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POSITIVE SCHOOL CULTURE: FACILITATING CHANGES TO CULTIVATE LEARNING AND CHANGE
PERCEPTIONS

A MASTER'S THESIS
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BY
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Abstract

There are a variety of things to consider when facilitating changes to a school culture. First of all, it is important to understand the differences and nuances between school culture and climate. It is also imperative to understand the role of perspective in school culture. There are many variables in a school and acknowledging the various perspectives of students, teachers, administration, and parents, is important if a school is going to facilitate changes. A school must also consider the role of a specific behavior management program, in this case, Positive behavioral interventions and support (PBIS) and classroom environment. All of these components make up a school culture and if used cohesively will in turn increase academic achievement.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

There are many factors that contribute to a school's success. Some of these factors include school and parent expectations, parent involvement, bully monitoring and prevention, behavior policies and consequences, and so on (Grace & Harrington, 2015). These can all be encompassed in one thing: school culture and climate. School culture refers to the school environment as a whole and it raises questions about what specific factors go into a school climate and what makes for a positive school climate.

Two years ago, my school made a transition from a junior high school to a middle school. Two-thirds of the school was brand new and administration and staff were both eager and nervous for what the change would look like in our school. We were excited to formulate a culture of high expectations, good behavior, high achievement, and fun. Our school missed the mark though. The transition did not go well and it was a very challenging school year. The school year left administration and staff asking ourselves- what are we going to do differently next year and the years to come?

Unfortunately, when it came to planning for the next year, district priorities were set and we didn't have a chance to be reflective and proactive for the next school year. This has inspired me and has guided me to research school climate; its role and impact in schools and how to facilitate the change necessary for a positive one. Taking into account my school's situation, I began by examining the middle school model and the transition for students. Past research is very inconsistent when it comes to best practices for transitioning students from elementary to middle school (Madjar & Cohen-Malayev, 2016). There is research showing both

positive and negative effects on students when making school transitions. Madjar & Cohen-Malayev (2016) found the best way to transition students is to have a more supportive environment after a transition and to have student-focused initiatives in place to help students adapt. Madjar & Cohen-Malayev (2016) also found it important for teachers to have an adaptive school climate in their classrooms through supporting personal choice, and providing clear rationale for activities, as well as showing appreciation for students regardless of their academic success.

It is important to understand what goes into a school's climate if there is a desire to measure it and change it. Many school leaders will use the terms school culture and school climate interchangeably but there is a distinction that is important to understand, especially if the goal is to facilitate change in one or both factors. Climate has been used to describe the attitude of an organization, a group's morale or mood, whereas culture describes a group's beliefs and values (Gruenert, 2008). Gruenert (2008) uses an analogy that climate is a group's attitude and culture is its personality. This is significant because culture determines climate, but it is easier to change an organization's morale than it is to change its personality.

School climate and culture are conceptual making them very complex and difficult to define. School climate is complex and it encompasses many dimensions (Madjar & Cohen-Malayev, 2016). It can be simply defined as the heart and soul of the school (Freiberg and Stein from Musheer, Govil, & Gupta (2016)) or as complex as consisting of five dimensions; instructional program, support for learning, school environment, parent/school relationships, and resource management (Grace & Harrington, 2015). Kwong & Davis (2015) has also found it

is linked to teacher commitment, student identity development, student dropout rates, sense of community, school satisfaction, and academic achievement.

When attempting to define school climate, research often refers to norms, goals, and values of an institution. Norms are based on patterns of student and teacher experiences within the school. Values are based on parameters of behaviors accepted by administration and staff. Climate also includes organizational structures in place that provide safe and orderly environments (Madjar & Cohen- Malayev, 2016). Back, Polk, Keys, & McMahon (2016) used norms, goals, and values as a part of their definition but then also adds in the perception of students, teachers, and administrators. The study also breaks school climate down into 4 domains; academic, community, safety, and instructional environment.

In an effort to combine the various definitions in this paper, school climate is defined as the quality and character of school life, including norms, values, and expectations that a school accepts and promotes, which in turn dictates whether the school community feels safe, welcomed, and respected (Read, Aldridge, Ala'i, Fraser, & Fozdar, 2015).

There are many reasons to focus on a positive school culture. When a school has a positive school culture a variety of things can occur, teachers feel fulfilled and supported, students feel safe, both teachers and students have a positive perception of the school, and as Musheer, Govil, & Gupta (2016) found student achievement increases. Musheer, Govil, & Gupta (2016) found that having a positive classroom environment leads to an increase in student achievement, and positive classrooms lend themselves to increasing positivity school wide. A positive classroom environment can be defined as students' and teachers' shared perceptions in that environment (Lashley & Stickl, 2016). When each individual classroom has a positive

environment, students are engaged and learning and in turn will perform better on academic tasks.

From my observations, when a classroom does not have affective classroom management student learning does not occur at the level it should. The focus shifts from the day's lesson to managing student behavior and disruptions. Middle school students already struggle with attention and motivation in the classroom setting (Kobus, Maxwell, & Provo, 2008). Classrooms with an influx of disruptions put student learning in jeopardy. Freiborg, Huzinec, & Templeton (2009) found schools need order in the classrooms and without it there are serious implications for student learning.

