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Promoting the Positive: A Case Study of the Influence of School Climate on One Turnaround School From 2016-2022

Cynthia Gunner

PROMOTING THE POSITIVE: A CASE STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL= CLIMATE ON ONE TURNAROUND SCHOOL FROM 2016-2022

by

CYNTHIA GUNNER

Under the Direction of Elise Cain

ABSTRACT

Schools across the country are finding various means to address the social realities that often exist in high poverty schools. School climate is one of those social realities. While there is research related to school climate in high poverty schools, there are limited case studies related to this subject. This qualitative case study examined how one elementary school was transformed by creating a positive school climate between 2016-2022. This study also explored the impact that the pandemic and subsequent school lockdown had on the newly established school climate. Findings from this study indicated that PF Elementary School established a positive school climate that resulted in transformational change, including a sense of community and collaboration, increased accountability, and teachers' feelings of success as well as improved student achievement and attendance. Discussion and implications of the findings suggest practical recommendations for schools and districts to implement changes.

INDEX WORDS: Collaboration, School climate, Covid-19 pandemic

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by

CYNTHIA GUNNER

B.A., Spelman College, 1993

M.Ed., Brenau University, 1998

Ed.S., Lincoln Memorial University, 2001

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CYNTHIA GUNNER

Major Professor: Elise Cain

Committee: Meca Williams-Johnson

Jennifer Perry

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DEDICATION

To my husband Chuck - I can not imagine where I would be without you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Given that emotions and relationships strongly influence learning, and that these are byproducts of how students are treated at school and at home and in their communities, a positive school climate is at the core of a successful educational experience (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). School climate is defined as a set of characteristics that distinguish one school from another and how these characteristics influence the behaviors of each of the school's members (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). School climate refers to the quality and character of school life and consists of various components, such as safety, teaching and learning, systems and procedures, and school/staff engagement. When assessing school climate, the viewpoints of students, teachers, and administrators are all considered (Johnson & Stevens, 2006). Positive school climate provides an environment in which the students feel valued and plays a significant role in providing a healthy and positive atmosphere (Osman, 2012). Research indicates that a positive school climate is associated with and predictive of academic achievement and school success (Cohen et al., 2009). Since a positive school climate is closely related to positive school and staff engagement, "...school environments that promote supportive relationships between teachers and students can protect those students from high-risk behavior" (Gregory et al., 2012, p. 35). Because of this, school leaders have vested interest in creating and sustaining positive school climates. Despite this, the ambiguity of quantifying a burgeoning school climate causes school leaders to be unsure of what school climate improvement looks like on a daily basis (Payne, 2018). Such confusion is known as the translation gap in that school leaders may be certain that improving school climate is imperative but may struggle to implement and maintain

a positive school climate (Cohen et al., 2009). This gap means there are varied opinions and a lack of practical strategies on how to establish such a school environment. While there is abundant evidence on the impact of a positive school climate, this gap in the literature warrants further research.

Background

For a family of five in the United States, the poverty threshold is $30,689 (Creamer, 2020). Poverty rates disproportionately affect racial minority students as 18.8% African Americans, 15.7% Hispanic, but only 9.1% White are said to live below the poverty threshold (Creamer, 2020). These disparities represent a stubborn educational failure story. The premise of American democracy is that merit should determine individuals' income and social status. The belief in meritocratic ideology is the belief that, in a given system, success is an indicator of personal deservingness—namely, that the system rewards individual ability and efforts (Jost et al., 2003;Young, 1961). The belief that hard work leads to success is a particularly important norm in the school environment (Duru-Bellat et al., 2009; Son Hing et al., 2011). Schools have assumed a major role in judging key elements of merit among students including academic skills, hard work, self-discipline, and cooperative behavior. Traditionally, schools accomplish this by evaluating students in a variety of subjects deemed important for success later in life. It is apparent throughout most aspects of American life that the impact of students' inherent characteristics, such as race, gender, or class contradicts America's democratic premise.

This contradiction between the ideal and reality of U.S. schools has led analysts over the last few decades to study and try to explain persistent gaps in student achievement. Research has provided evidence that race and ethnicity continue to be important factors in explaining

achievement differences. In fact, recurrent evidence shows that other factors, including social class and gender are important and consistent predictors of school performances (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2014). However, much of the Black-White and Hispanic-White achievement gaps are accounted for by social-class differences (Carnoy & Garcia, 2017). That is, in the United States, race and often ethnicity are closely intertwined with social class. Minority children, particularly African Americans and Hispanics, are more likely to be poor (free-lunch-eligible) than White children because of the ways that race and ethnicity shape opportunity and economic outcomes (Carnoy & Garcia, 2017). Black and Hispanic children are also more likely than their White or Asian-American counterparts to live in low-income, racially segregated neighborhoods and to attend schools with high concentrations of low-income, non-White students (Carnoy & Garcia, 2017). In fact, the typical poor public school student attends a school in which 60 percent of the children are poor (Saporito & Sohoni, 2007).

Heymann & Earle (2000) demonstrated that nationwide low-income parents are significantly more likely than middle- and upper-income parents to lack the paid leave and flexibility they need to help children who are doing poorly academically and children who have frequent behavioral problems. As a result, students are often ambivalent towards learning and see no connection to their everyday lives. Students in many of these inner city schools read several grade levels behind. According to Morrissey and Vinopal (2017), the poverty level of children's residential neighborhoods, as experienced during preschool, is predictive of poorer achievement outcomes, and these associations persist well into elementary school. They also found that children in low-poverty neighborhoods scored, on average, about one seventh to one quarter of a standard deviation above the mean in math and reading in kindergarten and first and second

grades, whereas children in high-poverty neighborhoods scored about two fifths to one half of a standard deviation below the mean. Problems at home affect student attendance and schools struggle to get and keep students in school. “Poor students were 5.9 percentage points more likely to miss some school than nonpoor (non-FRPL-eligible) students, and they were 7.8 percentage points more likely to miss school three or more days (23.2 vs. 15.4 percent)” (Garcia & Weiss, 2018, p. 7). In addition, there are high levels of teacher attrition and turnover and local school districts have employed initiatives focused on retaining high quality teachers. According to research by García and Weiss (2019), the share of teachers strongly agreeing that the stress and disappointments of teaching are not worth it is 2.2 percentage points higher in high-poverty schools than in low-poverty schools (5.9% versus 3.8%, or 1.6 times as large). The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2021) surmised that graduates of higher-income schools were more likely to enroll in college in the fall of 2021 than those in low- income schools (64% vs. 49%). The gap is even wider between students at high-poverty schools and low-poverty schools (46% vs. 72%). This benchmark study also found that graduates of higher-income schools completed STEM degrees at twice the rate of students from low-income schools within six years of high school graduation (18% vs. 9%). Similarly, 18 percent of students from low-minority high schools completed a STEM degree within six years, compared to 11 percent of students from high-minority schools (Garcia and Weiss, 2019).

Because of this gap in performance between high-poverty and low-poverty schools, the learning environment at the school-wide level, commonly referred to as school climate, and its relationship to important educational results have been of great interest to educators, researchers, and educational policymakers since the turn of the twentieth century (Bear et al., 2014). According to Vos et al. (2012), an unhealthy school climate can lead to ineffectiveness of the

entire school organization. Discovering the school climate is an essential component for developing strategies for management and improvement of an organization's overall health. Given that the overall climate of a campus has a significant effect on the job satisfaction levels of staff members, it is imperative to evaluate organizational health to maintain positive work performance (Vos et al., 2012). Understanding and measuring job satisfaction of teachers in schools is important as it is known that teachers who experience prolonged job stress tend to have weaker relationships with students, leading to an increase in classroom management issues (Burke et. al., 2007). According to Mertler (2002), teachers with high job satisfaction are more likely to want to improve their teaching efforts and are more likely to remain in the profession. Both of these areas lead to greater student outcomes. Thus, a sustainable, positive school climate encourages the development and learning necessary for students to become productive contributors to a democratic society (Cohen et al., 1999).

The quality of social and emotional interactions between and among students and teachers creates the classroom emotional environment (Reyes et al., 2012).When students feel connected emotionally to peers and teachers with high values of learning and expectations of academic success, they adopt positive values and achievement orientations (Elbertson et al., 2010). The key to making a difference in the lives of students is to provide a climate that fosters learning and promotes high achievement (Burney & Beilke, 2008). It has become increasingly clear that efforts to make substantial improvements to schools in America's most impoverished neighborhoods have failed (Berliner, 2006). If schools are to be the "great equalizer" for disenfranchised groups as touted across the country, it is imperative that researchers and practitioners acknowledge and analyze the historical and current impact of race and class on

learning environments. Researchers should also recognize the concept of building relationships and coalitions to bring about social change as essential when creating a positive school climate.

