HOOD
COLLEGE
GRADUATE SCHOOL

DOCTORAL PROGRAM IN
ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Name: Joshua Harold Munsey
Program: Doctoral Program in Organizational Leadership
Dissertation Title: Principals' Perceptions of School Climate Surveys and How They
                         Influence Their Practice
Committee Chair: Jennifer Cuddapah, Ed.D.
Program Director: Nisha Manikoth, Ph.D.

Statement of Academic Integrity

I certify that I am the author of the work contained in this dissertation and that it represents my original research and conclusions. I pledge that apart from my committee, faculty, and other authorized support personnel and resources, I have received no assistance in developing the research, analysis, conclusions, or text contained in this document, nor has anyone written or provided any element of this work to me.

Signed:

_____   _____
Joshua Harold Munsey   Date

HOOD COLLEGE

Principals' Perceptions of School Climate Surveys and How They Influence Their Practice

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Hood College
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Doctor of Organizational Leadership

by

Joshua Harold Munsey

Frederick, Maryland

2022

DOCTORAL COMMITTEE

The members of the committee appointed to examine the dissertation of Joshua Harold Munsey

find that this dissertation fulfills the requirements and meets the standards of the Hood College

Doctoral Program in Organizational Leadership and recommend that it be approved.

_____
Jennifer L. Cuddapah, Ed.D., Chair   Date

_____
Paulette Shockey, Ph. D., Member   Date

_____
Beverly H. Stanford, Ph. D., Member   Date

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I offer heartfelt thanks:

To my committee, Jennifer, Paulette, and Beverly, I cannot thank you enough for the time, energy, and coaching you invested in me to see me through this journey, to guide my thinking when it went astray, and to always provide me with exactly the support that you knew I needed. I am incredibly grateful.

To my editor, Judy, thank you so much for the time and energy that you invested into my dissertation.

To my parents, I am forever grateful for all the wisdom you've instilled in me, all the teaching and learning you've bestowed on me, and all the unconditional love you've given me. I'm always on a quest to make you proud, and I hope this works towards accomplishing that goal.

To my siblings, family, and friends, thanks so much for believing in me and providing me cheerleading along the way. The opportunity to check in with each of you, both near and far, was extremely rewarding, inspirational, motivational, and fun. Thanks to each of you.

To the Hood Doctoral of Leadership (and Doctoral of Business Administration) Cohort of 2021. Congratulations to each of you, thanks for checking on me (and each other), and being so supportive along the way. We truly benefited from the cohort model, and I'm very glad that I got to know each of you!

To Gabriella, Josh, and Kelsi, you guys are the reason that I do everything that I do. I hope that, by accomplishing this, you will see that you too can accomplish anything that you put your mind to, and that hard work always works!

LIST OF TABLES

Principals' Perceptions of School Climate Surveys and How They Influence Their Practice

Joshua Harold Munsey

Committee Chair: Jennifer Locraft Cuddapah, Ed. D.

ABSTRACT

In schools, principals are responsible for many things, but one of the primary responsibilities is to create a positive school environment. School climate has a different meaning to different stakeholders, including school leaders, school staff, and students, as well as parent and community members. School climate surveys are one way to measure school climate. Results provide each stakeholder with the opportunity to provide feedback on many of the aspects that make up the school climate. Additionally, climate surveys give administrators and other interested parties an opportunity to assess how stakeholders feel about the school climate. While climate surveys can provide insight into what is happening at a particular school, they also can be misleading. This may be problematic since they can have a large impact on evaluation of a school or school administrator. This qualitative research project explored how the perceptions of principals about their school climate surveys influenced their practice.

A brief questionnaire was used to gather information from principals about their experiences with and perceptions about climate surveys. Each of the 12 principal participants was interviewed to further explore their perceptions about climate surveys. Within the interviews, a self-anchoring scale and values inventory activities were used to delve into how their perceptions of school climate surveys have influenced their practice. Principals reflected on how and why they used climate survey data to act or not on implementing a policy or a structure. The findings of the study indicate that climate matters for student achievement and that the

duration of a principal's experience in a school makes a difference. Additionally, preparation of

the administrator is of paramount importance as is the need to have multiple data points.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In schools, formal leaders, such as principals, assistant principals, and department heads, are responsible for, among other things, creating a positive school environment (Kelley et al., 2005). Additionally, students, parents, and teachers are influential in creating a positive school culture (Peterson, & Deal, 1998). School and district leaders have searched for years with how to assess school climate and culture. How is school culture determined when there are so many constituents involved and many variations of what constitutes "positive?" One means used in a variety of school districts is school climate surveys. Using climate surveys, staff, faculty, and community provide input about how the administration and the district communicate with them and how supported and safe they feel at the school. Surveys also ask for their perceptions of teacher belief systems and other areas as a means to identify how confident they feel that the school is a place for quality education. These surveys give administrators and other stakeholders an opportunity to assess the climate of a school and to inform their practice. Climate surveys can lead to a principal creating action, to address specific concerns that were identified, or inaction, such as not implementing a process due to concerns about how well received it would be (Rojewski et al., 1990). The results of climate surveys are shared with the principal as well as the public in a format that may compare the results to previous years or to other schools in the district. Climate surveys can also be used to evaluate principals, formally or informally. In this study, principals' perceptions of their school climate survey data will be explored as well as what they do or do not do in response to their surveys to subsequently influence the school culture.

According to Stichter (2008), "student surveys have been found to be effective in investigating the complex nature of school climate" (p. 45). The results of school climate surveys can be used in a variety of ways. While climate surveys can provide insight into what is

happening at a school, they also can be misleading, which is a problem since they can have a large impact on the evaluation of a school or a school administrator.

The job of a school administrator is a complex one. School administrators have several responsibilities that include being an instructional leader, ensuring a safe and nurturing learning environment, and engaging with the school community. In its National Policy for Educational Administration, the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) hold school administrators to standards in the following areas:

1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values
2. Ethics and Professional Norms
3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
4. Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
5. Community of Care and Support for Students
6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel
7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff
8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community
9. Operations and Management
10. School Improvement. (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2020).

There are many data points that are used to evaluate if an administrator is meeting the standards. Student performance data, artifacts, observations, and climate surveys can all be used in evaluations.

Drawing on my own experiences as a school administrator, I learned that climate surveys do not always accurately reflect the work that is happening within the school. Prior to becoming an assistant principal, I had a wealth of experiences that I thought prepared me for being an

administrator. I had been a successful paraeducator, coach, teacher, and department chair. When I became an assistant principal, I transitioned from a comprehensive school to a special education school for students with emotional disabilities that served elementary, middle, and high school students. Upon arriving at this school, the principal shared with me the dynamics of the school staff. She shared the shortcomings of each of the team members in a heavily critical manner. She communicated to me that many people who work in the field of emotionally disabled students have their own emotional issues that they are working through. I knew that my job was to support the principal; however, I also viewed my job to support the students by creating structures that allowed student achievement to flourish. I realized this might mean challenging the principal's thinking. When the school year began, I started to realize exactly what the principal was telling me. There was a high degree of dysfunction on this team. Many of the teachers behaved and perhaps viewed themselves as therapists and refused to provide high expectations or rigor for students. Other teachers refused to take ownership of student productivity, clearly communicating that student failure was not their problem, because student failure is what had brought the student to this school in the first place. Other staff members had bullied or shamed peers who achieved at a high level for being in alignment with the principal They accused them of trying to please the principal or get special treatment. Other staff members cried on a regular basis and indicated that they felt accomplishment when bringing others to feel their sadness. The principal was aware of my values and skills, was aware that they complimented hers, and shared my belief that people rise to high expectations when supported and held accountable. She identified that we had not only the opportunity but also the responsibility and competency to enact change. Collaboratively, we developed an approach of rational detachment and a shared commitment to confront every challenge with poise and data.

Because the dysfunction was rampant, we had to be selective and intentional to identify the staff

members who had the most negative impact on students. We used the resources of the school

system to provide a significant amount of support to individual staff members. At the same time,

we actively confronted negativity and gossip by establishing expectations followed by difficult

conversations when people failed to meet the expectations. These conversations created

opportunities to hold people accountable. When they responded with outbursts or other

inappropriate behaviors, we responded by providing data that held them accountable. As a result,

the less competent people became uncomfortable. Staff members were dismissed or pursued

retirement or other career opportunities. We were clearly moving adults out of their comfort

zones.

The school district had a comprehensive leadership development program in which

probationary administrators–those in their first and second years–had a series of tasks to

complete and meetings to conduct to share the outcomes of their tasks. One of the tasks was to

collect anonymous survey data from staff members. The district designed a survey for novice

administrators to send to staff asking them to self-identify their role in the school and provide

their perceptions of their administrator's performance. While this was similar to a school climate

survey, it differed in that the responses were shared only with the novice administrator and

his/her professional development team. During the first year as an assistant principal, the survey

is administered during the middle of the year. This means that the staff had approximately 3 to 4

months of working with me, the assistant principal. During this time, I spent energy building

relationships, collecting information, and developing an understanding of the position. As a

result, the first survey results helped me gain a baseline understanding of what the faculty and

staff felt were my strengths and weaknesses. The results overall were positive. The feedback

indicated that the staff thought that I was pleasant, enthusiastic, and provided meaningful feedback, but there were a few comments that my pleasant disposition meant that I was not working as hard as other staff were. As a result, I felt that to apply the feedback, I had to temper my enthusiasm and overall pleasantness. The problem I faced was that my pleasant disposition and enthusiasm were authentic components of my personality. However, since most of the data were positive, I decided to act on the positive feedback and continued demonstrating enthusiasm and pleasantness in my interactions. I think this decision was a miscalculation because it communicated to the staff who provided the critical feedback that I did not apply their feedback.

When the assistant principal climate survey was administered for a second-year assistant principal, the faculty and staff had experienced a full year of working with me, and staff had been evaluated by the assistant principal. I, along with the principal, challenged the status quo and pushed faculty and staff out of their comfort zones. This was necessary because there were pockets of negativity throughout the building, practices that were sending low expectation messages to students, and groups that blamed students for their challenges instead of reflecting on their own practices. The staff responded to the second-year assistant principal survey with anger. The survey had many quotes that were highly critical, such as, "I have never seen this assistant principal have a positive relationship with anyone" and "The AP makes assumptions and then criticizes people when they don't live up to his assumptions," and "He joins the principal in questioning everything we do instead of respecting what we do."

After my second year as an assistant principal, I began aspiring to take the next step towards my career goal of becoming a school principal. I applied for a principal internship position and was rejected from the district's leadership development program. The feedback I received for not getting selected was that the staff survey data did not present a very positive

reflection of my work. I was perplexed because I knew that I was working hard and doing great work to move staff out of their status quo to a place that would be better for students. Yet this work, which was extremely challenging, resulted in negative climate survey results, which were interpreted in a manner that was hindering me from furthering my career. Ultimately, as I will explain later, I was able to overcome this perception and become a school principal a couple of years later.

As I moved into my next year as an assistant principal, I continued to work collaboratively with my principal in raising expectations, confronting negative attitudes and practices, and holding teachers and staff accountable. As a result, some staff retired or changed careers. At the end of this school year, I once again was not selected to become a principal intern. This time the feedback was that I would benefit from a different school experience. I left to become an assistant principal at a comprehensive school. The principal who I had worked so hard and collaboratively with over the years was not eager to start over with a new assistant principal and applied for and was hired for another job within the district. Eager to become a principal and excited to see how the work of influencing and coaching adults would affect students, I applied for the position and became the new principal. Many of the staff members were holdovers from when I was assistant principal; however, many of the key negative influences had now left and were replaced with positive influences. After my first year as principal, the results on the climate survey from staff soared. The climate survey results from students and parents also improved, although there was minimal participation. After my first year, the excellent climate survey data was not as good as it had been the previous year which was similar to my experience as an assistant principal. I began to wonder what that data meant, and how should I, as principal, use this information to inform my practices as principal.

When I was an assistant principal, the perceptual data was used evaluatively against me, even though the student achievement results that I was earning were impressive. I fell victim to the evaluative nature of the climate survey process. While it did eventually work out for me, I began to question the school climate survey process; specifically, the way that the data from these surveys can be used by individuals who are not in the school on a daily basis to form perceptions of schools and principals. As a principal, I had to consider the perceptual reaction to decisions that I made, and how that perceptual data might impact my performance evaluation. With this study, I explored the way principals perceive the climate survey process, and how they weigh the impact of their decisions on perceptual data of stakeholders.

Theoretical Framework

Why might school climate surveys, particularly those completed by school staff, significantly influence a principal's actions? Theoretically, there are multiple premises that have been supported by scholarly research. Jones and Shindler (2016) proposed that student achievement can be directionally affected by school climate. Thus, a positive school climate can lead to more student achievement, and a negative school climate can lead to less student achievement. MacNeil et al. (2009) proposed that a relationship between school climate and school culture exists, but that they are not synonymous. Kelley et al. (2005, p. 19) stated that school principals are responsible for creating and maintaining a positive school climate. In doing so, principals can establish and measure a school environment where students can learn and achieve at a high rate. Peterson and Deal (1998) suggested that multiple stakeholders influence a school's climate. Their premise is important because it establishes that a school administrator need an awareness of the impact that they and other parties have on the school climate. This leads to Stichter's (2008) claim that stakeholders respond to climate survey data differently

7

depending on their role. These premises suggest that the link between climate and culture, particularly as these can be revealed through climate survey data, is complex and nuanced.

Statement of the Problem

My experience with my school's climate survey process underscores the nature of the research problem I sought to explore. The climate survey data captured perspectives from those who were unhappy with being stretched and challenged professionally to help hold students with particular needs accountable to rigorous academic standards. There was not a relationship between what the students were achieving and how some of the staff said they felt about the school climate. When climate survey data are positive, this can be indicative of schools and culture maintaining a status quo that might not be indicative of what is best for students. Behind this dilemma is the dichotomy between principals/administrators and teacher leaders who may be lacking in trust about motives and vision. Climate survey data can hold high stakes for school administrators as they are often evaluated by these perceptual data measures. The problem is that when the stakes are high for administrators, if given a choice, do they make decisions based on what they believe is in the best interest of students or for what they believe will yield the best perceptual data results? This study sought to explore this problem to inform deeper understanding of how principals' perceptions of school climate surveys influence their practice to impact school culture.

Research Question

In order to explore the influence of school climate surveys on students, parents, staff and schools, this study sought to answer the following research question:

How do principal perceptions of school climate surveys influence their practice to effect school culture?

Additionally, these sub questions were used to analyze and probe the data collected to answer the main research question:

- How do school climate surveys change the perceptions of principals?

- What are principals' beliefs regarding the ways their leadership may impact the climate survey results or their school's climate/culture?

- How do the perceptions of principals lead to action or inaction?

- How do the actions or inaction influence school culture?

- What is the influence of the school level (elementary vs. secondary) on the impact of climate survey??

- How does the stakeholder group (staff, students, community) influence the impact of climate survey data?

- How accurately do climate surveys reflect the school culture?

Significance of the Problem

This study is significant because it highlights what can be done as a result of delving into study around principals reflecting on their climate surveys. Principals who better understand how their staff perceive the school climate as well as what motivates them to act or not act on those perceptions has the potential to highlight training for the development of mentor teachers and leadership team members. Principals are provided training on how to observe and evaluate teaching, how to use data to drive decisions, and how to create opportunities for student achievement. However, there is a dearth of resources provided to school principals and other school leaders on how to identify and coach valuable team members on practices that create a positive school culture. Another contribution of this study is the identification of the tools that

9

could be developed to observe and provide feedback to teacher leaders around culture and climate to support their growth. For a positive school culture to be cultivated, teacher leaders need to be developed (Reno et al., 2017). There should be a process, both formal and informal, for teacher leaders, as well as potential teacher leaders, to be observed and receive feedback based on standards as a means to develop as a teacher leader. Along the same lines, how do teacher leaders develop effectively if they do not have the support of their principal? Principals and teacher leaders can be challenged in terms of developing a trusting relationship if previous experiences have failed to establish trust. This lack of trust often creates negative attitudes that impact teacher performance and, ultimately, result in a negative effect on student learning.

An additional area of significance involves the way in which school climate and culture data are gathered. This study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated virtual and socially distanced learning situations. School culture and climate are influenced by many factors, with the learning context and environment being particularly impactful. Student engagement and performance looked very different during the pandemic. Any future study on climate needs to take the virtual, hybrid or distanced learning environment into account. Since this study began while schools were in a distance learning model, this study explored perceptions of principals of school climate surveys gathered on data from the previous cycle when schools were in person. Therefore, the reflections the participants had were shaped by the context of the time of pandemic during which they were leading.

Conceptual Framework

The research question this study explored influenced the development of a conceptual model reflecting the main constructs. The research question—How do principal perceptions of school climate surveys influence their practice to effect school culture?

The conceptual model, shown in Figure 1, illustrates three common school climate surveys, and how they influence principals' perceptions. These perceptions create actions or inactions that influence school culture.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model

```
┌──────────┐
│ Student  │
│ Climate  │ ═══════════▷        ┌─────────────────┐
│ Survey   │                     │                 │
└──────────┘                     │   Principal     │     Actions          ┌──────────────────┐
                                 │  Perceptions of │  ═══════════▷         │  School Culture  │
┌──────────┐                     │  Their School   │                      │                  │
│  Staff   │                     │     Culture     │     Inactions        └──────────────────┘
│ Climate  │ ═══════════▷        │                 │
│ Survey   │                     │                 │
└──────────┘                     │                 │
                                 │                 │
┌──────────┐                     │                 │
│  Parent  │                     │                 │
│ Climate  │ ═══════════▷        └─────────────────┘
│ Survey   │
└──────────┘
```
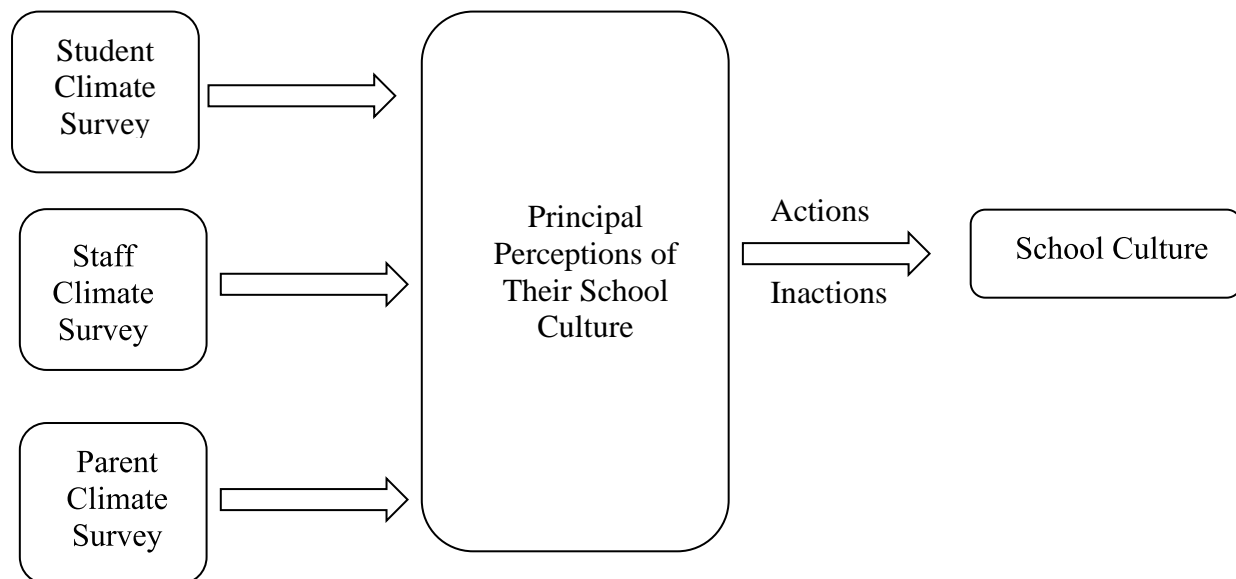
Through this study, I explored how perceptual data collected from the stakeholder groups of students, staff, and community influence the principal's perception of their school's climate and culture. The perceptual data from each stakeholder group are important because these give them a voice to be able to share what the school looks like as seen through their lens, as each stakeholder group engages differently with the school. These data then form a principal's perception of the school. Do the data show that the school has areas to improve based on the experiences of the stakeholder groups? If so, how does that knowledge influence the principal to change what they are doing? Do the data show that the experiences of the stakeholder groups

indicate areas of strength in a school? If so, does that lead principals to focus more energy on strengthening their perceived strengths or to put energy into relative weaknesses? Lastly, how do the actions that the principal takes, as well as the decision for inaction based on their perceptions of the survey data, influence the actual school culture?

This study used a qualitative research approach undergirded by tenets of phenomenology. "Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). A survey was sent to all principals in a school district, followed by invitations to participate in individual, in-depth interviews with a sample of principals from each of the three school levels–elementary, middle, and high school—as well as a variety of years of experience. During the interview, principal participants also completed a self-anchoring scale and a values inventory. The purpose of the surveys, interviews, and the activities was to explore the perceptions of principals in a large suburban school district that conducts an annual climate survey of students, staff, and parents.

