with identifying weaknesses. "When teachers or principals perceive their schools to be safe and respectful places, they may be blind to problems going on right under their noses."

These works indicate the value of student and staff voices as essential functions of school climate. For administrators and school improvement leaders, there are ideally few surprises when it comes to school climate. An optimistic belief would be that all key decision-makers are aware of both the strengths and weaknesses of the school. This includes a comprehensive understanding of the differences in stakeholder perceptions, and how to bridge these gaps. To this end, there is power in listening to all voices and gathering a better understanding of how to improve the wellness of the school.

Teachers often have a more direct path to communicate their needs, concerns, and wants, given their role within the school. There is still no guarantee their voices will be heard unless ample time and energy is invested in this process. As important or more important, are the student voices. Schools exist to provide opportunities for students to learn, grow, and succeed. It is important to know what our students think and feel about the place where they spend many waking hours each day. Students can view the school's climate through a different lens, which can drive opinions that differ significantly from

their teachers. This study examines perceptual differences between students and teachers as a means to identify areas of improvement and use this knowledge to better inform future administrative decisions.

Female and Male Student Perceptions of School Climate

Gender is a key characteristic to explore when considering perceptual differences in school climate, given it can have a profound impact on the lives of others. Korabik et al. (2008) state "Every day of their lives, people's gender influences the manner in which they are expected to behave, the way that they are perceived and evaluated by others, the kinds of roles that they take on, and the possibilities that are available to them."

On the surface, it can appear a school is equipped to offer equitable opportunities and assurances to students, regardless of gender. For example, many schools have codes of conduct, safety protocols, positive behavior programs, and social-emotional supports. Without a closer examination, an administrator could falsely assume perceptions of safety and security do not differ dramatically between male and female students. This assumption then could lead to a lack of action, failing to improve conditions for a large portion of the student population. It is important to recognize implementing these policies, procedures, and programs are the initial steps toward school improvement. To better the school climate, it is important to avoid assumptions and instead examine statistical differences in perceptions.

Astor and Meyer (2001) found that female students reported more school safety concerns than male students. This is not supported by the findings of The Center for

Social and Emotional Education (2008, p. 1), which reported that "climate ratings are consistently lower for boys and students of color." Bradshaw and Leaf (2008, p. 101), articulated that male students "reported less order and discipline." Berg and Aber (2015, pp. 1161-1162) also reported girls being more fearful than boys, which was surprising to the authors as "boys are consistently found to engage in more aggression and bullying behaviors and to be victimized." For future work in the field, this is an important finding. Although boys may experience higher levels of negative interaction, this could lead to erroneous conclusions regarding which gender has more urgent needs and how to best support these needs. A final interesting finding of Bradshaw and Leaf (2008, p. 101) is Male students report less "achievement motivation" than female students. Future research in the field may be inclined to determine what specific factors of school climate drive this disparity in motivation between males and females.

Results of the 2017 PISA Study (Organization for Economic Co-operation Development, 2017, p. 119) showed that boys in the United States showed a "particularly noticeable" more positive sense of belonging compared to girls. Cimpian (2018) notes that while gaps persist between the genders in multiple areas, there is little effort in educational policy to narrow these gaps. Similar gaps in race and socioeconomics, for example, are often at the heart of school improvement practices, while gender is typically not shown the same level of attention. This is an interesting point, given the influence gender has on our daily lives.

A consideration when comparing male and female student perceptions is how staff perceptions of gender differences can influence student perceptions. An alarming

discovery of Cimpian's findings is that when race and socioeconomic status are similar, teachers tend to have higher perceptions of a boy's mathematics ability than his female classmate. The findings are based on earlier research completed by Robinson-Cimpian et al. (2013). A great caution of the later work by Cimpian is that these lower perceptions of students perpetuate academic gaps in mathematics between boys and girls. Simply put, the teacher's perceptions of student self-efficacy matter greatly to the trajectory of student achievement. For the teacher, there is encouragement to consider personal biases and focus on what the data says about the student. For the administrator working in collaboration with teachers, there exists a moral and ethical imperative to support more positive perceptions of student ability. A potential difficulty arises in conversations between teachers and administration. Teachers may perceive a challenge to their potential biases as a lack of support. As the prevailing research suggests, teachers perceiving lower levels of support from their administration have lesser opinions of school quality and are more likely to leave their current school (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. 30).

Male and Female Teacher Perceptions of School Climate

Similarly to this current study, Shouppe (2005, pp. 91-92) considered the role of gender in teacher perceptions. He found no significant differences in perceptions of school climate between male and female teachers. He also found male and female teachers possessed similar perceptions of principal and colleague commitment to their roles.

Bevans et al. (2007, p. 296) explored school climate perceptual differences through the prism of staff affiliation in the school, defining this as "a collective sense of friendliness, enthusiasm, school pride, and feelings of accomplishment. Academic emphasis assesses order and discipline among students and a strong student work ethic." They found male staff had significantly lower perceptions in the area of staff affiliation compared to female staff. Compared to their female counterparts, male staff also perceived lower levels of academic emphasis within the school (Bevans et al., 2007, p. 298). The authors define academic emphasis in terms of "order and discipline among students and a strong student work ethic."

These findings are contradicted by Klassen and Chiu (2010, p. 748), who found female teachers reported greater stress than male counterparts related to student behavior, the demands of their roles, and classroom stressors. Interestingly, the authors note that previous research by Hopf and Hatzichristou (1999) found "female teachers to be more sensitive to externalizing behavior problems, especially from adolescent male students" while male counterparts did not view similar behavior problems with the same level of concern.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to examine perceptual differences in school climate between in-school stakeholder groups. Research question 1 examines perceptual differences between students and teachers. Research questions 2 and 3 examine the role of gender in shaping perceptual differences. Research question 2, involves a comparison of perceptual differences between male and female students, whereas research question 3

asks if there is a statistical difference between male and female teacher perceptions of school climate. Research question 4 is a follow-up to question 1. If a statistical difference in school climate perceptions is found between students and teachers, then research question 4 will determine if there is an interaction between the variables of school role and participant gender.

The literature in the field builds connections between several factors that both influence and are influenced by school climate. These include student factors related to attendance, behavior, academic achievement, and social-emotional learning. Additional factors examined in the literature review include the connections between school climate and issues impacting staff. The emphasis in this area is the connection between teacher perceptions of school climate and recruitment and retention of staff. This is a key area for the vitality of any school. Special considerations in this chapter were made for the role of relationships in shaping school climate, as well as the impact the school principal has in leading positive or negative perceptions.

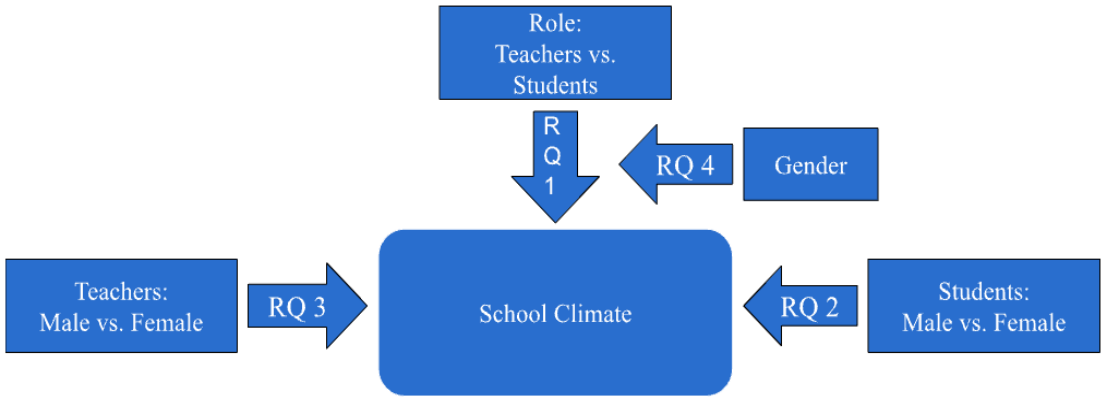
To directly address this study's research questions, additional literature explored differences in stakeholder perceptions found in other studies. This includes comparisons of student and teacher perceptions (RQ1), male and female student perceptions (RQ2), as well as male and female teacher perceptions (RQ3). In all three research questions, the literature provided mixed conclusions, with some studies reporting higher levels of perceptions between groups, while additional studies contradicted these findings.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that defines this study can be found in Figure 1 and is based on the theory that perceptual differences in school climate exist based on gender or role within the school. Research question 1 examines differences in perceptions between students and staff. Research question 2 examines perceptual differences between male and female students, while question 3 focuses on differences in perceptions between male and female teachers. If research question 1 delivers a significant result, then research question 4 will determine if there is an interaction between the factors of school role and gender.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Schools with positive climates are often characterized as having higher levels of trust, support, and care than those schools with negative climates. The traits allow these schools the opportunity to move forward in support of school improvement, often

resulting in meaningful, sustained growth. Therefore, schools must examine their present characteristics, beginning with what key groups believe. To accomplish this, educators must open themselves to gathering the thoughts and perceptions of those within the school community.