Statement of the Problem

With state and federal public school mandates continuing to increase, schools across the country are finding various means to address the social realities that often exist in high poverty schools.School climate is one of those social realities. Social realities, which are founded on agreement, are creations of the human minds and affect how humans relate and interact with one another (Taylor, 2010). School climate can be viewed as a product of social interactions among teachers and students (Payne, 2018). School climate is composed of the affective and cognitive perceptions regarding social interactions, relationships, safety, values, and beliefs held by students, teachers, administrators, and staff within a school (Rudasill et al., 2017). Although all schools face challenges, inner city schools seem to struggle greatly with the components that comprise school climate, including teacher retention, student engagement, chronic absenteeism, behavioral issues, and poor leadership. Jackson and Addison (2018) found statistically significant differences between high and low poverty schools existed for each school climate variable, favoring the schools serving a low concentration for students in persistent poverty. Families in these areas face limited permanent housing and a lack of basic needs. Poverty, and its effect on students and their families, compounds these issues and affects the total school environment and experience for students. Many of the parents have not completed high school, lack job flexibility, or have experienced trauma themselves.

This research examined one high-poverty school that faced these challenges. In 2016, a local urban district selected a new elementary principal for PF Elementary School (a pseudonym

for the school to maintain confidentiality), which serves approximately 450 students in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Although PF Elementary School is located in a middle class neighborhood, the student body is bussed in from several low income apartments located a few miles away. At the time, the school had low staff and student engagement as well as chronic student absenteeism, high levels of behavior referrals, and low student interest in learning. There was no clear vision and very few schoolwide norms and expectations related to relationships, belief systems, and social and emotional connections. This study examined how this elementary school was transformed by creating a positive school climate between 2016-2022. This study also explored the impact that the pandemic and school lockdown had on the newly established school climate. This case study serves as a replicable framework for other inner city schools who are looking to design their own plan of action for school improvement.

While there is research addressing the importance of a positive school climate and the barriers associated with creating this type of environment in high poverty schools, there are limited case studies related to this subject. Much of the current research also focuses on the academic outcomes for students as it relates to school climate, but fails to address the multidimensionality that often characterizes school climate. This study may provide a roadmap for schools to continue on the trajectory of transition and reform by building a solid positive school climate.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of school climate on one inner city, high poverty school from 2016-2022. The study explored the perceptions of this school's teachers related to school climate as well as their perceptions of the impact that the pandemic and

school lockdown has had on the newly established school climate. In addition to individual interviews, the school's Twitter site, student absenteeism and behavior rates, Georgia Milestone scores, and the district administered school climate surveys were also collected and analyzed.

The study examined what school climate related areas were addressed effectively and what areas were in need of further improvement in order to determine what is needed for a successful trajectory towards school reform. While there is research related to school climate in high poverty schools, there are limited case studies related to this subject. This study provided a "bridge" between theory and actual practice. As a case study, there was an opportunity to investigate the perceived effectiveness of theoretical practices in an actual school environment. In addition, much of the current research related to school climate focuses on student achievement results as the primary indicator, but fails to address the multidimensionality that often characterizes school climate. Focusing on one component or indicator is often at the expense of other indicators related to school climate. This case study addressed the multiple influences that exist within the complex system of school.

Research Questions

The qualitative research questions were designed to explore the perceptions of PF Elementary School teachers related to school climate as well as their perceptions of the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic and school lockdown has had on the newly established school climate.

Research Question 1: How do teachers at PF Elementary School describe their school climate from 2016-2022?

Research Question 2: What changes in school climate at PF Elementary School have occurred since the Covid-19 pandemic?

Significance of the Study

Education has always been the great equalizer for many students. This widespread belief, which has recently become even more popular post pandemic, underscores a myth that is pervasive across this country. The adage that education alone can improve one's economic standing, ignores the importance of class and race in the United States. This myth of meritocracy is centered around the idea that hard work alone can improve economic status and celebrates the opportunities for success by European Colonists in history while ignoring the racial disadvantages that exist for disenfranchised groups of people (Adams et al., 2013). Receiving a quality education can mean the difference between a life filled with career and financial opportunities and a life centered around basic survival (Kraft, 2020), but this quality education must include reconceptualizing oppression and acknowledging the barriers created by the interlocking categories of race and class that exist in all schools, and how these barriers are even more pronounced in high poverty educational institutions (Adams et al., 2013). Schools, especially those in high poverty areas, must find a way to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of its students while simultaneously recognizing that our differing experiences with oppression create problems in the relationships among us. This study's focus on one school's efforts to create such an environment with a positive climate can help to shed light on the necessary steps to total school transformation.

In order for schools to be successful in this endeavor, the needs and challenges of teachers must be addressed. High teacher turnover, which is known for contributing to low levels of student achievement, is also usually an issue at schools with high poverty rates (Garcia &

Weiss, 2019). The foundation of a positive school climate is teacher well being (Dreer, 2022). Knowledge of school climate and factors relating to teacher well-being are critical to allow for interventions to best support teachers and students in school settings. This support is even more important since the pandemic. Teachers, like students and families, have been severely impacted by the pandemic. Teaching virtually caused feelings of isolation and hopelessness and fear for one's health only compounded these issues. Post pandemic, teacher turnover is at an all time high (Dreer, 2022).

Building a positive school climate, specifically one that addresses building and maintaining healthy behaviors and relationships, is even more beneficial for students in low income areas . These students are more likely to fall behind academically and are often victims of over suspension which contributes to chronic student absenteeism as high school dropout rates are also higher in low income communities. Furthermore, academic achievement in elementary school has been linked to success as students move into secondary schools (Darling-Hammond, 2020). Building a positive school climate requires authenticity in relationships between and among students and teachers and understanding the connections in people's lives and then seeking solutions to multi-issue, multifaceted problems (Adams et al., 2013).

While there are numerous studies on the effects of poverty on schools and student achievement, the benefits of social emotional learning, and the importance of positive school climate, there is limited research available on the impact that the pandemic has had on teachers, schools, and the total school. This study is also intended to examine teachers' perceptions of the impact of the pandemic on the school climate at one urban elementary school and their perception of how their emotional well-being impacted this school climate. This is significant for PF Elementary School, which lost numerous teachers during that time and whose student

achievement scores have declined since the pandemic. PF Elementary School leaders continue to investigate ways to retain teachers and to improve teacher attitudes and perceptions related to student needs and achievement.

Procedures

This qualitative case study was designed to explore the perceptions of PF Elementary School teachers related to school climate as well as their perceptions of the impact that the pandemic and school lockdown had on the newly established school climate. Qualitative research is an approach to studying individual and group constructions of reality (Merriam, 2015). For anonymity, I used the pseudonym PF Elementary School. This design was chosen because of my desire to gain a deep insight and understanding of teacher perceptions related to school climate as well as their perceptions related to the impact of teacher needs and challenges during the pandemic on the existing school climate. Investigating these perceptions through the stories of teachers with varied experience levels and using multiple sources rich in context, can help school personnel better understand the school's successes and challenges. Convenience sampling was used to select the respondents to interview. I reviewed the staff rosters from PF Elementary School for each year of the research period and determined the staff who were employed at the school during that period. The following secondary documents were reviewed as part of the document review stage: school's Twitter site, student absenteeism and behavior rates, Georgia Milestone scores, and school climate surveys administered by the district. I held individual interviews with six teachers who worked at PF Elementary School for the entire research period (2016-2022). These staff varied in terms of years of experience. Race, gender, and subject taught were not a selection. To protect the anonymity, identity, and confidentiality of research participants, names were replaced with pseudonyms that participants self-provided. Interviews

were conducted via Zoom and were recorded. The interview questions were semi structured and conversational. The Zoom recordings were then used to transcribe the data. I used the audio file to manually clean up the transcription. Transcripts were read several times by the researcher and then uploaded into Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis software package, which provided common themes across the transcripts. I then identified sub-themes and categories that related to the research questions.The following secondary data points were also reviewed using descriptive analysis: the school's Twitter site, student absenteeism and behavior rates, Georgia Milestone scores, and school climate surveys administered by the district.

Definition of Key Terms

Transformational Leadership - For the purpose of this research, transformational leadership was defined as a style of leadership that transforms follower attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, to a higher realm of motivation where the leader inspires followers to be motivated to rise above and beyond current levels of achievement and performance to even higher levels of achievement and performance (Burns, 1978).

School Culture-For the purpose of this research, school culture is the stream of "norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals built up over time" (Peterson & Deal, 1998, p. 28).

School Climate- For the purpose of this research, school climate was defined as the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (Elias & Haynes, 2008).

High Poverty Schools- For the purpose of this research, the percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) was used as a proxy measure for the poor children in the student body.[1] A school is characterized as high-poverty when more than 75% of its students are eligible for FRPL (Carnoy & Garcia, 2017).

Chapter Summary

America's public schools, specifically those in high poverty areas, continue to face a myriad of challenges. These challenges have been compounded by the pandemic. Although a vast achievement gap between Black, Hispanic, and White children continues to exist, research suggests that schools with a positive school climate offer mitigating strategies that diminish the effects of poverty. Positive school climate is an effective risk prevention strategy, promotes healthier habits among students, and promotes teaching and learning.