Looking at data from the last school year, the majority of discipline referrals were in the classroom with the hallway as a close second. This information implies that students are most commonly acting up in their classes or in the hallway. This makes sense as students are either in their classes or transitioning between classes with a quick twenty-three minute lunch in the cafeteria. When looking at the breakdown of the types of conduct eliciting a referral the most common is physical contact followed by major disruptions.

The data only covers September and October from the 2017-2018 school year but I believe it sheds light on issues our school is facing. First of all, in a professional development session held at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year, there was a slide showing that my middle school was the seventh worst based on test scores. That information provides that our students are underperforming. If you combine that information, referral data, and research,

one might see a correlation between classroom management, classroom disruptions, and student achievement.

The referral data can also show information on our current school culture. In just two months of school, there were nine occurrences of physical conduct, as well as fifteen major disruptions, theft, and even a weapon referral. I am not naïve and know that these things happen in school, but speaking to the attributes of a positive school climate; school should feel safe for staff and students and be a space for success and learning. Kobus, Maxwell, & Provo (2008) found that even a minor positive attitude shift in students provided noteworthy changes and improvements in the classroom. The shift in positivity was displayed through students being more on task, engaged, and the quality of their work improved (Kobus, Maxwell, & Provo, 2008).

This has inspired my research questions and has guided me to the subject of school climate. I am interested to gain knowledge on how to reach our new students and how to facilitate changes with our returning students. I hope to identify specific contributions to a positive school climate and work with my school to implement these attributes into our daily routines. This research will focus on the following questions: What factors contribute to a positive school climate? Does a positive school climate impact student learning? How can a school successfully facilitate change to their school climate?

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

School Climate and Impact on Student Learning

It has been said that a school's climate is a reflection of the school's mood or morale. It has also been said that happier teachers are better teachers and better teachers increase student achievement. Then using modus ponens, one could deduce this to be better school climate positively impacts student learning. That is not enough and before schools focus all of their time and energy into improving school climate there should be some evidence of its impact on student academic achievement.

Perception of School Climate (students and teachers)

Student, teacher, and parent perception of school climate plays a role in academic achievement. Kwong & Davis (2015) found school climate variables, specifically increased surveillance (security cameras, metal detectors, etc.) and student learning environment, as a significant predictor in academic success on reading and math standardized tests. Their sample size was 16,258 and they utilized a nationally representative cohort of students. They used this population because it covered students from all parts of the United States and had a variety of variables.

It is important to consider the emphasis put on student perception of school climate and the learning environment and how it affected their academic achievement. Students participated in a survey on their perceptions of the school climate while administrators provided more information about the school in which the students attended. The survey focused on enforcement of school safety and learning environment. School safety enforcement was broken down into eight components measuring the strictness of rules, invoking random

metal detector checks, enforcement of wearing picture ID badge, security guards present, and security cameras. This was measured on a 2 point scale; the questions were written in yes/no format and students marked their answers according to how they felt for each domain. The learning environment category was divided into eleven items which measured the conditions of school facilities and whether they affected student learning. This was measured on a 4 point Likert-scale where higher scores corresponded with facilities interfering with learning.

Kwong & Davis (2015) found the higher students' perception of safety the higher their standardized test scores. They also found that the more school surveillance the less academic achievement. Students who reported metal detectors, drug sniffing dogs, and security guards did not feel motivated to excel academically but rather felt imprisoned by the school. The study found the criminalization within schools creates a negative climate. Increased surveillance measures leads to a decrease in trust within the school community. Schools who reported low disorder and delinquency had a disproportionate number of punitive measures, such as suspensions, used with black or minority students. The increase in surveillance along with punitive disciplinary measures often times results in a negative perception of minority students and aids in them being denied access to the educational system. The study found that low socioeconomic schools with a high amount of surveillance had the most students underperforming on the standardized tests.

The study also found that quality of facilities in a school directly related to school climate and academic achievement. Schools with more funding performed better than schools with less funding. This is an important aspect to consider for school leadership facilitating

change to school climate because although change can occur at the school, between school variables such as funding will always be present.

Not only is student perception of school climate a contributing factor to academic success but it is important to also consider teacher perception. Allen, Grigsby, & Peters (2015) found teacher perception of school climate was often defined by their perception of their school leadership. Allen, Grigsby, & Peters (2015) specifically found school principals can improve teacher perception of school climate by removing obstacles that interfere with instruction as well as using collaborative decision-making techniques. When teacher perception is positive, teachers become more efficient at managing behaviors, procedures, and learning in the classroom.

The study used The School Climate Inventory- Revised (SCI-R) survey to measure teacher perceptions of school climate. They sampled fifty-five elementary school teachers in southeast Texas. The majority of the participants were female (53) with two male. 78% of the participants were white, with 14.5% identified as Hispanic. When considering the number of years teaching 50% of participants had been teaching for over 11 years.