Researcher Positionality

Ungvarsky (2019) describes researcher positionality as "the idea that a person's understanding of the world is unavoidably influenced by the opinions, values, and experiences the person holds" (para 1). As the researcher, I had positionality in this study. As an experienced principal, I was researching how principals' perceptions of climate surveys influence their practice. Because I have experience as a principal, I brought my own experiences and perceptions when I was collecting and analyzing data. I was careful to ensure that my bias with my experiences with school climate surveys did not influence my data analysis. Another important example of positionality to note is that I was a principal within the Mid-Atlantic school system where the research was conducted and had personal, collegial relationships with

some of the participants. I also had professional experiences that were influenced by my experiences working within the Mid-Atlantic school system. These relationships and experiences gave me insider perspective and understanding that facilitated the ease of identifying participants and knowing the kinds of programs and acronyms they described. My insider positionality needed to be mitigated through reflection for me to be mindful about where I may or may not be influencing the data collection and analysis process.

Another factor influencing my positionality was the COVID-19 pandemic. School climate and culture may differ in virtual settings than in-person settings. In spring of 2020, the Mid-Atlantic school system did not administer a school climate survey as it transitioned to a virtual learning model and was caught in the chaotic throes of the initial quarantine period of the worldwide crisis. Climate survey distribution was not deemed essential at that time. The 2020-2021 school year opened with a virtual model and transitioned to a hybrid in-person/virtual model in March 2021. The demands of virtual learning are different than the demands of in-person learning, and those demands certainly had an impact the perceptions that stakeholders have about their school's climate. Additionally, the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic was that as information evolved, so did decisions that schools and school systems had to make. The consistent changes in information can influence a stakeholder's perception of a school's climate and culture, as can a stakeholder's personal experiences with the COVID-19 virus. I, as the researcher, had to be aware of the influence that my experiences and relationships could have on my research and the influence the pandemic could have on the perceptions of the respondents.

While I was conducting my research, a career development that could potentially influence my positionality arose. I earned a promotion to be the principal of a comprehensive high school. My career had now taken me from a paraeducator, to a teacher, to a department

chair, to an assistant principal, to the principal of a special education school, to now a principal of a comprehensive school. One of the primary factors in my career advancement was my perceived victimhood of perceptual data that I felt inaccurately presented the work that I had accomplished. The student achievement data that I was responsible for was not as impactful as the perceptual data of the staff when I was a novice administrator. This experience made me consider the impact of climate surveys as a data point that could be used to evaluate my performance. It would have been easy to adjust my practices to only cater to the perceptual data of staff. But I was driven by more core values of passion, collaboration, authenticity, and work ethic, and I relied on those core values to elevate the performance of staff. This work, which was exhausting, was best for students, and allowed me to remove staff members who had negative attitudes, beliefs, and impacts on students, which ultimately increased both student achievement and staff perceptual data. Subsequently, because of this hard work, I was able to be promoted to the principal of a much larger school. My experiences shaped my practice and will influence my work at my new school.

Limitations and Implications

One potential limitation of this study may be that the nature of the questions was specific to the climate survey and the principals' perceptions of the climate survey; however, many additional factors may contribute to a school's success that are outside the scope of this study. While I anticipated that some respondents may identify concepts about leadership style and practices as well as formal and informal leadership, I anticipated that principals might also identify factors that are outside of the scope of this study.

The principals' understanding of the various factors that influence a school climate survey and a school or principal's success may influence the reliability of this study. Another

potential limitation is that the respondents and participants were not normed for climate survey data that is higher than the district average, on par with the district average, or below the district average. This means that the individuals who chose to participate in the survey may have climate surveys that present their school in a positive or negative light. Similarly, the random selection of interview participants may have resulted in participants with climate surveys that present their schools in a positive or negative light.

I anticipated that a theme among respondents would be the influence of teachers and staff, specifically influential teachers and staff. That influential peers can help to cultivate a negative or a positive school climate is supported by prior research (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Furthermore, I anticipated that the findings could support that, when conditions are right, shared leadership, which is a theoretical construct, can develop and help an organization achieve goals (Pearce & Conger, 2003). This would demonstrate that school leaders who have a strong climate survey and a positive school culture could be the result of effective shared leadership practices.

I anticipated that the findings of this study also may support the concept that schools are complex adaptive systems. In a mechanistic organization, control creates the structure for the organization and the information is given incrementally as needed. In an organismic organization, the relationships provide the information that create the structure for the organization (Buckley, 1968). In the complex adaptive system that is a school, there is structure, control, rules, and order that must be followed, and there are relationships that exchange information, develop trust, and create an environment for student learning. In this qualitative study, the school survey attempts to assess how well the formal leader provides the structure and the processes and accountability. Part of the answers are determined by how well the informal leaders develop relationships within the organization that influence staff, students, and parents.

In spite of the limitations of this study, it can impact the practice of school principals. While principals have comprehensive responsibilities that center around student learning, this study highlights how the perceptions that principals have about their school influence the experiences of staff, students, and parents. This research can hopefully add to the research that demonstrates an understanding of how principals perceive and use school climate surveys because a school that has a healthy learning environment for staff and students is a school that has an energy that leads to students achieving at a high level.

Definitions

There are key terms used in this dissertation. The following definitions indicate the intended meaning of each term.

School administrators - the individuals, primarily principals and assistant principals, who are trained, responsible, and compensated for conducting teacher appraisals (Radinger, 2014).

School climate - the health of the learning environment for students and educators. There are many factors that influence a school climate, and many ways to measure a school climate from multiple perspectives (Freiberg, 1999). However, for the purposes of this study, climate refers to the perceived health of a school by educators, students, parents, and community members.

School culture – defined by Peterson and Deal (1998) as:

Culture is the underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges. This set of informal expectations and values shapes how people think, feel, and act in schools. This highly enduring web of influence binds the school together and makes it special. It is up to school leaders—principals, teachers, and often parents —to help

16

identify, shape, and maintain strong, positive, student-focused cultures. Without these

supportive cultures, reforms will wither, and student learning will slip. (p.28)

School climate survey - a tool that has been tested for reliability and validity that

measures the general situation of the school with regards to teacher-to-student relations, student-

to-student relations, as well as how well parents like the school and how fair they perceive the

school rules to be (Durnali & Filiz, 2019). For this study, a school climate survey given in a large

suburban school district in the Mid-Atlantic United States will be used.

Influential teacher - teachers who do not have formal leadership responsibilities within

the school and are not responsible for school-wide decisions. Informal teacher leaders do

influence their colleagues to improve through a variety of job-related tasks and high performance

(Von Dohlen, & Karvonen, 2018).

Distributed leadership - the outcome of the interactions between formal and informal

leaders to leverage the collective expertise on a school (Bagwell, 2019). In distributive

leadership, the formal leader creates the interaction to leverage the expertise of all.

Shared leadership - Pearce and Conger (2003) defined shared leadership as the

interactive influence process shared between individuals in an organization to achieve common

goals. The key distinction between the terms is the responsibility of the formal leader which, in

this case, is the school principal. In shared leadership, all of the stakeholders assume similar

ownership.

Summary

While there is copious research on schools and measures of school functioning, there is

limited research on how school principals' perceptions of their climate influence their work.

Because principals can leverage multiple stakeholders to impact their school culture,

17

understanding their perceptions of school climate is important. The three climate surveys all

capture perceptual data from various stakeholders including staff, students, parents, and

community members. The construct this study explored is school culture and a principal's

perceptions of school culture as informed by school climate surveys. Principals' perceptions can

be influenced by many factors. This study aimed to identify how impactful stakeholder

investment, community investment, and staff investment are all factors that may influence that

perspective. I anticipated that both formal and informal school leadership are factors that

influence these perspectives. The research and experiences of Jones and Shindler (2016)

supported that the school climate has a direct impact on student achievement. Additionally,

research as well as my personal experiences have shown that the perspectives of school leaders

lead to both action and inaction that directly impact the school climate (Peterson & Deal, 1998).

Although the study has potential limitations, i.e., lack of specificity in the survey questions, the

data support the argument that school principals have perceptions from climate survey data that

impact their perceptions of the school culture and lead to decisions of action and inaction that

help shape school culture.

Table 1

Research Overview and Chapter 1 Summary

Element	Summary
Purpose of Study	To explore principals' perceptions about their school climate surveys and whether these influence their action or inaction
Methodology	Phenomenological study involving surveys of all principals in a Mid-Atlantic suburban school district, followed by in-depth, individual interviews including a values inventory and a self-anchoring scale with 12 principals across elementary, middle, and high school levels
Theoretical Framework	A positive school culture has a direct impact on student achievement. A principal is responsible for creating a positive school culture. A positive school culture is created by perceptual data of stakeholders about the school's climate.
Limitations	The specific nature of the questions may not consider additional factors that influence climate. Respondents and participants were not normed for their specific climate survey data. The researcher's positionality influenced the access to participants and data and needed to be mediated through mindful researcher reflection.
Implications	Can impact the practice of school principals, as well as the practice of school districts on how they evaluate perceptual data of school culture, climate, as well as the performance of principals.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994) was to examine the perceptions that principals have about the school climate of the schools they lead. In this chapter, I review what the literature indicates about many of the concepts that this study such as school climate and school culture, staff morale, student voice, community engagement, leadership style, formal and informal leadership, and school climate surveys. The purpose for reviewing what the literature says about these concepts is that these concepts work together to influence perceived school climate. These concepts relate to the primary factors within a school that potentially can be influenced by school principals. The chapter ends with a summary of the concepts explored.

Perceptions and self-efficacy are the first concepts reviewed because they both are central components of what the study was designed to reveal. While the study is focused on understanding the perceptions that principals develop specifically related to the climate survey, perceptual data (i.e., perceptions of principals, students, teachers, and parents) all influence how each stakeholder assesses the school climate. Furthermore, self-efficacy is related because self-efficacy influences perceptual data of the individual stakeholder. These concepts are followed by a review of studies on school climate and school culture, two ideas that are similar, but have different meanings and interpretations. I then explore key concepts that influence the perceptions of school staff, staff morale, student voice, and community engagement. I then review literature on leadership as an influencer by focusing on leadership style and formal and informal leadership. Lastly, I explore the concept of the school climate survey, as that is the tool used for principals to share their perceptions that are explored in this research.

Perceptions and Self-Efficacy

Perceptions and self-efficacy are aligned. Versland and Erickson (2017) explained that,

Self-efficacy is a perceived judgment that one has the ability to execute a course of action that brings about a desired result. Principal self-efficacy describes a set of beliefs that enable a principal to enact policies and procedures that promote the effectiveness of a school. (p. 1)

This builds on empirical work from Bandura (1977), who stated "not only can perceived self-efficacy have directive influence on choice of activities and settings, but, through expectations of eventual success, it can affect coping efforts once they are initiated" (p. 194). Perceptions influence self-efficacy, which creates mindsets. "Thus, a mindset is reflective of the identity of individuals–how they perceive themselves–which in turn influences how they interact with others and how they perceive their environment and responsibilities" (Nadelson et al., 2020, p. 1). Additionally, there is a correlation between an individual's self-efficacy and motivation (Girgin, 2020). This illustrates that the self-efficacy of a principal shapes the mindset and motivation of the principal, which shape the perceptions that principals have about their practice and skillset.

This concept is not unique to principals. Teacher self-efficacy is also generated by perceptions of colleagues and leaders. Research shows that the perceptions of principals influence the perceptions of teachers. The perceptions of school principals, as well as the behaviors of school principals, have a direct and directional effect on the self-efficacy perceptions of teachers (Özdemir et al., 2020). In addition to perceptions, principal leadership practices play significant roles on teacher self-efficacy beliefs as well as job satisfaction (Duyar, et al., 2013). These perceptions create relational trust which is a result of perceptions of others in addition to self-efficacy (Albritton et al., 2016). Walker and Slear (2011) synthesized this concept stating, "by working to enhance the efficacy of the teachers with whom they work,

principals have the opportunity to directly influence the type and quality of instruction students receive" (p. 48). Perceptions of teachers and principals work together to influence a school's climate. Sharma (2019) conducted research to explore teachers' perception of the leadership practices of their principals and stated, "The results of this study revealed that teachers' perception of principals' leadership for learning is somewhat positive and at moderate level. Similarly, teachers' perception on their organizational commitment and teachers' professional communities in their school is at moderate level" (p. 402). The practices of principals influence the self-efficacy of teachers, while the practices of teachers influence the self-efficacy of teachers.

In exploring self-efficacy, Bandura (1977) found that it proved to be a better predictor of behavior toward unfamiliar tasks than did past performance. Furthermore, he found self-efficacy proved to be an accurate predictor of performance, because subjects were judging their future performance from their past behavior. His research found that, "expectations of personal mastery affect both initiation and persistence of coping behavior" (p. 193). This suggests that the more self-efficacy teachers have, the higher their perception of their performance will be. A higher perception of performance will lead to principals having more self-efficacy, which will enhance their perception of their performance. Similarly, the more self-efficacy a principal has, the higher the perception of their performance which, likely, will result in a higher perception of a school's wellbeing.

The perceptions of teachers and principals have an influence on the actions that they do to affect a school's climate. Perceptions and self-efficacy work collaboratively as variables in a school, as teachers work collaboratively with principals. These perceptions also influence the self-efficacy of others within the school that can have an impact on perceived wellbeing of a

school, which influences the climate. The concepts of perceptions and self-efficacy were explored in this study to probe principals about what degree they think that these concepts work in unison to influence school climate and school culture.

School Climate and School Culture

School climate denotes the health of the learning environment for students and educators. Freiberg (1999) argues that the definition of school climate should be an evolving measure and that, instead of a static definition, it should consist of elements that foster a positive school climate and multiple ways to measure the efforts made to establish the climate. Gage et al. (2019) observed, "The link between a healthy and safe school environment and the academic, social, and emotional success of students is well established" (p. 239). Pinkas, and Bulić (2017) discussed school climate differently by explaining that there are two types of ways to identify school climate, objectivistic or realistic and subjectivist or phenomenological. The difference, they charge, is that objectivistic school climate, means that a school's climate exists as a part of the school's reality, whereas phenomenological school climate is not concrete, it is the perception and cognitive structuring of a school:

Although it is composed of typical behaviors, attitudes and feelings, climate is an attribute that exists independently of the perception of members of the organization. Contrary to this, according to subjectivist understanding, the climate refers to the perceptual and cognitive structuring of the organizational situation, common to its members. This implies that the climate does not exist objectively and that it represents the result of personal cognitive maps of all members of the organization, which they perceptively and cognitively structure the organizational situations (Pinkas & Bulić, 2017, p. 38).

While there are multiple connotations of school climate, there are also multiple ways to measure it. A tool developed to measure school climate is the Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments (CASE). CASE was developed as a result of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) developing a task force to identify ways to evaluate and improve school climates (Halderson et al., 1986).

Gülşen and Gülenay (2014) conducted a study to identify the effects a principal has on a school climate. They concluded that teachers having high expectations for students creates a healthy school climate, and that a consistent administrative team is essential for a healthy school climate. Not all research supports that a consistent administrative team is the essential ingredient of a healthy school climate. There are many factors that affect a school's climate including community factors, social-economic needs within the student body, quality of teachers, grading practices, as well as a diversity of students, teachers, course offerings and extra-curricular activities (Stichter, 2008). Gage et al. (2019) observe that "School climate, defined as the quality of a school's social and physical environments is the most widely used indicator of school health and safety" (p. 239).

Principals play a major role in assessing, monitoring, and addressing the school climate. "It is through the principal's ability to interact with the climate of the school in a manner which improves the goal focus and adaptation that the learning environment is improved" (MacNeil et al., 2009). This is important because the principal is responsible for the educational outcomes of the school. As Kwong and Davis (2015) noted, school climate assessments "point to the salience of student perception of school climate and the institutional learning environment in predicting academic achievement" (p. 77). A positive school climate yields better learning outcomes for children.

While school climate is related to, school culture, it is not synonymous with it. Nadelson et al. (2020) explained the contrast in the following terms:

School climate and school culture may be perceived as the same; however, there is a distinct difference between the two. Gruenert (2008) describes climate as being similar to attitude, and culture as being similar to personality. Gruenert also notes it is far easier to change an attitude than it is to change a personality, suggesting that it is easier to change a school climate than change a school culture. School climate can also be viewed as the way the school functions on a day-to-day basis and described using terms such as bright, warm, and sunny; or dark, cold, and stormy. In contrast, culture denotes a deeper dive into understanding the nuances of the shared values, norms, processes, language beliefs, and assumptions of those in the organization. (pp. 2-3)

Peterson and Deal (1998) recognized the importance that multiple leaders and stakeholders play in creating a school culture. "Principals communicate core values in their everyday work. Teachers reinforce values in their actions and words. Parents bolster spirit when they visit school, participate in governance, and celebrate success. In the strongest schools, leadership comes from many sources" (p. 30). All of these factors, along with other factors, play a role in how students, staff, and community members feel about their school. Nadelson et al. (2020) agreed. They found that through principals' practices, including instructional leadership, collaboration, advocacy, etc., principals can support a learning environment that promotes equity of opportunities and creates a healthy school culture. Additional factors that influence school culture include the energy that students and staff bring to a school building as well as consistent communication and data analysis (Fullan & Pinchot, 2018). Thus, school culture is made up of a totality of factors, and school climate consists of multiple stakeholders' perceptions of the

school's health which is one factor that creates a supportive school or organizational culture (Uçar & İpek, 2019).

Both school climate and school culture are major factors that influence school successes and student achievement. The school climate provides an assessment of the school culture which frequently correlates with the predictability of successful student outcomes. Assessing these factors is important so that schools and districts can ensure positive student outcomes. Obviously, the many factors that go into these perceptions, including staff morale, student voice, and community engagement, will be explored in the next sections.

Staff Morale

In schools, staff morale has an influence on school climate and student achievement (Sabin, 2015). Staff morale, specifically teacher morale, is important because teachers are the individuals who are charged with creating meaningful learning experiences for students on a daily basis. MacNeil et al. (2009) observed, "testimony from successful school principals suggests that focusing on development of the school's culture as a learning environment is fundamental to improved teacher morale and student achievement" (p. 74). Because of this, school leaders need to pay attention to teacher morale. Cheema and Fuller Hamilton (2017) recognized this stating, "Another aspect that has an effect on student learning is teacher morale…With increased accountability and higher teacher standards, school principals not only have to consider teacher shortages and teacher participation within schools, but they also have to devote attention to teacher morale" (pp. 216-217).

Because teacher morale is so impactful, principals and other school leaders devote attention to it (Eppley, 1977). Cheema and Fuller Hamilton (2017) asserted, "How school principals interact with, understand, and address the needs of teachers is an important component

26

in creating school environments that foster longevity, high morale and leadership capability of teachers" (p. 215). The challenge many principals face is weighing the importance of teacher morale, while simultaneously having high expectations for staff that may require confronting complacency. Jones (2018) illustrated this:

> The unlearning of comfortable beliefs, values, and practices and the re-learning of foreign beliefs, values, and practices require enormous amounts of social, emotional, and intellectual energy. Sustaining the level of energy required to implement a new vision of schooling often demands more time, more resources, and more preparation than main offices are capable of providing" (p. 140).

There are a variety of variables that shape teacher morale. Sabin (2015) identified some of the considerations of variables that influence teacher morale, "each of the five constructs of time, facile teaching–learning and development of organizational directions, has the effect of strengthening the school culture that is premised on high teacher expectations in student learning" (p. 23). Sabin continued, "When principals communicate these expectations to teachers, and support and monitor teachers in their achievement of these expectations, teachers will feel a heightened sense of work morale and accountability, thereby benefiting student learning" (p. 23). By communicating their focus and expectations, principals express their core values, and use their core values as a tool to influence staff morale. And high teacher morale leads to high productivity within a school (Miller, 1981).

Staff morale affects much of the perceptual data within a school (Pinkas & Bulić, 2017). When teachers have a high morale and feel excited about collaborating on teaching and learning in their school, they have a positive impact on the school's measurable climate. This often happens when school leaders create opportunities for teachers to feel that they are in a supported

environment. If staff morale is positive, then student performance can be predicted to be positive as well. Thus, principals have a responsibility to monitor, measure, and elevate teacher morale. Student perspective is something that can potentially factor into staff morale.

Student Voice

Student experience and perspective play an important role in a school's climate. These experiences and perspectives are described as student voice. According to Caetano et al. (2020), "Many studies have been developed by listening to students, gathering first-hand accounts from children and young people who describe their experiences, self-perspectives, interactions, and schools" (p. 57). Student voice influences school climate because it provides unique perspectives from individuals who are the essential element in education. "The voices of children and young people emerge, at different levels of participation, a critical participation towards the transformation of their contexts" (Caetano et al., 2020, p. 70).

Elias (2010) illustrated how student voice has evolved into becoming a crucial feedback tool:

> All over the world, educators are recognizing that creating a school culture and climate that genuinely engages and supports all students is essential to increasing students' achievement and preventing students from dropping out…Research supports the view that schools must encourage students to express themselves —clearly and often —and be places where students feel listened to and understood. Under such circumstances, a dynamic ethic of social participation is created that begins in the classroom and extends to the school building, the surrounding environs, and outward into the community. (Elias, 2010, p. 23)

Because feedback from students is informative, schools engage students in learning about their experiences and perspectives. Just like a school has influence on a student's perspective, each student also can influence other perspectives within schools. "In the context of schools, this implies that students' development is shaped by their schools (e.g., the teaching and learning experience, discipline policies, the physical space), and that students have the ability to, in turn, influence their schools" (O'Malley et al., 2014, p. 331).