The purpose of this study examined how one inner-city school focused on promoting a positive school climate from 2016-2022 in an effort to retain teachers, close the achievement gap, and ultimately increase student achievement. I implemented a case study method. Six teachers who vary in range of experience and who also worked at the school during the research period were asked to participate in interviews via Zoom. Interview questions focused on teacher self-efficacy, the role of the principal on school climate, and perceptions of the school environment and how these perceptions correlate to a positive school climate. The following secondary data points were also reviewed: the school's Twitter site, student absenteeism and behavior rates, Georgia Milestone scores, and school climate surveys administered by the district. The findings of the study serve to inform urban school leadership by exploring the needs and challenges of teachers in an effort to create a positive school climate that can ultimately lead to improved student well-being and increased student achievement in high poverty schools.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature cites key studies relevant to this examination of the impact of a positive school climate in a high poverty school. Through a comprehensive review of the literature, this chapter provides a background of the literature that will aid in understanding this study. In conducting this review of the literature, various definitions for school climate emerged, but I identified one specific definition that best suits this project. To complete the review of the literature, I highlighted the theoretical framework of the Systems View of School Climate, as well as existing research on the impact of poverty on schools including school climate as a mitigating strategy, teacher turnover, and the achievement gap. I explored the relationship between transformational leadership and school climate and reviewed literature related to whole child development, the school turnaround movement, teacher self-efficacy, and teacher perceptions of school climate. The chapter concludes with the impact of the pandemic on school climate.

Theoretical Framework

The Systems View of School Climate (SVSC) was the theoretical framework used for this study. School climate is situated within Ecological Systems Theory to guide future research and to help specify levels of analysis which will provide utility as a theoretical framework for future causal models (Rudasill et al., 2017). The SVSC provides a roadmap for research by separating school climate from related constructs. This framework places individuals or students

at the center of a series of contexts that work together to support or detract from students' experiences in school.

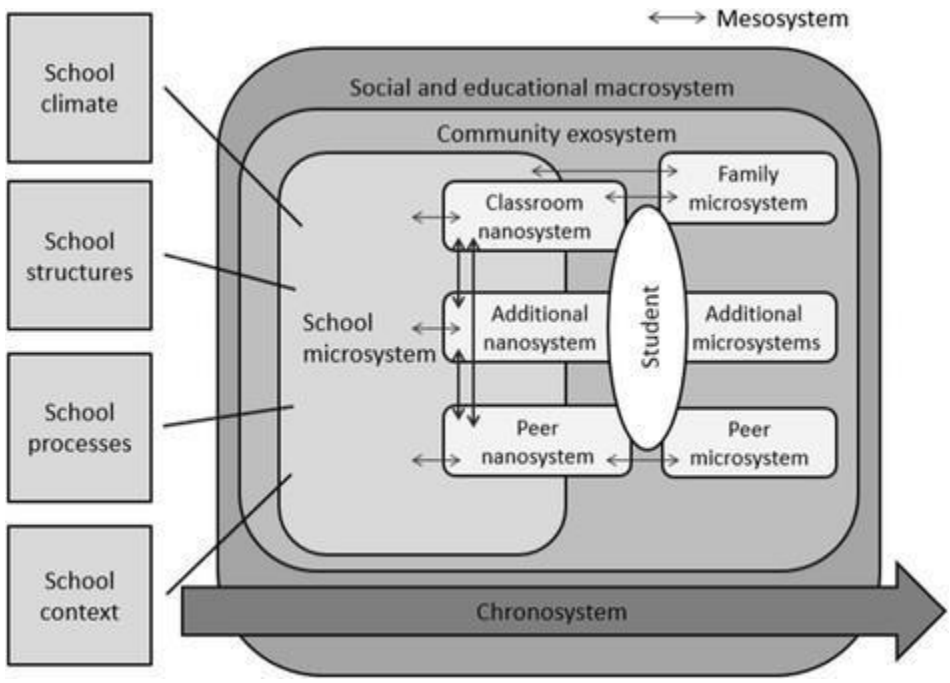
The Ecological Systems Theory was developed by American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner who was critical of previous theories of child development. Bronfenbrenner (1974) claimed most earlier studies were unidirectional, meaning that the laboratory studies observed the influence of A on B (e.g., teacher on student), rather than looking at the possible influence of student on teacher, or any other third party's influence, like family, community, and social media. He argued that studies of children in unfamiliar laboratory environments with one other person, usually a stranger, were ecologically invalid. Bronfenbrenner maintained that these laboratory features of research are not characteristic of environments that children actually live and develop in. Bronfenbrenner (1977) suggested that the environment of the child is a nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next. He organized them in order of how much of an impact they have on a child. The structures were as follows: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and the chronosystem. According to Bronfenbrenner, because the five systems are interrelated, the influence of one system on a child's development depends on its relationship with the others. SVSC extends the role of interactions between microsystems from traditional Ecological Systems Theory (mesosystem) to include interactions between contexts in multiple systems. Nanosystems, which are a part of SVSC, contain a new component and provide guidance for examining interactions between subsystems within individual schools (Guy-Evans, 2020). Some examples of nanosystems are peer groups, sports teams, and academic tracks. The role of interactions between microsystems from traditional Ecological Systems Theory (mesosystem) include interactions between contexts in multiple systems, enabling a richer understanding of the processes by which school climate may operate.

Finally, there are broader factors that may assist in identifying influences on school climate (exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems). This articulation of nested structures surrounding school climate serves to guide the formulation of causal models and to identify ecological niches or the unique contexts that best serve particular students.

Just like the Ecological Systems Theory (EST), SVSC begins as a series of systems nested inside each other. Figure 1 depicts the SVSC. The individual student is the smallest unit at the center and moving to the outside of the model. Applied to school climate, the school is the microsystem in which school climate is created through the combined perceptions of its members. The levels of conflict or cooperation among teachers and students, academic expectations for students, and the sense of collaboration between teachers are all examples of contributing factors to the formation of school climate in the microsystem (Haynes et al., 1997; Juvonen, 2007). The chronosystem may also shape how characteristics of the school are perceived by its members; for example, a school community may feel less safe after a high-profile school shooting (Hong & Eamon, 2012). An additional concept within EST that makes it a powerful choice for developing a school climate theoretical framework is ecological niche, a context that uniquely meets the needs of students with particular characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). For example, a child with average intelligence and a child with cognitive delays may benefit from different levels of support in the same classroom (Firmender et al., 2013; Schofield, 2010). Each of these examples is grounded in the daily experiences of members of the school community that are unique to each school; however, their interpretations and perceptions of these events are the source of school climate (Rudasill et al., 2017).

Figure 1

The Systems View of School Climate (SVSC)



Three themes form the taxonomy of this theoretical framework: the shared beliefs and values of school members; perceptions of relationships; and the perception of social, emotional, and physical safety within the school. Rudasill (2017) stated that each theme is based on aggregated perceptions rather than individual perceptions. Similarly, it is the perceptions that make up school climate, rather than objective measures related to these constructs. For example, a student's sense of safety contributes to school climate, and this sense of safety may (or may not) relate to specific disciplinary incidents, such as fighting or escalated verbal conflicts. As with any complex system, these perceptions are not formed in a vacuum. Instead, many characteristics of the school microsystem and more distal influences within families and the community have the potential to contribute to the development of school climate. This is the role

of the teaching and instruction, leadership, and physical environment themes we found in prior models. These characteristics of the school may inform or reflect school climate, but they are related constructs more reflective of school context and processes.

This theoretical model helped focus the areas for literature review and interview protocols as well as provided a foundation that allowed for data to be analyzed. Because SVSC is grounded in the idea that a myriad of systems work together in context and that school is at the center of these systems, the cornerstone of my interview questions and data analysis were the concepts of collaboration, communication, and the daily experiences of teachers.

School Climate Defined

School climate has been a topic of research for many decades. Over this time, the construct has been referred to as the "esprit de corps" (Perry, 1908, p. 304), the "heart and soul" (Freiberg, 1999, p. 11), and "the atmosphere, culture, resources, and social networks of a school" (Loukas & Murphy, 2007, p. 293). According to some theorists, school climate is how the quality of the school environment that is experienced by teachers, students, and staff affects their behavior and is based on their collective perceptions of behavior in schools (Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Keefe et al., 1985; Marks, 1995; Tableman, 2004). These perceptions are dynamic and malleable (Brault et al. 2014; Gottfredson et al., 2005) and use the school as a common referent (Marsh et al., 2012). Aggregated perceptions are at the heart of an organization's climate, and the subjective impressions of its members become the reality that climate seeks to describe (Steffgen et al., 2013). For others, it is less about the perceptions and more about the atmosphere, working conditions, and job demands at a school (Masoom, 2021). When measuring school climate, some theorists rely heavily on the perspective of only one role group in a school (e.g., Hoy & Hannum,

1997). In contrast, others consider shared beliefs across multiple role groups, such as teachers and students (Haynes et al., 1997). Additionally, there appears to be an implicit assumption toward including factors in the definition of school climate only if they are predictive of critically important outcomes, such as students' academic achievement or school violence (Heck, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2009; Richard et al., 2012; Whipple et al,. 2010). Many researchers have suggested that variables associated with school climate, such as social support, caring classroom, teacher commitment, and student-teacher relationships, should not only be desirable but prerequisites for positive behavioral change (Zullig et al., 2010).