The study concluded that a teacher's perception of school climate was strongly related to the teacher's perception of the principal. When teachers find the principal to have ideal characteristics they feel better about their leadership and in turn feel more positive about the school in general. It also found that teachers with a more positive perception of the school had an increase in math achievement on standardized tests. They did not find it to be significant but Choi & Chang (2011) found there to be a significant effect on math achievement. It found that math achievement was influenced by teacher instructional strategies and students in

classrooms that were more teacher-directed had better attitudes towards math. This means that school climate has significant effects on math achievement. Teachers feel more connected to their students and staff when they are satisfied at work and more satisfied teachers lead to better instruction and increased academic achievement.

A study by Voigt & Hanson (2017) found a correlation between academic achievement and student perception of school climate. The study found the more positive the student perception of the school; the better they performed on state tests. The study analyzed 7th grade student data from the California Healthy Kids Survey and administrative data for approximately 1,000 middle schools in California. It measured this data from the 2004-2005 school year through 2010-2011. They used the survey and data to measure student perception of school climate over six domains, safety/connectedness, caring relationships with adults, meaningful student participation, low rates of substance use at school, bullying/discrimination, and student delinquency. They then compared the survey and data to school-level academic performance on grade 7 California Standard Test scores in language arts and math.

The study examined the relationship between school climate and academic performance across schools. Schools with a more positive perception of school climate reported higher levels of safety and connectedness, caring relationships with adults, and meaningful student participation and low rates of substance use at school, bullying/discrimination, and student delinquency. The study found schools with more positive student-reported school climate had higher average academic performance on the grade 7 California standard tests in both subjects of language arts and math. Since the study took this data over a period of time, it also found that positive changes in the student- reported school

climate survey showed a simultaneous change in academic performance over time. This is an important factor to note when improving school climate and student perceptions may be a critical component of changing a school climate. The study has some limitations, a big one being they do not disclose the specific ways schools changed the student perception of the culture and climate.

Classroom Management and School Climate

Classroom management is critically important for middle school students (Beaty-O’Ferrall, Green, & Hanna, 2015). In middle school students are more likely to experience declines in self-esteem and academic motivation (Beaty-O’Ferrall, Green, & Hanna, 2015). This decline has an effect on their perception of themselves and school and can affect their academic performance (Gage, Scott, Hirn, & MacSuga-Gage, 2018). Teachers can build meaningful relationships with students, create trust, and increase academic achievement by utilizing various management strategies in their classrooms (Beaty-O’Ferrall, Green, & Hanna, 2015). Having positive interactions in the classroom can create positive experiences for the students which adolescents crave (Beaty-O’Ferrall, Green, & Hanna, 2015). A positive classroom environment enhances the students’ ability to be productive both in and outside of the classroom (Lashley & Stickl, 2016). Classroom climate and culture can dictate and influence a school’s climate and culture.

Back, Polk, Keys, & McMahon (2016) defines classroom management as “an umbrella term for techniques employed by teachers to create a positive environment that allows students to effectively focus on academics.” Classroom management strategies are important

for teachers to utilize because they may have large class sizes and may face many different instructional needs based on the diversity in the class.

Sulak (2014) found a correlation between classroom management and academic achievement. The study looked at 2,560 schools; they picked these schools because they were participants in the 2007-2008 School Survey on Crime and Safety. This sample of schools would also provide adequate numbers of respondents at each instructional level, enrollment size, and location. The study used the survey issued by the National Center for Educational Statistics to look into school climate and academic achievement in suburban schools. The version of the survey used focused on “school practices and programs, parent and community involvement in schools, school security, staff training, frequency of crime and violence at schools, number of incidents of specified types of violence in schools, disciplinary problems and actions, and school characteristics.” (Sulak, 2014, p. 676). The survey included both open- ended and restricted response questions.

The data was analyzed with a focus on four variables, school size, racial composition of student body, frequency of disciplinary behaviors, and crime level where students live. The study found that school climate was positively affected by effective behavior management. It found that classroom disorder contributed the most to a decrease in academic achievement. There was also a difference in student achievement between schools with different levels of diversity of the student body. Schools with more than 50% minority students had less academic achievement on reading and math standardized tests. The schools with more diverse student bodies also reported the most classroom disorder. This is a significant finding when looking at classroom management and academic achievement. It is imperative that teachers have

techniques available to them so they can facilitate a learning environment that limits disorder and allows all students to be successful.

Facilitating Changes to School Climate

A positive school climate is conducive to academic achievement in schools. There are many factors that contribute to a positive school climate such as classroom management through interventions, role of school leadership, and the overall perceptions of the school. When facilitating changes to a school's climate it is important to consider all of the factors.

Classroom Management through Interventions

Good classroom management is one of the most important skills a teacher can have. There are many interventions available for teachers to utilize to help assist them in managing their classrooms. One intervention is Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Many schools use PBIS to help with student and staff relationships, to improve school climate, and to help eliminate classroom disruptions and behaviors. Knowles (2014) specifically looked at PBIS and how it affected classrooms and middle school student achievement.