But do school climate surveys accurately measure the student perspective? Gase et al. (2017) identified a need to "ground school climate measurement and improvement efforts in a multidimensional conceptualization of climate that values student perspectives and includes elements of both engagement and safety" (p.10). This is an important point because the student perspective is complex and begs the question, do student climate surveys accurately reflect a school's climate? The point is especially important considering how education has evolved since many policy makers and school and district leaders were actually students. Additionally, there are advances in technology, social media, as well as other societal shifts that impact a student in today's society differently than previous generations.

Student voice is a critical element in understanding school dynamics. As such, it needs to be considered when evaluating the health of a particular school. Student voice provides a way to understand the experience and perspective of students. It is important, however, to recognize that these perspectives are often influenced by factors out of the control of the student or school. One example of a variable that could influence a student's learning experience and perception of a school is the school's engagement of the local community.

Community Engagement

Community engagement is an influential component that contributes to understanding a school's climate. Similar to other variables such as staff morale and student voice, community engagement is a perspective of a school's health that should be evaluated. In contrast to staff morale and student voice, community engagement takes into consideration multiple stakeholders who have different relationships with the school based on their position in the community.

Obviously, schools, especially those that serve local communities, are an important element of a community. In addition to providing education and supervision to children within a community, schools often also provide playgrounds and fields for recreation. Schools create connections between younger and older community members. School communities are influenced by multiple variables including size, diversity, urban or rural settings, etc. (LaJeunesse et al., 2019). Community engagement consists of the relationship between the school and the unique community, which includes parents of students as well as local businesses, community service agencies, and local elected officials.

Each of these roles has a different relationship with the school and school leaders. Berg, et al. (2006) explained, "When school leaders develop collaborative relationships across institutional boundaries, however, partners are more likely to meet their agreed upon responsibilities, stay invested in joint initiatives, and motivate each other to expand their success" (p. 31).

Furthermore, Spier (2016) asserted, "parent and Community Involvement reflects student and staff perceptions of parents' and community members' degree of involvement in their school" (p. 15). As previously discussed, perceptions of school stakeholders influence the school climate and culture. Berg, et al. (2006) explained the benefit of encouraging, engaging and

empowering parents and community members to have an active role in the school, as this "helps

parents feel like they have a voice in the school, and it helps build relationships with teachers. It

levels the playing field" (p.19). Furthermore, Berg et al. also acknowledged the importance of

engaging the greater community as a whole in addition to the parents of current students by

stating, "as publicly supported institutions, schools are subject to the wishes and needs of

taxpayers" (p. 34). It is clear that having strong school-community relations are important for

local schools

Because each of the perspectives that contribute to community engagement within a

school is unique, an accurate way for schools to evaluate the community engagement perspective

accurately is important. While it is critical to solicit and receive feedback from all of the multiple

perspectives in a community, it might be effective to adjust the feedback tool to meet the specific

position of the community member. This could allow a community partner to share a perspective

using a different lens than a parent might (Pawlas, 2005). However, most schools and school

districts (including the school district that participated in this study) do not have multiple

assessments, despite advancing technologies that would allow engaging with multiple

stakeholders to receive the community's unique perspectives of a school's health (O'Reilly, &

Matt, 2013).

Schools are community centers that impact and are impacted by many different members

of their communities. Thus, engaging community partners, including taxpayers, local businesses.

alumni, and parents to learn their perspectives on a school climate is valuable. Community

engagement is a variable that influences a school and affects the perceptions of a school's health

and effectiveness from an outsider's perspective. While staff morale, student voice, and

community engagement inform the perspectives that people use to assess school climate, they are

influenced by practices within the school building. The leadership style of the principal and other

leaders is a factor that influences staff morale, student voice, and community engagement.

Leadership Style

Leadership style plays an important role for a principal. The role of a principal is to

provide the school with leadership that creates an opportunity for learning to occur. Leadership

involves the relationship between two bodies, an influencing agent and a person or persons

influenced (Kareem & Patrick, 2019). In 1985, Bass developed the transformational/

transactional model of leadership which Flynn (2019) described as a distinction between a

transactional leader, who exchanges reward for effort, and a transformational leader who

encourages followers to achieve higher for the sake of the greater good. The transformational

leader practices a laissez-faire leadership in which the leader does not actively attempt to meet

the needs of followers. Avolio et al. (1999) reflected on Flynn's work and determined that the

best leaders typically demonstrate both the transformational and transactional leadership

qualities. The type of leadership style that a principal decides to employ can have a direct result

on the perceptions of stakeholders within the building. Kareem and Patrick (2019) found that the

most effective principals are leaders who marry components of transformational and

transactional leadership qualities. Ali and Waqar (2013) found this to be accurate and also

determined that laissez-faire is the least effective leadership style for principals to use in schools.

The leadership style of a principal affects many aspects and perspectives of the school

environment, particularly the perceptions of multiple stakeholders. Allen et al. (2015) provided

an example stating, "transformational leadership has also been found to have an impact on

teachers' perceptions of school conditions, their individual commitment to change, and

organizational learning and student outcomes" (p. 3). Tan (2018) provided another example

when he observed that the combination of leadership styles leads to a shared leadership model which has proven to create an "indirect positive relationship with student mathematics achievement via the mediating processes of 'professional community' and 'focused instruction'" (p. 34). Furthermore, Moses and Nelson (2019) found a clear correlation between the leadership styles of principals, in both high and low performance schools, and the perceptions of students, staff, and community members.

Research supports that the leadership style of school principals influences the actions, outcomes, and perceptions of stakeholders in a school (Jones, 2018). These actions, outcomes, and perceptions are used by stakeholders to assess school climate. The leadership style not only influences the perceptions of teachers, students, and stakeholders, but also impacts the structures and processes that schools have in place as part of the daily operating practices. The way principals operationalize their leadership style is by selecting and appointing formal and informal leadership roles within a school.

Formal Leadership and Informal Leadership

The perceptions of schools are influenced by the actions of both formal and informal leaders within schools (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1998). There are two types of formal school leaders. Formal school leaders can be individuals who are responsible for conducting teacher appraisals (Radinger, 2014). These individuals conduct appraisals and are compensated for their work. Formal school leaders can also be persons who have other formal responsibilities that influence others such as scheduling, motivating, mobilizing, and leading teachers. These persons must have the skills to lead and be able to understand nuanced concepts such as, "group dynamics, influence, respect, and leadership by example to boost the productivity of her department"

(Gabriel, 2005, p. 2). These individuals typically include principals, assistant principals, and department leaders within a school.

Many formal leaders undergo training to learn and implement leadership practices. Although not all formal leaders benefit from formal leadership development programs, it is impactful for principals to have a baseline of understanding of what type of leadership training a formal leader has had (Fiedler, 1972). This baseline understanding can allow a principal to know exactly what type of leadership training the formal leader has received and how they can optimize the training. Allen et al. (2015) highlighted some of the benefits of this training on perceptions in schools, when he found, "all five factors of transformational leadership (idealized attributes, idealized behaviors, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) exhibited significant positive relationships with the seven dimensions of school climate, highlighting the importance of leadership on a campus" (p. 15). Principals leverage these formal leaders by identifying, hiring, and mentoring high quality formal leaders and empowering them to create processes and structures.

In contrast to formal leaders, informal leaders are individuals with influence within a school who do not have an official formal role. Gabriel (2005) identified informal leaders as individuals who "command a great deal of respect; they have much say and sway in determining a team's climate or the chances of a proposal's adoption, and they are often sought after for advice" (p. 3). Both formal and informal leaders engage in practices that shape perceptions of a school.

Informal leaders in schools are teachers and other staff that have influence over peers. Informal leaders play a pivotal role in influencing peers by the actions that they take, the social groups that they form, and even the social media dynamics that are formed (Dearing et al., 2017).

34

Informal leaders have such influence that even non-verbal gestures can create influence that affects followers (De Jong & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2009). While informal leaders can create influence, often the informal leadership can be counterproductive, work to be divisive, and actively work against the initiative of positive climate (Jameson, 2018). This is why it is important for principals to be aware of who their informal leaders are. Principals have a responsibility to leverage the skillsets of their informal leaders as well (Ng'ambi & Bozalek, 2013).

Principals also have opportunities to develop these leaders as well. Von Dohlen and Karvonen (2018) identified specific practices to teach teachers how to develop as informal leaders, a practice used to help teachers grow as professionals. Many of the practices identified in their research serve as a model to provide explicit training on how to develop informal school leaders.

Since both formal and informal leaders have influence that shapes the perceptions of stakeholders who assess school climate, a principal has a responsibility to strategically use these leaders, especially if the school and the principal are being evaluated based on perceptual school climate survey data. Obviously, principals take specific measures to influence the formal leaders, but it is also important for principals to be aware of informal leaders in their buildings and take measures to leverage them to positively influence the perceptions of their school. The perceptions of all stakeholders, including students, staff, community members, formal leaders, and informal leaders, can determine a school's climate when school climate surveys are used.

Climate Survey

A school climate survey is a tool that is used to gather perceptual data from stakeholders who make up a school community. The stakeholders include students, teachers and staff, and

various community members. There are multiple types of school climate surveys that are used

nationwide, most of which focus primarily on at least one of four important school climate

elements: relationships, institutional environment, teaching and learning, and safety

(McGiboney, 2016). These surveys provide feedback to school principals, district leaders, and

other observers about the perceptions of a school.

The National Council on Teacher Quality (2019) discussed how surveys can inform

school leaders, stating, "survey data, whether from a school leader's students, teachers, or

community, can provide a more comprehensive picture of a principal's performance than

observation data alone" (p. 16). A climate survey can measure the perceptions of multiple

stakeholders within a school. Mathews (2019) provided a rationale for climate surveys stating,

Schools nationwide are being encouraged to seek better means of assessing their work.

States that try climate surveys also ought to research the effects of ethnic bias. I know

some terrific black and Hispanic principals who don't deserve being tainted by flawed

data. (para 17)

Climate surveys are also used to provide transparency of perceptions and insight to the

greater public. Voight (2015) stated that many schools, particularly urban schools, need this

assessment and oversight as they are currently not working adding, "Amidst dissatisfaction with

testing-, choice-, and curriculum-based solutions to the problems of urban education, a growing

movement is advocating for approaches that target school climate, which refers to the social,

emotional, and physical aspects of the school environment" (p. 310). Furthermore, Voight

acknowledged that, "important school climate-related issues like discipline policy and

instructional practices–issues on which students likely have opinions–maybe contentious" (2015,

p. 320). School climate surveys provide valuable information about how schools are perceived.

However, it is important to recognize that, if schools and principals are evaluated based on the perceptual data alone, the assessment would not be comprehensive; climate surveys do not provide comprehensive information on a school or a principal's performance. Mathews (2019) pointed out another problem with these surveys stating, "School climate data may also be skewed by low response rates" (para 15). McGiboney (2016) asserted that school climate surveys do not actually measure school performance. Instead, they measure concepts that are the influence of perceptions from many, and, thus, may be subjective. Furthermore, upon reflection on school climate surveys in New York, Nathanson et al. (2013) found that there was sometimes a disconnect between school climate survey data and test scores. They indicated that climate surveys should be used as a data point, but not the data point to evaluate schools or principals. This is because climate surveys measure perceptions of stakeholders, but there are many factors that influence these perceptions, some within the locust of control of school leaders and some that are not.

Research has shown that climate surveys are important tools that capture perceptual data from stakeholders in schools. They provide meaningful information that people can use to glean insight of the relationships within a school that students, staff, and community members including parents have. And they enable multiple stakeholders to share their perceptions of the health of a school. They can be predictors of student achievement; however, they are not necessarily an accurate reflection of the performance of the schools or the principals.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions that principals have about the school climate of the school they lead and how those perceptions influence their practice. In this chapter, I explored what literature says about many of the concepts that influence school climate

and help form the perceptions that principals develop about them. These concepts focused on

factors that influence the perceptions about a school's climate that are potentially within the

control of the school principal. I explored perceptions and self-efficacy in this literature review

because they both are central components of the perceptual data collected on school climate

surveys. The distinction between school climate and school culture was made, notably that

school climate is the perceptual assessment of stakeholders about a school's health, whereas

school culture is the totality of the multiple variables that make a school unique. I also explored

key concepts that influence the perceptions of stakeholders of a school including staff, student,

and community perspectives. I examined leadership as an influencer, specifically leadership style

and formal and informal leadership. Lastly, I explored the school climate survey, the tool that

provides the results of perceptual data assessment. Table 2 provides an overview of the main

research studies reviewed in this chapter. Chapter 3 will provide a description of the study design

and methodology.

Table 2
Seminal Research that Influenced the Study

Topic	Year	Researcher
Perceptions and Self Efficacy	1977	Bandura
	2001	Nadelson, et al.
	2011	Walker & Slear
	2013	Duyar, et al.
	2016	Albritton, et al.
	2017	Versland & Erickson
	2020	Girgin
	2020	Ozdemir
School Climate and Culture	1986	Halderson, et al.
	1988	Peterson & Deal
	1999	Freiberg
	2005	Kwong & Davis
	2008	Stichter
	2009	MacNeil, et al.
	2019	Gage, et al.
	2020	Nadelson, et al.

Staff Morale	1977	Eppley
	1981	Miller
	2009	MacNeil, et al.
	2015	Sabin
	2017	Cheema, et al.
	2018	Jones
	2018	Tan
Student Voice	2010	Elias
	2014	O'Malley, et al.
	2017	Gase, et al
	2020	Caetano
Community Engagement	2005	Pawlas
	2006	Berg, et al
	2013	O'Reilly & Matt
	2016	Spier
	2019	LaJeunesse, et al.
Leadership Style	1999	Avolio, et al.
	2013	Ali & Waqar
	2015	Allen, et al.
	2018	Tan
	2019	Flynn
	2019	Kareem & Patrick
	2019	Moses & Nelson
Leadership	1972	Fiedler
	1988	Leithwood & Jantzi
	2005	Gabriel
	2009	De Jong, et al.
	2013	Ngambi & Bozalek
	2014	Radlinger
	2015	Allen, et al.
	2018	Jameson
	2018	Von Dohlen & Karvonen
Climate Survey	2013	Nathanson, et al.
	2015	Voight
	2016	McGibboney
	2019	Mathews
	2019	National Council on Teacher Quality

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore principals' perceptions about their school climate surveys from students, parents, staff, and schools and whether and how these influence their action or inaction. This research assumed three premises:

- that a productive school climate leads to positive student outcomes,

- that school principals are responsible for establishing and maintaining a productive school climate, and

- that school climate surveys are a way to measure or evaluate a school climate (McGiboney, 2016).

This phenomenology explored how principals in a large school district described their lived experiences with and perceptions of school climate surveys and how those experiences and perceptions influenced their practice.

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological design in which I collected data in a variety of ways: a questionnaire, structured interviews using an interview protocol, and self-anchoring and value scales. One of the seminal authors of phenomenology, Moustakas (2994), identifies this as the study of lived experience. Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research that explores phenomenon such as personal experiences or perceptions (Moran & Cohen, 2012). Gaete Celis (2019) stated, "both phenomenology and qualitative methods come from related but different disciplines, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, neurosciences, and medical sciences, even from interdisciplinary fields such as neurophenomenology" (p. 146). These methods are appropriate for this case study because I explored the phenomenon of the effect of school climate surveys on principals. I explored this phenomenon using study principals'

personal lived experiences with school climate surveys and examining how those experiences shaped their perceptions and informed their practice.

Research Design

This study used a multi-layered approach. I invited all principals in a Mid-Atlantic suburban school district to respond to an anonymous questionnaire that I developed. This questionnaire asked respondents about their experiences with climate surveys as well as their experiences with the concepts explored in Chapter 2, such as their experiences with the perceptions of staff, students, parents, communities, and leadership style. Subsequently, I randomly selected principals from among the respondents to participate in an interview. The questionnaire and interview data were triangulated with data from interview participants completing both a self-anchoring scale (Kilpatrick & Cantril, 1960) and a values inventory activity both of which I developed. Triangulation is important in qualitative research because it is the use of multiple methods or data sources which, according to Carter et al. (2014), provides researchers an opportunity to gather a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon.

The study design featured asking participants to complete an anonymous questionnaire to identify their experiences with school climate surveys. The questionnaire, formatted as an electronic Google form, was sent to all of the 209 plus principals in the large Mid-Atlantic suburban school district. The preliminary questionnaire was submitted to the committee chair for feedback before being submitted to the Hood College Institutional Review Board (IRB). The questionnaire included 25 questions for principals to respond to about their experiences with climate surveys as well as other concepts that inform perceptual data. Twenty of the questions were multiple choice, and five were short answer questions requiring a written response (see Appendix A for the questionnaire).

From among the principals completing the questionnaire data, I selected individuals to participate in an interview. When I communicated with principals encouraging them to participate in my research, I also asked for volunteers to participate in the interview process. I then used a random sampling of these volunteers by longevity as the principal at their current school (1 to 5 years, 6 to 10 years, or more than 10 years) to participate in the interviews. This process was used to ensure even distribution across length of time at their present school by applying random sampling to avoid sampling bias. I asked participants to select a pseudonym and arranged to interview the participant using an electronic format, Google Meet, to address concerns about safety due to COVID-19. The interview was structured according to an interview protocol which was shared with the committee chair for feedback before submission to the IRB (see Appendix B for the interview protocol). The structured interviews provided data to explore. As Weiss (1994) stated that by interviewing, "We can learn what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions" (p. 1). This is precisely what this study was designed to explore. It was important to collect the information from multiple sources because as Yazan (2015) stated, "It is incumbent upon the case study researchers to draw their data from multiple sources to capture the case under study in its complexity and entirety" (p. 142).

The target goal of four interview candidates per longevity group created a total of 12 interview participants which resulted in 12 self-anchoring responses, 12 values inventory responses, and the data produced by the 209 solicited questionnaire respondents. The goal of this was to have methodological triangulation, which would help reach data saturation. This is consistent with the findings of Fusch and Ness (2015) who found, "There is a direct link between data triangulation and data saturation; the one (data triangulation) ensures the other (data saturation). In other words, data triangulation is a method to get to data saturation" (p. 1412).

Subsequent to the interviews, I compiled and analyzed the interview data to identifytrends. I analyzed the data to examine the perceptions of school leaders of school climate surveys, the influence that these perceptions had on their practice, and how these practices influenced school culture.

Setting/Context

The study setting was a large Mid-Atlantic school district with urbanized apartment areas, suburban developments, and rural farm settings punctuated across its catchment of 500 square miles. Rounding some of the demographic numbers to protect confidentiality, the district is home to 209 schools serving over 150,000 students. There are 130 elementary, 54 middle, and 25 high that make up the 209 schools. Over 70% of the students served in the district identify as students of color. Over 30% of them qualify as economically disadvantaged. About 20% of this district's students do not speak English as their primary language. Close to 15% of the students qualify for special education services. With an attendance rate well over 90%, and a graduation rate close to 90%, the students in this district perform well overall.

Researcher As the Key Instrument

As the researcher, I am the key instrument in this qualitative study. I have biases that I knew I needed to mitigate to ensure the fidelity of the research. As previously discussed, I am an experienced principal with various relationships within the participating school system and with varied experiences with school climate surveys. I had personal relationships with some of the participant colleagues. I took precautions so that my previous relationships with my colleagues would not jeopardize the fidelity of the results. Because the initial questionnaire was anonymous, I avoided influence of any previous relationships. For the interviews, I countered any biases by strictly adhering to the protocol for the data collection tools that were developed: the interview

protocol, the self-anchoring scale, and the values inventory. These tools minimized any influence that potential relationships might have had, since the data collected from all participants, regardless of any previous relationship with me, was the same.

I was bringing my own experiences with and perceptions of school climate surveys while I collected and analyzed the data. As the key instrument of the research, I understood that my biases from my experiences could influence data collection and analysis. I addressed by adhering to my procedures for data collection and analysis. When analyzing the data, I thought that I would likely find that some data were similar to both my positive and negative experiences with school climate surveys. Because of my experiences, I was interested in the principals/ perceptions of climate surveys, but my research was focused on the collective perspectives of the principals, so I maintained that platform as I analyzed the data. I, as the researcher, was aware of the influence that my experiences and relationships might have on my research.

Research Questions

In order to explore the influence of school climate surveys on students, parents, staff, and schools, this study sought answers to the following research question: *How do principal perceptions of school climate surveys influence their practice to effect school culture?* Additionally, these sub questions were used to analyze and probe the data collected to answer the main research question:

- How do school climate surveys change the perceptions of principals?
- What are principals' beliefs regarding the ways their leadership may impact the climate survey results or their school's climate/culture?
- How do the perceptions of principals lead to action or inaction?
- How do the actions or inaction influence school culture?

- What is the influence of the school level (elementary vs. secondary) on the impact of climate survey??

- How does the stakeholder group (staff, students, community) influence the impact of climate survey data?

- How accurately do climate surveys reflect the school culture?