With the perceptual data from students and staff, there is a newfound ability to examine differences within groups, distances between groups, and most importantly, reshape a more positive school narrative. Knowing what others believe is the first step towards action. By improving student and staff perceptions, schools not only have the opportunity to improve their climate but also indirectly influence overall school improvement.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Methods

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study is to identify differences in perceptions between in-school stakeholders based on their gender and their role within the school. As articulated in the literature review, positive perceptions of school climate are connected with better individual and whole-school outcomes. For school leaders to foster meaningful school improvement, it is necessary to examine current stakeholder perceptions, identify areas of statistical difference, and leverage this knowledge to improve school conditions. The current study is part of one administrator's action research, working towards improved school quality. The study addresses the following research questions:

Research Question 1: To what extent is there a difference in perceptions of school climate between students and teachers?

Research Question 2: To what extent is there a difference in perceptions of school climate between female students and male students?

Research Questions 3: To what extent is there a difference in perceptions of school climate between female teachers and male teachers?

Research Question 4: If question 1 found a difference between students and teachers, is there an interaction between role and gender?

Research Design and Rationale

Research question 1 asks if there are perceptual differences in school climate (DV) between students and teachers within the school based on their role (IV). Research question 2 seeks to understand if there are perceptual differences in school climate (DV) between female students and male students, based on their gender (IV). Research question 3 explores perceptual differences (DV) between male teachers and female teachers, based on gender (IV). Research question 4 asks if these perceptual differences are due to an interaction between the factors of role within the school (IV) and gender (IV).

Participant selection was completed through an online Google Survey shared with all current high school teachers and students. Responses to the survey required a login through district-issued Gmail accounts, thus limiting responses to those with approved access.

Methodology

Population

The target population was composed of current high school students and current teachers within a single high school in a Western Nebraska High School. The population was surveyed during the spring semester of the 2019-20 school year. Official school statistics from the Nebraska Education Profile (NEP) show the high school to have a population of 1,220 students and 71.43 teachers (Full-Time Equivalency). Of the 1,220-students, there was a similar distribution between the 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade levels, with 303, 294, 299, and 324 students at the respective grade levels.

Forty-one percent (41%) of students attending the school qualified for free and reduced meals. Achievement data from the 2019-20 school year, reported as part of the 2020-21 NEP, shows a graduation rate of 90% and a college-going rate of 72%. In comparison to the State of Nebraska, the free and reduced meal and college-going rates were each slightly below the state averages (46% and 73%, respectively). The graduation rate of high school was above the state average of 88%.

Teaching demographics show that of the approximately 71 teachers on staff, 52.26% possessed master's degrees, slightly below the statewide average of 56.06%. In terms of overall teaching experience, 11.41 years was the average, compared to 13.96-years as a state average. Interestingly, despite less collective experience and a lower incidence of earned graduate degrees, the average teacher compensation has trended higher than the state average over multiple years.

In terms of race, the student population was notably more diverse than the teacher population. Approximately 21.5% of the student population was of diverse racial backgrounds, compared with less than 3% of the teaching staff. The student population consisted of 957 white students, 187 students of Hispanic descent, 41 students identifying as two or more races, 22 African American students, 10 Asian Americans, and 3 students of Native/American Indian descent. Comparatively, only 2-teaching staff were of minority ethnic backgrounds. Future studies in the area may consider the impact of these staff-to-student racial discrepancies when examining potential differences in climate perceptions.

In considering student achievement characteristics, there was no state assessment data from the 2019-20 or 2020-21 school years, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The school was rated by the Nebraska Department of Education as "Good" during the 2018-19 and 2019-20 school years. This came after the rating of "Needs Support to Improve" during the 2017-18 school year. At the time of this study, the State of Nebraska categorized all schools as either Excellent, Great, Good, or Needs Support to Improve, with 'Excellent' reserved for the highest rated of schools. Schools in the 'Needs Support to Improve' were identified as having significant barriers impacting student achievement and school quality.

Participants were invited to respond to a Google Survey regarding their school's climate, as part of doctoral research through the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The survey was emailed to all current high school students and staff, through district-provided mailing lists.

Sampling Procedures

Convenience sampling was utilized to gather as many student and teacher perceptions as possible. This sampling method resulted in nearly all teachers responding, but a response rate of less than half of current high school students.

Instrumentation

After the survey information page, explaining the study's purpose and rationale, respondents were provided with a statement to agree or disagree before continuing. Choosing to disagree immediately terminated the survey and thanked the respondent for their time.

The concept of the survey was inspired after students in the same school district completed the Gallup Student Poll in the Fall of 2018. Initially, the data from this student survey was to be used, and permission from Gallup (2019) was obtained. However, it was determined a different instrument would need to be used to compare student and teacher responses. The current survey responses are connected to the main themes found within the review of literature.

Both the Gallup Student Poll and the current survey contain the simple prompt "I have fun at school." While the Gallup poll touches on the feeling "safe in the school," the current study breaks this concept into separate prompts of physical and emotional safety.

The survey was administered through Google Survey and focused on whole-child/whole-teacher perceptions of school quality. Questions were formulated with consideration of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, with questions that encourage respondents to consider their safety, level of belonging within the school, and ability to reach their personal goals. Survey prompts were the same for both student and staff groups, to eliminate any unnecessary variability. For each of the 12 survey prompts, responses were provided on a 5-point Likert scale. Respondents rated their level of agreement with the statement using one of the following options: I Strongly Disagree, I Disagree, I Neither Agree Nor Disagree, I Agree, I Strongly Agree. The prompts can be found in their entirety in Table 1.

Table 1

Climate Survey Prompts

Statement	Scale
1. I feel physically safe at school.	1=I Strongly Disagree
2. I feel emotionally safe at school.	2=I Disagree
3. People at school care about me.	3=I Neither Agree or Disagree
4. I have friends at school.	4=I Agree
5. I have fun at school.	5=I Strongly Agree
6. People at school tell me when I've done a good job.	
7. People at school help me when I have a problem.	
8. At school, I can reach my goals.	
9. I look forward to coming to school.	
10. At school, I can be myself.	
11. At school, I can explore things I'm interested in.	
12. I'm free to express my opinions at school.	

The first questions of the survey ask the respondent about their gender and role within the school, ensuring that responses are connected with the appropriate groups examined in this study.

Assent for minor students participating in the survey was gained through email communication with families. The procedures for gaining assent were vetted through a formal IRB approval process. Two separate explanations of the survey, its purpose, and instructions for opting out of participation, were provided to families. No parents or guardians chose to opt their student out of participation, but one parent did contact the lead researcher for clarification.

Communication to prospective student and staff participants explained the survey is optional and there are no risks or direct benefits associated with participating or choosing to not participate.

Recruitment

Families and staff were reminded of the upcoming climate survey, through approved IRB communication. This communication was shared with all current email contacts housed within the school's student information system (SIS). The email communication was sent via SchoolMessenger, a bulk communication platform for schools.

Communication included the rationale for the study, its uses as part of doctoral research and school improvement, as well as an assurance of anonymity. Care was taken to explain how no identifying information would be gathered through participation in the study. Prospective participants, and their families, were encouraged to ask any questions and bring any concerns to the researcher.

Student and staff names, emails, and other directly identifying information were not collected by the survey instrument. Through the recruitment process, students and staff were informed of an opportunity to enter a random drawing for one of 20 Amazon Gift Cards, each worth $10. These gift cards were provided at the expense of the researcher. After the perceptual survey, entrance for this random gift card selection was provided as an option. Winners were randomly selected using an online random number generator. The randomly generated number was then compared to the correlating row on an Excel spreadsheet. A link to a separate gift card entrance was provided to participants

after the perceptual survey. This instrument did collect names, but these were not connected to any responses in the perceptual survey itself.

Data Collection

The perceptual Google Survey was kept open to students and staff for 3 days. Responses required a login through school-administered email accounts and were limited to a single response per school-administered email account. It is estimated that a typical survey took approximately 5 minutes to complete and could be completed on any device with a web browser.

Responses fed directly to a Google Sheet, only accessible to the lead researcher. Responses were coded on a 1-5 scale, with a "5" representing "I Strongly Agree" and a "1" representing "I Strongly Disagree." The remaining values of 2, 3, and 4 similarly act as replacements for the other statements. A mean response, or composite score, was derived from each participant's 12 responses. To address research questions 1-4, the raw data was then uploaded into SPSS for further analysis.

Variables

For research question 1, the dependent variable is the composite school climate score. The independent variable is the role of the participant in the school. This variable has two levels, defined as teacher and student.