The US Department of Education (2014) defined school climate as the extent to which a school community creates and maintains a safe school campus; a supportive academic, disciplinary, and physical environment; and respectful, trusting, and caring relationships throughout the school community. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009) referred to a positive school climate as one with caring and supportive interpersonal relationships; opportunities to participate in school activities and decision-making; and shared positive norms, goals, and values. Others have defined school climate as the quality and character of school life that involves social, emotional, and academic experiences of students, family members, and school personnel, which can be summarized as the collective beliefs, values, and attitudes that prevail at school (Wang et al., 2014). In addition, school climate has also been defined by the quality and character of school life, including norms, values and expectations that a school accepts and promotes (Aldridge & Ala'l, 2013). The National School Climate Council (2007) recommends that school climate be defined as "patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (p. 362).

According to Rudasille et al. (2018), when school climate is defined narrowly, it can appear as an independent factor; however, when viewed within context, it is evident that it is related to everything else associated with school. In a study of urban public schools, Jones et al. (2003) found that all of the various aspects of climate were correlated to one another at most schools. They found that when one variable, such as the discipline culture, was high, so were other variables, such as student interactions and student-adult relationships. While student achievement continues to be an area of concern in many high poverty schools, focusing on that one area alone will not yield the ultimate desired results in the most vulnerable schools across the country. Fullan (2003) asserted that although direct methods of intervention with the goal of improving student achievement are necessary, if the basic structure of a school is dysfunctional, its capacity to promote its desired goals is limited. A conceptual definition that clearly differentiates between components that are part of school climate and components that are not is an essential basis of the utility of the SVSC. School context, structure, and processes may, in fact, be the objective basis of some perceptions that contribute to school climate. In contrast, school climate is defined distinctly as aggregated perceptions across members of a school community, based on their subjective interpretations of social interactions and relationships, sense of safety, and shared beliefs and values that describe the character of a school (Gottfredson et al., 2005; Marsh et al., 2012). Although these school climate components may be responsive to contextual variables, such as the proportion of students in poverty or relate to important outcomes such as academic achievement or school violence, their inclusion in the SVSC is theoretically driven rather than based on empirical relationships.

The benefits resulting from a positive school climate have not been translated into effective educational practices. There is a lack of knowledge regarding the link between a

positive and communal school climate and the beneficial outcomes that result for students, teachers, and the entire school community (Payne, 2008; Payne et al., 2003). This *translation gap*, the gap between school climate research and policy, is an issue in schools across the country. "There is a large gap between the empirical research findings surrounding school climate and the policies and practices aimed at school improvement" (Cohen et al., 2009, p. 181).

Examination of existing research on school climate reveals some conceptual and theoretical confusion. Anderson (1982) describes school climate as a complex construct, yet it is measured as a unidimensional factor in other studies (e.g., Fedewa & Ahn, 2011). There continues to be a lack of consistent conceptual or empirical approaches to school climate. Characteristics of school climate within research range from leadership structures, school appearance, and customs and values to academic courses and the relationships between students, staff, and parents. School climate often has been used as an umbrella term to describe multiple constructs related to perceptions of acceptance, support, and safety in the school environment (Cohen et al., 2009; Goddard et al., 2000; Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Kuperminc et al., 1997; Libbey, 2004; Niehaus et al., 2012). Additionally, there appears to be an implicit assumption toward including factors in the definition of school climate only if they are predictive of critically important outcomes, such as students' academic achievement or school violence (Heck, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2009; Richard et al., 2012; Whipple et al., 2010). This definitional confusion prevents a consistent understanding of school climate between researchers and practitioners, which causes varied guidance in terms of measurement or models for school and student success.

There continues to be a lack of a national consensus on what exactly constitutes school climate. Researchers define school climate in countless ways and continue to debate the key

components of a positive and communal school climate. The lack of a shared understanding behind the meaning of school climate is problematic. Descriptions of school climate are not often grounded in common theoretical understandings, empirical investigations lack consistent guidance on the components of climate that must be measured to represent this construct, and school practitioners are left with little pragmatic guidance on how research might guide interventions in their schools. Without clear definitions that fully articulate exactly what constitutes school climate, and what are the important elements to consider, school leaders are left without a roadmap for school climate improvement, and the translation gap continues to widen. For this study, the researcher used the following definition developed by Rudasill et al. (2018): School climate is composed of the affective and cognitive perceptions regarding social interactions, relationships, safety, values, and beliefs held by students, teachers, administrators, and staff within a school.

Teacher Perceptions of School Climate

Teacher perception of school climate is a significant factor in overall school success (Smith, 2020). School leaders often believe that implementing well known school climate components, such as behavior incentives or teacher mentoring programs, is sufficient for creating a positive school climate (Johnson & Stevens, 2006). However, studies have shown that teachers' perceptions of school climate has a greater impact on school climate than program implementation as teachers who perceived that their school had a positive school climate were more likely to have higher levels of student achievement (Smith, 2020). Johnson and Stevens (2006) found a statistically significant positive relationship between teachers' perceptions of school climate and student achievement. This indicates that the perception associated with school climate is a factor that should be considered when attempting to understand student achievement.

One of the biggest factors in determining teachers' perception of school climate is the principal or educational leader (Powell & Beard, 2018). Principals must be intentional with not just developing programs and initiatives that they think foster a positive school climate, but should create an environment that encourages honest feedback and communication from teachers (Hit & Meyers, 2018). Fullan (1991) emphasized the role of principal in establishing a collaborative community among school stakeholders as well as implementing shared decision making practices. Teacher perceptions of support from their principal directly impact teacher commitment, turnover, and collegiality (Singh & Billingsley, 1998). The everyday interactions that principals have with their teachers can affect trust and collegiality and the teachers' ability to influence decisions (Edgerson, 2006). They must foster a community where teachers can share ideas and feel comfortable sharing experiences that positively influence the atmosphere (Meristo & Eisenschmidt, 2014). When these relationships exist, they impact student achievement and performance, as teachers feel supported and mutually respected (Edgerson et al., 2006; Friedkin & Slater, 1994). In school environments where this happens, the entire school community tends to work together to problem solve and achieve common goals (Cobanoglu, 2020). When teachers believe their principal exhibits a high level of idealized attributes, they identify better with their leader and thus lead them to feel more optimistic about the overall climate of the campus (Duraku & Hoxha, 2021). School principals who integrate creative insight, persistence, and energy with intuition and sensitivity to the needs of others, while inspiring them to surpass their self-interests, are known as transformational leaders (Bums, 1978; Bass & Avolio 1994). Bird et al. (2009) concluded that a teacher's perception of school climate was strongly related to his or her perceptions of the principal's idealized attributes. In other words, the authenticity of the

school principal was found to be significantly positively related to teacher trust and teacher engagement levels.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

In addition to teacher perceptions of school climate, teachers' self-efficacy, their health, and their effectiveness over student learning is also associated with a positive school climate (Ciani et al., 2008). Bandura (1977) expanded his research to distinctively define self-efficacy. An integral part of this research is Rotter's Locus of Control Theory, which is essential to self-efficacy because it focuses on causal beliefs of actions and outcomes and whether those actions and outcomes have internal or external controls (Bandura, 1977; Rotter, 1966). The theory states that people who possess an internal locus of control will conclude that their self-efficacy is measured by factors they personally control. As a result, any success or failure that they encounter is solely due to their own efforts. In contrast, individuals possessing an external locus of control feel that outside factors for which they have no control determine outcomes and actions. According to Bandura (1986, 1997) the most significant source of an individual's self-efficacy is mastery experiences. Hoy (2003) asserts that if one has a positive perception i.e., successful mastery, their expectations of teaching will be proficient. In contrast, if one believes their teaching has been a failure, they are apt to think that future teaching performances will provide the same result.

Teacher self-efficacy is important for schools to support as previous studies have found that teacher self-efficacy is negatively associated with teacher burnout and positively associated with commitment to teaching (Pas et al., 2012). Previous research has also found that teacher self-efficacy impacts student outcomes and instructional quality (Kunsting et al., 2016). Different aspects, which are related to self-efficacy, help to understand the relevance of self-efficacy as

characteristic of an effective teacher. Teachers' with positive efficacy expectations are described to be highly committed, to provide effective instructional strategies, and to be open towards their students (Larsen & Samdal, 2012). According to Hajovsky (2020), when it comes to student academic outcomes, teachers with high teacher self-efficacy have more success because they are more comfortable scaffolding students through mistakes, building relationships with students, and increasing student engagement within the classroom. High self-efficacy practices foster teachers' confidence in teaching students to meet high standards, and they tend to exhibit teaching behavior that supports this goal (Katsantonis, 2019). A teachers' ability to do these things directly impacts school climate. Schools have less teacher turnover and have a more positive learning environment when teachers believe that they can be successful. In fact, a study has shown that teachers' satisfaction with their school climate is a major contributor to their decisions to stay in the profession based on the variables of self-efficacy, work conditions, and job satisfaction (Mansor, 2021).

Additionally, researchers have found that school environments may also influence teacher's self-efficacy (Mansor, 2021). School environments where teachers have high, attainable goals and that create a serious learning environment tend to have higher teacher self-efficacy (Wolters & Daugherty, 2007). With all the changes teachers faced during Covid-19, one study found that the teaching environment played a critical role in maintaining teachers' sense of success (Kraft et al., 2020).Within the environment, the principal and school community may impact teaching efficacy through resources of vicarious learning and verbal persuasion (Fackler & Malmberg, 2016). The relationships teachers form within the school environment may impact teacher self-efficacy, with teachers who develop stronger relationships with other teachers tend to have higher efficacy than teachers with many weak relationships (Siciliano, 2016). Teachers who

believe that they have the ability to make a positive impact on their students by helping them make advances in their learning and growth embody a strong sense of self-efficacy (Lacks & Watson, 2018). Research supports that a positive correlation exists between teacher self-efficacy and student achievement (Protheroe, 2008; Hoy,et al., 2002). Thus, the ability of a teacher to be effective in their classroom is paramount for a school's success.