Participants

This study used respondents and participants. Respondents were the school principals in a large school district in the Mid-Atlantic. There are 209 schools in this district, each with a principal. Thus, 208 principals were asked to participate in the questionnaire. 32 principals completed the questionnaire, for a response rate of 15.4%. Respondents were given an anonymous questionnaire about their experiences with climate surveys, as well as other factors that influence perceptual data of a school's climate (see Appendix A). After collecting the questionnaire responses, I used a random selection of questionnaire respondents stratified by longevity of principalship at their current school to identify four interview participants per level. The goal was to get an unbiased data source (Weiss, 1994). The criteria for participating in the interview were principals who have between 1 and 5 years at their current school, 5 to 10 years at their current school, and more than 10 years at their current school. These principals included elementary, middle, and high school principals. The interview participants also completed the self-anchoring scale activity as well as the values inventory activity. Additionally, the interview principals also participated in the anonymous questionnaire, as they were also among the 208 principals who were invited to participate.

There were some perceived risks to participants because they were asked to participate in research that might challenge their beliefs on school climate and how school climate is assessed.

They might also be concerned that their answers would not be confidential and could be accessible eventually to their supervisors. I ensured all participants that their participation would remain confidential.

Data Sources/Procedures

The first data source for this study was a questionnaire I developed (see Appendix A). This preliminary questionnaire was emailed to all principals in a large suburban school district in the Mid-Atlantic after it was submitted to the committee chair for feedback and approved by the IRB. I invited all principals to complete the brief questionnaire to support my research to develop a better understanding of principals' attitudes towards school climate surveys, as well as other factors that influence perceptual data of a school's climate. I asked principals to complete the questionnaire within 2 weeks. I gave a reminder after the first week and again before the last day.

After collecting the responses, I entered the names of respondents (who completed the informed consent form) into a random selection generator for each level: elementary, middle, and high. Once the names were randomly selected, I contacted the individual principals and asked them to continue to participate in my study by taking part in an interview about their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards school climate surveys. The interview protocol was submitted to the committee chair for review before being submitted to the IRB (see Appendix B). Prior to each interview, participants were provided with a letter of Informed Consent, a confidentiality agreement, an explanation of the study, and communication that they could withdraw from participation at any time. I recorded the interviews as well as took notes during the interview to try to capture as much data from the participants as possible (Roulston, 2019). At the end of each interview, I asked the individual participants to engage in a self-anchoring scale activity (see Appendix C) and a values inventory activity (see Appendix D).

In the self-anchoring scale activity, participants were asked to identify a word or phrase that identified their ideal school climate and a word or phrase that identified their least ideal school climate. Participants were then asked to rank their school using the scale from 1, their worst possible school climate, to 10, their ideal school climate. They were also asked to rank their school in its current state and in its state 5 years ago and to predict its state 5 years in the future. Then participants were asked to participate in a values inventory, for which they were to analyze a list of 18 values and identify the three that were most important to their work and the three that were least important to their work.

<center>**Data Analysis**</center>

According to Maxwell (2013), "Any qualitative study requires decisions about how the analysis will be done, and these decisions should inform, and be informed by, the rest of the design" (p. 104). The decisions made for this qualitative study were informed by the responses to the initial questionnaire. That data from the initial questionnaire was collected and used for exploratory purposes.

The interview data were compiled using coding to identify themes of the responses. Coding can be used to develop comparisons and contrasts of different interview outcomes and different experiences (Maxwell, 2013). Once themes were identified, I categorized different responses into themes so I could identify similarities and differences in the responses of the participants. This allowed me to develop an understanding of the lived experience of principals regarding climate surveys.

I used tools to help me collect and analyze my findings, as well as to ensure that the questions on the data sources aligned with the research questions. The research question matrix (see Appendix E) illustrates which aspects of each data source addressed each research question

<center>47</center>

and sub-research questions. The alignment matrix (see Appendix F) illustrates the alignment between research question and participant, data source, analysis and finding.

The sub questions to the main research question were used at the analysis stage. As I examined the data sources, I brought to my coding and theme building process, the following analytical questions:

- How do school climate surveys change the perceptions of principals?

- What are principals' beliefs regarding the ways their leadership may impact the climate survey results or their school's climate/culture?

- How do the perceptions of principals lead to action or inaction?

- How do the actions or inaction influence school culture?

- What is the influence of the school level (elementary vs. secondary) on the impact of climate survey??

- How does the stakeholder group (staff, students, community) influence the impact of climate survey data?

- How accurately do climate surveys reflect the school culture?

Boundaries/Delimitations

Boundaries and delimitations explain what is included in the research and what is beyond the scope of the study (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). One delimitation of this study is that the only participants were school principals from one large, suburban, Mid-Atlantic school district. Principals from other districts are beyond the scope of this study. Another delimitation is the time of the study. The initial round of data collection had a 2-week window for respondents to complete the questionnaire, while the second round of data collection, the interviews, took place over a period of 3 months. Another delimitation of this study is that it is focused on principals'

attitudes and perceptions of climate surveys specifically, not other variables associated with school climate.

Trustworthiness

It was essential that I maintained trustworthiness with respondents, participants, as well as with the data analysis and interpretations. Maxwell (2013) explained, "What is a 'research project' for you is always, to some degree, an intrusion into the lives of the participants in your study" (p. 92). This concern was a priority for me, as I was using respondents and participants who were colleagues, and it was essential to ensure that I was not influenced by prior relationships or camaraderie. One tool that I used to ensure the trustworthiness and confidence of my research was an alignment matrix (see Appendix F) to ensure that the focus of my questionnaires, interviews and analysis was aligned with my research questions.

Summary

This qualitative study explored the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of school administrators towards school climate surveys. The research question investigated was how do the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of school principals towards climate surveys influence their practice. The practices that principals implement as a result of these attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions influence the overall culture of a school.

The study was conducted using multiple steps. The first step asked school principals from a large suburban school district to complete a brief questionnaire about their experiences with climate surveys. Subsequently, I randomly selected 12 respondents stratified by longevity in their principalship to participate in qualitative interviews and complete a self-anchoring scale, and values inventory. The goal was to ascertain how principals' perceptions of climate surveys

influence their practice and how that practice influences school culture. Chapter 4 will discuss

the findings of the study.

Table 3

Research Methodology Summary Table

Element	Summary
Data Sources	Questionnaire sent to all 209 principals in Mid-Atlantic School district (response rate = 15.4%).
	Interviews with 12 principals (4 each at ES, MS, and HS levels)
	Self-anchoring scale during interview
	Values Inventory during interview
Data Analysis	Data from questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics for the multiple-choice responses and coding for the open-ended responses
	Interview data and self-anchoring scale and values inventory were analyzed by using codes to identify themes.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

This study explored the influence of school climate surveys on the perceptions of school principals. This chapter presents findings from this phenomenological, qualitative study centered on this research question: *How do principal perceptions of school climate surveys influence their practice to effect school culture?* This chapter includes discussion about how data were analyzed as well as the findings which surfaced through that analysis. I include my decisions regarding coding, identifying trends and themes, and the organization of the data.

Summary of Methodology

All principals in a large suburban school district in the Mid-Atlantic were asked to complete a brief questionnaire titled, "Preliminary School Climate Survey Self-Assessment." This self-assessment questionnaire asked respondents to reflect on their experiences as principals, their experiences with climate surveys, and their experiences with aspects of school leadership that shape school climate. The questionnaire had 25 questions, 20 of which were multiple choice questions, and five of which were open-ended questions. The data were analyzed to identify commonalities in the experiences that principals had and ways in which they differed.

Subsequently, 12 respondents were selected from among those completing the self-assessment survey to participate in an interview that was conducted using Google Meet. The participants volunteering to take part in the interview were chosen based on number of years of principal experience. Four principals were selected who were in their first 5 years of a principalship, four with 5 to 10 years of experience, and four that have been a principal for more than 10 years. These interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives that principals have of school climate surveys. Data were analyzed by aligning responses of questions that were similar, and coding responses using a matrix of questions to

identify themes that emerged. Themes frequently were consistent with other themes that emerged from similar questions.

Interview participants completed a self-anchoring scale and values inventory activities. Their answers for each of these were placed into a matrix to identify themes and commonalities which were used to help answer the research question and sub-questions. Direct quotations of participants included in this chapter are italicized for ease of reading.

Preliminary School Climate Assessment

For the first part of the data collection, I asked all of the principals in a large suburban school district in the Mid-Atlantic to complete a brief questionnaire titled, "Preliminary School Climate Survey Self-Assessment" (see Appendix A). The self-assessment was confidential, asked respondents to provide biographical information including information about their experiences. Respondents also were asked to provide their perspectives of climate survey data and how it influenced their work. I received 40 signed informed consent forms indicating an interest in participating in the study and 32 completed Climate Survey Self-Assessments were returned. Of the 32 respondents who participated, 69% indicated that they have been a principal between 3-10 years, and 66% indicated that they did not have previous principal experience.

Most of the respondents (53%) indicated that their most recent student climate survey was *a mildly accurate* representation of their perspective of their school. Overwhelmingly, the respondents (94%) indicated that they gave a considerable amount of energy and/or attention to the perceptions of their students.

The majority of the respondents (85%) indicated that the most recent staff climate survey was an accurate representation of their perspective of their school. Of that majority, 44% of respondents indicated their most recent staff survey was a *mildly accurate* representation, while

41% indicated that it was a *very accurate* perception of their schools. Of the staff respondents, 78 % indicated that they gave considerable energy and/or attention to the perceptions of their staff.

The majority of the parent respondents (59%) indicated that their most recent parent climate survey was a *mildly accurate* representation of their own perspective of their school, while a smaller percentage (31%) indicated that it is a *very accurate* representation of their perspective. Most respondents indicated that they gave considerable energy and/or attention to the perceptions of their community members. The majority of the respondents (81%) indicated that they would describe their staff morale as positive, and no respondent indicated that they would describe their staff morale as negative.

The majority of the respondents (68%) indicated that the perceptions of students, staff, and community members gave them a higher sense of self-efficacy. Some of the respondents (26%) indicated that their self-efficacy was not affected by these perceptions, while a small number of the respondents (6%) indicated that they have a lower sense of self-efficacy as a result of the perceptions of students, staff, and community members. The majority of respondents indicated that they actively plan activities to address staff morale frequently (81%) and the majority of respondents indicated that they actively plan activities to engage with and respond to student voice frequently (81%), and the majority of respondents indicated that they actively plan activities to enhance community engagement frequently (66%).

The majority of respondents (72%) indicated that the stakeholder group that was most influential in shaping the school's culture was the staff. An overwhelming majority of the respondents (94%) indicated that they knew who most of their influential staff members were.

Most of the respondents (69%) indicated that the singular most influential factor in shaping a school's culture is the leadership style of the principal.

The respondents had the opportunity to identify other variables that they thought were impactful in influencing their school's culture. Themes identified included:

- influences generated outside of the school, such as district-level decisions,

- union involvement,

- local, national, and global issues,

- vocal parents,

- staff attitude and belief systems,

- collaboration and transparency,

- celebrations of successes,

- cultural proficiency of stakeholders, and

- teacher and leader effectiveness.

Respondents were asked to describe their leadership style in three words or phrases without being given words to choose from. The most frequent word respondents used to describe their leadership style was *collaborative*. The second most used word respondents used to describe their leadership style was *supportive*. There were other themes that emerged such as *communicative, honest, authentic*, and *transparent*.

Respondents were asked to identify strategies that they used to monitor the influence of staff members in their school who are influential. The most frequently identified strategies included:

- individual and group meetings,

- individual and group conversations about school wide initiatives,

- inclusion in decision making, and

- using structures currently in place.

Examples of currently used structures included inviting staff to Instructional Leadership Team meetings and discussing ideas and concerns with elected faculty and supporting services members. One respondent synthesized this by stating, "*I share the results with stakeholders and create facilitated opportunities to determine solutions or celebrations*."

Respondents were also asked to identify strategies that they had implemented as a result of a climate survey. There were many themes that evolved in the responses to this open-ended question. The primary theme that emerged was to develop an extrinsic motivator to recognize staff. A variety of ways were suggested, including planning social events, hiring food trucks, and purchasing gifts for staff. Another theme that emerged was educating staff on school culture and climate, as well as educating staff on the climate survey process. Another theme that evolved was reducing teacher workload. Some respondents recognized the importance of student and community climate surveys and identified themes such as home visits, providing translation and childcare services, and strengthening the systems for school-to-home communication. One respondent stated, "*we have looked for different ways to "fill" teacher's buckets: personal congratulations versus public. Small gifts to lift spirits: school gear, small food gifts, etc*."

Respondents were asked to answer the question, "How does your perception of climate surveys influence your practice?" The data suggests that, according to the respondents, the principal's perception of climate surveys was influential in the principal's practice. Themes emerged in the responses that identified a benefit of climate surveys as giving feedback to principals about the perspectives of their other stakeholders. Climate surveys appeared to give the principals an entry point to develop changes to processes, protocols, and structures. The data

also suggest that the climate surveys are one data point, and they do not necessarily paint a complete and comprehensive picture of a school. One response highlighted this with the comment, "*a great deal as I serve the school community, their voices has to matter and guide-Their voices must have impact not just input.*"

The final question on the self-assessment on school climate surveys was, "How did the pandemic influence your school's climate?" The overwhelming theme of the data indicated that the respondents felt that the pandemic had a detrimental effect on their school's climate. For example, one respondent noted the COVID-19 pandemic was, "*Seriously tough on the teachers. Lots of fear and extra work.*" Some of the responses indicated that building a sense of community with students, staff, and communities was adversely affected by school closures and the transition to distance learning. Furthermore, the data indicated that school climates were negatively impacted by communication coming from both the district level and the state level. Additionally, the level of stress and anxiety caused by the pandemic on an individual level made building or strengthening school climate extremely difficult.

Interviews

I interviewed 12 principals. All of the participants were given pseudonyms. Table 4 identifies the principals by pseudonym, their years of experience in their current position, the level of school that they lead, and if they have previous principal experience. The interviews were conducted in two parts. The first part of the interview focused primarily on the experiences of the principal, while the second part focused primarily on the experiences of the principal regarding school climate surveys. Four of the principals have led their schools for less than 5 years (2 years, 2 years, 3 years, and 1 year). Four of the principals have led their schools between

5 and 9 years (6, 6, 8, 9). Four of the principals have led their schools for 10 or more years (10, 10, 11, 20). Of the participants, five of the principals had previous experience as a principal.

Table 4

Principals' Experience and School Level

Principal	Years of Experience	Level of School	Previous Principal Experience
Brianna	2 Years	Elementary	No
Curtis	11 Year	Secondary	No
Eldridge	2 Years	Secondary	Yes
James	1 Year	Secondary	Yes
Jamie	3 Years	Secondary	No
Lawrence	10 Years	Elementary	No
Lisa Marie	9 Years	Elementary	Yes
Mary Louis	8 Years	Elementary	Yes
Melina	6 Years	Secondary	No
Robert	10 Years	Secondary	No
Terry	20 Years	Elementary	No
Robert	10 Years	Secondary	No

After interviewing all 12 participants and analyzing the data, themes began to emerge. There were two prominent conclusions that emerged in addition to other, less commonly held themes. The first conclusion was that climate survey data influence the practice of principals. The second conclusion was that the tenure of school principals influences their perceptions of school climate survey data.

Climate Surveys and Principals' Practices

The interviews clearly conveyed that these principals perceived the importance of school climate as it relates to student achievement, and they take the climate surveys seriously. All of the participants recognized that a positive school culture has a direct relationship with student

achievement. Most noted that, if students feel safe and welcome at a school, student achievement is likely to be higher. Brianna synthesized the perspective shared by most of the participants,

> *If a student doesn't have a healthy relationship with the staff here or doesn't have someone in there that they trust, then they're not going to have the motivation to do their work. You first have to work with their mind and make sure that their social and emotional wellbeing is in sound order for students to achieve.*

All of the participants interviewed work in a school district that conducts systemwide climate surveys for students, staff, and parents. Themes began to emerge when principals were asked which climate surveys were most impactful. All of the principals recognized that the climate surveys were impactful to their work. Most of the principals indicated that all of the climate surveys communicate important information to principals that help influence their decision making. While a theme emerged that it was crucial to get student voice and that student voice communicates important information, the staff climate survey was more impactful than the student climate survey. One of the principals, pseudonym Lisa Marie, illustrated a common view,

> *It* [the climate survey report] *points out things that maybe are blind spots for me. It's publicly reported, we intentionally share it back with staff every year, so I think there is more accountability for acting upon the staff survey.*

Most of the participants indicated that the student climate survey results help guide their work, and that, generally, the results are similar with what the principals expected. A theme emerged that participants felt that these data were a way to stay connected with the student experience and measure student wellbeing and sense of belonging. Another theme that emerged

however, was that the student climate survey data were not entirely accurate because the data represent a limited perspective. Jamie illustrated this point stating,

> *We have very few fights and very few discipline issues, but some students indicated that*
> *they don't feel safe at school. I don't know if that's just the way the Likert scale was*
> *interpreted or kids were confused, but that's why I don't know how valid the student*
> *climate survey data is.*

Several of the other participants echoed this sentiment indicating the students do not have an accurate perspective of the big picture, just of their personal experiences.

Many participants felt that the parent climate survey results were relatively accurate and helped the principals understand the parents' perspectives. Overwhelmingly, the participants observed that the data from the parent climate survey was largely incomplete because of limited response rate. Lisa Marie observed, "*I'm not sure how valid the data is because our parents, we typically get a low turnout rate for parents filling it out.*"

While many participants felt the parent climate survey results had value, they indicated the low turnout rate and their knowledge that the likeliest parents to respond were parents who were momentarily upset. As Robert observed, "*I think that's biased too, because the parents that are upset with school normally fill it out faster.*"

When asked what actions they have taken as a result of climate survey data, many themes emerged, but the primary theme was that of adjusting communication practices. Eldridge observed,

> *When I first got here, staff identified that they did not think that there was clear*
> *communication, so immediately when I came in we had weekly, I mean daily emails to*
> *staff. The other thing I did was started communicating with the community more, but I*

always send it to the staff first, always, always, always. When you send something to the

community first, the staff feels totally blindsided by that.

Another example of a communication adjustment was from Terry, who observed, "*I talk*

to staff and have conversations with them about it. I don't typically talk to them about climate

before the survey results come out, but I do after." Participants indicated that communication

channels were adjusted as a result of school climate survey data.

Another major theme that developed for actions taken was self-reflection. Lawrence

described the practice employed, "*I look for trends, and even if there's something that maybe I*

disagree with or don't think is valid, especially if I see a trend, I need to reflect on my own

leadership and see where the disconnect is."

A tertiary theme that was observed for actions taken was initiating celebrations. Melina

observed, "*I do a really good job of celebrating afterwards and recognizing what's good. It*

validates their work, and it's great for parents to see their kid's names listed on achievements."

She expanded on the importance of celebrating,

> *The survey is a flashlight on what's happening. And when I get the results that I do, I like*
>
> *to celebrate everyone's accomplishments, because we're in a profession that doesn't frequently*
>
> *celebrate but tends to narrow in on what's not working.*

Tenure and Climate Surveys

A conclusion that emerged throughout the research was that the more experience that a

principal has, the less concerned they seemed to be with the data gleaned from system-wide

school climate surveys and the more focused they were on different data points. Melina, who is

an experienced principal stated,

I think an ideal survey has to be ongoing, it cannot be a once and done. It needs to be

longitudinal so that you can gather data in real time. I haven't found a good way of

surveying the community, but we do surveys quarterly to really get at feedback that you

can't really do with one system-wide survey that doesn't address the specifics of your

school. The survey isn't important, and I'm not sure how valid it is, but what we need to

do is get feedback from our students and staff and then let them know what we're going

to do about it.

That perspective was shared consistently by the more experienced principals. This is a contrast to a perspective shared by more novice principles, such as Jamie, who stated,

Sometimes there's a gut defensive reaction to dismiss 5-minute climate surveys.

Especially if they say things you don't want to hear. And, of course, there's fear because

if there's a perception that you're going to be addressed by your supervisors. So, in the

case of a principal would be a central office level administrator that creates real fear and

frustration. But I also think sometimes what happens is there can be no accountability for

a principal because your director might come see you once or twice in a year.

As principals advance in their tenure and developed best practices that work for them, they seem to feel more comfortable with what they are doing and less interested in climate surveys.

Other Themes

In addition to the two prominent conclusions, other themes developed throughout the course of my data analysis. These themes included preparation, positive school climate, principal job satisfaction, ideal climate survey design and timeframe, validity of perceptual data, school climate impact on student achievement, stakeholders' perceptions of performance of school

principals, relevance of questions on traditional climate surveys, and the influence of the COVID 19 pandemic on school climate surveys and school climate.

Preparation

Most of the principals interviewed indicated that they felt *very well prepared* to become a principal, usually because of their previous leadership experience or the district's leadership development program. Interestingly, there was a variety of responses about what the participants thought the principalship entailed when they first began as principals in contrast to what they found was the reality. Prior to becoming principals, the participants indicated they mostly expected the job would entail being an instructional leader responsible for student learning outcomes. After experiencing the role of principal, many participants reported they learned the job entails much more than expected, including managing human and financial resources, crisis management, and being politically astute to address the varying needs and demands of the staff and community. Curtis gave the following anecdote,

> *I will often compare it to being the mayor of a small town. People who don't know what a principal does because the truth is you do everything. It's probably easier for me to think about what we don't do than what we do do.*

Positive School Climate

All principals except one described their school's culture as a positive one during the interview. Themes that emerged included student-centered, caring, and collaborative. One of the participants, Terry, summarized his school culture as, "*a very collaborative culture. Our parent community is very involved, very kind, and our teachers are very caring.*" This view was similar to other principals who emphasized collaboration, caring, and a commitment to students.