Research question 2, like question 1, used the same composite school climate score as the dependent variable. For this question, the independent variable is the gender of students. This variable has two levels, defined as male students and female students.

As with research question 2, question 3 uses the composite school climate score as the dependent variable, and gender as the independent variable. This variable has two levels, defined as male teachers and female teachers.

Research question 4 is explored if there is a statistically significant result for question 1. The dependent variable is the school climate composite score. In this case, there are two independent variables. The first independent variable is gender with levels of male and female. The second independent variable is the role of the participant in the school with levels of student or teacher.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics are generated for the mean scores and standard deviations of each group (Female Students, Male Students, Female Teachers, Male Teachers). Research questions 1, 2, and 3 called for the use of the independent samples t-test, as each question explored mean differences between two independent groups. Research question 1 compared student and teacher perceptions, based on the factor of their role within the school. Research question 2 compared male and female student perceptions. Research question 3 performed a similar test along the factor of gender but with teachers instead of students.

Research question 4 called for the use of two-way ANOVA, based on the 2-levels (gender and role within the school) of the design. The two-way ANOVA was exercised to determine how any differences in research question 1 depend on the factors of gender and role within the school (teacher/student) (see Table 2).

Table 2

Research Questions, Dependent Variables, Independent Variables, and Statistical Tests for Analysis

	Survey Items		
Research Question	DV	IV	Analysis
RQ1: To what extent is there a difference in perceptions of school climate between students and teachers?	School Climate Survey Scores (Composite Means)	Participant Role: Student or Teacher	• Independent samples t-test. • Descriptive statistics and a comparison of 95% confidence intervals.
RQ2: To what extent is there a difference in perceptions of school climate between female students and male students?	School Climate Survey Scores (Composite Means)	Student Gender	• Independent samples t-test. • Descriptive statistics and a comparison of 95% confidence intervals.
RQ3: To what extent is there a difference in perceptions of school climate between female teachers and male teachers?	School Climate Survey Scores (Composite Means)	Teacher Gender	• Independent samples t-test. • Descriptive statistics and a comparison of 95% confidence intervals.
RQ4: If question 1 found a difference between students and teachers, is there an interaction between role and gender?	School Climate Survey Scores (Composite Means)	Participant Gender and Role Within the School	• Two-way ANOVA • Descriptive statistics and a comparison of 95% confidence intervals.

Ethical Considerations

Communication relating to the recruitment of participants informed assent, explanation of risks, potential benefits, and general purpose were approved through the IRB Process. Fair efforts were taken to protect the anonymity of all participants, including no directly identifiable information being collected as part of the research process. The only directly identifiable information connected through this study pertained to the random drawing for one of 20 Amazon Gift Cards. This information was

deliberately kept separate from survey responses, with no way for the lead researcher to connect the individual's identity with their responses.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research methods used to address the study's research questions. This chapter includes a discussion of the population, sampling method, recruitment, data collection, instrument, data analysis, ethical considerations, and potential threats to validity. A quantitative survey methodology was employed to examine in-school stakeholder perceptual differences in school climate.

Limitations

A key limitation of the study is the difference in sample sizes between students (n = 522) and teachers (n = 69). The teacher participation rate captured over 97% of the teaching staff during the survey window, while the number of students surveyed represented less than half of the total population.

Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study is to identify differences in perceptions between in-school stakeholders based on their gender and their role within the school. As articulated in the literature review, positive perceptions of school climate are connected with better individual and whole-school outcomes. For school leaders to foster meaningful school improvement, it is necessary to examine current stakeholder perceptions, identify areas of significant difference, and leverage this knowledge to improve school conditions. The current study is part of one administrator's action research, working towards improved school quality.

The study examined differences in perceptions of school climate between teachers and students, male students and female students, and finally between male teachers and female teachers. This study was designed around four research questions. Research question 1 posed "To what extent is there a difference in perceptions of school climate between students and teachers?" Research question 2 similarly pondered, "To what extent is there a difference in perceptions of school climate between female students and male students?" Research question 3 posed "To what extent is there a difference in perceptions of school climate between female teachers and male teachers?" Finally, research question 4 presented "If question 1 found a difference between students and teachers, is there an interaction between role and gender?"

Descriptive Statistics for All Participants

The descriptive statistics of this study can be found in Table 3. A visual analysis of the 12 survey items, across all participants, reveals several insights. Of the n = 591 participants, the highest mean score came from the prompt "I have friends at school (μ = 4.32)." This score places the average response firmly between "I agree" and "I strongly agree." It also outpaces the next highest survey indicator of "I feel physically safe at school (μ = 3.89)" by a notable margin. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the prompt "I look forward to coming to school (μ = 2.97" provided the lowest mean score within the climate survey. This average response lies just below the neutral point of "I neither agree nor disagree." This is the only survey item to obtain a mean score of less than 3.00. The remaining items within the study yielded mean scores in the range between 3.36 and 3.75 (see Table 3).

A great deal of variation in responses can be found in the survey items of "I feel emotionally safe at school (σ = 1.06)," "At school, I can be myself (σ = 1.11)," "I am free to express my opinions at school σ = 1.16)" "At school, I can be myself (σ = 1.11), and "I look forward to coming to school (σ = 1.21)." These survey items each had a standard deviation of 1.00 or greater, indicating a notable amount of variability in responses.

The overall composite score for all participants (n = 591, μ = 3.60, σ = 0.70) shows less variability as all survey indicators are combined. The average mean survey composite score falls firmly in the range between "I neither agree nor disagree" and "I agree." In viewing the average composite survey on a possible scale from 1.00 to 5.00, this indicates the mean response trends slightly in the positive direction. In placing all

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for All Participants

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I have friends at school.	591	1.00	5.00	4.32	.79
I feel physically safe at school.	591	1.00	5.00	3.89	.81
People at school care about me.	591	1.00	5.00	3.75	.94
At school, I can reach my goals.	591	1.00	5.00	3.69	.92
At school, I can explore things that I'm interested in.	591	1.00	5.00	3.67	1.00
People at school help me when I have a problem	591	1.00	5.00	3.64	.92
Climate Composite	591	1.25	5.00	3.60	.70
I feel emotionally safe at school.	591	1.00	5.00	3.55	1.06
People at school tell me when I've done a good job.	591	1.00	5.00	3.48	.99
At school, I can be myself.	591	1.00	5.00	3.47	1.11
I have fun at school.	591	1.00	5.00	3.38	1.10
I am free to express my opinions at school.	591	1.00	5.00	3.36	1.16
I look forward to coming to school.	591	1.00	5.00	2.97	1.21

individual survey questions on this same range from 1.00 to 5.00, only the item of "I look forward to coming to school" falls below the midline of 3.00. All other individual survey items fall above 3.00 and indicate at least a modest level of positive agreement.

While only one of the individual survey items is below this 3.00 threshold, it is a concerning item from the perspective of a school administrator. "I look forward to coming to school" provided an average response of 2.97, indicating this is an area of growth. It is interesting to see this indicator trend below all others by a large margin.

One consideration for future research is to determine other possible factors that influence the adverse opinion of going to school.

The other survey items provide more positive mean responses and indicate sound reasons a student or teacher is positive about going to school. For example, physical safety ($\mu = 3.89$), people caring ($\mu = 3.75$), receiving help during a problem ($\mu = 3.64$), exploring interests ($\mu = 3.67$), reaching goals ($\mu = 3.69$), and having friends ($\mu = 4.32$) all provide mean responses that far exceed "I look forward to coming to school." Many of these responses point to a climate in which the average student or teacher feels safe, cared for, and with resources to grow. There may be other factors that influence this negative desire to attend school or some combination of factors that this study does not attempt to identify.

Descriptive Statistics for Research Question 1

A visual inspection of 12 survey items for research question 1 (see Table 4) yields several mathematical comparisons of note. We find that teacher responses exceed the 3.50 threshold in all 12 survey prompts, compared to only 6 for students. Additionally, teachers have 12 items that exceeded a mean score of 4.00, while students have only 1 survey item with a mean score reaching the 4.00 threshold.

Though statistical tests were *not* conducted to compare these items, teachers had visually larger mean scores for 11 survey items. The lone area in which students ($\mu = 4.33$) reported higher perceptions than teachers ($\mu = 4.23$) was the prompt of "I have friends at school."

A notable mathematic gap exists for the survey item “I look forward to coming to school.” Here, teachers ($\mu = 4.06$) express much more positive sentiment compared to students ($\mu = 2.83$).