Impact of Poverty on Schools

The impact of poverty on students is vast and often creates challenges to schools. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) refer to the prolonged exposure of children to potentially traumatic events that may have immediate and lifelong impact (Felitti et al., 1998). ACEs can occur across the child, family, or community ecologies and may include child maltreatment (e.g., verbal, physical, or sexual abuse), family stress or dysfunction (e.g., a family member that is mentally or physically ill, incarcerated or substance abusing; the absence or loss of a parent because of death, divorce, or separation; domestic violence), community violence, and natural disasters (van der Kolk, 2005). Economic hardship was the most frequently reported ACE, followed by divorce or separation of a parent and living with a parent who has a substance abuse issue (Sacks et al., 2014). Blodgett and Lanigan (2018) found that the association between ACE exposure and school success remained significant even after accounting for some of the most widely accepted threats to school success, including gender, variability across schools, race, and overall school poverty. Blodgett and Lanigan also noted that many children who have significant ACEs are at risk for academic problems but likely will not meet the diagnostic and access-to-care standards that define most of our intervention systems.

Poverty increases the risk for lower academic achievement (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005) and was positively correlated with ACE exposure (Tomer, 2014). A higher incidence of ACE was associated with greater risk of repeating a grade, absenteeism, and lower school engagement (Bethell et al., 2014). Burke and colleagues (2011) found that as ACE exposure increased, learning and behavior problems in schools also increased. In a study involving 10,639 urban third graders, researchers used multilevel modeling to examine how school concentrations of early risk factors affected attendance and achievement in reading and mathematics (Fantuzzo et al., 2014). Although the study focused on school concentrations of risk factors rather than individual risk profiles, and the risk factors examined were not limited to those associated with ACE, results indicated that high concentrations of children who were experiencing four risks (displacement, homelessness, child maltreatment, or inadequate parental care) were associated with lower reading achievement and school attendance.

The persistent achievement gap between students from poor families and their peers calls for research that examines risk factors associated with poverty and the strategies that may mitigate those factors. Research demonstrates the impact of school climate on behavior and academic achievement, especially in high-poverty schools (Hopson & Lee, 2011). Educational outcomes for children are one of the key areas influenced by family incomes (Ferguson et al., 2007). Children from low-income families often start school already behind their peers who come from more affluent families (Ferguson et al., 2007). Poverty decreases a child's readiness for school through aspects of health, home life, schooling and neighborhoods. Furthermore, school readiness, or the child's ability to use and profit from school, has been recognized as playing a unique role in escape from poverty in the United States and increasingly in developing countries (Engle & Black, 2008).

Poor children are exposed to risks, and this exposure leads to stress, which often becomes chronic and toxic. Such a condition can result in a number of adverse effects, including toxic stress, which can hinder a child's academic performance by compromising his or her ability to develop the kinds of skills necessary to perform well in school (Evans et al., 2011). Insights into the school experience of poor children have shown that the way a poor child experiences schooling is quite different from how children from better-off families experience it. Poor children are exposed to parenting practices that are sometimes adverse to their development: they will receive lower cognitive stimulation (such as reading), they will more likely be exposed to toxic materials, and they will receive less adequate nutrition (Evans et al., 2011). These risks come together and generate cumulative disadvantage dynamics that account for the "achievement gap" between poor and non-poor children, i.e., the disparity in academic performance between socioeconomically challenged students and their peers (Evans et al., 2011; Huntington, 2019). Individual stressors tend to aggregate in persistent conditions of poverty and social exclusion.

Chronic stress exposure has deep-reaching negative effects and "may disrupt task persistence and produce disequilibrium in self-regulatory behavior" (Evans & English, 2002, p. 1336). Challenges in socioemotional adjustment caused by stress (external factors outside of a person's ability to change) may lead to a disruptive and deviant behavior that can have further exclusionary effects that will likely include discrimination, which can again be a source of internal, stressful experiences, even in childhood. Gary Evans (2002) has shown in a number of publications that child poverty leads to toxic stress, which together with inadequate cognitive stimulation and parenting styles that for reasons discussed above do not encourage achievement

directly hinders poor children's academic performance. Together with many other pieces of the puzzle, this may lead to a vicious circle, thus exacerbating and consolidating poverty.

Toxic Stress

Poverty can be defined as a deprivation of tangible and intangible resources, as a situation of "lack" (Evans & English, 2002). What is more, poverty can be defined as a situation of "cumulative lacks": lack of income, lack of living space, lack of reliable and available supportive social contact (Evans & English, 2002). Deprivation of resources together with these cumulative lacks make high demands on a person or a family system. Not being able to pay one's bills, being in need of living space for the family but not being able to secure it, being in desperate need of medical care and not having access to it are the dynamics of demands exceeding the coping and responsive resources of a person; to put it another way, it is exceedingly stressful to fall behind on bills, to not be able to provide for the family, or to live with untreated medical conditions. Poverty causes stress. Living with persistent poverty damages one's health (English & Evans, 2002). Poverty then implies toxic stress. Antonovsky (1990) has pointed out, however, that it is not the stressor load on its own that is toxic or pathogenic, but the inability to resolve it. This is especially true for stress resulting from poverty. Low socioeconomic status, discrimination, and stress are linked to unpromising outcomes that in turn are likely to reinforce and perpetuate disadvantage and deprivation, and thus also bring about further exposure to stress and other related health impairments.

Moreover, not only does poverty limit the choices people actually have, but in turn, where choices are to be made, the pressure of stress, especially chronic stress, may have consequences for people's decision-making. In their review of research findings, Haushofer and

Fehr (2014) provided evidence that suggests that chronic stress changes people's behavioral preferences: they are less willing to take risks, less willing to adopt new technologies, less able to adopt a long-term perspective, and less willing to forgo an immediate if low income in favor of higher future incomes. Such preferences are probably disadvantageous in regard to improving a person's future situation or eventually escaping poverty (Haushofer & Fehr, 2014). However, as the authors emphasize, such findings should by no means be misinterpreted as "blaming the poor" for their situation. Rather, an environment of poverty (including dysfunctional institutions, exposure to violence and crime, exposure to noise and pollution, distressing living conditions, and poor access to health and educational systems, to point out just a few likely daily challenges) may have detrimental psychological effects and may shape people's minds in a disadvantageous way, in the worst case forming a vicious circle further deepening poverty (Haushofer & Fehr, 2014; Mani et al., 2013;Rawlinson, 2013).

Children living in a community with high rates of poverty can be exposed to a range of stressors. This is of particular concern because many areas in which poverty is high are often places dominated by Black and Hispanic students. For instance, in 2021, 19.5% of Black people living in the United States were living below the poverty line compared to 8.2% of White people and 8.1% of Asian people (Statista Research Department, 2022). Poor communities often have high concentrations of people who have endured traumatic losses, including unemployment, loss of life due to murder, suicide, and accidents; long-term hospitalization; incarceration; foster care placement; and eviction or foreclosure (Abramovitz & Albrecht, 2013; Wade et al., 2014). These traumatic losses create significant challenges for all community members, and children can be exposed to stressors that overwhelm their ability to cope both at school and in other areas of their lives. Constant stress without relief increases the baseline resting stress level of a person,

changes the brain, lowers the immune system, and in turn, increases health and emotional issues (Kerker et al., 2015). These emotional responses often manifest as emotional outbursts or an unwillingness to communicate at school with teachers and peers (Kerker et al., 2015).What educators often first perceive as misbehaviors initially started out as ways of dealing with the overwhelming emotions and need to escape from the brutality that comes from trauma. For example, the behavior of wearing a hoodie pulled tight over their heads, curled up, head down on a desk or sitting quietly in the corner of the classroom is similar to what they may have had to do at home. These moments of acting out are attempts at dealing with the ravages of poverty (Kerker et al., 2015).

School climate is a critical factor in behavioral, academic, and mental health outcomes for students. Research literature supports the idea that social supports for students in high poverty schools, as opposed to punitive consequences, can moderate the impact of poverty and its associated stressors (Hopson & Lee, 2011). When these supports are not established, the academic effects as a result of poverty continue to be vast on students. Thus, the negative difference in academic performance between minority and White students remains wide.

Academic Performance Disparities

Some scholars argue that poverty—perhaps more than any other variable—explains why academic performance disparities exist across racial groups (Anyon, 2005; Rothstein, 2004; Wilson, 2009). Poverty can have a drastic impact on how young people experience school (Ferguson et al., 2007). Students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to have access to medical care, which can allow vision, dental, hearing, and other health ailments to go untreated (Buck & Deutsch, 2014). According to the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study,

children from poverty have a higher risk of chronic diseases and mental health issues from having experienced just one adverse childhood experience (Kerker et al., 2015). In addition, research shows that children living in older, dilapidated homes are more likely to be exposed to lead-based paint, which is associated with delayed cognitive development and behavioral problems (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997).