Principals then identified variables that influenced their school culture. The three primary themes that emerged were leadership, staff belief systems, and the impact that life has on students and staff. It was interesting that the theme of leadership emerged as a variable that influenced school climate. When asked to reflect on their leadership style, the principals consistently mentioned collaborative leadership and authentic leadership. While most discussed these concepts, one of the participants, Jamie captured their philosophy concisely by stating, "*I'm very collaborative. But I'm also very transparent, and what you see is what you get.*"

One of the participants, Lawrence observed,

there are variables we can control, we can control our attitude, our ability to collaborate and our ability to continuously professionally grow our ability to be flexible… some variables that you can't control are just life within our staff and families. Unfortunately, you know things happen and they might not be able to be present.

These themes were echoed by many of the participants.

When asked to identify variables that were outside of their control, participants described commonalities that included school district initiatives, variability in interpretations of the questions, and pre-existing relationships between stakeholders with colleagues and administrators. Table 5 summarizes the themes resulting from responses to Questions 7, 8, and 9.

Table 5

*Participants' Responses to Interview Protocol Part 1 – Questions 7, 8, and 9**

Description	Number	Participants					
		7. School Culture					
Positive	11	Melina	Mary Louise	Lawrence	Robert	Jamie	Lisa
		Wayne	Brianna	Terry	Eldridge	Curtis	
Negative	1	James					
Student controlled	4	Wayne	Mary Louise	Eldridge	Curtis		
Caring	4	Melina	Brianna	Terry	James		
Collaborative	4	Jamie	Brianna	Wayne	Curtis		
		8. Influential Variables					
Staff belief systems	5	Melina	Robert	Lawrence	Lisa	Curtis	
Life	3	Terry	Eldridge	Lisa			
Leadership	4	Jamie	Brianna	Wayne	Robert		
		9. Leadership Style					
Collaborative	5	Melina	Mary Louise	James	Jamie	Lisa	
Facilitative	1	James					
Authentic	5	Eldridge	Lawrence	Brianna	Wayne	Curtis	
Assertive	3	Terry	Mary Louise	Lisa			

Note. Question 7: Describe your school's culture? Question 8: What variables influence your school's culture? Question 9: Describe your leadership style.

Job Satisfaction Metaphors

The last item in Part 1 of the interview included a series of metaphors from which participants had to choose which metaphor most accurately described their role as a school leader. This gave the researcher insight into the job satisfaction of the principals interviewed. Four principals identified the metaphor, a garden filled with flowers, as representing how they saw their role. These principals discussed growth and the rewards of nurturing learning. Three principals identified the building a plane while flying it as representing how they saw their role. Two others identified the metaphor, making lemonade out of lemons, but each of these five

64

participants indicated that their response was influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and the influence that the pandemic had on their school communities. Another principal identified the metaphor, a teacup filled with flavor, another principal identified the metaphor, sunshine and rainbows, and another principal identified the metaphor, juggling knives, although that participant did mention that the metaphorical knives were not very sharp. Table 6 displays the metaphor choices of participants. All of the participants enjoyed listening to the metaphors and identifying one that most resonated with their perception of their roles.

Table 6

Participants' Responses to Interview Protocol Part 1 – Questions 10

Metaphors	Number	Participants			
Building the Plane While Flying It	3	Lawrence	Eldridge	Wayne	
Sunshine and Rainbows	1	Terry			
Herding Cats	0				
Soaring Like an Eagle	0	Lisa Marie			
Juggling Knives	1	Lisa Marie			
A Teacup Filled with Flavor	1	James			
Making Lemons Out of Lemonade	2	Jamie	Robert		
A Garden Filled with Flowers	4	Melina	Mary Louis	Briana	Curtis
Growth	2	Melina	Mary Louise		
Pandemic	0				

Note. Question 10: What metaphor most accurately describes your role as a school leader and why?

Ideal Climate Survey

During the interview, I asked principals if they could design an ideal school climate survey, what would it look like, and what would be the ideal time to administer the survey. Very consistent themes emerged from these questions. The first theme identified was that the ideal

school climate survey would be an ongoing survey administered multiple times throughout the school year. One of the participants, Melina, observed, "*I think an ideal survey needs to be ongoing. I don't think it can be a once and done in a year. It needs to be longitudinal, so you can gather data over time*." Of the 12 participants, seven identified similar sentiments.

Another strong theme that emerged was the need for multiple data points. Lawrence stated, "*It needs to have multiple data points, and without multiple data points I don't feel it's accurate*." Six other participants indicated a desire to see multiple data points used. A third theme that emerged was to have more specific questions and a qualitative component. Wayne observed, "*We should be asking questions based on an identified need. Not generic questions, but more specific questions that are not seemingly random.*" Six of the principals interviewed shared this perspective. Table 7 summarizes these themes by participant.

Table 7

Participants/ Responses to Protocol Part 2 – Questions 11 and 16

Changes	Number	Participants						
		11. Ideal Design						
Ongoing	7	Melina	Mary Louise	Lawrence	James	Jamie	Lisa	Curtis
Multiple times	5	Melina	Mary Louise	Lawrence	James	Lisa		
Multiple data sources	3	Lawrence	Jamie	Curtis				
Qualitative	3	Lawrence	Mary Louise	Lisa				
More specific questions	5	Terry	Eldridge	Jamie	Brianna	Wayne	Robert	
		16. Ideal Time						
One-time administration	4	Terry	Eldridge	Brianne	Robert			
Individualized	2	Wayne	Robert					

Note. Question 11: If you could design an ideal climate survey what would it look like? Question 16: When is the ideal time to administer a climate survey to stakeholders?

Attitudes Towards Perceptual Data

Participants were asked if their most recent climate surveys for staff, students, and parents accurately reflected their perceptions of their schools. For the staff survey, the themes that emerged were that the survey results guide their work because it represents the perspectives of the staff. Additionally, participants felt that the survey highlights the values and beliefs of staff as a whole, but it is more likely to be completed by people that are upset, which negatively impacts the validity of the data. Interestingly, several of the participants indicated a perspective similar to that. James stated, "*It reflects my beliefs and my values."* It was interesting that several of the participants felt that the staff climate survey, which represents the staff's perspective, communicates the values and perspectives of the principal.

Impact of School Climate on Student Achievement

Participants were asked how impactful school climate surveys were on student achievement and how impactful a healthy school culture has on student achievement. The perceptions of principals on how impactful school climate surveys were on student achievement varied, as seen in Table 8. Some participants, such as Milena, who indicated that school climate surveys were impactful, indicated the impact of school climate surveys on student achievement was "*not at all*." Others, such as James, responded about the impact of a school climate survey indicating, "*I think it really mirrors student achievement*." Still others were more moderate in their responses, such as Robert who observed, "*I don't think it's [climate surveys] impactful, but I think it does play a role.*" Conversely, all of the participants indicated that a positive school culture has a direct relationship with student achievement, mostly noting that if students feel safe and welcome at a school, student achievement is likely to be higher. A participant with the pseudonym Brianna commented,

67

If a student doesn't have a healthy relationship with the staff here or doesn't have

someone in there that they trust, then they're not going to have the motivation to do their

work. You first have to work with their mind and make sure that their social and

emotional wellbeing is in sound order for students to achieve.

Table 8

Participants/ Responses to Protocol Part 2 – Questions 18 and 19

Changes	Number	Participants					
		18. School Culture Survey					
Very Impactful	3	James	Eldridge			Jamie	
Not impactful	1	Melina Brianna	Lawrence	Terry	Lisa	Robert	Curtis
Biased perception	2	Wayne	Lawrence				
		19. Healthy School Culture					
Very Impactful	11	Melina	Lawrence	Terry	Lisa	Robert	Curtis
Not impactful	0	Brianna	Eldridge	James	Wayne	Jamie	
Safety, feeling welcome	5	Melina	Lawrence	James	Brianna	Curtis	

Question 18: How impactful do you feel that climate survey is on student achievement?
Question 19: How impactful do you feel a healthy school culture has on student achievement?

Perception of Stakeholders on Principal Performance

Participants were asked how they think the climate survey data influences the way that

their staff, students, and parents perceive them, and how they think other principals feel about the

climate survey. Most participants indicated that they felt that the climate surveys helped

stakeholders feel heard and valued. Lisa Marie opined,

I believe that the staff survey has the greatest influence in terms of perception because

we're all in together. I can change the work environment with you because you've given

me input, and I can make a change that can change the quality of life for a teacher. I

don't have that immediate kind of sweeping direct impact on kids, I feel like the teachers

are the go-between in that respect.

Wayne observed, "I *think more often than not, climate surveys are a direct criticism or*

celebration of the principal and the processes that are in the building." Most principals were

hesitant to guess how others feel about school climate surveys, but many observed that they

believed there's a perception that climate surveys are used in an evaluative manner by district

leaders, and that, since they are publicly shared, competition exists among principals.

Jamie shared, "*I think sometimes people have a defensive reaction to it, because there is*

a fear because there's a perception that you are going to be addressed by your supervisors as a

failure despite your hard work." Terry looked at it from a different perspective stating, "*I'm a*

competitive person. I want it to be better than everyone." Eldridge took a different lens and

observed, "*Every principal I've ever worked with has taken the surveys extremely seriously and*

it's always been an important component of the school improvement plan."

Relevance of Climate Survey Questions

Since all of the participants experienced administering climate surveys, I asked, "What is

the most relevant question on a climate survey the principal has administered and what is the

least relevant question on a climate survey that the principal has administered?" Three clear

themes emerged in the responses to the most relevant question on climate surveys: (a) How can I

help you? (b) Do you have a trusted adult at school? and (c) Do you feel safe/happy at work or

school? The least relevant question resulted in two distinct themes: (a) Do you have a best friend

at work? and (b) Subjective questions asking if there are enough materials or is the building

clean. Eldridge explained his thinking,

Do you have the materials? Everyone's got the materials. Is your building clean? You

could have a sparkling clean building and some staff might say, 'well, there's a speck of

dust over there.' I care more about leadership, trust, vision, communication.

Participants were asked how impactful a healthy school culture has on student

achievement. The perceptions of principals on how impactful school climate surveys are on

student achievement was varied, as seen in Table 5. Some participants, such as Milena, who

identified that school climate surveys are impactful, "*not at all*." Others, such as James,

identified that school climate surveys, "*I think it really mirrors student achievement.*" Still others

identified that it is in between, such as Robert who observed, "*I don't think it's impactful, but I*

think it does play a role."

With regards to responses to the item, other perspectives to add, many interesting

perspectives arrived, and even though it is an open-ended question, four primary themes

emerged. The first theme is that school climate surveys illustrate an opportunity to learn, both

from within the principal's school as well as from outside organizations that have overcome

similar issues identified in a climate survey. Jamie summarized their perspective by stating,

I am a fan. I think that you take what you can glean from them. They may not always be a

hundred percent accurate just like any survey, but there is usually a nugget you can take.

I'm a big believer in continuous improvement, and the surveys, flawed as they may be,

ensure that you can't rest on your laurels."

Another theme that emerged was a negative perception of school climate surveys due to

being penalized for having negative feedback. Lawrence explained,

My first year here the climate survey was given and I caught a lot of heat for having some

negativity. And it still resonates with me because if you want to change a climate and a

70

culture as a leader, you can't make everyone happy. I'm not going about trying to ruin

everyone's day or irritate people, that there were things that were happening that were

not in the student's best interest, they were in the staff's best interest. And it was

concerning to me that my supervisors used this data against me when I was doing what I

was trained to do.

A third theme that emerged was the need for more timely results of school climate

surveys. Curtis recognized, *"I know it's not a perfect art or science, but I would advocate to get*

more timely results so that we can take action in real time, in the real moment so that we can

make effective change."

The fourth theme that emerged was the opportunity for a principal to communicate their

values. James stated, "*You get to communicate your beliefs by how you respond to surveys. Not*

opinions, but your belief systems."

Pandemic

Participants were asked about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their leadership

and school's perspective. They were also asked about anything else that they felt would be

valuable to add regarding their experience with school climate surveys during the pandemic.

Unanimously, the participants indicated that the pandemic took a significant toll on the students,

staff, and families, but all were hesitant to indicate how significant the impact was while they

were still in the midst of it. Eldridge observed, "*Being a principal going through the pandemic*

is the hardest leadership challenge of my life."

Self-Anchoring Scale

All of the interviewees also completed a modified version of Kilpatrick and Cantril

(1960) self-anchoring scale, as well as a values inventory. For the self-anchoring scale,

participants were asked to identify a word or phrase that described the best possible school

climate and a word or phrase that described the worst possible school climate. The word or

phrase that they identified as the best possible climate was given a score of ten, while the word

or phrase that they identified as the worst possible climate was given a score of 1. Using that

same scale, participants were asked to identify how they would rank their school's current

climate, where they would put their current school 5 years ago, and where they hoped to see their

school on that scale in 5 years. Then each participant was asked to complete a values inventory.

Eighteen values were listed on a page, and participants were asked to identify the three most

important values to their work as a principal as well as the three least important values to their

work as a principal.

When completing the self-anchoring scale, the words or phrases that participants used to

describe the best possible school climate included *collaborative, inclusive, honest, nurturing,*

community, engaging, harmonious, belonging, positive, progressive, and *accountability*. Words

or phrases that participants used to describe the worst possible school climate included *isolating,*

toxic, institutionalized, hostile, divided, selfish, disingenuous, lack of empowerment, having a

leader who doesn't care, and *lack of accountability*. All of the participants identified their

current climate as 7 or higher, except one who identified the climate as a 6, a first-year principal

performing during a pandemic. Three participants ranked their school as 7, while one participant

gave a 7½. Three participants identified their school as an 8, three participants ranked their

school climate as a 9, and one ranked their school as a 9½.

When identifying how their schools would have ranked 5 years ago, most participants

indicated that their school would have ranked lower on the same scale. Of the participants, 2

ranked their climate from 5 years ago a 3, one ranked it a 4, and one ranked it a 4½, while three

participants ranked it a 5, three ranked it a 7, one ranked it an 8, and one ranked it a 9. Of those

ratings, only one participant indicated that their school climate was lower than it was 5 years ago

and that principal indicated the belief that the pandemic negatively impacted their school and one

participant indicated that their school climate was the same today as it was 5 years ago, while all

other participants indicated the belief that their school climate had improved in the past 5 years.

When identifying where they expected their climate to be in 5 years from the time of the

study using the same scale, all of the participants indicated their belief that their school climate

would be a 9 or a 10. Six participants predicted that their school climate would be a 9, and six

participants predicted that their school climate would be a 10. Table 9 summarizes the results of

the self-anchoring scale activity.

Table 9

Participants' Responses on the Self-Anchoring Scale

Participant	Best Possible Climate Word/Phrase	Worst Possible Climate Word/Phrase	Current Rank	5 Years Ago Rank	5 Years from Now Rank
Melina	Honest	Disingenuous	9	8	9
James	Belonging	Isolating	6	7	9
Lawrence	Collaborative	Toxic	7.5	3	10
Mary Louis	Collaborative	Selfish	8	4	10
Terry	Nurturing	Toxic	9	9	9
Eldridge	Community	Divided	7	3	10
Jamie	Positive	Lack of empowerment	9	7	9
Brianna	Harmonious	Leader doesn't care	7	5	10
Lisa Marie	Inclusive	Hostile	8	7	9
Wayne	Engaging	Isolating	8	5	10
Robert	Accountability	Lack of Accountability	9.5	4.5	10
Curtis	Progressive	Institutionalized	7	5	9

Values Inventory

In the values inventory activity, participants were given a set of values and were asked to identify the three most important to their work, and the three least important to their work (see Appendix G). The value that most participants identified as important to their work was administrative support, which was clarified to mean support from district-level administrators. Five participants identified this as one of their top three values. Community engagement, teacher collaboration, teacher leadership and student diversity were the next most common values identified. Four participants identified these values as one of their top three values that influenced their work as principals. Parent engagement and teacher accountability were identified as the top three values by three participants. Student autonomy, professional growth opportunities, and teacher diversity were each identified two times by participants as top three most important values. Financial support, student accountability and principal autonomy were each identified one time as among the top three values. The results are shown in Table 10.

Table 10

Participants' Responses to the Most Important Value to their Work on the Values Inventory

Participant	Top 1	Top 2	Top 3
Melina	Parent engagement	Professional growth	Teacher collaboration
James	Community engagement	Teacher diversity	Teacher collaboration
Lawrence	Student autonomy	Parent engagement	Administrative support
Mary Louis	Student accountability	Teacher leadership	Community engagement
Terry	Administrative support	Teacher accountability	principal autonomy
Eldridge	Admin support	Teacher diversity	Teacher leadership
Jamie	Teacher collaboration	Teacher accountability	Administrative support
Brianna	Administrative support	Professional growth opportunities	Teacher diversity
Lisa Marie	Financial support	Student diversity	Teacher leadership
Wayne	Teacher leadership	Student autonomy	Parent engagement
Robert	Community engagement	Teacher accountability	Teacher Diversity

Curtis	Teacher collaboration	Student diversity	Community engagement

Note. Indicate the 3 most important values to your work as a principal

There were many commonalities when it came to identifying values that are least important to the work of the participants. Technology capabilities, facilities, and community growth each were identified five times as being one of the bottom three values. Student autonomy, student diversity, teacher autonomy and teacher mobility were each identified three times as a value that is in the bottom three in terms of importance to the work of a principal. Principal autonomy, administrative support, and financial support were each identified two times, and professional growth opportunities and student accountability were each identified one time as a bottom three value as displayed in Table 11.

Table 11

Participants' Responses to the Least Important Value to their Work on the Values Inventory

Participant	Bottom 3	Bottom 2	Bottom 1
Melina	Community growth	Staff autonomy	Student autonomy
James	Community growth	Administrative support	Facilities
Lawrence	Financial support	Student diversity	Community growth
Mary Louis	Student diversity	Principal autonomy	Tech capabilities
Terry		Community growth	Diversity
Eldridge	Teacher mobility	Technology capabilities	Student accountability
Jamie	Principal autonomy	Student autonomy	Teacher autonomy
Brianna	Financial support	Technology capabilities	Facilities
Lisa Marie	Community growth	Teacher autonomy	Administrative support
Wayne	Teacher mobility	Professional growth opportunities	Facilities
Robert	Student autonomy	Technology capabilities	Facilities
Curtis	Technology capabilities	Teacher mobility	Facilities

Note. Indicate the 3 least important values to your work as a principal.

Sub-Research Questions Discussion

This qualitative study explored the perceptions that principals have about school climate, school climate surveys, and ways to measure school climate and culture with the clear understanding that a healthy school climate is essential to optimize student achievement. The research clearly illustrated responses to the research question and sub-research questions. The next sections provide discussion around each of the sub-research questions.

How do school climate surveys influence the perceptions of principals?

The data illustrate that school climate surveys influence the perceptions of principals. All of the participants recognized the important impact of a healthy school culture on student achievement, and all identified variables that influence the climate surveys including variables within and outside of the principal's control. All participants identified actions that they had taken as a result of the school climate survey including incorporating survey results into the school improvement planning process. School climate surveys give principals a data source that provides them the opportunity to reflect on their practices and adjust to meet the needs of stakeholders.

What are the principals' beliefs regarding the ways their leadership may impact the climate survey results or their school's climate/culture?

The data collected suggest that a principal's leadership influences the climate survey results as well as the culture of the school. The themes that developed were that leadership does influence the school climate, and this group of participants specifically identified collaborative leadership and authentic leadership as leadership styles that they implement to create a climate conducive to student achievement.

How do the perceptions of principals lead to action? How do the perceptions of principals lead to inaction?

These two sub- questions are aligned as the perceptions of principals can lead to both action and inaction. The participants indicated that they take the results of school climate surveys as important data points, and they create action in response to the results such as adjusting communication styles or processes. Additionally, it was clear that the participants have the perception that not all of the results of the climate survey are valid because stakeholders have limited information and the survey is an opportunity for certain groups to respond with emotion or to weaponize it.

How do the actions or inaction influence school culture?

The actions (or lack of actions) that principals take in response to climate surveys have a direct impact on the school climate and school climate surveys. A theme that emerged was that the climate surveys give stakeholders an opportunity to feel heard and to feel more ownership and involvement in the school community. That ownership is the result of a principal acknowledging the results of the climate survey and incorporating the feedback into future practices.

How does the stakeholder group (staff, students, community) influence the impact of climate survey data?

The data collected suggest that the staff climate survey data is regarded by principals as the most important climate survey data collected. This is because the staff climate actively influences the climates of students and parents. Additionally, the data suggest that principals feel that the staff climate survey is the one that is most influenced by the principal. If the staff climate

is high, that will have an effect on the student climate, which will have an effect on the parent climate.

How accurately do climate surveys reflect the school culture?