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Research Question 1

	Role	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel physically safe at school.	Teacher	69	4.22	.68
	Student	522	3.84	.82
I feel emotionally safe at school.	Teacher	69	4.23	.73
	Student	522	3.46	1.06
People at school care about me.	Teacher	69	4.07	.73
	Student	522	3.71	.96
I have friends at school.	Teacher	69	4.23	.67
	Student	522	4.33	.81
I have fun at school.	Teacher	69	4.04	.74
	Student	522	3.29	1.11
People at school tell me when I've done a good job.	Teacher	69	3.74	.96
	Student	522	3.45	.99
People at school help me when I have a problem	Teacher	69	4.09	.70
	Student	522	3.58	.93
At school, I can reach my goals.	Teacher	69	3.93	.81
	Student	522	3.66	.93
I look forward to coming to school.	Teacher	69	4.06	.68
	Student	522	2.83	1.19
At school, I can be myself.	Teacher	69	4.00	.79
	Student	522	3.39	1.13
At school, I can explore things that I'm interested in.	Teacher	69	3.88	.80
	Student	522	3.65	1.02
I am free to express my opinions at school.	Teacher	69	3.64	.91
	Student	522	3.32	1.18

Descriptive Statistics for Research Question 2

Research question 2 compares the perceptions of male and female students. Statistical tests were not performed to compare perceptions for each of these items, but a

visual inspection shows of the 12 survey items (see Table 5) shows male students with higher mean responses than female students in all 12 prompts. In general, there was a wide range of variability in both male and female responses across the individual survey items. All items provide a standard deviation of at least .80 for all mean female responses and .75 for all mean male responses. Additionally, 8-mean responses for males had a standard deviation exceeding 1.00, alongside 5 indicators exceeding this same threshold for females.

In terms of agreement with each survey indicator, male students had 7 survey prompts with mean scores of 3.50 or higher. Of these 7 scores, only "I have friends at school" passed the 4.00 threshold. Similarly, this was the only survey item in which female students returned a mean response exceeding 4.00. While male students reported 7 mean scores of 3.50 or higher, their female counterparts only met this same level of favorability in 6 of the survey items.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Research Question 2

	Role & Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel physically safe at school.	Male Student	252	3.96	.83
	Female Student	270	3.74	.80
I feel emotionally safe at school.	Male Student	252	3.70	1.01
	Female Student	270	3.23	1.06
People at school care about me.	Male Student	252	3.73	.98
	Female Student	270	3.69	.94
I have friends at school.	Male Student	252	4.44	.75
	Female Student	270	4.23	.84
I have fun at school.	Male Student	252	3.37	1.20
	Female Student	270	3.21	1.02
People at school tell me when I've done a good job.	Male Student	252	3.49	1.05
	Female Student	270	3.41	.92
People at school help me when I have a problem	Male Student	252	3.61	.99
	Female Student	270	3.55	.88
At school, I can reach my goals.	Male Student	252	3.71	1.00
	Female Student	270	3.61	.86
I look forward to coming to school.	Male Student	252	2.92	1.22
	Female Student	270	2.75	1.16
At school, I can be myself.	Male Student	252	3.46	1.17
	Female Student	270	3.34	1.08
At school, I can explore things that I'm interested in.	Male Student	252	3.65	1.07
	Female Student	270	3.64	.97
I am free to express my opinions at school.	Male Student	252	3.43	1.30
	Female Student	270	3.21	1.04

Descriptive Statistics for Research Question 3

Research question 3 compares the perceptions of male teachers and female teachers. For male teachers, 7 items provided a standard deviation of .80 or greater,

compared to only 3 items for female teachers (see Table 6). This indicates more variability in male responses across multiple survey indicators.

In terms of agreeability, a visual inspection of the descriptive statistics shows both male and female teachers providing mean responses of 3.50 or higher across all 12 survey items. Raising this visual comparison to the 4.00 threshold, we see more separation, with male teachers providing mean scores exceeding this mark in 10 items compared to only 5 indicators for female teachers. Overall, the teaching staff included in the survey provided positive perceptions across the various survey items.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Research Question 3

	Role & Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel physically safe at school.	Male Teacher	31	4.39	.72
	Female Teacher	38	4.08	.63
I feel emotionally safe at school.	Male Teacher	31	4.42	.81
	Female Teacher	38	4.08	.63
People at school care about me.	Male Teacher	31	4.00	.89
	Female Teacher	38	4.13	.58
I have friends at school.	Male Teacher	31	4.16	.82
	Female Teacher	38	4.29	.52
I have fun at school.	Male Teacher	31	4.13	.76
	Female Teacher	38	3.97	.72
People at school tell me when I've done a good job.	Male Teacher	31	3.87	.99
	Female Teacher	38	3.63	.94
People at school help me when I have a problem	Male Teacher	31	4.06	.81
	Female Teacher	38	4.11	.61
At school, I can reach my goals.	Male Teacher	31	4.03	.87
	Female Teacher	38	3.84	.75
I look forward to coming to school.	Male Teacher	31	4.23	.72
	Female Teacher	38	3.92	.63
At school, I can be myself.	Male Teacher	31	4.19	.75
	Female Teacher	38	3.84	.79
At school, I can explore things that I'm interested in.	Male Teacher	31	4.10	.70
	Female Teacher	38	3.71	.84
I am free to express my opinions at school.	Male Teacher	31	3.77	.99
	Female Teacher	38	3.53	.83

Descriptive Statistics for Research Question 4

The descriptive statistics of research question 4 (see Table 7) allow a visual comparison of school climate scores for all study groups. We establish that male teachers ($n = 31$, $\mu = 4.11$, $\sigma = 0.58$) provided the highest school climate score, followed by

female teachers (n = 38, μ = 3.93, σ = 0.45), then male students (n = 252, μ = 3.62, σ = 0.74), then female students (n = 270, μ = 3.47, σ = 0.66).

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for Research Question 4

Dependent Variable: Climate Composite

Which best describes your role in this school?	What is your gender?	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Student	Female	3.47	.66	270
	Male	3.62	.74	252
	Total	3.54	.70	522
Teacher	Female	3.93	.45	38
	Male	4.11	.58	31
	Total	4.01	.52	69

Results of Research Question 1

The first research question (see Table 8) was derived from n = 591 participants, across student (n = 522, μ = 3.54, σ = 0.70) and teacher groups (n = 69, μ = 4.01, σ = 0.52).

Levene's test for equality of variances provided a value of p = .00, indicating equal variances are not assumed. Research question 1 therefore yields an estimated mean difference=.47, with 95% CI [.33, .61], indicating a 95% probability the mean difference between student and teacher perceptions is between .33 and .61 (see Table 9).

The results of research question 1 indicate there is a statistical difference in perceptions of school climate between the teacher and student groups with an

independent sample t-test leading to a p-value of < .001. This indicates teachers have a statistically higher perception of school climate than their students.

Cohen's d (see Table 10) was then examined to determine the magnitude and precision of these perceptual differences between the teacher and student groups. The statistic of Cohen's d = 0.68 suggests a medium to large effect size (Cohen, 1988). The 95% confidence interval for Cohen's d ranges from 0.43 to 0.94. This means that we are 95% confident that the true effect size falls within this interval. This range does not include 0, so we conclude the result is statistically different from 0. The results indicate a medium effect size at the lower bound and a large effect size at the upper bound. These results reflect a meaningful difference between teacher and student perceptions, worth further consideration and potential action.

Table 8

Group Statistics for Research Question 1

	Role	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Climate Composite	Teacher	69	4.01	.52
	Student	522	3.54	.70

Table 9

Independent Samples T-Test for Research Question 1

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
						Significance	Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Two-Sided p	Difference	Lower	Upper
School Role	Equal variances assumed	9.87	.00	5.34	589.00	<.001	.47	.30	.64
	Equal variances not assumed			6.74	104.47	<.001	.47	.33	.61

Table 10

Independent Samples Effect Sizes for Research Question 1

				95% Confidence Interval	
		Standardizer	Point Estimate	Lower	Upper
School Role	Cohen's d	.68	.68	.43	.94

Results of Research Question 2

Research question 2 (see Table 11) comprised responses from n = 522 students, broken further into male students (n = 252, $\mu = 3.62$, $\sigma = 0.74$) and female students (n = 272, $\mu = 3.47$, $\sigma = 0.66$).

Levene's test for equality of means (see Table 12) provides a value of = .10, indicating equal variances are assumed. The mean difference between male and female student perceptions of school climate is .15 and yields a 95% CI [.03, .27], indicating a 95% probability the mean difference between student and teacher perceptions is between .03 and .27.

The independent samples t-test found p = .01, indicating a statistical difference in perceptions of school climate between male and female students. Male students were found to have statistically higher perceptions of school climate than their female counterparts.

Cohen's d (see Table 13) was then utilized to determine the magnitude and precision of perceptual differences between teachers, based on gender. At Cohen's d=0.22, This suggests that on average, gender has a small effect on school climate perceptions amongst students. This indicates a noticeable difference in how male and

female students perceive their school's climate. The 95% confidence interval for Cohen's d was .05 on the lower bound and .39 on the upper bound. This suggests male students, on average, have a small to moderately higher perception of school climate compared to female students.