These circumstances inevitably influence school performance and academic outcomes. Additionally, children from low income backgrounds are more likely to have parents with low-wage jobs or no employment at all, increasing the rate of student mobility and compromising learning opportunities for students. A study by Rumberger (2002) showed that grade retention can be predicted in cases of three or more school moves, and even a single residential move can negatively impact both academic and behavioral functioning in school. These factors influence the quality of continuous schooling students receive. When students move around frequently, schools are forced to slow pacing down or repeat information for high mobility students. Using data from Chicago Public Schools to determine the extent of urban school mobility, the Kerbow Study (1996) revealed that constant review of material to help highly mobile students catch up results in delays in curriculum pacing that lessens achievement for all students in the school. In addition, the occurrence of violence, crime, drugs, and death in impoverished communities can have a profound influence on students' social, psychological, and emotional well-being (Jones-Webb & Wall, 2008). Research also suggests that students from impoverished backgrounds are more likely to have decreased educational outcomes, increased problems with social and emotional development, and more challenges in becoming academically successful (Barajas et al., 2008; Lin & Harris, 2009; Murnane, 2007; Noguera, 2010).

Teacher Training

Students in high poverty schools are also impacted by the training, experience, and belief system of many of the teachers (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Many teachers have had limited interaction with students from poor backgrounds (Blazar & Kraft, 2016). Thus, teachers may believe that students from low-income backgrounds cannot be taught effectively, lack the necessary intellectual and cognitive dispositions to be successful learners, and come from home environments that do not support learning (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Many preservice teachers lack knowledge about low-income students and see these students and their family through deficit lenses (Amatea et al., 2012). Out of this gap can grow a lack of empathy. In fact, research shows that "nine out of ten American adults felt that lack of effort was either very or somewhat important in terms of causing poverty" (Wilson, 2009, p. 45).

Haberman's (1991) notion of the *pedagogy of poverty* explains how teachers can exacerbate poor students' feelings of inadequacy through the tasks they assign and experiences they provide. Schools with a positive school climate promote and encourage rigorous instruction for all students (Wang & Degol, 2015). Students who are engaged in an engaging curriculum, by teachers who know their subject matter and provide students with stimulating learning opportunities, have a much better chance at success (Wang & Degol, 2015). However, the lowered expectations that are common in many urban and rural schools are steeped in a belief that students are unable to learn (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Without effective training and support, inexperienced teachers in the most vulnerable schools are able to shift or minimize their own responsibility for student success and achievement and are more likely to point out the deficiencies of students and other poverty-related factors that are outside their scope as educators (Gorski, 2008).

These myths can negatively influence the school climate as they support a deficit ideology of students which only makes learning conditions worse for them. It is imperative for schools to challenge these beliefs early and often with teachers. This can be instrumental in helping students overcome some of the obstacles brought about by poverty, and improve their educational experiences and outcomes (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). In preparing teachers to work with students in poverty, the single most important thing teacher educators can do is to work against "othering" and to understand people in poverty do not live some monolithic, shared cultural experience that makes all of them different from all of us (Ullucci & Howard, 2015).

In addition, teachers can help work against reinforcing a cycle of poverty by not writing off their students which includes maintaining high expectations coupled with achievable goals. Another way to mitigate the negative influence of the myths is to convey the importance of context-specificity to upcoming teachers. The University of Chicago's Urban Teacher Education program (UTEP) provides one model in which schools of education have targeted this issue (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Arguing that the site in which new teachers work is not simply a setting but content that requires particular unpacking, UChicago's UTEP program provides a thoughtful framework for thinking through context on multiple levels. These include the educational policy context, the urban public school context, the local geographical context, the local sociocultural context, and the children, classroom, and school context. By particularizing the novice teacher's experience, Hammerness and Matsko (2012) argue that such an approach can help teachers understand students better and manage the realities of urban schools more thoughtfully.

It is critical for educators in training to embrace an ideology that recognizes the assets, strengths, and resources that are possessed by many people living in poverty. What is crucial to

these approaches is to recognize the rich assets and knowledge that reside in low-income communities. Moll and Gonzales (2004) point out that newly trained educators should take the time to incorporate these funds of knowledge, which they define as "the social and cultural resources" of local communities (p. 700). Through field trips, guest speakers and research, students can identify the sources of support that can be found in particular areas (e.g., community centers, libraries, community gardens, places of worship, social service agencies, youth leadership groups, after school programs, neighborhood groups, sports leagues). This is a different way of understanding the lives of children in poverty. Instead of focusing on all the "problems" that children in poverty bring, this approach highlights determination and resiliency. It provides a new lens through which students can see differently. Switching the lens, while a small change, yields considerable impact (Ullucci & Howard, 2015).

Teacher Turnover and Retention

A consistent teaching staff is an integral component of a positive school climate. Because the needs of staff vary greatly by school, it can be difficult for school leaders to determine the underlying causes and possible remedies of teacher turnover. Therefore, the teacher shortage—the gap between the number of qualified teachers needed and available for hire in a given year—in the nation's K–12 schools is an increasingly recognized but still poorly understood crisis (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Schools are having difficulty filling teacher vacancies and are leaving vacancies unfilled despite actively trying to hire teachers to fill them. This is especially true for high poverty schools that are often characterized as having challenging learning environments and often provide support and resources outside the realm of instruction (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Despite substantial teacher training and teachers' ability to deal with the

challenges of their job, the negative aspects of the school climate can dissuade young people from becoming teachers and driving some teachers out of classrooms (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). The teacher shortage, the gap between the number of qualified teachers needed and available for hire in a given year, in schools across the country is an increasing crisis (Gracia & Weiss, 2019). The share of schools that were trying to fill a vacancy but couldn't tripled from the 2011–2012 to 2015–2016 school years (increasing from 3.1% to 9.4%), and in the same period the share of schools that found it very difficult to fill a vacancy nearly doubled from 19.7% to 36.2% (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). A dwindling pool of applicants makes it more difficult to fill vacancies. One of the reasons for this decrease in applicants is the lower number of students who major in education-related degrees (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). From the 2008–2009 to 2015–2016 school years, there was a 15.4% drop in the number of education degrees awarded and a 27.4% drop in the number of people who completed a teacher preparation program (Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

In Georgia, 47% of novice teachers leave the profession within five years (Owens, 2015). According to Owens (2015), reasons for this include state-mandated testing, level and quality of support, and school/district level leadership. Compounding this already high attrition, teachers' intentions to leave the teaching profession have drastically increased since the global health pandemic, with a 9% increase indicating a desire to leave by the summer of 2021, a 13% increase by the summer of 2022, and a 16% increase by the summer of 2025 (Fullard, 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in an increase in teachers' workloads, lower levels of happiness and wellbeing, and a rise in anxiety and stress (Leech & Gullet, 2022).

These turnover rates and its challenges are more alarming given that high turnover schools usually service low-income and minority students. Freeman and colleagues (2002) found

that teachers who switched schools were more likely to have served a greater proportion of minority, low-income, and low achieving students at their previous schools. Ingersoll (2001) found that schools with poverty levels greater than 50% have significantly higher rates of turnover than low-poverty schools (i.e., schools with less than 15% poverty). Additionally, Lankford and colleagues (2002) found that teachers who leave poor urban schools are more likely to have higher skills than the teachers who choose to stay in those schools. The negative impacts of turnover include a loss of organizational productivity as well as a decrease in quality of service (Donley et al., 2019). Students in these hard-to-staff schools disproportionately suffer the consequences of both turnover and shortages: substitute teachers, canceled classes, and inexperienced, underprepared teachers. Office for Civil Rights data show that districts serving children of color are about four times more likely to be assigned uncertified teachers. In addition, there are additional intangible costs that are difficult to quantify. Intangible costs in schools with high teacher turnover may include a decrease in employee morale which in turn causes strain on working relationships (Donley et al., 2019). Such intangible costs of turnover are often linked to the concept of trust, which has been found to influence organizational functioning and student outcomes (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

High turnover necessitates the hiring of large numbers of beginning teachers who typically are less effective than those with more experience (Grissom, 2011), resulting in negative student learning impacts. Turnover also can produce disruptions in instructional continuity, as schools must reconfigure teaching assignments in response to ongoing staffing changes, resulting in less unified and less comprehensive instructional programs (Guin, 2004). Sustained collegial and trustful relationships among teachers, students, and families are also difficult in schools with high turnover, making it challenging to unify the school community

around common goals and school improvement strategies (Simon & Johnson, 2015). When there is a constant stream of new colleagues, teachers find difficulty in establishing any kind of order within their daily activities (Donley et al., 2019). Teachers often feel resentment for having to do their jobs, as well as continually having to take on responsibilities for new teachers and their students (Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Professional development for teachers and the momentum of instruction is also impacted at schools with high turnover rates (Darling-Hammond, 2017). There is often a need to repeat the same professional development because of the constant churning of the teaching staff which increases resentment in veteran teachers and a feeling of being overwhelmed by new teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2017). When teachers are burned out, students' focus is not on the instruction. These unstable environments affect the more vulnerable student populations constantly. Such challenges make it very difficult for teachers who remain in these schools to keep a positive attitude toward developing the school's instructional plan (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

To compound the issue, difficulty hiring teachers impacts the overall school environment. Studies have shown that schools with lower teacher and principal turnover are more likely to experience positive school climates (Koth et al., 2008; Mitchell et al., 2010). A report from the National School Climate Center in February 2013 entitled, *School Climate and Shared Leadership*, contended that schools that developed a positive school climate that included teacher buy-in and a safe and supportive work environment were more likely to have high teacher retention and were more likely to have created a foundation for teaching and learning (Hughes & Pickeral, 2013). In contrast, The National Center for Education Statistics (2003) claimed that due to negative school climates, unsafe work environments, and negative teachers' perceptions,

621,000 elementary and secondary teachers left the teaching workforce to pursue employment in fields other than education. According to research, the share of teachers strongly agreeing that the stress and disappointments of teaching are not worth it is 2.2 percentage points higher in high-poverty schools than in low-poverty schools - 5.9% versus 3.8%. (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). In high poverty schools where the needs of students are higher, teachers are overworked, stressed, and often experience burn out, which results in many fleeing the profession (García & Weiss, 2019).