The participants in the study were from two schools in central Virginia. The schools were picked because they were similar in racial composition, socioeconomic levels, and school size. The two schools are also from the same school district so they receive similar supports and resources other than PBIS. Middle School A was the control school. It had 282 students who had not been exposed to PBIS. Middle School B was the experimental school. It had 282 students who would be exposed to PBIS in the 2010-2011 school year. The study compared the student scores on the English reading Standards of Learning assessment for 8th graders.

The study found there wasn't a significant difference when looking at academic achievement of minority students between schools or between males and females. It did find there to be a significant difference in academic achievement in Caucasian students. Knowles (2014) found that students at the experimental school implementing PBIS scored significantly higher than Caucasian students at the control school. This is interesting to consider when implementing PBIS because there may be aspects of the behavioral intervention that benefited the Caucasian students' style of learning. Another interesting aspect is the experimental school's teachers did not elect to put PBIS into place. This is important because staff buy-in of the intervention is critical to its success for all students. Perhaps if not all of the staff in the experimental school was interested in utilizing PBIS then they did not use the intervention to the fullest extent and in turn didn't have the same affect for all of their student body.

There are many limitations to the study, one being PBIS was only implemented for a single school year. It would be interesting to continue to study the control and experimental schools to see if the same results were found. It would also be interesting if the study could compare different sections of classes for a single teacher. Perhaps in one class the teacher utilizes PBIS and in the other he/she didn't. Doing this would take into account instructional differences between teachers.

Norton (2009) also looked at PBIS and its effect on student achievement. The study looked at how introducing PBIS to a school would affect seventh grade MAP scores on reading and math. The study used three schools in the largest district in South Carolina. The schools were chosen for their low academic performance and history of discipline issues. The study had a sample size of 390 students and 38 teachers from school A, 308 students and 24 teachers

from school B, and 380 students and 40 teachers from school C. The participant demographic breakdown was 77% African American, 18% white, 5% other backgrounds, and over 65% qualified for free or reduced lunch.

In the study, schools were required to implement PBIS strategies for the 2008-2009 school year. Then they would collect data from the math and reading MAP tests and compare the results with the previous school year (2007-2008). When implementing PBIS, there are not any other significant changes other than teacher and staff behavior. The study found that when teacher behavior changed it caused a positive change in student behavior. The study found the exposure to PBIS increased academic performance.

Norton (2009) found an increase in MAP scores in both reading and math. When comparing scores between gender and ethnicity, there wasn't a significant difference. When looking at the data between students with free or reduced lunch there was a significant difference on their MAP scores as compared to the previous year.

Norton (2009) also takes into account a limitation in the Knowles (2014) study when it compares the same teachers and the use or not use of PBIS in the classroom. This alleviates the instructional variable that was in Knowles (2014). Again, I think it would be ideal to see this study replicated in a larger volume to assess the validity.

Role of Leadership

Much of a school's culture depends on the teachers, but teachers are led by administration. Administration in a school set guidelines for teachers and rely on teachers to take what they learn from Professional Development into the classrooms. Administration and

their leadership play a large role in school culture- as the leaders in a school they have the weight of setting rules and expectations for teachers.

Allen, Grigsby, & Peters (2015) found that the school leaders are one of the most influential factors in the development of the quality and character of a school since the principal influences the organizational structure. In the study, Allen, Grigsby, & Peters (2015) looked at principal engagement, specifically the impact transformational leadership had on the perception of school climate. The study used the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X) to measure the factors of transformational leadership displayed by the principal along with the School Climate Inventory- Revised (SCI-R), which measures seven areas, order, leadership, environment, involvement, instruction, expectations, and collaboration. This was used to measure teacher perception of school climate. The MLQ-5X measures five areas of transformational leadership, idealized attributes and behaviors, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. The study also looked at the role of transformational leadership and student academic achievement.

The study found that teachers who believe they have a principal who will support new initiatives and help them work through problems are open to trying new things and instructional strategies. It also found that principals should collaborate with teachers to find more time for student interactions to help impact student achievement. Allen, Grigsby, & Peters (2015) found that teachers who felt motivated and empowered by their principal had a more positive perception of the school climate. The higher the principal scored on the MLQ-5X, the more positive the teacher perception of school climate.

The study also looked at the role of leadership and student achievement on math and reading scores. Allen, Grigsby, & Peters (2015) found no significant relationship between the five transformational leadership characteristics and math achievement. The study did find a significant positive correlation between the characteristic of inspirational motivation and reading achievement. This finding suggests that a principal's enthusiasm, optimism, and confidence have a positive influence. Principals can exhibit this characteristic through promoting reading skills and critical thinking strategies, as well as, engage in discussions with students about their potential. This study is important when facilitating change in a school climate via administration.

Looking deeper at the role of administration in creating a positive school climate, the word collaboration was found time and time again. Gruenert (2005) found that school climate and academic performance were related over time. It also found that more collaborative schools tend to have higher student achievement. Gruenert (2005) found that staff being unified in a behavioral system, in this case PBIS, helped reduce class disruptions and increase an attention on academics. Teachers found collaboration in behavior management and academics provided a collegial environment. According to Gruenert (2005), this positive teacher climate had a positive correlation with student performance in both math and language arts on standardized tests.