While there is a difference between the groups, this indicates there is considerable uncertainty regarding the magnitude of this difference. Further investigation might be required to better understand this dynamic, and any decisions should consider both the quantitative analysis and the qualitative context of the study.

Table 11

Group Statistics for Research Question 2

	Role & Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Climate Composite	Male Student	252	3.62	.74
	Female Student	270	3.47	.66

Table 12

Independent Samples T-Test for Research Question 2

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
						Significance	Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Two-Sided p	Difference	Lower	Upper
Student Gender	Equal variances assumed	2.67	.10	2.52	520.00	.01	.15	.03	.27
	Equal variances not assumed			2.51	502.62	.01	.15	.03	.28

Table 13

Independent Samples Effect Sizes for Research Question 2

				95% Confidence Interval	
		Standardizer	Point Estimate	Lower	Upper
Student Gender	Cohen's d	.70	.22	.05	.39

Results of Research Question 3

The descriptive statistics underlying research question 3 (see Table 14) include a total of 69 teacher responses. This sampling can be broken down into male teachers ($n = 31$, $\mu = 4.11$, $\sigma = 0.58$) and female teachers ($n = 38$, $\mu = 3.93$, $\sigma = 0.45$).

Levene's test for equality of variances (see Table 15) produced a value of = .46, indicating equal variances are assumed. Research question 3 yields an estimated mean difference=.19, with 95% CI [-.06, .43], indicating a 95% probability the mean difference between student and teacher perceptions is between -.06 and .43. Since this range includes 0, it means that the true difference could be no difference at all, or it could be as low as -.06 or as high as .43. In summary, the analysis suggests a potential difference in. school climate perceptions between male and female students, but with considerable uncertainty regarding the size and direction of this difference. Further investigation might be required to better understand this dynamic. Unlike research question 2, question 3 found no statistical difference in school climate perceptions between male and female teachers. The independent samples t-test provided a p-value of .14 (see Table 15).

Cohen's d (see Table 16) was then utilized to determine the magnitude and precision of perceptual differences between teachers, based on gender. At Cohen's d=0.36, This suggests that on average, gender has a moderate effect on school climate perceptions amongst teachers. This indicates a noticeable, yet non-substantial difference in how male and female teachers perceive their school's climate. The 95% confidence interval for Cohen's d of -0.12 and 0.84. This range suggests uncertainty over the true magnitude of differences in perceptions. With a confidence interval from -0.12 to 0.84, this indicates that the effect size could range from small negative to moderate positive. The point estimate of 0.36 indicates male perception trends more positively than female perceptions. However, the confidence interval indicates there could also be situations where the opposite is true or where males have much more positive perceptions. This wider range suggests some uncertainty about the effect's precise magnitude and direction. This calls for cautious interpretation and possibly further research to more accurately determine the effect size and its practical implications.

Table 14

Group Statistics for Research Question 3

	Role & Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Climate Composite	Male Teacher	31	4.11	.58
	Female Teacher	38	3.93	.45

Table 15

Independent Samples T-Test for Research Question 3

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
						Significance	Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Two-Sided p	Difference	Lower	Upper
Teacher Gender	Equal variances assumed	.55	.46	1.49	67.00	.14	.19	-.06	.43
	Equal variances not assumed			1.45	55.38	.15	.19	-.07	.44

Table 16

Independent Samples Effect Sizes for Research Question 3

				95% Confidence Interval	
		Standardizer	Point Estimate	Lower	Upper
Teacher Gender	Cohen's d	.51	.36	-.12	.84

Results of Research Question 4

As with research question 1, question 4 utilized results from all n = 591 participants, across the student (n = 522, $\mu = 3.54$, $\sigma = 0.70$) and teacher groups (n = 69, $\mu = 4.01$, $\sigma = 0.52$).

The design of this study provides question 4 as a conditional test, based on the results of question 1. As the results of research question 1 were statistically different, this means research question 4 is needed to further explore this difference between student and teacher perceptions.

Research question 4 utilizes a two-way ANOVA to determine if there is an interaction between the variables of gender and school role. With a p-value of .86, no interaction is found between the variables of role and gender. The effect of the participant's role does not vary significantly based on gender, and vice versa (see Table 17).

The interaction term "Role * Gender" has a very small effect size (.00). This suggests very little variation in school climate perceptions can be explained by a potential interaction between the variables of school role and gender. As this effect size is approaching zero, the result is inconsequential.

Table 17

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Research Question 4

Dependent Variable: Climate Composite

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	17.08[a]	3.00	5.69	12.27	<.001	.06
Intercept	3455.64	1.00	3455.64	7443.07	<.001	.93
Role	13.65	1.00	13.65	29.40	<.001	.05
Gender	1.74	1.00	1.74	3.75	.05	.01
Role * Gender	.01	1.00	.01	.03	.86	.00[b]
Error	272.53	587.00	.46			
Total	7935.66	591.00				
Corrected Total	289.61	590.00				

a. R Squared = .059 (Adjusted R Squared = .054)
b. Partial Eta Squared = .0000527

(1)

$$SE = \sqrt{\frac{2 \times (1 - \hat{\eta}^2) \times df_{\text{effect}}}{df_{\text{error}}}}$$

$$SE = \sqrt{\frac{2 \times (1 - 0.0000527) \times 1}{587}}$$

$$SE \approx \sqrt{\frac{1.9998946}{587}}$$

$$SE \approx \sqrt{0.0034072}$$

$$SE \approx 0.05834$$

$$ME = t \times SE$$

$$ME \approx 1.96 \times 0.05834$$

$$ME \approx 0.11425$$

$$\text{CI} = \hat{\eta}^2 \pm ME$$

$$\text{CI} \approx (0.0000527 - 0.11425, 0.0000527 + 0.11425)$$

$$\text{CI} \approx (-0.11420, 0.11431)$$

Chapter 5

Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study is to identify differences in perceptions between in-school stakeholders based on their gender and their role within the school. As articulated in the literature review, positive perceptions of school climate are connected with better individual and whole-school outcomes. For school leaders to foster meaningful school improvement, it is necessary to examine stakeholder perceptions, identify areas of significant difference, and leverage this knowledge to improve school conditions. The current study is part of one administrator's action research, working towards improved school quality. This chapter communicates the interpretation of results, theoretical implications, practical implications, study limitations, recommendations for future research, and conclusions.

The problem in this study is examining the perceptual differences between in-school stakeholders based on characteristics of gender and role within the school. This study compares perceptions between students and teachers, male students and female students, and between male teachers and female teachers.

Convenience sampling was utilized to recruit participants from a target population composed of current high school students and current teachers within a single high school in a Western Nebraska High School. The population was surveyed during the spring semester of the 2019-20 school year. Official school statistics from the Nebraska

Education Profile (NEP) provide a student population of 1,220 and a teacher population of 71.43.

For each of the 12 survey prompts, responses were provided on a 5-point Likert scale. Respondents rated their level of agreement with the statement using one of the following options: I Strongly Disagree, I Disagree, I Neither Agree Nor Disagree, I Agree, I Strongly Agree.

Composite responses for each participant were derived from a numerical average. Composite scores inhabited a possible range between 1.00 and 5.00, with a 5.00 representing statements of "I strongly agree" for each response, while a 1.00 represents statements of "I strongly disagree" for all 12 survey indicators.

Research question 1 compared student and teacher perceptions of school climate. Research questions 2 and 3 compared perceptions based on gender, with question 2 composed of male vs. female student perceptions, and question 3 focused on female teacher vs. male teacher perceptions. In the event research question 1 returned statistical differences between student and teacher perceptions, research question 4 was included as a conditional question. Question 4 poses a potential interaction between the participant's gender and their role within the school.

These composite means, measuring perceptions of school climate, were used to compare perceptions between independent groups. Statistical tests were completed using SPSS. Research questions 1-3 utilized the independent samples t-test and mean differences with confidence intervals to compare perceptions between two independent groups. For each of these questions, Cohen's d was utilized to determine the magnitude

and direction of the effect size. Unlike questions 1-3, research question 4 used a two-way ANOVA to determine a potential interaction between the factors of school role and gender. A partial eta squared with confidence intervals was then used to determine the magnitude of this effect.

The results of research question 1 found teachers have higher perceptions of school climate than their students, indicating the participant's role in the school has a potential influence on their view of the school's climate. Research question 2 found male students have higher perceptions of school climate than female students. Although the mean perceptions were statistically different, this difference is small and calls for caution in further interpretation. Research question 3 found no statistical difference in perceptions between male and female teachers. Finally, question 4 yielded no interaction between the variables of gender and school role.