The data suggests that the climate surveys are fairly accurate at reflecting the school culture. While it was certainly established that there are opportunities for the data to be skewed, it was also certainly evident that climate surveys present a reflection of the school climate that is meaningful. The principals who responded to the questionnaire, as well as the ones who participated in the interview, indicated an acknowledgement that, although it is only one data point, the climate survey data presents them with a snapshot of the perspective of their schools from multiple stakeholders.

<div align="center">

Research Question

</div>

How do principal perceptions of school climate surveys influence their practice to effect school culture?

Findings from this study demonstrate that the perceptions of school climate surveys influence the practices of school principals to try to influence school culture. How these perceptions influence practice is individualized by the principal's experiences, the principal's experiences with school climate assessment, and the myriad of factors that influence perceptions of school climate. The perceptions that principals develop about school climate surveys evolve over time based on experiences with multiple stakeholder groups, the attitudes and beliefs of stakeholders, the leadership skill of the principal, and many other variables that were described in this study. Principals use their own lived experiences to develop a perception of how school climate surveys influence their practice. Overwhelmingly, the questionnaire responses and interviewees in the study illustrate a direct relationship between having a positive school climate

and culture and student achievement which is in alignment with research explored in Chapter 2. The school climate surveys provide a tool to attempt to measure that climate. While the tools that are currently in place may not provide a comprehensive or complete evaluation of a school's climate, they provide data that create a reflection of the climate, at minimum resulting in modified practices at maximum.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the data analysis and findings. I shared how I analyzed the data and identified themes that emerged. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the conclusions I drew from the research and share implications of the research for practice and further research. Also, I will discuss the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the research and make recommendations based on the research.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the lived experiences of principals as they talked about their school climate surveys.   This chapter contains a discussion of the findings. It also includes implications and conclusions of the research conducted.

In Chapter 1 of this study, I illustrated the significance of the problem. I discussed my personal experiences with school climate surveys, specifically my experience where perceptual school climate survey data were used to negatively influence my career options. I communicated the theoretical framework that perceptual data from the stakeholder groups of students, staff, and community members influence the principal's perception of their school culture, which ultimately leads to a principal implementing practices that ultimately form the actual culture of a school. I identified potential limitations and biases that might influence my research, and how I would work to not allow the limitations or biases to corrupt the research. Lastly, I identified key definitions that needed to be clearly defined as they applied to the study.

In Chapter 2, I conducted a thorough literature review. In the literature review, I explored what contemporary research says about many of the concepts that influence school climate surveys and help form the perceptions developed by principals as a result. I explored the concepts of perception and self-efficacy because they both are central components of the perceptual data that is collected on school climate surveys. Additionally, the distinction between school climate and school culture was made. Notably school climate is the perceptual assessment of stakeholders about a school's health, whereas school culture is the totality of the multiple variables that make a school unique. Other key concepts that influence the perceptions of stakeholders of a school included staff, student, and community perspectives, leadership as an

influencer, leadership style, formal and informal leadership, and, lastly, the school climate survey as an assessment tool.

In Chapter 3, I explained the methodological decisions and research design. I identified premises that were central to answering the research questions, such as the premise that a productive school climate leads to positive student outcomes, that school principals are responsible for establishing and maintaining a productive school climate, and that school climate surveys are a way to measure or evaluate school climate. I identified the research design that was used which included principals from a Mid-Atlantic suburban school district who participated. I also described the data sources and procedures which used the School Climate Survey Self-Assessment, an interview protocol, a self-anchoring scale, and a values inventory, all of which I designed specifically to answer my research questions.

In Chapter 4, I reported my findings. I described the data shared from the School Climate Survey Self-Assessment which supported themes that emerged from the interviews, self-anchoring scale, and values inventory. Two primary conclusions drawn from the research were that (a) school climate surveys do influence principal practice, and (b) the longer the tenure that principals have, the less concerned they are with climate survey results because they use multiple and varied data sources to develop perceptions of their school climate. Other themes that emerged from the research included that (a) this group of study principals felt prepared to become principals and had a basic understanding of how they would be evaluated, (b) all of the participants except for one described their school climate as positive, and (c) most of the principals interviewed had high job satisfaction. Furthermore, the participants identified ideal design and delivery of climate surveys, understood the validity of perceptual data, and agreed that school climate directly affects student achievement. The interview and questionnaire data

were triangulated with a self-anchoring scale and a values inventory, which supported the themes that emerged previously.

In this chapter, I discuss the implications of this study for practice, research, and policy. The discussion addresses the themes that developed through the analysis of the data and explores them with my interpretation of the study's findings. My interpretation is presented in the context of the research questions, the theoretical framework, and the literature review. I also share reflections from the research.

Impact of COVID-19

This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. All data collected during the study were gathered during the pandemic when all of the schools at the time had fully transitioned to a distance-learning model. No teachers or students were allowed to be physically in school for the last 3 months of the 2019-2020 school year nor for the entirety of the 2020-2021 school year. This had a massive impact on school climate. It also led to discontinuing administration of district-wide climate surveys for those 2 school years.

Because the information about COVID-19 evolved so frequently, the decisions of district leadership continued to shift, which had a massive impact on morale of students, staff, and community members. Teachers were forced to learn how to teach classes on Zoom and then teach them while students had to learn how to use the technology and participate in classes from their own home. Students frequently have their cameras off during the classes, so teachers had a difficult time assessing student learning. As a result, fatigue and frustration were high, and it would be surprising if everyone was not traumatically affected by the experience.

Since there were no students and teachers in school buildings, the concept of school climate shifted. School administrators frequently had to share changing directives and be creative

in finding ways to assess the morale of students and staff. It is possible that school climates were positively affected because schools were able to work collaboratively to create new systems in response to the shift to virtual teaching and learning. It is also possible that the challenges of transitioning to virtual teaching and learning took a negative toll on stakeholder groups.

Discussion

In Chapter 4, the findings of the study indicate that climate matters for student achievement and that the duration of a principal's experience in a school makes a difference. Additionally, preparation of the administrator is of paramount importance as is the need to have multiple data points. Table 12 includes the summary of findings with the evidence supporting each of the main claims. Next is a discussion of these ideas in relation to the research question.

Table 12

Summary of Findings Table

Concept	Evidence
Climate is Important to Student Achievement	"If a student doesn't have a healthy relationship with the staff here or doesn't have someone in there that they trust, then they're not going to have the motivation to do their work."
Tenure Makes a Difference	Experienced Principal – "The survey isn't important, and I'm not sure how valid it is, but what we need to do is get feedback from our students and staff and then let them know what we're going to do about it." Novice Principal – "Sometimes there's a gut defensive reaction to dismiss 5-minute climate surveys. Especially if they say things you don't want to hear. And, of course, there's fear because if there's a perception that you're going to be critically addressed by your supervisors."

Preparation is Critical	"I will often compare it to being the mayor of a small town. People who don't know what a principal does because the truth is you do everything. It's probably easier for me to think about what we don't do than what we do do."
Multiple Data Points Are Needed to Evaluate Climate	"I think an ideal survey needs to be ongoing. I don't think it can be a once and done in a year. It needs to be longitudinal, so you can gather data over time.

Putting aside the novel experience of teaching and learning brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and using the information gleaned from the literature review and study findings, the overarching research question (*How do principal perceptions of school climate surveys influence their practice to effect school culture?*) is discussed in this section. There are many factors that influence how principals' perceptions of school climate surveys influence their practice to impact their school culture. These factors include those that are within the principal's control, such as leadership style, leadership development of staff, and communication. However, there are clearly factors that are not within a principal's control that influence how their perceptions of school climate surveys influence their practice. The most glaring factor outside of a principal's control is tenure in the position, as well as tenure within the school. Tenure provides experiences from which principals can pull from to improve their self-efficacy, learn from their mistakes, learn from peers, norm their practices, and implement their unique vision that potentially affects perceptual data. The theoretical framework illustrated that perceptual survey data from three primary stakeholder groups (students, staff, and community members) influence the perceptions of the principal, which influence the school culture. This framework is inconsistent with the findings of this study because it does not include consideration of a principal's previous experiences which influence the principal's perception of their own self-efficacy and, in turn, influence their practice. The self-efficacy of the participants in this study was high, as they self-reported high job satisfaction, positive school cultures, and high self-efficacy as school leaders.
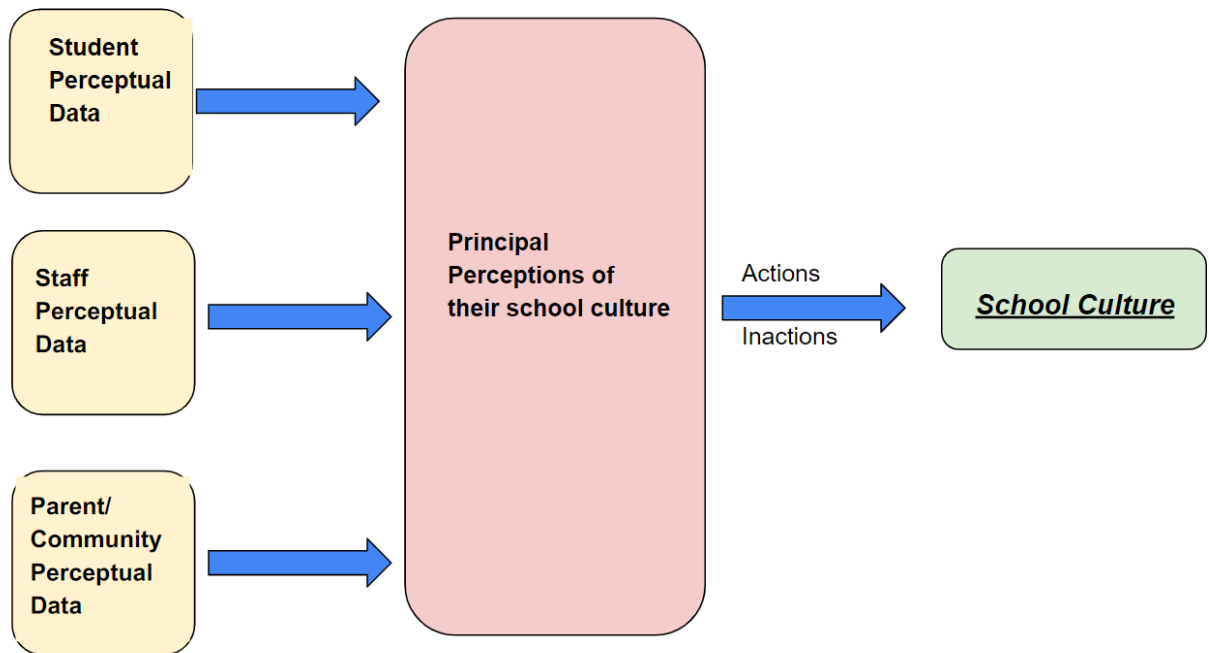
Another factor that influences the perceptions of principals is preparation before becoming a principal. Most of the participants described how prepared they were before they became principals. While there was certainly some variability between what the principals

thought their jobs entailed before becoming one, versus what they experienced their jobs actually entailed, the common denominator was that the principals felt adequately prepared for the position and were able to transition that preparation to support them in their practice. Their perceptions of their own preparation influenced the way they perceived their responsibilities and how they were able to navigate the perceptions of other stakeholders.

In Figure 2, I revisit my conceptual framework. This conceptual framework illustrates that this is what really creates a school's culture. A school's culture is developed by the perceptual data of multiple stakeholder groups, the students', the staff's, and the parents and community members. These perceptions are measured by climate surveys, but these perceptions, as well as the data that is gleaned from the climate surveys that measure this data, shape the principal's perception of their school. The principal's perception leads to a principal taking a specific action in response to one or more of these data points, or not taking a specific action based on one or more of these data points. These decisions that a principal makes creates a school's culture.

Figure 2

Student Perceptual Data

Staff Perceptual Data

Parent/ Community Perceptual Data

Principal Perceptions of their school culture

Actions

Inactions

School Culture

Research Question

The overarching research question was, how do principal perceptions of school climate surveys influence their practice to effect school culture? The findings address this question in that school climate surveys influence the perceptions of principals; however, they are not a singular data source. Principals identified that negative perceptions of stakeholders often are a result of individuals who have a skewed understanding of what is happening in their school buildings. Because the school climate surveys are publicly reported and available, there is an ownership that feels very personal to the principal and a natural comparison among schools that occurs. As Terry indicated, "*I am a very competitive person.*" *School climate survey data definitely influence the perceptions of principals*.

Sub-Research Questions

How do school climate surveys influence the perceptions of principals?

School climate surveys influence the perceptions of principals; however, they are not a singular data source. Principals reported that negative perceptions of stakeholders may be a result of disgruntled persons. As a principal and a researcher, I too have had the experience of disgruntled individuals who have a skewed understanding of what is happening in the school. People can become disgruntled because of a negative interaction they had or be upset about a decision that was made that affected their job. If these people have some influence, they can create more disgruntled individuals. Principals have a responsibility to have a positive school climate, and because school climate surveys are publicly shared, a principal can be negatively affected by the responses of the disgruntled people in the school.

What are the principal's beliefs regarding the ways their leadership may impact the climate survey results or their school's climate/culture?

During their interviews, the principals clearly communicated that their leadership was a primary factor in how they were perceived by their stakeholder groups. Each participant identified their leadership style and described how their unique leadership style influences the perceptions of others. The participants discussed the validity of perceptual data and the relevance of specific survey questions to evaluating a school's culture. All of the participants recognized the importance of a healthy school climate for student achievement as well as the correlation between their leadership maneuvers and a healthy school climate. Furthermore, they all recognized the importance of evaluating school climate as necessary for school and district leaders to do. Each participant identified ideal times and methods of collecting data to evaluate their leadership as it relates to school climate and culture.

I expected the study finding that leadership style plays a major role in the perceptual data of stakeholders. Leaders are responsible for influencing adults, and often leaders influence adults unknowingly. The leader of a school is constantly being evaluated and assessed by everyone in the building. The way that a leader interacts with people can be just as influential as the leadership maneuvers that they make.

How do the perceptions of principals lead to action?

During the interviews, the principals each discussed how they perceive climate survey data and the actions that they take as a result of their perceptions of the climate survey data. Enhancements to communication channels and frequency of communication were actions the principals took. Staff recognition ceremonies were also actions that these principals routinely exercise.

The findings about this sub-question were a little different than what I anticipated. I anticipated hearing that principals made decisions based on what was on their minds, the best interest of students. And I expected that if there was the perception that decisions were not made in the best interest of students, the principals would act on that perception. The finding that many principals plan staff recognition ceremonies as a reaction to climate survey data was interesting. Staff should certainly be recognized for a job well done, but if a staff recognition ceremony is conducted in response to a climate survey that indicates that staff do not feel appreciated, then is the ceremony an authentic move or just a cosmetic move?

How do the perceptions of principals lead to inaction?

The principals interviewed agreed that all perceptual data is not necessarily actionable. Each participant acknowledged that some perceptions of stakeholders are not perceived to be

valid by the principal. When the participating principals perceived the climate survey data not valid, principals did not take action.

Similar to the results for the previous sub-question, the results to this question surprised me. The fact that the climate survey data are so public and analyzed by many leads me to wonder what rubric or rationale a principal would use to consider some perceptual data so important that action has to be taken, while other perceptual data to be not so important that action should not be taken. Additionally, if the climate survey is an accurate assessment of the experiences of stakeholders, it would be very difficult to make the decision to not implement some type of change based on this feedback tool. However, if the climate survey is not an accurate assessment of the experiences of stakeholders, then it would make sense to not take action on any of the feedback. The question then becomes, how do leaders make the determination of the accuracy of the climate survey data?

How do the actions or inaction influence school culture?

The actions and/or inaction taken by a principal in response to school climate survey data may influence school culture; however, the data clearly indicate that responses to climate survey data are not believed to be significant influences of school culture. Instead, leadership style, communication style, relationship skills, and collaboration and work ethic displayed by the principal are the key factors that influence school culture.

The findings regarding influence of these factors is reassuring. A climate survey is a snapshot in time and while it may provide data that represents the experiences of stakeholders, these are only perceptual data. In a school, concrete data are used to provide feedback on what teaching and learning is happening in the school. These concrete data are shaped by the leadership style and practices, the communication of the leader, and the way the leader sets

processes and procedures that create a learning community. Perceptual data are not used to assess student or teacher performance because they are not concrete. It is good to learn that, according to the research conducted, school culture is not widely influenced by responses to climate survey data.

How does the stakeholder group (staff, students, community) influence the impact of climate survey data?

The stakeholder group does influence the impact of the climate survey data. Collectively, the participants shared that the most impactful stakeholder group with regards to climate surveys are the staff. This group is the one that the principal can actively influence directly. The student group was the second most influential stakeholder group. They are influential because they are the primary client of the service being provided; however, there was agreement that students frequently have a limited lens from which they form their perceptions. Lastly, the community stakeholder group is the least influential stakeholder group. Their perceptions are usually developed indirectly because they are not in the school building and hear information indirectly. It was clear that the participant group identified that leadership influences staff perceptions, which influence student perceptions, which influence community perceptions.

This finding is not surprising to me. Community stakeholder perceptions are not grounded in firsthand observations. Student stakeholder groups are important, and have perceptions from firsthand observations; however, students often do not have all of the information to have accurate perceptions. The staff stakeholder group views the school from firsthand observations and have more information, maturity, and life experience than students. Additionally, the staff is the group that the principal has the most influence over.

How accurately do climate surveys reflect the school culture?

The participants interviewed generated data that suggest that the climate surveys are fairly accurate at reflecting the school culture. The participants agreed that there are opportunities for the data to be skewed, they also shared that climate surveys present a reflection of the school climate that is meaningful. The principals who responded to the questionnaire, as well as the ones who participated in the interview, identified that, while only a singular data point, the climate survey data give them a perspective of their schools from the lens of multiple stakeholders.

This finding was different than my expected results. I expected most principals to think that the climate survey data did not accurately reflect their perception of their school. I anticipated this because I know that most principals are experts at collecting and analyzing student achievement data and would prefer to use those data as a representation of their school rather than climate survey data. However, it does make sense that they would use climate survey data as a singular data point that they can use for taking the temperature of the school.

Implications

As with any study, there are opportunities after data analysis to consider future implications. After surveying and talking with school principals about their lived experiences with their climate surveys, several implications for practice and research surfaced. Each of these is discussed in the sections that follow. Table 13 is a summary of these implications.

Table 13

Implications Summary Table

Element	Summary
Implications for Practice	School Districts Should:
	Develop a climate survey assessment tool that includes measures rather than only perceptual data.
	Incorporate student achievement data points in any assessment of a school's performance.
	Be willing to assess and analyze the data before responding to the data.
	Develop processes for collecting data in an anonymous manner that stakeholders have confidence in, followed by developing processes for analyzing that data in a non-threatening and non-punitive manner, and then sharing that feedback with school leaders so that they can apply it.
	Continue to monitor and assess school climate survey data in a way that incorporates other qualitative and quantitative measures to develop a comprehensive representation of a school's performance, not one that only isolates school climate.
	Conduct climate surveys over a period of time over the course of a school year.
	Develop a process or structure to allow for authentic and honest assessment of climate survey data so that thoughtful and intentional decisions are made as a result of themes and patterns that emerge, which demonstrate systemic successes or challenges.
Implications for Future Research	Need for further research around school climate, school climate assessment, and the ability of principals to influence school climate and culture.

Explore principals with climate surveys that vary in how they are interpreted to include principals who lead schools with historically positive school climate survey data, schools with historically negative school climate survey data, and schools that have had a significant change in their school climate survey.

Explore specific data points that are likely to indicate that a school has a healthy climate and culture.

Research the influence of formal and informal school leaders and how they are developed by the principal, and how they utilize their influence to influence the school climate.

Research the practices of principals who have positive school climate to develop a better understanding of best practices to cultivate a positive school climate.

Implications for Practice

This study has several implications for practice. The research findings and the literature clearly show a relationship between a positive school climate and student achievement. Both the research and the literature clearly establish that school climate needs to be assessed and measured. The initial interest in this study was the problem of school leaders' practice being assessed, evaluated, and even held accountable for perceptual data which might not be consistent with student achievement data nor aligned with the realities of school leadership. Thus, school districts need to develop a climate survey assessment tool that includes measures rather than only perceptual data. Since student achievement is the ultimate responsibility of a school, student achievement data points should be included in any assessment of a school's performance.

Furthermore, to generate accurate and trustworthy climate survey data, they should be collected multiple times throughout the school year using a variety of data collection techniques.

Another implication for practice is that to gather authentic feedback from stakeholders, there needs to be a willingness of school and district administrators to assess and analyze the data before responding to it. Districts should develop processes for (a) collecting data in an anonymous manner that stakeholders have confidence in, (b) analyzing those data in a non-threatening and non-punitive manner, and (c) sharing that feedback with school leaders so they can apply it.

Based on the study results, I recommend that school districts continue to monitor and assess school climate survey data, but they do so in a way that incorporates other qualitative and quantitative measures. This will provide a comprehensive representation of a school's performance, not one that only isolates school climate. I also recommend that climate surveys be administered over a period of time over the course of a school year. Lastly, I recommend that a process or structure be developed to allow for authentic and honest assessment of climate survey data so that thoughtful and intentional decisions can be based on themes and patterns that emerge which demonstrate systemic successes or challenges.