When looking at collaboration, Back, Polk, Keys, & McMahon (2016) found that principal support, through developing and nurturing relationships, is a key component to fostering collaboration among staff. Back, Polk, Keys, & McMahon (2016) looked at the role of leadership in cultivating a positive school climate. It found that staffs play a meaningful role in the climate

of the school. They act as a bridge between students in the classroom, administrators, and the learning experience in the school overall (Back, Polk, Keys, & McMahon (2016). Back, Polk, Keys, & McMahon (2016) noted that when a principal's leadership role is perceived as strong it is a predictor of student achievement, less job-related stress, and less teacher burnout. It found that principal support helps staff well-being as well as improves school climate and academic achievement.

Improving Perceptions

School culture depends on how staff, students, and parents *feel* about a school and with many different lenses the perceptions vary. When facilitating a change to school culture, the goal should be to have a positive perception from all of the people involved with the school. Allen, Grigsby, & Peters (2015) found teachers who perceive a positive school climate had high levels of student achievement. It also found more satisfied teachers leads to better instruction. Voigt & Hanson (2017) found that schools with more positive student-reported school climate had a higher academic achievement on standardized tests. Grace & Harrington (2015) highlighted the importance of parent perception. With all of those aspects considered, if a school can change the perception of those involved with schools, it should successfully be able to alter the climate and culture of the school.

Grace & Harrington (2015) looked at improving schools through parent perception. The study looked at parent perception of an urban school, which it defined as a "school districts which serve city populations that exemplify concentrated levels of poverty, are set in high crime areas, and often have deficient school success among students at all grade levels" (Grace & Harrington, 2015). The school district issued 150 surveys to parents of students attending a

school in the southeast region of the United States. 116 were returned and this may be due to teacher incentives to students who completed the surveys. The sample population was 98% free or reduced lunch.

The school used the Parent Opinion Survey which consisted of 50 likert-type questions covering five domains, instructional program, support for learning, school climate/environment, parent/school relationships, and resource management. The study used the results to understand parent perception of the school and then work to adapt and facilitate change from there.

The study also looked at parental educational orientation, which refers to what parents believe is their role in education and how these beliefs impact their involvement. The past research the study found that parent perceptions strongly impact overall involvement at schools and can strongly influence minority children's academic achievement. The right kind of parental involvement can boost academic achievement and is important because it can serve to create greater student achievement through creating a climate of respect and trust. If parent perception of a school is negative it can have a negative impact on the student attending the school. A parent's educational orientation may be affected by social class and race because poverty is associated with lack of income and perceived lack of power and these factors may negatively impact parent perceptions toward education and their involvement (Grace & Harrington, 2015).

This study found parent perception to be favorable on four of the five domains. The school was favored for all but resource management. Parents wanted more opportunities for their students to be involved in sports, clubs, and school sponsored activities. This unfavorable

response may be due to the lack of funds the district had. Parents also noted they wanted to have more input when the school was making decisions. Considering parent perception is imperative when facilitating changes to a school culture as parent opinion may hold a significant amount of weight for students.

Gage, Larson, Sugai, & Chafouleas (2016) looked at student perception of school climate and office discipline referrals. It compared student perception and the number of office referrals. With this information, it focused attention on how to facilitate change to both. The study collected data from a school district in New England consisting of 8 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, and 2 high schools. The district students were 62% free or reduced lunch and 11.5% were not fluent in English. The study used a sample of 3,797 students between 3rd and 12th grade, 45% elementary, 22% middle, and 32% high school 50% female, 40% white, 42% Hispanic, and 15% African American 63% received reduced lunch. The students were given the Meridian School Climate Survey-Student Version. The survey consisted of 47 items and considered the perception of adult support at school, school safety, respect for differences, adult support at home, including academic support, student aggression towards others, and peer support.

The study also looked into office discipline referrals (ODR) and referenced the survey results. It found a correlation between student perception and ODRs. They then broke the students into three tiers, “a. typical students not at risk for academic or behavioral problems (80%) b. students at risk for developing academic or behavioral problems (15%) and c. students with persistent and chronic behavioral problems (5%)” (Gage, Larson, Sugai, & Chafouleas, 2016). The students in Group C were predominately male and receiving free or reduced lunch

and were performing significantly worse academically, socially, and behaviorally than the students in Group A. With the results from the survey and ODR information, the study then looked into ways to facilitate changes to student perception to decrease ODRs. This is an imperative change to make because students in Group C spent the most time out of the classroom in the office or suspended.

Gage, Larson, Sugai, & Chafouleas (2016) noted that academic, social, and behavioral interventions should be used for Group C students. It also noted the importance of schools to connect with parents. The study found a way to reduce ODRs is to create an environment in which parents are involved with the school. It is also important for the student to have a caring adult at school; this person should help reinforce appropriate behaviors, as well as create a feeling safety at school. It is important for the schools to connect with parents so parents know and support school rules as well as care about their student's performance in school. Relating to Grace & Harrington (2015) the role of parent and student perception is critical knowledge for schools facilitating change to their school culture.