A consistent teaching staff is one of the markers of a positive school climate as a high-quality educator can make a significant difference in a student's life (Gallant & Riley, 2017). Minority and/or economically disadvantaged students benefit greatly from having consistent, quality teachers (Simon & Johnson, 2015). When teachers perceive a school environment as unsafe, unsupportive or not helpful in building capacity and confidence, they tend to leave that environment, which causes high teacher turnover and inconsistent teacher presence in many schools (Masoom, 2021). Oftentimes teachers who leave high poverty schools are not leaving because of students, but because of the environment that often characterizes these schools. These environments are perceived by teachers as making it more difficult for them to teach and for their students to learn. These same teachers seem to value working conditions that are more social in nature, such as school leadership, collegial relationships, and elements of school culture (Simon & Johnson, 2015).

According to Carnoy and Garcia (2017), attending a high-poverty school lowers math and reading achievement for students in all racial/ethnic groups and this negative effect has not diminished over time. However, despite the documented effect of poverty on students,

researchers have determined that a positive school climate is able to minimize the adverse effects (Hopson & Lee, 2011). A recent report reviewed 78 school climate studies published since 2000 and found that a positive school climate can reduce the harmful effects of poverty on academic achievement (Berkowitz et al., 2016). The authors of the report concluded that a more positive school climate is related to improved academic achievement, beyond the expected level of achievement based on student and school socioeconomic status backgrounds (Berkowitz et al., 2016). School climate can act as a protective factor against the impact that high-risk family structures have on academic achievement (Payne, 2018). O'Malley et al. (2015) asserted that students from homeless or single-parent families display academic grades that are similar to students from two-parent families when they attend schools with a positive school climate. Effective teachers positively impact student achievement. This is especially true in high-poverty schools. For this reason, rethinking teacher retention in hard to staff schools should be a priority.

The Achievement Gap

The achievement gap is another challenge facing schools in high poverty areas. In fact, this gap has become one of the biggest challenges in school reform over the past 40 years (Ladson-Billings, 2006). A school's achievement gap is measured by a collection of evidence, such as test data, behavior consequences, class selection options, and course availability, within which students are grouped by race/ethnicity and gender. When one group of students outperforms another group and the difference in average scores (on national/state school exams) for the two groups is statistically significant, that is when an achievement gap occurs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

Scholars Gandhi and Ladson-Billings (2022) have called for a shift away from the term

achievement gap to education gap or opportunity gap. This shift in terminology sends a clearer message that these gaps do not exist because of a child's own capability, but because of systemic issues. In other words, a student from a low-income background is no longer "at-risk" for poor achievement, but rather has not been given adequate opportunities to succeed (Gandhi, 2022). Furthermore, the term opportunity gap forces us to face the ways in which educational disparity is not about a student's level of motivation, but rather the ways in which large segments of the population have been given inequitable resources (Gandhi, 2022). Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) proposed that the differences in education outcomes are not merely non-White students underperforming, but that the educational disparities are the result of an accumulation of injustice, lack of access, racial discrimination, and denied opportunity. Ladson-Billings argued that a narrow focus on the achievement gap only produces short term solutions that will not address the long term underlying problems that plague our society.

The history of this country supports Ladson-Billings claim. The United States of America has had discrepancies in educational outcomes and access for hundreds of years, especially when students are compared by race/ethnicity (Ladson-Billings, 2022). Research has shown that even when social class is held constant, sizable gaps are still present between racial groups (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Observing the gap on the 2017 NAEP Assessment within one year, researchers noted significant performance gaps (Carnoy & Garcia, 2017). At grade four, the White students' reading achievement scores were 26 points higher than Black students' scores, and 25 points higher in mathematics achievement and the gap in 8th grade was similar (Assari et al., 2021). The assessment revealed that among 4th graders, 49% of African American, 46% of Latinx, and 52% of American Indian students were reading below a basic level, compared with only 22% of White and 16% of Asian American students (Assari et al., 2021) In addition, the NAEP

assessment showed that only 20% of African American 4th grade students were at proficient and advanced levels of reading in comparison to 47% of White 4th graders (Assari et al., 2021).

Schools that predominantly serve racial and ethnic minority students tend to have lower levels of academic achievement and thus higher levels of delinquency and victimization (Payne, 2018). Research showed that punitive approaches to instruction and student treatment undermine student motivation and learning and facilitate student disengagement from school (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Data reveals that the same groups of students who struggle with reading and math proficiency are the students most likely to be suspended, retained, and subsequently expelled from school (Alexander et al., 1994).

Although students' and schools' socio-economic background continue to be the strongest predictors of academic success, there is evidence of successful schools that beat their achievement odds by performing better than expected based on the socio economic status (SES) of their student population (Cunningham, 2006; Voight et al., 2013). A central school-level factor associated with decreased achievement gaps is school climate. According to Hopson and Lee (2011), school climate buffers the severity of the relationship between class and/or race and student achievement, such that a positive and communal school climate has a stronger impact on academic and behavioral outcomes in these schools.

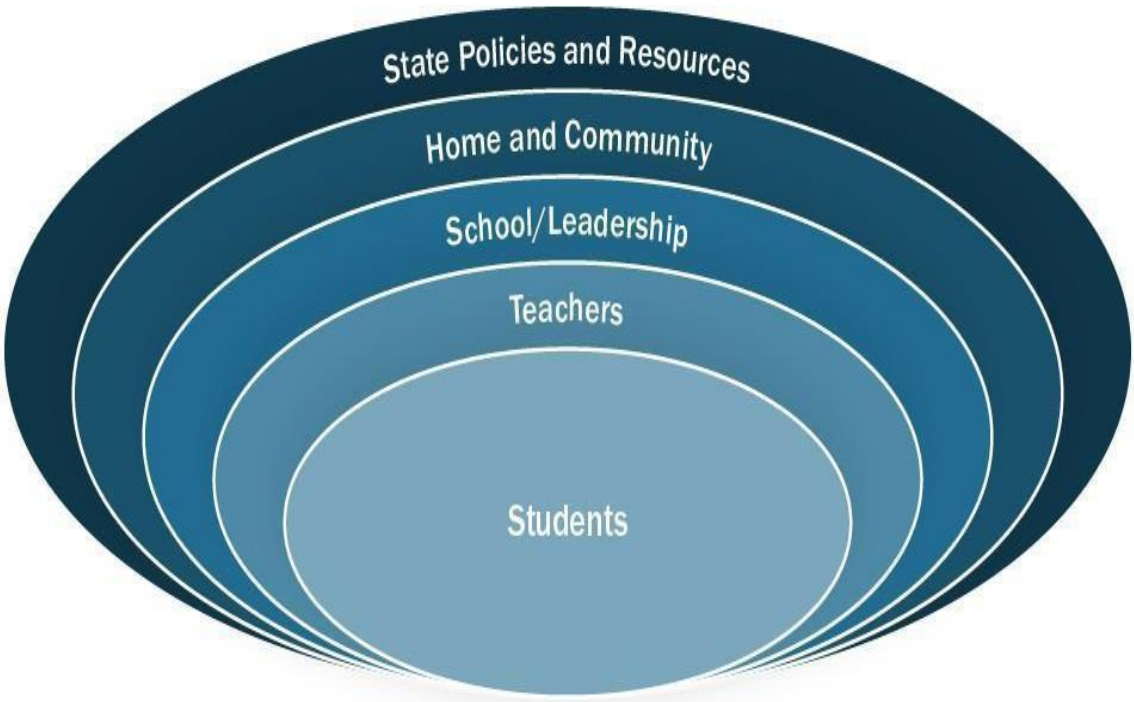
Whole Child Development

When considering the impact of poverty on schools, including teacher turnover and the achievement gap, it is crucial to address not just the academic needs and challenges of students, but their social and emotional needs as well (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Educators often make the mistake of concentrating on student achievement numbers and graduation rates (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Test scores have been and continue to be a major

focus of governmental policies and legislation (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). However, developing a positive school climate that transforms students' lives, especially the most disenfranchised of them, requires addressing the whole child (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Emotions and social relationships affect learning. Positive relationships, including trust in the teacher, and positive emotions, such as interest and excitement, open up the mind to learning (Darling-Hammond, 2018). Negative emotions, such as fear of failure, anxiety, and self-doubt, reduce the brain's capacity to process information and learn (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). In addition, children's abilities to manage their emotions influence learning. For example, learning to calm oneself, regulate one's behaviors, and focus attention provide the foundation for learning and the ability to persist with hard tasks and pursue interests over a more extended period of time. While there are many contexts that matter for child development—including families, neighborhoods, and peers—schools play a central role, both directly and indirectly (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). They create a developmental context that can be either supportive or unsupportive for children, and they can also influence how parents and peers engage with children as well (refer to Figure 2) .