A key limitation of the study is the difference in sample sizes between students (n = 522) and teachers (n = 69). The teacher participation rate captured over 97% of the teaching staff during the survey window, while the number of students surveyed represented less than half of the total population.

Discussion of Findings

Interpretation of Results

Through the use of the independent samples t-test, research question 1 provided that teachers have a statistically higher perception of school climate compared to students (see Table 9). Cohen's d (see Table 10), at d = 0.68 suggests a medium to large effect size for participant gender, alongside a confidence interval ranging 0.43 to 0.94. This

range does not include 0, so we conclude the result is statistically different from 0. The results indicate a medium effect size at the lower bound and a large effect size at the upper bound. These results reflect a meaningful difference between teacher and student perceptions, worth further consideration and potential action.

Given the results, we can comfortably conclude that teachers in the study have a higher perception of school climate than students. These results align with several sources within the review of the literature. Smith (2020) found teachers have higher perceptions of school climate in connection to *people, places, processes, policies, and programs*. In each of these defined areas, teachers possessed significantly higher perceptions than students. These items do not directly align with the current study's survey items, but there is some overlap. For example, *Places* can be connected to physical safety ("I feel physically safe at school." Smith found higher perceptions from teachers in this area, and the current study found teachers have a higher opinion of physical safety. It should be noted this is a visual comparison of one survey indicator, and statistical tests were not used to determine if these means are statistically different.

The themes of *Processes, policies*, and *programs* incorporate a variety of elements, which include opportunities for stakeholders. As Smith found teachers thinking more highly about these areas of school climate, so did the teachers in the current study. Statistical tests were not used to compare individual survey items between groups, but a mathematics comparison was conducted. Items 8, 10, 11, and 12 in the current study addressed areas including reaching goals, being oneself at school, exploring interests, and the ability to express personal opinions. Building further connections to the

current study, it is important to recognize Smith's element of *people*. Smith included this element of climate to measure the care and value shown for others. As his study participants showed teachers having higher opinions in this area, the current study yielded similar results. Items 3, 6, and 7 measure the levels that others in the school care (People at school care about me), recognize others (People at school tell me when I've done a good job) and provide assistance (People at school help me when I have a problem). The teachers in the current study provided more positive feedback on these items than their students.

Mitchell et al. (2010) found these perceptual differences could be a result of how the school environment impacts stakeholders based on their role. Students are more likely to be impacted by schoolwide factors than their instructors. This is aligned with Organizational Climate Theory (Litwin & Stringer, 1968) which will be discussed in greater detail in the theoretical implications section of Chapter 5.

Additional works concluding teachers hold higher perceptions include those of Preble and Taylor (2008, p. 39). These authors found teachers held more positive views than students in areas of physical safety, fairness, support between students, and adult support for students.

Portions of the literature review contradicted or did not align with the findings of research question 1. Jacobs (2018, p. 2) found no significant perceptual differences in school climate between teachers and students. Preble and Taylor (2008, p. 39) found areas where students had higher perceptions than teachers. These students reported higher marks in student empowerment, school decision-making, and respect between

genders. In the current study, students only had higher opinions on the survey prompt of "I have friends at school." Future studies may choose to examine the role of friendships within schools and how they form. It is worth considering the importance friendships play in school climate, especially for students. A conclusion from the literature review is that *relationships matter,* but it would be interesting to drill down to the level of *friendships* and how these impact in-school dynamics for both students and staff. In the current study, teachers had a mathematically lower perception with the prompt "I have friends at school," yet they reported higher scores in all other areas of the climate survey. Organizational climate theory (Litwin & Stringer, 1968) is one possible theoretical explanation for the higher value of friendships in student life. This theory provides that students may be more influenced by their peer interactions than teachers.

Research question 2 examined differences in perceptions of school climate between female students and male students. The independent samples t-test (see Table 12) provided a statistical difference between the groups, indicating student gender plays a role in student perceptions of school climate. Further comparison of student perceptions included the use of Cohen's d (see Table 13). At d = .22, student gender has a small effect on perceptions of school climate. The mean difference between male and female responses was .15, with a 95% CI [.03, .27]. This range does not include 0, so we can conclude the result is different than zero, albeit still small. While there is a difference between the groups, this indicates there is considerable uncertainty regarding the magnitude of this difference

The review of literature tells us that gender plays a part in our lives, including how society views us and how we in turn view ourselves. We find that male students responded with higher composite scores ($\mu = 3.62$) than female students ($\mu = 3.47$), and the results are statistically different. A visual comparison of the 12 survey items finds male students have higher perceptions than female students in every response. The comparison is mathematical, and statistical tests were not run to compare the means for each of the 12 items.

The greatest contrast was in the survey item "I feel emotionally safe at school." On this item males provided a mean score of 3.70, well outpacing the mean female score of 3.23. Berg and Aber (2015, pp. 1161-1162) similarly found a higher level of emotional fear from female students. The authors found this odd, given their assertions that "boys are consistently found to engage in more aggression and bullying behaviors and to be victimized." Similarly, Astor and Meyer (2001) found female students had more safety concerns and the current study found female students reporting lower marks on physical safety.

The 2017 PISA Study (Organization for Economic Co-operation Development, 2017, p. 119) found boys to have a greater sense of belonging at school, which aligns with the results of the current study. Of the 12 survey prompts, several deal with having friends, being oneself, expressing opinions, having fun, and other elements that can be reasonably connected to a sense of belonging.

Literature countering these findings includes that of The Center for Social and Emotional Education (2008, p. 1), which reported "climate ratings are consistently lower

for boys and students of color." An important acknowledgment is the population of the current study, while including students of color, is not exceptionally racially diverse. Another significant contradiction to the current study is the work of Koth et al. (2008, p. 101), who found male students often have less "achievement motivation" than female students. The current study did not present a survey item directly related to motivation but did have items related to goals (At school, I can achieve my goals) and interest (At school, I can explore things I'm interested in). Males scored higher on both of these items. A possible limitation of this line of thinking is the current study is focused on personal perceptions and not the perceptions of others.

Research question 3 again examined the role of gender in influencing perceptions of school climate, this time from the teacher perspective. While male teachers ($n = 31$, $\mu = 4.11$, $\sigma = .58$) reported higher perceptions of school climate than female teachers ($n = 38$, $\mu = 3.93$, $\sigma = 0.44$), the results of the independent samples t-test (see Table 15) were not statistically different. Cohen's d (see Table 16) returned a result of $d = 0.36$, suggesting that gender has a moderate effect on perceptions of school climate between male and female teachers. Additional uncertainty is added, given the 95% CI [-0.12, 0.84]. This range includes zero, indicating the result may not be different than zero. It also provides uncertainty over the magnitude and direction of these perceptual differences. This range indicates that the effect size could range from small negative to moderate positive. The point estimate of 0.36 indicates male perception trend more positively than female perceptions, yet the confidence interval indicates there could also

be situations where the opposite is true or situations where males have much more positive perceptions.

Previous work by Shouppe (2005, pp. 91-92) came to similar conclusions, finding no significant differences between teacher groups, based on gender. While the results of the current study were not significant, the average male composite survey yielded a higher score. This is contradicted by the work of Bevans et al. (2007, p. 296), who found male teachers to have a lesser sense of "staff affiliation," which they used as a broad term to cover "a collective sense of friendliness, enthusiasm, school pride, and feelings of accomplishment. Academic emphasis assesses order and discipline among students and a strong student work ethic."

The current study found female teachers to perceive less physical and emotional safety than male teachers. This is echoed in the works of Klassen and Chiu (2010, p. 748) who described female teachers experiencing more stress in their roles. A word of caution should be noted, as this was a mathematical comparison of perceptions. Statistical tests were not utilized within this study to compare individual survey items. Future studies examining perceptions of school safety will necessitate robust statistical comparisons to draw an informed conclusion about these potential differences.

Research question 4 found no interaction between participant gender and their school role. While the results of research question 1 showed teachers and students had different perceptions of school climate, there was no interaction between the variables of school role and gender. This means the effect of the individual's role is not dependent on their gender, and vice versa.

Cohen's d, was utilized for a comparison of effect sizes between questions 1-3 (see Tables 10, 13, and 16). In determining if the participant's role or gender has a greater effect size on school climate, these results point to the participant's role as having a greater effect on school climate perceptions. Participant role (see Table 10) provided an effect size of .68, which outpaces the .36 found for teacher gender (see Table 16) and student gender, at .22 (see Table 13). This is supported by the results of research question 4, where no interaction was found between participant role and gender. The conclusion is role within the school has a greater effect on perceptions of school climate compared to gender.

Theoretical Implications

The major theoretical implication of this study is how a stakeholder's role can influence their perceptions of school climate. The study found teachers have higher perceptions of school climate than their students, indicating the position within the school has the power to influence perceptions. To a lesser degree, theoretical implications also include the influence of gender in comparing male and female student perceptions. The study found male students have statistically higher perceptions of school climate than female students. This implication should be exercised with caution, as the differences were minuscule.