CHAPTER III: APPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH

Teachers are expected to create engaging lessons, meet the diverse needs of their students, utilize a variety of instructional strategies, increase academic achievement, and create positive relationships (Beaty-O’Ferrall, Green, & Hanna, 2015). Middle school teachers are expected to meet all of the stated demands while navigating 100+ personalities of their students. This can be a daunting task but Beaty-O’Ferrall, Green, & Hanna (2015) found teachers who develop positive and meaningful relationships with their students have fewer classroom problems and better academic performance. They also found a great way to create a better classroom environment is through building positive relationships. Teachers’ actions in the classroom have double the impact on achievement than assessment preparation policies, community involvement, and staff collaboration. Teacher classroom management and student engagement are related with the finding that teachers who develop positive relationships with their students have fewer classroom problems and an increase in academic performance (Beaty-O’Ferrall, Green, & Hanna, 2015).

Alber (2011) created a “Top Ten” list for classroom management and encourages schools to use the list as early in the school year as possible. The list reiterates what the research found; it focuses on designing safe and well-managed classroom environments, knowing the students you teach, integrating positive rituals, and partnering with parents and guardians. Creating positive classroom environments includes starting the year with high expectations for staff and students, encouraging student involvement, getting parents involved, and using effective praise and feedback (Lashley & Stickl, 2016). This research has consistent

themes throughout and these themes align with PBIS. This shows just how important using a strategy like PBIS can be for improving classrooms and in turn improving schools.

According to research well executed classroom management strategies influence a school culture as well as increase student achievement. This research will be applied into an action plan to use PBIS to increase staff morale, improve classroom management, build relationships with students, and change perceptions of the school. The justification for PBIS stems from the school district requiring the implementation of the behavioral support system. By utilizing PBIS it will allow staff and students to become more comfortable with the system and fulfills the district requirements.

The action plan combines the overarching themes from the research conducted as well as PBIS components. The first step in the plan is to provide a survey to staff (See Appendix A). This survey asks staff what they like about the implementation of PBIS up to this point and what they would like to see in the following school year. The staff will complete portions individually and then as grade level teams. This will allow for staff to collaborate and brainstorm on what they think would work best not only for them individually but as a team.

Once the survey has been completed the next step is to assemble a PBIS team. Currently the team consists of the principal, associate principal, and me. An email will be sent out to staff asking for volunteers to join the team for the upcoming school year. The team should consist of at least one teacher from each grade level, elective teachers, and student representatives. We will accept all volunteers and also ask each grade level to have one representative join the team as well as at least one elective teacher. This way the team will have representatives throughout the school.

The team's first meeting will consist of reviewing the staff surveys. This important step will provide the PBIS team insight into what the staff would like from PBIS and also gives them an idea as to what is going well and what needs improvement. Also by asking staff specifically their wants and needs, it will hopefully increase staff perception of the behavioral intervention and increase their buy-in to the program.

The team will also plan to meet with students to gain insight into their current perceptions of school culture and what they believe is going well and areas of improvement. The PBIS team will send out a meeting invitation to the school's Peer Leaders, a selected group of students from each grade, to gain student representation in the implementation of PBIS. The team will organize and meet with the students to cover specific topics (See Appendix B) and learn more about their perceptions, visions, and goals for the school.

Through reviewing the surveys and discussions had with Peer Leaders, the team will come up with specific goals for the year, the role of staff with PBIS goal implementation, as well as incorporating parents and students into the PBIS action plan as well. When the goals have been made and the roles of staff, students, and parents have been assigned the team will create a professional development slideshow to go over the action plan, goals, and roles of staff and students.

Once all of the initial startup steps have been completed the action steps can shift towards deliberate implementation steps. In making this shift some aspects of PBIS must be explicitly laid out. For example, the PBIS team will meet monthly with team leadership (principal, associate principal, and me) meeting bi-weekly. As a group, along with the Peer Leaders, we will create common language around PBIS for staff and students to use as well as create common

signage to be hung around the school. The Peer Leaders will plan to create videos to be shown in advisory classes the first week of school that go over the common language and expectations. Staff and all of the Peer Leaders will greet students on the first day of school.

From the research conducted a couple of things stood out, such as classroom management and creating positive interactions between staff and students throughout the school. In an attempt to improve classroom management as well as positive interactions specific components will be implemented, these include morning meetings, a review of 4:1 positive/negative ratio, monthly PBIS Professional Development meetings and trainings, teacher awards at weekly Professional Development meetings, monthly PBIS newsletters to families, teacher requirement of three positive emails home each week, classroom walkthroughs, and restorative practices between students, administration, and teachers. All of these aspects of PBIS either already exist or will be introduced in the professional development the first week of school, as well as information acquired from the staff surveys.

Throughout the school year staff will continually be surveyed about how they're feeling about the implementation of PBIS, school culture, and what they want/need from the team. Another survey will ask students and parents separately about the school culture and get their input on how they feel and what they want/need from the school. The team will review the surveys often to help guide next steps. It will adapt what they can in the current year and start to plan for the 2019-2020 school year.