Implications for Further Research

There are implications for further research around this topic. First, this study has highlighted the need for further research around school climate, school climate assessment, and the ability of principals to influence school climate and culture. Future research could consider exploring schools with climate surveys that vary in how they are interpreted. Such research could include principals who lead schools with historically positive school climate survey data, schools with historically negative school climate survey, and schools that have had a significant change

in their school climate survey data. Additionally, most schools have climate surveys for students, staff, and community members, but rarely is there an opportunity for school principals to provide their perceptual feedback of a school's climate, which I recommend.

Additionally, this study had limitations that may offer new research opportunities. One new research opportunity would be to explore specific data points that are likely to indicate that a school has a healthy climate and culture. These data points could include student achievement data and other data that indicate a school's performance. Another new research opportunity might be to investigate the influence of formal and informal school leaders, how they are developed by the principal, and how they utilize their influence to impact the school climate.

Another opportunity for new research would be to study the practices of principals of schools with positive school climate to develop a better understanding of best practices that cultivate a positive school climate. This study also highlighted the need for further research, on the topic of informal school leadership, the perceptions of school climate, and how school climate influences student achievement. Additionally, this study illustrated a need for more specificity in researching the theories of shared leadership versus distributive leadership and the effects both can have on informal leadership that impacts school climate and culture.

Conclusions

When I began this research project, I was eager to learn more about assessing school climate, and how that assessment was used to evaluate school leaders. I wanted to examine the perceptions that principals have about their experiences with school climate surveys and how those perceptions influenced their practice. The literature review demonstrated a direct relationship between school climate and student achievement. This study and the literature indicate that there is indeed a relationship between school climate and student achievement. And

through both the literature review and this study, it is clear that school principals' perceptions on climate surveys influence their practice. It also became clear that there are other factors in addition to the tool being used that influence principals' perceptions on school climate surveys. External factors, previous experiences, leadership style, and experience in the principalship all helped shape the principals' perceptions. And the principal's perceptions influenced their practice by highlighting whether practices effective or ineffective. The principal then uses that information to make informed decisions.

It became clear through this process that there are opportunities to assess school climate more effectively. These include using more frequent surveys and using different assessment tools. Furthermore, an opportunity to seek and apply feedback about school climate would give leaders an opportunity to address concerns or celebrate successes in real time, which would enhance the experience of educators, and potentially influence their perceptions of the school's climate. This would create a continuous feedback loop that would elevate a school's climate and likely elevate student achievement.

REFERENCES

Albritton, S., Chadwick, M., Bangs, D., Holt, C., Longing, J., & Duyar, I. (2016). Utilizing professional learning community concepts and social networking for state advocacy: The Arkansas case. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 11*(2), 40–50.

Ali, U., & Waqar, S. (2013). Teachers' organizational citizenship behavior working under different leadership styles: Pakistan. *Journal of Psychological Research, 28*(2), 297–316.

Allen, N., Grigsby, B., & Peters, M. L. (2015). Does leadership matter? Examining the relationship among transformational leadership, school climate, and student achievement. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 10*(2), 1–22.

Avolio, B. J., Bass, B. M., & Jung, D. I. (1999). Re-examining the components of transformational and transactional leadership using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 72*(4), 441–462. https://doi.org/10.1348/096317999166789

Bagwell, J. L. (2019). Exploring the leadership practices of elementary school principals through a distributed leadership framework: A case study. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development, 30*, 83–103.

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84*(2), 191-215. https://doi.org/10.1037//0033-295x.84.2.191

Berg, A. C., Melaville, A., & Blank, M. J. (2006). *Community & family engagement: Principals share what works*. MetLife.

Buckley, W. F. (1968). *Modern systems research for the behavioral scientist: A sourcebook*. Aldine.

Caetano, A. P., Freire, I. P., & Machado, E. B. (2020). Student voice and participation in intercultural education. *Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research, 9*(1), 57–73. https://doi.org/10.7821/naer.2020.1.458

Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. J. (2014). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum, 41*(5), 545–547. https://doi.org/10.1188/14.onf.545-547

Cheema, J. R., & Fuller Hamilton, A. N. (2017). Morale, participation and shortage in White-majority and White-minority schools: Principals' perceptions. *Issues in Educational Research, 27*(2), 215–233.

Dearing, J. W., Beacom, A. M., Chamberlain, S. A., Meng, J., Berta, W. B., Keefe, J. M., & Estabrooks, C. A. (2017). Pathways for best practice diffusion: The structure of informal relationships in Canada's long-term care sector. *Implementation Science: IS, 12*(1), 11. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-017-0542-7

De Jong, B. A., & Bijlsma-Frankema, K. M. (2009). When and how does norm-based peer control affect the performance of self-managing teams? *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings*, (1), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2009.44259610

Durnali, M., & Filiz, B. (2019). Adaptation of Delaware School Climate Survey - Student into Turkish: The study of validity and reliability. *Kastamonu Education Journal, 27*(6), 2651-2661. https://doi.org/10.20146/kefdergri.3513

Duyar, I., Gumus, S., & Bellibas, M. S. (2013). Multilevel analysis of teacher work attitudes: The influence of principal leadership and teacher collaboration. *International Journal of Educational Management, 27*(7), 700-719. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-09-2012-0107

Elias, M. J. (2010). School climate that promotes student voice. *Principal Leadership, 11*(1), 22-27.

Eppley, E. D. (1977). Developing a school philosophy: Can it improve staff morale? *Middle School Journal, 8*(2), 10–11.

Fiedler, F. E. (1972). Predicting the effects of leadership training and experience from the contingency model. Journal of Applied Psychology, 56(2), 114-119. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0032668

Flynn, S. I. (2019). *Transformational and transactional leadership*. Salem Press Encyclopedia.

Freiberg, H. J. (1999). *School climate : Measuring, improving and sustaining healthy learning environments*. London: Routledge.

Fullan, M., & Pinchot, M. (2018). The fast track to sustainable turnaround. *Educational Leadership, 75*(6), 47–54.

Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet: Data saturation in qualitative research. *Qualitative Report, 20*(9), 1408–1416. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2281

Gabriel, J.G., (2005). *How to thrive as a teacher leader*. ASCD.

Gaete Celis, M. I. (2019). Micro-phenomenology and traditional qualitative research methods. *Constructivist Foundations, 14*(2), 146–149.

Gage, N. A., Kaplan, R., Ellis, K., & Kramer, D. (2019). Student- and school-level predictors of high school students' perceptions of school climate: Implications for school counselors. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Counseling, 5*(3), 239–255. https://doi.org/10.1080/23727810.2019.1670511

Gase, L. N., Gomez, L. M., Kuo, T., Glenn, B. A., Inkelas, M., & Ponce, N. A. (2017).

>Relationships between student, staff, and administrative measures of school climate and

>student health and academic outcomes. *Journal of School Health, 87*(5), 319-328.

>https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12501

Girgin, D. (2020). Motivation, self-efficacy and attitude as predictors of burnout in musical

>instrument education in fine arts high schools. *Eurasian Journal of Educational*

>*Research, 85*, 93-108. https://doi.org/10.14689/ejer.2020.85.5

Gülşen, C., & Gülenay, G. B. (2014). The principal and healthy school climate: Social behavior

>and personality *An International Journal, 42*(1), 93-100.

>https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2014.42.0.S93

Halderson, C., Kelley, E. A., Keefe, J. W., Berge, P. S., Glover, J. A., Sorenson, C., Speth, C.,

>Schmitt, N., & Loher, B. (1986). *Comprehensive assessment of school environments*.

Jameson, J. (2018). Critical corridor talk: Just gossip or stoic resistance? *Higher Education*

>*Quarterly, 72*(4), 375–389. https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12174

Jones, A., & Shindler, J. (2016). Exploring the School Climate--Student Achievement

>Connection: Making Sense of Why the First Precedes the Second. Educational

>Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development, 27, 35–51.

Jones, A. C. (2018). The first 100 days in the main office: Transforming a school culture.

>Information Age.

Kareem, J., & Patrick, H. A. (2019, February 26). Educational Leadership Styles Scale (ELSS):

>Construction, validation and reliability analysis. *IUP Journal of Organizational*

>*Behavior, 18*(4), 50–67.

Kelley, R. C., Thornton, B., & Daugherty, R. (2005). Relationships between measures of

    leadership and school climate. *Education, 126*(1), 17–25.

Kilpatrick, F. P., & Cantril, H. (1960). Self-anchoring scaling: A measure of individual's unique

    reality worlds. *Journal of Individual Psychology, 16,* 158-173

Kwong, D., & Davis, J. R. (2015). School climate for academic success: A multilevel analysis of

    school climate and student outcomes. *Journal of Research in Education, 25*(2), 68–81.

LaJeunesse, S., Thompson, S., Pullen-Seufert, N., Kolbe, M. B., Heiny, S., Thomas, C. &

    Johnson, E. R. (2019). Diverse school community engagement with the North Carolina

    active routes to school project: A diffusion study. *International Journal of Behavioral*

    *Nutrition and Physical Activity, 16(*1), 118 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-019-

    0889-z

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (1998, Aparil 13-18). *Distributed leadership and student*

    engagement in school [Conference session]. Annual Meeting of the American

    Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA, United States.

MacNeil, A. J., Prater, D. L., & Busch, S. (2009). The effects of school culture and climate on

    student achievement. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 12*(1), 73-84.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/13603120701576241

Mathews, J. (2019, September 28). *Are bad staff morale reports in school systems caused by an*

    unconscious bias? The Washington Post.

    https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/are-bad-staff-morale-reports-in-

    schools-caused-by-unconscious-bias/2019/09/27/5f427858-e0df-11e9-be96-

    6adb81821e90_story.html

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. SAGE.

McGiboney, G. W. (2016). *The psychology of school climate*. Cambridge Scholars.

Miller, W. C. (1981). Staff *morale, school climate, and educational productivity. Educational*

Leadership, 38(6), 483.

Moran, D., & Cohen, J. D. (2012). *The Husserl Dictionary*. Bloomsbury.

Moses, M., & Nelson, M. N. (2019). Exploring school principals' leadership styles and learners'

educational performance: A perspective from high- and low-performing schools. *Africa*

Education Review, 16(2), 90–108. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2017.1411201

Moustakas, C. (1994). Phenomenological Research Methods. Sage Publications.

Nadelson, L. S., Albritton, S., Couture, V. G., Green, C., Loyless, S. D., & Shaw, E. O. (2020).

Principals' perceptions of education equity: A mindset for practice. *Journal of Education*

and Learning, 9(1), 1–15.

Nathanson, L., McCormick, M., & Kemple, J. J. (2013). Strengthening assessments of school

climate: Lessons from the NYC School Survey. Research Alliance for New York City

School.

National Council on Teacher Quality. (2019). Teacher & principal evaluation policy: State of the

states 2019.

National Policy Board for Educational Administration. (2020). *Professional standards for*

educational leaders.

Ng'ambi, D., & Bozalek, V. (2013). Leveraging informal leadership in higher education

institutions: A case of diffusion of emerging technologies in a southern context. British

Journal of Educational Technology, 44(6), 940–950. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12108

O'Malley, M., Voight, A., & Izu, J. A. (2014). Engaging students in school climate

improvement: A student voice strategy. In M. J. Furlong, R. Gilman, & E. S. Huebner

(Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology in schools* (2nd ed., pp. 329-346). Routledge.

O'Reilly, F. L., & Matt, J. J. (2013). Public relations opportunities for schools utilizing

innovations in virtual communities. *Journal of Education and Learning, 2*(2), 139–143.

https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v2n2p139

Özdemir, G., Sahin, S., & Öztürk, N. (2020). Teachers' self-efficacy perceptions in terms of

school principal's instructional leadership behaviours. *International Journal of*

Progressive Education, 16(1), 25–40. https://doi.org/10.21831/jpv.v11i2.42193

Patton, M. Q. (2002). Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods. Sage.

Pawlas, G. (2005). *The administrator's guide to school-community relations* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Pearce, C. L., & Conger, J. A. (2003). Shared Leadership: Reframing the hows and whys of

leadership. SAGE.

Peterson, K. D., & Deal, T. E. (1998). How leaders influence the culture of schools. *Educational*

*Leaders*hip, 56(1), 28–30.

Pinkas, G., & Bulić, A. (2017). Principal's leadership, style as perceived by teachers, in relation

to teacher's experience factor of school climate in elementary schools. *Human Journal*

for Interdisciplinary Studies, *7*(2), 34–50. https://doi.org/10.21554/hrr.091705

Radinger, T. (2014). School leader appraisal: A tool to strengthen school leaders' pedagogical

leadership and skills for teacher management. *European Journal of Education, 49(*3),

378–394. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12085

Reno, G. D., Friend, J., Caruthers, L., & Smith, D. (2017). Who's getting targeted for behavioral

interventions: Exploring the connections between school culture, positive behavior

support, and elementary student achievement. *The Journal of Negro Education, 86*(4),

423-438. http://dx.doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.86.4.0423

Roberts, C., & Hyatt, L. (2019). The dissertation journey : A practical and comprehensive guide

to planning, writing, and defending your dissertation. Corwin.

Rojewski, J. W., Wendel, F. C., McInerny, C. D., & Smith, E. (1990). Individualizing school-

climate surveys. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and

Ideas*, 63(5), 202-206. https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.1990.9955764

Roulston, K. (2019). *Interactional studies of qualitative research interviews*. John Benjamins.

Sabin, J. T. (2015). Teacher morale, student engagement, and student achievement growth in

reading: A correlational study. *Journal of Organizational and Educational Leadership,

1*(1), Article 5.

Sharma, S. (2019). Relationship between principals leadership practices, teachers professional

communities & organizational commitment. https://doi.org/10.14686/buefad.441189

Spier, E. (2016). Alaska school climate and connectedness survey: 2016 statewide report.

https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED577047.pdf

Stichter, K. (2008). Student school climate perceptions as a measure of school district goal

attainment. *Journal of Educational Research & Policy Studies, 8*(1), 44–66. Retrieved

from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ809442.pdf

Tan, C. Y. (2018). Examining school leadership effects on student achievement: The role of

contextual challenges and constraints. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 48*(1), 21–45.

https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2016.1221885

Uçar, R., & İpek, C. (2019). The relationship between high school teachers' perceptions of

    organizational culture and motivation. http://dx.doi.org/10.11114/jets.v7i7.4198

Ungvarsky, J. (2019). *Positionality*. Salem Press Encyclopedia.

Versland, T. M., & Erickson, J. L. (2017). Leading by example: A case study of the influence of

    principal self-efficacy on collective efficacy. *Cogent Education, 4*(1).

    https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2017.1286765

Voight, A. (2015). Student voice for school-climate improvement: A case study of an urban

    middle school. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 25*(4), 310–326.

    https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2216

Von Dohlen, H. B., & Karvonen, M. (2018). Teachers' self-reported leadership behaviors in

    formal and informal situations. *International Journal of Teacher Leadership, 9*(2).

Walker, J., & Slear, S. (2011). The impact of principal leadership behaviors on the efficacy of

    new and experienced middle school teachers. *NASSP Bulletin, 95*(1), 46-64.

    https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636511406530

Weiss, R. S. (1994). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview*

    studies. Free Press.

Yazan, B. (2015). Three approaches to case study methods in education: Yin, Merriam, and

    Stake. *Qualitative Report, 20*(2), 134–152. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-

    3715/2015.2102

APPENDIX A

PRELIMINARY SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEY SELF-ASSESSMENT

1. How long have you been principal at your current school?

   a. 0-3 years

   b. 3-10 years

   c. More than 10 years

2. Do you have previous principal experience?

   a. Yes, within this district

   b. Yes, with another district

   c. No

3. How much energy and/or attention do you give to the perceptions of your students about your school?

   a. I give considerable energy and/or attention

   b. I give medium energy and/or attention

   c. I give little energy and/or attention

4. Does the most recent student climate survey accurately reflect your perspective of your school?

   a. It is a very accurate representation

   b. It is mildly accurate representation

   c. It is not an accurate representation

5. How much energy and/or attention do you give to the perceptions of your staff about your school?

   a. I give considerable energy and/or attention

   b. I give medium energy and/or attention

   c. I give little energy and/or attention

6. Does the most recent staff climate survey accurately reflect your perspective of your school?

   a. It is a very accurate representation

   b. It is mildly accurate representation

   c. It is not an accurate representation

7. How much energy and/or attention do you give to the perceptions of your community members about your school?

   a. I give considerable energy and/or attention

   b. I give medium energy and/or attention

   c. I give little energy and/or attention

8. Does the most recent parent climate survey accurately reflect your perspective of your school?

   a. It is a very accurate representation

   b. It is mildly accurate representation

   c. It is not an accurate representation

9. Do you actively assess perceptions of community members other than parents?

   a. Frequently

   b. Sometimes

   c. Never/rarely

10. How do perceptions of students, staff and community members affect your self-efficacy as a principal?

    a. I have a higher sense of self-efficacy as a result of these perceptions

    b. My self-efficacy is not impacted as a result of these perceptions

    c. I have a lower sense of self-efficacy as result of these perceptions

11. I would describe the staff morale in my school as?

    a. Positive

    b. Could be better, could be worse

    c. Negative

12. I actively plan activities to address staff morale:

    a. Frequently

    b. Sometimes

    c. Rarely

13. I actively plan activities to engage with and respond to student voice:

    a. Frequently

    b. Sometimes

    c. Rarely

14. I actively plan activities to enhance community engagement:

    a. Frequently

    b. Sometimes

    c. Rarely

15. I was actively engaged in the hiring of all of the formal leaders within my school:

    a. I was actively engaged in hiring most of the formal leaders within my building

    b. I was actively engaged in hiring some of the formal leaders within my building

    c. I was actively engaged in hiring few of the formal leaders within my building

16. I plan and implement mentoring for the formal leaders within my school:

    a. Frequently

    b. Sometimes

    c. Rarely

17. I am aware of all of the influential staff within my school:

    a. I know most of the influential staff

    b. I know some of the influential stafff

    c. I know few of the influential staff

18. Which stakeholder group is most influential in shaping my school culture?

    a. Students

    b. Staff

    c. Community members/parents

19. Which aspect is most influential in the shaping of my school culture?

    a. Your leadership style

    b. The formal leaders within my school

    c. The informal leaders within my school

20. What are the most impactful variables that influence your school's culture?

21. Describe your leadership style.

22. How do you monitor the influence of informal leaders within your school?

23. What activities have you done in response to a climate survey?

24. How does your perception of climate surveys influence your practice?

25. How did the pandemic influence your school's climate?

APPENDIX B INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Pseudonym: _____ _____**Date:**_____

Location of interview:_____**Time:**_____

Interview Questions:

Interview Part I

1. How long have you been principal at your current school?

2. Do you have previous principal experience?

3. Does your school district conduct climate surveys for:

    a) Staff?

    b) Students?

    c) Parents?

4. If yes to all three, which climate survey data is most important to your work and why?

5. How prepared were you when first became a principal?

    Optional probe: What activities made you more prepared?

    Optional probe: What activities made did not prepare you?

6. When you first became a principal, what did you think the job entailed, and how did you think you'd be evaluated?

    Optional probe: What surprised you most about the realities of being a principal?

7. Describe your school's culture.

8. What variables influence your school's culture?

9. Describe your leadership style.

10. Which of the following metaphors most accurately describes your role as a school leader and why:

   a) Building the plane while flying it

   b) Sunshine and rainbows

   c) Herding cats

   d) Soaring like an eagle

   e) Juggling knives

   f) A teacup filled with flavor

   g) Making lemonade out of lemons

   h) A garden filled with flowers

Interview Part II

11. If you could design an ideal climate survey that accurately reflected your work as a principal, what would it look like?

12. In what ways does the staff climate survey represent your perspective of your school?

13. In what ways does the student climate survey represent your perspective of your school?

14. In what ways does the parent climate survey represent your perspective of your school?

15. What are the factors that are outside of your control that influence the climate surveys?

16. What is the ideal time to administer a climate survey to stakeholders?

17. What actions have you taken in response to climate survey data?

18. How impactful do you feel that climate survey is on student achievement?

   1. Optional probe: Can you expand on that?

19. How impactful do you feel a healthy school culture has an impact on student achievement?

1. Optional probe: Can you expand on that?

20. How do think the climate surveys influence the way your staff, students and parents perceive you?

21. What do you think other principals feel about the climate survey?

    Optional probe: Have you had conversations with other principals about the climate survey, and if so, can you describe those conversations?

22. What is the most relevant question on a climate survey that you've administered?

23. What is the least relevant question on a climate survey that you've administered?

24. Optional probe: How much investment do you think your staff, students or community have in completing climate surveys?How important is having alignment between the 3 different stakeholder climate surveys (students, staff, parents/community)?

25. Describe how the pandemic influenced your leadership and affected the school's climate from your perspective.

26. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience with school climate surveys?

APPENDIX C SELF-ANCHORING SCALE ACTIVITY

1. Elicit phrases to describe his or her conception of an ideal school climate.

2. Write the phrases at the top of a sheet of paper, using participant's words exactly

3. Elicit phrases to describe the worst possible school climate

4. Write these phrases at the bottom of the same sheet of paper

5. Draw a ladder on the left side of the page connecting the bottom of the page and the top of the page. Use equidistant slash marks for ten steps on the ladder. Number the steps from 0, at the bottom of the page to 10 at the top.