The current study finds differences in perceptions, based on the participant's role within the school. This supports Organizational Climate Theory (Litwin & Stringer, 1968), which attributes individuals deriving different perceptions based on their place within the organization. For teachers, the requirements of their role differ from those of

their students. These differences influence their experiences and shape their perceptions. Student life often revolves more around personal development, academics, exploration, and working towards future goals, while a teacher's experiences are more within the parameters of employment and professional responsibilities. Many schools recognize these differences in expectations by having employee-specific handbooks alongside student-specific handbooks. There is often overlap in expectations between these sets of rules and procedures, but the existence of multiple handbooks articulates there are inherently different responsibilities and expectations between the groups.

Organizational Climate Theory asserts student perceptions of school quality may be more heavily influenced by peers, whereas teachers may ascribe more meaning to their perceived place in the organization. A student answers to multiple adults within a school day. Each teacher, counselor, administrator, and coach has a shared influence on the student's school life.

In thinking about possible secondary student peer interactions during a day, these can include classmates, with differing groups across a multi-period day. Between these classes, passing periods provide additional opportunities to interface with peers in the hallways, at lockers, and in common areas. Breakfast and lunchtime can be another key area of interaction between students, especially as this time is often less structured than classroom time. Through various teams, clubs, and organizations, there are a multitude of other options for students to communicate and socialize with peers. Considering these opportunities alone, a picture develops of students having many more opportunities with their peers than teachers have with their peers.

The prior examples of peer communication within the school day do not include the most significant change in how students communicate. In an Associated Press article written by Gecker (2024), schools across the United States recognize the challenges faced by a stream of constant distractions coming from student cell phones. Cell phones offer an abundance of platforms for students to communicate with peers at both the individual and group levels. This communication can be constant before, during, and after school hours. The larger picture indicates teachers have many of the same opportunities to socialize during the school day, but not nearly at the scale of their students. This provides a disproportionate opportunity for peer influence in comparison to teachers.

From an organizational perspective, teachers answer to their professional peers but are also accountable to the expectations of their administration. This may place a disproportionate amount of power in a small number of hands. For a secondary student, a positive or negative experience can be limited to a single teacher, peer, or class, and the student then can move to another classroom. For the teacher, an interaction with an administrator may stay with them throughout the day, as there is not as much freedom to move. A teacher remains in his or her classroom for the majority of the day. Interactions with peers are not as frequent as a result. Interactions with administrators may be even less frequent. The principal therefore holds a great deal of influence over a teacher's perceptions. Given the less frequent nature of these interactions, a positive conversation has the power to uplift, while a negative comment can linger and isolate. This is a caution for how administrators communicate with staff and the tone they choose to set.

Perceptual differences within the current study support the assumptions of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986). Teachers may possess more positive perceptions of school climate because they have more established beliefs, behaviors, and approaches to their environment. This can be compared to students, who are still working to establish their views. For one group, the views are more firmly entrenched and perhaps influenced by more life experiences. Students and teachers are at different stages in their lives, which can influence differences in how they view their environment.

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) provides a potential theoretical connection to male students expressing higher perceptions of school climate than female students. This theory asserts that gender influences the forming of the individual's identity within the school. With the shaping of this unique identity comes perceptions unique to each gender group.

Society helps to shape our expectations of self and place within larger structures. Gender can play a powerful role in setting society's expectations for how we should act within a school. The same behavior between a male and female student can be perceived differently, based on gender. For the student, these expectations can be learned at a young age and stay with them throughout their K-12 years. Erden and Wolfgang (2004) examined the behaviors of teachers at the kindergarten level. They found the gender of students led to differential teacher beliefs about student behavior. This indicates student gender can play a role in school expectations, starting at a young age. A caution for further study is the minuscule difference in male and female perceptions of school

climate. In the current study, the mean differences were small, both mathematically and statistically.

Practical Implications

This study underscores the need to examine potential perceptual differences between stakeholder groups in the school. Specifically, there is a need to identify areas of concern, and then take action to address these concerns for the benefit of individuals, groups, and the whole school climate. An examination of perceptual differences between students and staff is a key area to begin, considering each group has different roles and experiences in the school setting. Each group inhabits the same school, yet their interactions, responsibilities, and overall well-being may differ. In some cases, this gap can be notable.

Within the current study, it is concerning to see the climate perceptions of students lag behind their teachers by a notable margin. Situations like these encourage the school administrator to partner with students and staff to gather more information. This demonstrates the current study is a first step in the process of improving school climate. What begins with a purely quantitative approach should naturally evolve into more qualitative work. For a principal, this means asking the right questions of a representative sample of students and staff. Knowing there are gaps in perceptions leads the principal to ask "Why?" The "why" is the piece that will lead to informed, steady, incremental growth.

An increased emphasis on student perceptions is imperative, given the results of the study. Research question 1 provides that the participant's role within the school does

matter, with student perceptions lagging behind teacher perceptions. Drilling down deeper, we find that female student perceptions are lower than male perceptions of school climate. This is a key area to learn more about and inform daily practice. What steps can and should the school administrator take to determine the reason for the perceptual gap between students and teachers? Additionally, what steps can be taken to provide increased support to female students so they feel more comfortable and supported by their school environment? The results of this study show the principal may help to instill a positive climate for teachers, but more deliberate action is needed to improve the perceptions of students, especially female students.

A practical implication for school administrators is to provide mechanisms for staff to communicate their concerns. Many schools have committees, school improvement teams, or advisory councils. These provide a formalized opportunity to dialogue directly with each other and with their administration. Less formal opportunities should be offered through a variety of means, to allow more voices to be heard. This can include open conversation in staff meetings, collecting staff perceptual surveys, and providing impromptu opportunities to discuss pressing matters.

Administrators who speak of an "open door" policy must ensure they are living this in their daily practices. At times, it can be challenging to listen to the concerns of staff, especially when this feels like a revolving door of frustration, concerns, and questions. In these moments, the school administrator must remember listening and learning are key components of improving school climate. To intently listen is to directly demonstrate value for others. It is an offering of one's time, energy, and potential

encouragement. The review of the literature reflects a desire for teachers to be heard and cared for. Principals must listen to learn and better support their staff through challenges. Listening intently also offers the opportunity to gain insights that may otherwise go unnoticed. The principal cannot know it all. They must lean on the collective wisdom and professional input from their staff.

Similar communication mechanisms should be implemented to engage students in providing input. A weakness of many of the formal student leadership groups is they may not be representative of the larger student population. School leaders should consider the demographics of their schools when establishing membership for these groups. Concerted efforts should be made to ensure the students occupying these advisory roles are representative of the whole school. This includes active representation from students of all ages, genders, ethnicities, and ability levels. The goal is to learn more about the successes and challenges all students face, which requires a sample group representative of the larger school.

As with an open-door approach to staff, it is imperative administrators are visible, accessible, and approachable to students. Students have a variety of concerns related to academics, behavior, attendance, social-emotional learning, challenges with peers, and growing up in an increasingly complex world. They have valuable insights on how they can best be helped through these challenges. They must have the freedom to express themselves with the administrators who provide leadership and enforce policy.

A final practical implication involves the school administrator as an agent of change. Change is a necessity in schools. The essence of school improvement is rooted

in making meaningful, sustained change. Some adaptations warrant immediacy, while others require a more nuanced approach. Concerns related to threats to physical or emotional safety are among those necessitating an immediate response. Other issues within schools allow for more deliberation. As a change agent, the principal has significant influence over the priorities within school improvement. This includes choosing where resources are devoted and at what pace. It is important to set priorities based on a variety of data sources, which includes perceptual data. Too many changes lead to a lack of focus from staff and students. Change that comes too rapidly can overwhelm, and even alienate stakeholders.

For school administrators, it is important to consider the various factors that influence stakeholder perceptions. Each change to the school environment can have both expected and unexpected consequences. These shifts may positively impact the perceptions of one group, while unintentionally harming the perceptions of another group. This highlights the importance of fully considering the impact of both major and minor actions. The challenge is knowing what is major versus minor. Individuals can have drastically different responses to the same stimuli, which underscores the need for school leaders to consider the possible impacts on all stakeholders.

The challenge is determining what are the “big” things versus the “small” things. For some schools, a change in a bell schedule may be a small change, while a similar change could feel disruptive to another school. The school administrator must have a clear understanding of the potential benefits and challenges before he or she proceeds.

This process includes an understanding of the school's current climate and considering the response to similar initiatives in the past.