The goal of this action plan is to better implement PBIS to help teachers with their classroom management and relationship building. The school staff currently does not have the buy in to PBIS but hopefully through listening to their wants and needs and revamping PBIS

they will feel included and heard. Once they notice a difference either better or worse, the team will survey them again and make any changes necessary to the existing plan. From there the hope is to include students and parents so the culture shift is evident through all lenses. Ideally, gradually including parents and students into the school culture discussion will help staff and administration to adapt and facilitate changes to alter the school culture to meet the needs of everyone involved.

This project will optimistically be implemented while collecting feedback from staff throughout. The current staff is feeling very defeated and like their voices are not being heard. By using surveys and grade level representatives hopefully they will start to feel valued and see the positive aspects of PBIS. Also, by having more student voice in the classroom language and signage they will hopefully feel like their wants and needs are being validated as well. The hope of the plan is to shift the school culture from one of negativity to one of positivity. Since the school is a middle school the shift could occur within a class. If the school can be consistent, reliable, and accountable with the incoming sixth graders then ideally they will continue as seventh and eighth graders and be leaders for the younger students. The shift will not happen overnight but with constant effort between all involved I am hopeful the culture can change.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary

Districts and schools often say they want to create a more positive school culture or climate. Although the two ideas are often used interchangeably it is important to fully understand what each means and encompasses. According to Gruenert (2008) culture refers to a group's beliefs and values whereas climate refers to a groups attitude. If schools would like to successfully facilitate changes to their culture and climates it would be easiest to start with climate and once it has been altered it should be easier to manipulate the school's culture.

Perception of school climate probably has the largest role in school climate. Perception is reality and if students, teachers, staff, and parents perceive things to be a certain way, they probably are. Kwong and Davis (2015) found student perception of climate had significant effects on their academic achievement. If students felt safe and experienced positive learning environments they performed better on standardized tests. As well as when parents have a positive perception of a school it translates to their children and has an impact on their child's experiences and impressions of the school's climate (Grace & Harrington, 2015).

Teachers have an incredible amount of responsibility in a school's climate. Since perception plays such a big role, it is important to look into teacher perceptions of school climate when working to change it. Allen, Grigsby, & Peters (2015) found teacher perception was largely influenced by their school leadership. If teachers found their leadership to have ideal characteristics they felt more positive about the school in general. More specifically Allen, Grigsby, & Peters (2015) found teachers respond best when administration utilize transformational leadership, support teacher initiatives, and help with teacher collaboration.

When teachers are more satisfied they feel more connected to their work and provide better instruction and increase academic achievement. Taking into account student and staff perceptions of school climate are critical when developing ways to improve a school's climate. When both have positive perceptions satisfaction and academic achievement increase.

Since school climate is defined in this paper as the attitude of a school, classroom management plays a huge role in it. Students and teachers spend their days in the classroom and having effective strategies to prevent disruptive behaviors and promote learning and achievement is important and is a large variable in a school's climate. Sulak (2016) found classroom disorder contributes the most to a decrease in academic achievement and that effective behavior management had a positive impact on school climate. Knowles (2014) found utilizing Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) helped with classroom management, student achievement, and school climate.

Professional Application

When applying the research to schools, it is important to begin with administration and teachers having a common goal. If teachers respect the vision of administration as well as feel supported, positive things can happen in a school. By having a common goal within the large-scale task of changing school climate it will help focus the staff. Administration and teachers should take into account what parents and student want from their schools as well. They should take this into consideration when deciding where to focus their efforts in facilitating changes to the climate. For example, if parents and students want better classroom management, utilizing a specific behavior management tool, such as PBIS, can provide staff a specific support when managing classroom settings.

If morale is down, it is important to change school perceptions from the inside out. One could start with teachers, perhaps provide a survey to see what teachers want and need from administration. With more satisfied and happier teachers, come changes in the classroom. Students will notice and adapt to changes and in turn, develop more positive feelings towards their schools and learning. When the change occurs students should be more responsive to learning content in the classroom which would influence academic achievement (Sulak, 2016).

Change will not occur overnight but by asking parents, students, and staff what they want and coming up with common goals and working towards supporting them is a good place to start. It is important that across the school the effort is consistent so the change can happen school-wide rather than by individual classrooms.

Limitations of Research

Research in education can be a daunting task considering the number of variables involved at any given moment. There are varying schools, teachers, students, classrooms, curriculum, demographics, and the list goes on. That being said, the biggest limitation with this research is the number of variables. Every study or article focuses on a different school and although the range of schools in regions across the world and United States allow for the widest range of students and teachers to be investigated, it also makes it hard to find consistent findings across studies.

A limitation in the research is the lack of longitudinal studies. Most of the studies lasted a year or two or followed one group of students through a specific time but it would be interesting if they followed multiple groups of students for the same time period, this way they could measure the interventions of different groups of students going through the same school

or system. It would also be interesting if every school in a district was involved in studies. Although schools in the same district have similarities, there are also many differences between them. By studying all of the schools in the district it would show how different groups of administrators, teachers, and students react to an intervention or study. If each school had different or even similar demographics it would provide information on how the study affects the different schools and demographics in both similar and different ways.