6. Ask participant to think about his or her school climate and then to indicate at which step of the ladder it would be for right now. Write that number to the right of the ladder and write next to it "now."

7. Ask participant where on the ladder their school climate would have been 5 years ago (or when they first became principal at their current school). Write that number above or below the "now" number and next to it write "5 years ago."

8. Ask participant where their school climate will be in 5 years (if they stay at their school that long). Write that number above or below the other numbers and next to it write "5 years from now."

9. Ask participant to explain why the numbers differed (or stayed the same) for "now" and "5 years ago."

10. Ask participant to explain why the numbers differed (or stayed the same) for "now" and "5 years from now."

APPENDIX D VALUES INVENTORY

Rank the top three and bottom three in each set of values in order of most important to you (1, 2, 3) and least important (16, 17, 18).

School Climate Values

Administrative Support

Community Engagement

Community Growth

Facilities

Financial Support

Parent Engagement

Principal Autonomy

Professional Growth Opportunities

Student Accountability

Student Autonomy

Student Diversity

Teacher Accountability

Teacher Autonomy

Teacher Diversity

Teacher Collaboration

Teacher Leadership

Teacher Mobility/Longevity

Technology Capabilities

APPENDIX E RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND DATA SOURCES ALIGNMENT

MATRIX

Research/ Sub-Research Questions	School Climate Survey Self- Assessment	Interview Protocol Questions	Self- Anchoring Scale	Values Inventory
How do school climate surveys influence the perceptions of principals?	• 3 • 5 • 7 • 10 • 24 • 25	☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 11 ☐ 12 ☐ 13 ☐ 14 ☐ 15 ☐ 16 ☐ 17 ☐ 18 ☐ 19 ☐ 20 ☐ 21 ☐ 24	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10	☐ Y
What are the principals beliefs regarding the ways their leadership may impact the climate survey results or their school's climate/culture?	• 11 • 12 • 13 • 14 • 15 • 16 • 18 • 20 • 22 • 23 • 24 • 25	☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12 ☐ 13 ☐ 14 ☐ 15 ☐ 16 ☐ 17	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10	☐ Y

	☐ 18		
	☐ 19		
	☐ 20		
	☐ 21		
	☐ 22		
	☐ 23		
	☐ 24		
How do the perceptions of principals lead to action?	• 10 • 15 • 16 • 17 • 18 • 24 • 25	• 7 • 8 • 11 • 12 • 13 • 14 • 15 • 17 • 18 • 19 • 22 • 23	• 6 • 7 • 8 • 9 • 10 ☐ N
How do the perceptions of principals lead to inaction?	• 10 • 15 • 16 • 17 • 18 • 24 • 25	• 6 • 7 • 8 • 11 • 12 • 13 • 14 • 15 • 17 • 18 • 19 • 22 • 23	• 6 • 7 • 8 • 9 • 10 ☐ N

Question				
How do the actions or inaction influence school culture?	• 21 • 23 • 24 • 25	☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 11 ☐ 12 ☐ 13 ☐ 14 ☐ 17 ☐ 18 ☐ 19 ☐ 20	☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 10	☐ N
Is the impact of the climate survey more influential depending on school level?	•	☐	☐	☐ Y
Is there a climate survey that is more impactful to the principal (staff, students, community)?	• 3 • 4 • 5 • 6 • 7 • 8 • 9 • 12 • 13 • 14 • 19	☐ 8 ☐ 11 ☐ 12 ☐ 13 ☐ 14 ☐ 15 ☐ 18 ☐ 19 ☐ 20 ☐ 21	☐	☐ N
Are the climate surveys an accurate reflection of the school culture?	• 21 • 24 • 25	☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 11 ☐ 12 ☐ 13 ☐ 14 ☐ 15	☐	☐ N

☐ 16

☐ 17

☐ 18

☐ 19

☐ 20

☐ 24

Research Questions/ Sub-Research Questions	Participants	Instruments	Analysis	Finding
How do principal perceptions of school climate surveys influence their practice to effect school culture?	All principals in the district	School Climate Survey Self-Assessment	• School climate surveys do influence the perceptions of principals. • All recognized the importance of a healthy school culture on student achievement. • All identified variables that influence the climate surveys. • All identified actions that they have taken as a result of the school climate survey. • School climate surveys give principals a data source to evaluate next steps.	There are many factors that influence how principals' perceptions of school climate surveys influence their practice to influence their school culture: • Within a principal's control: • leadership style • leadership development of staff • communication. Not within a principal's control: • tenure in the position • tenure within the school. • job satisfaction • positive school cultures • high self-efficacy as school leaders. • preparation
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Interview protocol questions		
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Self-Anchoring Scale		
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Values Inventory		
	All principals in the district	School Climate Survey Self-Assessment		• Leadership does influence the school climate

Research Questions/ Sub-Research Questions	Participants	Instruments	Analysis	Finding
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Interview protocol Questions	• What are principals' beliefs regarding the ways their leadership may impact the climate survey results or their school's climate/culture?	• Collaborative leadership, authentic leadership can be implemented to create climate conducive to student achievement.
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Self-Anchoring Scale		
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Values Inventory		
How do the perceptions of principals lead to action?	All principals in the district	School Climate Survey Self-Assessment	These two sub-research questions are aligned as the perceptions of principals lead to both action and inaction. The participants indicated that they do take the results of school climate surveys as an important data point, and that they create action in response to the results, such as adjusting communication styles or processes. Additionally, it was clear that the participants are aware that	
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Interview Protocol Questions		

Research Questions/ Sub-Research Questions	Participants	Instruments	Analysis	Finding
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Self-Anchoring Scale	not all of the results of the climate survey are valid due to stakeholders having limited information, as well as the opportunity for certain groups to respond with emotion or to weaponize the climate survey.	
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Values Inventory		
	All principals in the district	School Climate Survey Self-Assessment	These two sub-research questions are aligned as the perceptions of principals lead to both action and inaction. The participants indicated that they do take the results of school climate surveys as	
How do the perceptions of principals lead to inaction?	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Interview protocol Questions	an important data point, and that they create action in response to the results, such as adjusting communication styles or processes. Additionally, it was clear that the participants are aware that not all of the results of the climate survey are	
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Self-Anchoring Scale	valid due to stakeholders having limited information, as well as the opportunity for certain groups to respond with emotion or to weaponize the climate survey.	

Research Questions/ Sub-Research Questions	Participants	Instruments	Analysis	Finding
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Values Inventory		
	All principals in the district	School Climate Survey Self-Assessment		
How do the actions or inaction influence school culture?	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Interview protocol Questions		
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Self-Anchoring Scale		
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Values Inventory		

Research Questions/ Sub-Research Questions	Participants	Instruments	Analysis	Finding
	All principals in the district	School Climate Survey Self-Assessment		
Is the impact of the climate survey more influential depending on school level?	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Interview protocol Questions		
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Self-Anchoring Scale		
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Values Inventory		
Is there a climate survey that is	All principals in the district	School Climate Survey Self-Assessment		

Research Questions/ Sub-Research Questions	Participants	Instruments	Analysis	Finding
more impactful to the principal (staff, students, community)?	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Interview protocol Questions		
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Self-Anchoring Scale		
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Values Inventory		
Are the climate surveys an accurate reflection of the school culture?	All principals in the district	School Climate Survey Self-Assessment		
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Interview protocol Questions		

124

Research Questions/ Sub-Research Questions	Participants	Instruments	Analysis	Finding
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Self-Anchoring Scale		
	Selected High School, Middle School and Elementary school principals	Values Inventory		

Hood College
Institutional Review Board
Research Proposal Template

1.   Title of Proposal: How the Perceptions of Principals on School Climate Surveys Influence Their Practice

2.   Principal Investigator (PI): Joshua Harold Munsey

3.   PI Department: Graduate School; Department of Education (Doctor of Organizational Leadership)

4.   PI Contact Information: 70 Upper Rock Circle, Apt. 236 Rockville, Maryland 20850; 301.785.6241 (cell); jhm6@hood.edu

5.   Faculty Sponsor and Contact Information (if PI is a student): Dr Jennifer Cuddapah, cuddapah@hood.edu

6.   Date of this Submission: October 29, 2020

7.   Proposed Duration of the Project (indicate starting and ending dates):
          December 2020 – July 2021

8.   Background Information and Research Questions/Hypotheses:
          This qualitative research project explores how the perceptions of principals on school climate surveys influence their practice. In schools, principals are responsible for many things, but one of the primary responsibilities is to create a positive school environment. School climate has a different meaning to different stakeholders, including school leaders, school staff, students, as well as parent and community members. School climate surveys are one way to measure school climate. It provides each stakeholder with the opportunity to provide feedback on many of the aspects that make up the school climate. Additionally, climate surveys give administrators and other interested parties an opportunity to assess how stakeholders feel about the school climate. While climate surveys can provide insight into what is happening at a particular school, they also can be misleading, especially since they can have a large impact on evaluation of a school, or of a school administrator.
          This study will ask principals about their experience with climate surveys in a brief questionnaire and will then further dive into their experiences with qualitative interviews, a self-anchoring scale, and a values inventory to explore how their perceptions of school climate surveys have influenced their practice. Have they used the information gleaned to implement a policy or a structure, or perhaps have they not implemented a policy or structure due to the results of a climate survey. Ultimately, the results of this study will add to the research about school climate, how it is measured, and if school climate surveys are an appropriate way to

measure school climate. Additionally, it will explore the implications of school climate surveys, how they are received and interpreted, as well as the ways in which principals and other leaders utilized the data collected to influence a school's climate. The statement of the problem is that this study seeks to explore is how impactful school climate surveys are on the perceptions. In order to explore, the influence of school climate surveys on students, parents, staff and schools, this study will seek answers to the following research question:
How do principal perceptions of school climate surveys influence their practice to influence school culture? Additionally, this study will consider the following analysis questions to develop a stronger understanding of how principal perceptions of school climate surveys influence their practice to influence school culture:

•   How do school climate surveys influence the perceptions of principals?
•   What are the principal's beliefs regarding the ways their leadership may impact the climate survey results or their school's climate/culture?
•   How do the perceptions of principals lead to action?
•   How do the perceptions of principals lead to inaction?
•   How do the actions or inaction influence school culture?
•   What is the influence of the school level on the impact of climate survey??
•   How does the stakeholder group (staff, students, community) influence the impact of climate survey data ?
•   How accurately do climate surveys reflect the school culture?

9.   **Human Participants**:

      A. **Who are the participants**? Elementary, Middle and High School Principals in
      ██

      B. **How many participants do you plan to have in your study?** 12

      C. **How will the participants be contacted or recruited?** Participants will be sent an email inviting them to participate in the study.

      D. **Will the participants be compensated for participating? If so, describe:** Given a $10 gift card.

10. **Procedures**:
      This case study will be conducted in a multi-layered approach, with all principals in a Mid-Atlantic suburban school district being asked to respond to an anonymous questionnaire that I developed, which can be found in Appendix A. This questionnaire will ask respondents about their experiences with climate surveys as well as their experiences with the concepts explored in chapter two, such as their experiences with the perceptions of staff, students, parents and communities, leadership style. Subsequently, respondents will be randomly selected principals to explore further with an interview, using a interview protocol, which can be found in Appendix B. The data will be triangulated with interview participants completing both a self-anchoring scale, (Kilpatrick, & Cantril, 1960), which can be found in Appendix C, as well as using a values

127

inventory activity (Rokeach, 1967), which can be found in Appendix D, both of which I developed.

        The design will be to ask participants to complete an anonymous questionnaire to identify their experiences with school climate surveys. The questionnaire will be shared with respondents via email and will use an electronic format through surveymonkey.com. The preliminary questionnaire, Appendix A, asks respondents twenty-five questions about their experiences with climate surveys as well as other concepts that inform perceptual data. Twenty of the questions are questions that ask respondents to respond to multiple choice questions. Five questions are short answer response questions in which the respondents are asked to respond with a written response.

        Following collection of the questionnaire data, I will then use a random selection of respondents to be invited to participate in an interview. When I communicate with principals to encourage them to participate in my research, I will also ask for volunteers to consider participating in the interview process (Appendix E). I will then use a random sampling of the volunteers by longevity as principal at their current school (one to five years, six to ten years, more than ten years) to participate in the interviews, ensuring representation across school levels by applying random sampling to avoid sampling bias. I will ask participants to select a pseudonym, and will arrange to interview the participant using an electronic format such as Zoom due to COVID-19. The interview will be structured according to the interview protocol. The target goal will be to have four interview candidates per school level, which would create a total of 12 interview participants, in conjunction with 12 self-anchoring responses and 12 values inventory responses, in addition to the data produced by the 208 solicited questionnaire respondents. Subsequent to the interviews, I will compile and analyze the data gained from interviews and identify trends. I will analyze the data to examine the perceptions of school leaders of school climate surveys and the influence that principal perceptions have on their practice and how these practices influence school culture.

        The setting of my methodology will be communicating via email to all principals in a large Mid-Atlantic school district with a link to respond to a questionnaire that respondents can complete electronically from the location of their choice. For the subsequent interviews, the setting will change depending on the availability of the participant. I will interview the participants electronically using Zoom due to safety concerns about COVID-19.

11.   **Consent:** Before the interviews begin, I will read the informed consent form (Appendix E), ask if the interview can be audio recorded, and ask if the participant has any questions before we begin. When all questions have been answered, I will ask the participant to sign the consent form and will provide him or her with a copy of the form, or will provide electronic correspondence if the interview takes place virtually.

12.   **Risks and Debriefing:** There are no physical, psychological, or social risks of participating in the study.

13.   **Privacy and Storage of Data**: Data gathered for this investigation will be kept confidential. Principals being interviewed will be asked to choose a pseudonym, so their names or schools will not be used. Names and email addresses of participants will be collected only to obtain consent and to be able to share the survey with participants electronically. Access to the surveys and data being collected will be limited to the PI

and his doctorial committee. Further, to protect confidentiality, participants will be told: participants names will not be kept subsequent to obtaining consent and sharing of electronic survey, tracking of data will only be done using pseudonyms, and all data will be kept in a locked room on the PI's personal computer. The PI's computer is only accessible through username and password. The PI will be storing data for the study for three years.

References

Kilpatrick, F. P., & Cantril, H. (1960). Self-anchoring scaling, a measure of

individuals' unique reality worlds. Journal of Individual Psychology, 16, 158-173

Rokeach, M. (1967). *RokeachValue Survey Manual*

Perceptions of Principals on School Climate Surveys and How They Influence Practice
Consent Form

1. INTRODUCTION You are invited to be a participant in a qualitative research study regarding the perceptions of principals on school climate surveys and how those perceptions influence practice. You were selected as a possible participant because you have an important perspective of school leadership in serving diverse school communities. I ask that you read this document and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study. It is required that participants in this study be at least 18 years old. The study is being conducted by Joshua H. Munsey, doctoral candidate of the Hood College Doctoral of Organizational Leadership Program and a school principal with the Mid-Atlantic school district at the focus of this study.

2. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY The goal of this qualitative research study is to assess the influence of school climate surveys on the practices of school principals. Results of our inquiry may help others grow in understanding how school climate surveys can enhance school leadership practices. All school principals are invited to participate in this study.

3. DURATION The length of time you will be involved with this study is 10 minutes to complete the climate survey questionnaire, and/or 45 minutes to participate in focused interviews.

4. PROCEDURES If you agree to complete the school climate survey impact self-assessment, you will be asked to do the following: a) You will be asked to complete a 25 question self-assessment through an anonymous survey link. A response to each question is required to move forward in the self-assessment. No adverse action will be taken against any participation of the study or any participant who chooses to withdraw from the survey. b) For items 1 – 20 please choose the response that best matches your level of agreement with the corresponding statement or the appropriate response to match your participant profile. For questions 21- 25, please write a response that accurately your experience. c) No adverse action will be taken against any participation of the study or any participant who chooses to withdraw from the survey. d) Your identity will be protected in any written report or article about this research project. To help protect your confidentiality, no email addresses will be tracked or collected during this survey. If you agree to participate in a focused interview, you will be asked to do the following: e) Participate in one 45-minute interview. f) Select a pseudonym to protect your identity. g) Consent to be audio recorded during the focus group discussion.

5. RISKS/BENEFITS RISKS: There are no intended risks involved in participating in this study. In addition to a doctoral researcher, Joshua H. Munsey is also a school principal in the Mid-Atlantic school district referenced in this study. Mr. Munsey's position of a school leader will not lead to any adverse impact for participants of this study. Should you choose to participate in an interview, pseudonyms will be used. BENEFITS: The perspective of principals who are responsible for creating and maintaining a school climate that is evaluated through a climate survey offers valuable information about the relationship between school climate and student

performance, factors that influence school climate and factors that influence climate survey results. By completing the school climate survey questionnaire, school leaders will lend their perceptions and assist with capturing data to help inform and shape future research and practice. Further, it is possible that participants of this study may benefit from practices that lead to improved school climate, improved student performance outcomes, or additional sources of support.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY To help protect confidentiality of the interview, participants will select pseudonyms that will be used when we talk about and record their experiences, and the identity of all participants will be known only to the researcher. All audio recordings of conversations, written reminiscences, and transcripts of our conversations will be kept in a locked office. Digital recordings, notes about responses, and drafts of reports and articles will all be kept on the researcher's computer that are accessible only through username and password entry. Further, in any written report or article about this research project, identities will be protected. Data will be destroyed after 3 years.

7. VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Hood College or any of its representatives. If you decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships. If you choose to participate in the study, you can stop your participation at any time, without any penalty or loss of benefits. If you want to withdraw from the study, please tell Joshua H. Munsey, doctoral researcher at Hood College and principal within the Mid-Atlantic school district. No adverse action will be taken against any participation of the study or any participant who chooses to withdraw from the study. Any responses prior to your withdrawal will be destroyed and will not be included in the study results.

8. CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS You can ask questions about this research study now or at any time during the study, by talking to Joshua H. Munsey at (301) 785-6241. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to speak with someone other than the researcher(s), you may contact Dr. Diane R. Graves, Institutional Review Board Chair, Hood College, 401 Rosemont Ave., Frederick, MD 21701, graves@hood.edu.

9. STATEMENT OF CONSENT: Click Here

APPENDIX I INTEREST EMAIL

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to ask for your support with my doctoral research study. There are two phases of the study, a school climate self-assessment and follow up interviews with select principals. You are invited to participate in one or both phases. Your participation will assist me in exploring the benefits and opportunities that are created as a result of school climate surveys. All elementary and secondary school principals from traditional comprehensive schools, special schools and alternative school programs are invited to participate. Participation is voluntary. For more information, please see the attached approval memo.

Phase I: Confidential School Climate Survey Self-Assessment (completion time: estimated 10 minutes)

AND/OR

Phase II: Interview, Self-Anchoring Scale, and Values Inventory (completion 60-75 minutes)

If you are interested in participating in this study, please read the attached Informed Consent Form, and click on the link at the bottom to give informed consent.

Please contact me directly if you have any questions regarding this study.

Thank you-

Joshua H. Munsey

Doctoral Candidate

Hood College

APPENDIX J INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

HOOD COLLEGE

December 2, 2020

Mr. Joshua Harold Munsey
401 Rosemont Ave.
Frederick, MD 21701

Dear Mr. Munsey,

The Hood College Institutional Review Board reviewed your revised proposal for the study entitled *"How the Perceptions of Principals on School Climate Surveys Influence Their Practice"* (Proposal Number 2021-12). The committee approves this study for a period of 12 months. This approval is limited to the activities described in the procedure narrative and extends to the performance of these activities at each respective site identified in the IRB research proposal. This approval does not authorize you to recruit participants or conduct your study on site at other institutions. Should you decide you would like to systematically recruit participants and/or conduct your study on location at other institutions or facilities you will need to receive IRB approval from those organizations *prior* to any recruitment activities or data collection.

In addition, due to the current COVID 19 precautions, Hood's IRB is restricting all in-person (e.g. face-to-face) data collection with participants at this time. You may only recruit participants and collect data online. You are not authorized to meet with your participants for the purpose of data collection until notice from this IRB. In accordance with this approval, the specific conditions for the conduct of this research and informed consent from participants must be obtained as indicated.

All individuals engaged in human subjects research are responsible for compliance with all applicable Hood Research Policies:
https://www.hood.edu/sites/default/files/Hood%20IRB%20Policy%20revised%20September%202013.pdf.

The Lead Researcher of the study is ultimately responsible for assuring all study team members review and adhere to applicable policies for the conduct of human sciences research.

The Hood College IRB approval expiration date is December 2, 2021. As a courtesy, approximately 30-60 days prior to expiration of this approval, it is your responsibility to apply for continuing review and receive continuing approval for the duration of the study as applicable. Lapses in approval should be avoided to protect the safety and welfare of enrolled participants.

No substantive changes are to be made to the approved protocol or the approved consent and assent forms without the prior review and approval of the Hood IRB. All substantive changes (e.g. change in procedure, number of subjects, personnel, study locations, study instruments, etc.) must be prospectively reviewed and approved by the IRB before they are implemented.

Sincerely,

Diane R. Graves, PhD
Chair, Hood College Institutional Review Board