Smaller actions can take the form of the day-to-day routines and procedures. This includes how those within the school influence others. A key role of the principal is setting the tone for the school's culture and climate. This includes setting expectations of acceptable conduct and care of each other. In my time as a school leader, I have subscribed to the belief that school climate can have a trickle-down effect. The way staff are treated by their leadership sets an expectation for how staff should then treat students. Staff can take on the characteristics of their leaders, for the good or bad. Leadership that is consistent, clear, and supportive encourages many of these same approaches between teachers and their students. While the argument can be made that these are small, simple-to-implement ideas, they can still be areas where some leaders struggle, while others thrive. In theory, it is simple to treat others with a high level of care and consistency, yet the review of the literature shows that many principals drive teachers to leave their schools. It can be argued that administrators have so much to do and focus on the "big" things that they fail to devote enough of their efforts to what matters most, which is the care and mentorship of their staff and students. A direct, deliberate investment in supporting staff and students is among the greatest, most impactful investments a principal can make.

A focused, patient, and informed approach to change allows students and staff to acclimate over time. Ideally, change can develop over time, with ample opportunity to evaluate the level of effectiveness. When implementing a program, or major initiative,

there must be adequate time to determine which pieces are working and which pieces need to be adjusted. If school leaders are addicted to making changes, it can be difficult to know what is working vs. not working because there are too many variables in the equation.

A challenge with the patient approach to school improvement is that it requires longevity in the role and a willingness to focus on a smaller number of initiatives at a time. Even when the principal is willing to take a more patient approach to school improvement, they must answer to a variety of people. This includes students, staff, parents, community members, and their superiors within the organization. The principal may have a patient vision for change, mapped out over multiple years, but this must align with the expectations of others. For students and parents, there is an understandable desire for immediacy, as they want action to take place while they are still able to directly reap the benefits. The principal is also accountable to superiors, who in turn are held accountable by the Board of Education. This underscores the value of working within school districts built on a positive school climate, as it encourages greater trust and unity towards common goals.

Limitations

This study included multiple limitations. Several of these limitations were planned as part of the study design. As a climate survey, the results are meant to capture a moment in time. School climate is more akin to a temperature check for the school, and will therefore not explain every nuance that drives perceptions of school quality. This study examines the perceptions of stakeholders at a moment in time.

The scope of the survey is limited to a single high school in Western Nebraska and should therefore not be used to form large generalizations. It is recommended the results be used as part of a series of similar studies in the field.

The current study focused on the perceptions of secondary teachers and students. A key difference between elementary and secondary schools is the more frequent movement of students during the school day at the middle and high school levels. This may lead to students at the secondary level being more impacted by schoolwide factors while elementary students may be more impacted by classroom factors. This is a consideration for future research in the field.

Another limitation of the study is that only the responses of teachers were captured. The opinions of administrators, secretaries, school counselors, paraeducators, custodial staff, and other key personnel were not examined, as the study focused on teacher and student perceptions. Further studies may seek to examine the perceptions of those working in these essential roles.

An additional limitation is this study only seeks to measure perceptions of in-school characteristics. Students spend the majority of their time outside of school, and there are inherent influences beyond the school's control. This study did not attempt to capture perceptions related to out-of-school factors to keep the emphasis on items within the influence of school leadership.

The most critical limitation of this study was the difference in sample sizes between students (n = 522) and teachers (n = 69). Convenience sampling was utilized to gain broader participation. This approach resulted in the aforementioned disparity in

participation. While the participation rate of teaching staff exceeded 96%, less than 50% of eligible students completed the survey.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies in perceptions of school climate perceptions should consider which factors carry the greatest influence over stakeholder perceptions. The literature review points to the importance of school climate, and the relationship to positive outcomes. Given the increasing demands placed on educators, it is important to determine high-leverage, efficient practices. This study does not identify the specific areas a school leader should focus their attention on. These areas will be different for each Principal, based on the unique climate of their school.

Additional studies should build upon the results of research question 1, which found teachers have higher perceptions of school climate than students. More information is needed to grasp what is influencing these perceptual differences. This could be related to in-school environmental factors, as well as other factors not discussed in the study.

While the study found statistical differences in perceptions between male and female students, these differences were minuscule, and should therefore be taken with caution for future endeavors.

By design, the current study focused on the independent variables of school role and gender of the participant. Future studies should consider other independent variables and their potential impact on perceptions of school climate. The race and socioeconomic status of respondents were not collected in this study, yet prevailing research indicates

these are important factors to consider. For school administrators, these may uncover additional concerns involving vulnerable and at-risk children. As with students, exploring the potential impact of race and personal finances among staff may help to inform the principal of challenges that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Additional considerations should be made for gathering the perspectives of students with special needs, and how they view their place in the school. Students with persistent challenges have unique perspectives that can go unheard. The age of participants was not included in the current study but is another characteristic worth implementing in future studies. For students, their grade level may provide insight into how successful or unsuccessful students transition from one grade to the next. Staff characteristics worth considering include the age of respondents, years of experience, and highest education level obtained. These are all factors of interest as they can form a clearer picture of influences driving perceptual differences.

Conclusions

This study found teachers have higher perceptions of school climate than students. It did find statistically different perceptions between male and female students, but these differences were small and worthy of future research. Perceptual differences between male and female teachers were considered, yet no statistical difference was found between these groups.

A further evaluation of perceptual differences between teachers and students concluded there was no interaction between the variables of role and gender. The

participant's role within the school had a statistical impact on responses, but there was no interaction involving the participant's gender.

The study contributes to the broader literature on perceptual differences in school climate, primarily based on the role of the participant within the school organization. It is recommended educational leaders continue to explore perceptual differences between stakeholders. This includes determining the factors that act as high-leverage drivers of a positive, productive school setting. The ability to determine the factors that carry the greatest weight will better inform school leaders, their day-to-day practices, and their work towards continuous school improvement.

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument

School Climate Survey

You are invited to participate in a web-based online survey about school climate. School climate is how the school makes us feel about ourselves, others, and the school as a whole. This is a research project being conducted by Scott Siegel, a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

This survey should take approximately 5-minutes to complete.

PARTICIPATION
Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the survey without penalty.

BENEFITS
Your responses will help us to learn about how our students and staff feel about their school. The results will be used to help with future decisions about the school, and how to make it a better place for all.

At the conclusion of the survey, you will have the opportunity to enter for a $10 Amazon Gift Card. Up to 20 winners will be chosen, using a random number generator.

RISKS
There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Your survey answers will be collected after completion of a Google Form. The data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. No identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address will be collected. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study.

CONTACT
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the lead researcher using the following information:

Email: ssiegel@nppsd.org
Phone: 308-535-7105
Office: North Platte High School, 1220 W. 2nd Street, North Platte, Ne. 69101

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or that your rights as a participant in research have not been honored during the course of this project, or you have any questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator, you may contact
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, IRB at 402-472-6965 or irb@unl.edu.

* Required

Skip to question 1.

Consent to Participate

Please select your choice below. You may request a paper copy of this form for your own records from the lead researcher, Scott Siegel.

1. **You are a current student or staff member of North Platte High School, you have read the information on the previous page, and you voluntarily agree to participate in this survey.** *
Mark only one oval.

- ◯ I Agree *Skip to "About You."*
- ◯ I Disagree *Stop filling out this form.*

Skip to "About You."

About You

The following questions will be used to help determine how responses vary based on staff characteristics. This information is anonymous.

Skip to question 2.

About You

2. **Which best describes your role in this school?** *
Mark only one oval.

- ◯ I am a Student
- ◯ I am a Teacher
- ◯ I am a Staff Member, but NOT a Teacher

3. **What is your gender?** *
Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female
- ◯ I Prefer Not to Say

Skip to "School Culture Statements."

School Culture Statements

Your responses to the following statements are your personal opinions. There are no right or wrong answers. Your responses will be anonymous.

Skip to question 4.

School Culture Statements

4. **I feel physically safe at school.** *
Mark only one oval.

- ◯ I Strongly Agree
- ◯ I Agree
- ◯ I Neither Agree or Disagree
- ◯ I Disagree
- ◯ I Strongly Disagree

5. **I feel emotionally safe at school.** *
Mark only one oval.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree or Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

6. **I am free to express my opinions at school.** *
Mark only one oval.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree or Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

7. **People at school care about me.** *
Mark only one oval.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree or Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

8. **I have friends at school.** *
Mark only one oval.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree or Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

9. **I have fun at school.** *
Mark only one oval.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree or Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

10. **People at school tell me when I've done a good job.** *
Mark only one oval.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree or Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

11. **People at school help me when I have a problem** *
Mark only one oval.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree or Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

12. **At school, I can reach my goals.** *
Mark only one oval.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree or Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

13. **I look forward to coming to school.** *
Mark only one oval.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree or Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree

14. **At school, I can be myself.** *
Mark only one oval.

- I Strongly Agree
- I Agree
- I Neither Agree or Disagree
- I Disagree
- I Strongly Disagree