Another limitation was the sole focus on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) rather than other behavioral support systems and curriculum. This was an intentional omission as PBIS is an initiative of focus in the affiliated school district.

Implications for Future Research

An implication for future research would be looking into teacher perceptions and how to facilitate change in a school's faculty. Beaty-O'Ferrall, Green, & Hanna (2015) brought up an important question to consider, can the beliefs of teachers be changed and will that change enhance student academic achievement? Although there are many variables in teachers' day to day experiences the one constant is the teacher him/herself. Teachers have their own set of morals, ethics, beliefs and systems. An overlying question is how can schools acknowledge and accept these components as well as provide reason and evidence of necessary change to universally occur in staff.

In the research conducted, a topic that stands out is the perceptions of those involved in a school. The perceptions of administrators, teachers, students, and parents all have an effect on people individually and can alter the perceived school culture. These perceptions can absolutely affect a school culture and academic achievement. It would be beneficial for

research to continue to look into these perceptions, how they affect a culture and how to facilitate changes to them.

Conclusion

The research conducted focused on two guiding questions: Does school climate impact student learning? And How can a school successfully facilitate changes to their climate? The research found that yes, school climate does impact student learning and since this is true schools should work to facilitate changes to create a positive school climate.

A positive school climate starts with positive perceptions of the school. The perceptions involve teachers, students, and parents and it should be a focus for a school to know how it is perceived and work to change any negative perceptions. When staff, students, and parents have a positive perception of school this can lead to be better behavior in classes and lends itself for better classroom management for teachers.

Since students spend most of their days in varying classrooms it is important that their experience is a positive one. Teachers who have good classroom management can not only shift perceptions but as research shows can also help with student academic achievement. Using a specific intervention such as PBIS can assist teachers with their classroom management and provide students a consistent experience between teachers and classrooms. All of this stems from the building leadership and administration should take its role in promoting positive school climate seriously. Teachers depend on leadership for support and guidance and when teachers are feeling fulfilled, they work better by having improved classroom management and in turn student achievement increases. The research conducted shows positive school climate is important in student achievement and with PBIS interventions, better classroom management,

improved school perceptions, and strong leadership a school's climate can be changed and improved.

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Appendix A

Example of Survey Given to Staff Regarding PBIS for the Next School Year

Grade Level Taught: _____

Inclusion Activity

Check in with your table members. Where are you at on a scale of 1 to 10? What was your high and low from today?

Table

Facilitator:

Timekeeper:

Reporter:

Recorder:

1. Where do you see PBIS headed next year?
2. Write a building goal for PBIS.
3. What do you want students to say about PBIS at Metcalf next year?
4. What will it look like in your classroom?
5. How do we include parents and community members?

Appendix B

Possible Presentation Option for PBIS Meeting with Peer Leaders

Metcalf PBIS Leaders

Welcome to the 2018-2019 School year!
Building Success for Every Student

As you enter...

Thank you for being here!

P	R	I	D	E
---	---	---	---	---

- At your table, start **brainstorming** what the letters of PRIDE could stand for. (blue sheet)
- Write** your ideas on the poster at the center of your table.

Introductions and Welcome

Agenda

- Ice Breaker
- PRIDE- in the past
- Small group- 3 Questions
- Large group- Goals
- Small group- Roles and Responsibilities
- Break
- Large Group- Pride in 2018-2019

Find a partner at your table:

- Introduce Yourself:
Name - Elementary School - Something you Love
- Describe a positive experiences you've had in school that made you feel happy, included, valued, supported or successful?

In your small group:

Introduce Your Partner:

- Name
- Elementary School
- They love....
- Positive Experience

Purpose:

Gather input from students about what YOU need and want to see in your school.

Three Questions

- What are things you are happy and proud about in our school?
- What are things you would like to make better?
- What have you seen or experienced in your previous schools/ groups/ clubs that you really liked and would like to bring here?

Small Group:

Good things at Metcalf already:	Things you'd like to change at Metcalf:
•	•

Sharing

How did your small group answer the questions?

What do we hear in all the groups?

What are some unique perspectives?

Small Group Discussion:

- Which pieces are most important for starting the year off right?
- Where do we begin?

Goal:

> **How do we teach expectations to middle school students?**

> **(Type in Student Goal Here)**

Action	Who
•	•

Goals

- What are our goals for the year?
- What goal should we start with?
- How would that look?
- What are the roles of the staff?
- What are the roles of the students?

Goals and Roles

- Now that we have chosen our goal to start with, talk with your small groups what that might look like?
- What roles do the student play?
- What roles do our teachers play?

Our Goal in all parts of the building...

How do you see the goal in all areas of school?

- Hallways
- Classrooms
- Lunchroom
- Restrooms
- Busses
- Assemblies/ Performances

More to consider...

- How do we know if we have accomplished our goal?
- How do we celebrate as a school?
- How do we check in and monitor our growth?

What will PRIDE stand for this year?

EXIT SLIP

EXIT SLIP

- What are your thoughts and feelings about our meeting today?
- Is there anything that we didn't talk about that you would like to share?