Figure 2

Whole Child Ecosystem



Note. Darling-Hammond, L., & Cook-Harvey, C. M. (2018). *Educating the whole child: Improving school climate to support student success*. Learning Policy Institute.

A central part of whole child development is addressing student mental wellness. Schools are often the place where mental health challenges arise. Child mental health difficulties, especially emotional symptoms, are increasing (Fink et al., 2015; Patalay & Gage, 2019) and there is some evidence that mental health difficulties are manifesting earlier in primary school-aged children when compared to previous generations (Kovacs & Gatsonis,

1994). These issues vary in severity, but approximately 70% of those who need treatment will not receive appropriate mental health services (Perou et al., 2013).

Failure to address students' mental health needs is linked to poor academic performance, behavior problems, school violence, dropping out, substance abuse, special education referral, suicide, and criminal activity (Darney et al., 2013; Hawton et al., 2012). Schools, given their near universal access to children and the large proportion of time children spend there, have been highlighted as a key context in which early mental health intervention, screening and prevention efforts might be effectively concentrated (Fazel et al., 2014). Given the growing focus on schools as an important context for mental health prevention and intervention efforts, understanding the extent to which schools influence children's mental health is essential.

According to research, school-level factors, such as school climate, are amenable to intervention (Thapa et al., 2013). Students' social and emotional well-being is improved through the school climate's relationship with school connectedness and belonging (Lester & Cross, 2015). There is some evidence for the efficacy of school climate based interventions and school practices such as mental health support, socio-emotional learning provision and non-punitive disciplinary strategies might be some strategies to improve school-climate. Improving school climate can be a productive avenue to promote healthy peer relationships and school connectedness (Bradshaw et al., 2008). In addition, feelings of liking and connection to school is a protective factor in the development of mental health difficulties (Patalay & Fitzsimons, 2018; Somersalo et al., 2002; Thumann et al., 2016). Because of this, focusing on school climate can be beneficial to children's mental health and other school retention benefits.

Trauma Informed Schools

An extension of the whole child development approach is the trauma informed schools model which expands mental health efforts through whole school initiatives. Urban communities and their schools have been negatively affected by decades of federal economic policies that have concentrated poverty into isolated communities, with devastating consequences for urban education (Anyon, 2014). People who live in financially poor communities are frequently exposed to a range of traumas and losses that affect individuals, families, and schools (Abramovitz & Albrecht, 2013). Students who arrive at school burdened with stresses associated with poverty are significantly more likely to have mental health and social-emotional challenges (Howell, 2004), yet live in communities that typically lack adequate mental health services. While all students need to experience school as a safe and welcoming environment, students managing stress and trauma also need schools that support healing and resiliency as children learn and grow (Bloom, 1995; Cole et al., 2013).

The negative consequences of childhood trauma occur when there are events or circumstances that overwhelm the child's ability to cope and there is no supportive network of adults to help the child make sense of the adversity (Shonkoff et al., 2012). The negative impacts of child trauma and toxic stress are more likely in financially poor communities because the adults in the community are also more likely to be affected by trauma and loss (Abramovitz & Albrecht, 2013; Wade et al., 2014). Stressors faced by children who live in poverty may affect their development, stress response, and relationships with adults and peers. Classroom teaching does not take place in isolation; it occurs in the context of school climate, and the school exists in the context of community and society.

Children who are dealing with toxic stress will carry this emotional burden to school, and when a school has many children managing toxic stress, school climate can be affected (Franke, 2014). Therefore, it is important to consider ways to address trauma and stress as part of universal student supports (Blitz & Lee, 2015; Ko et al., 2008). Trauma-informed schools recognize the impact of trauma and toxic stress in the lives of the students, respond by helping children build resiliency, and develop discipline practices that teach prosocial behavior rather than risk re-traumatization through harsh punishment (Bath, 2008).

School personnel may understand that some parents are unable to attend conferences or other school functions because of work obligations or transportation issues. However, it may be more difficult to understand why phone calls are not returned or homework is not completed, and this may be interpreted as a lack of interest in their child's education. Parents from low-income communities are often painfully aware that school personnel think that they do not care about their children and their children's education (Blitz et al., 2013). Strained relationships between school faculty and parents can cause distrust, frustration, and anger, furthering the divide. As a whole-school approach, trauma-informed methods offer structured ways of responding to vulnerable students that support the well-being of all members of the school community and cultivate a healthy school climate (Cole et al., 2013; Ko et al., 2008). Furthermore, trauma-informed approaches help teachers to understand historical and structural oppression in culturally grounded ways, specifically talking about the underlying trauma and social justice issues and to understand students' motivation behind behavior rather than acting only to stop the behavior (Blitz et al., 2020). When the role of trauma in students' lives is understood, classroom practices can respond with flexibility to the students' learning needs and teach self-determination. Recognizing cultural distance between the student and the teacher can help

teachers move to strategies such as project-based learning that engage students in culturally grounded, real-life problem solving and learning (Cross et al., 2012).

Understanding the tendency to look at troubled children and families as "others" who bring problems can also be understood as a manifestation of secondary trauma, where adults exposed to the students' trauma begin to take on the stress as their own (Alisic, 2012). Trauma-informed schools encourage engagement with families that can bridge this divide and build solidarity that supports education and builds alliances to oppose structural inequity. In addition, understanding how trauma affects the brain provides teachers with knowledge they need to adjust their teaching strategies. When the role of trauma in students' lives is understood, classroom practices can respond with flexibility to the students' learning needs, teach self-determination, and promote resiliency (Condly, 2006). The implementation of trauma informed approaches such as these helps to create a positive school climate (Blitz et al., 2020).

Public School Mandates

The federal government's role in American education has increased steadily in the past 30 years (Finn & Hess, 2004). This increased involvement by the federal government has been a result of more federal dollars being directed towards schools. Those dollars come with expectations and federal accountability mandates. This increase in federal involvement has also increased testing that happens in public schools and has been viewed as a loss of local control and local accountability (Allington, 2003). The answer to these accountability mandates were annual testing for all students in grades three through eight in reading and math and that adequate yearly progress (AYP) be calculated (Finn & Hess, 2004). States were forced to utilize accountability systems using standardized tests or face the loss of Title 1 funds.

ESEA of 1965 and the 2002 reauthorization, also known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), are seen as bookends in terms of education policy. ESEA focused on funding and content standards and NCLB signaled a policy shift to measuring output, specifically student performance on state tests. NCLB legislation made a stronger tie between federal funding and state testing, included public reporting mandates, and specified harsh consequences for not improving or reaching benchmarks (Seashore & Robinson, 2012). The 1,100 page NCLB act was passed by congress in 2001. This act is seen as the shifting point away from local control towards federalization of public education. The goals for NCLB were to increase student achievement while narrowing learning gaps with an ultimate goal of 100 % student proficiency by the year 2004 (Caillier, 2007; Finn & Hess, 2004). Mintrop and Sunderman (2009) showed that although school accountability systems are met with positive attitudes by policy makers, the perception of high-stakes accountability systems by teachers and administrators is more negative. Husband and Hunt (2015) found that teachers have a negative or frustrated viewpoint of NCLB as a result of perceived loss of instructional time, professional freedom, and strict mandates.With the large amount of requirements and accountability, educators must teach in such a way that their students will be able to perform well on standardized tests. The mandated approaches have not been effective for all learners, but teachers are often not given the autonomy to utilize other methods that may be more effective for students. Therefore, the challenge of addressing student needs while creating an environment where teachers feel empowered continues.

School Turnaround Movement

The trauma-informed approach is not the only strategy employed at high poverty schools. School turnaround has emerged as a strategy to improve chronically low-performing schools

which usually are perceived to have a negative school climate by both teachers and students (Herman et al., 2008). The idea behind this movement is to address the multidimensional issues facing many struggling schools, such as ineffective leadership, low levels of instructional capacity, staff demoralization, a lack of resources, and high teacher turnover (Redding & Nguyen, 2020). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) spotlighted school and student performance and forced politicians and educators to develop a more systematic process of identifying underperforming schools (Calkins et al., 2007). Under NCLB, schools that failed to meet proficiency goals for three or more consecutive years were required to implement strategies related to changes in school organization, staffing, management, and governance (Redding & Nguyen, 2020). These options included restructuring school programs (the transformation) and replacing administrators and teachers (school turnaround models), restarting the school as a charter school or under the management of a private company, closure, and state turnaround (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019).

Three federal policy changes led to the widespread adoption of school turnaround: (a) School Improvement Grants (SIG) targeted the lowest performing 5% of schools in a state and provided substantial resources to support the implementation of a prescribed turnaround strategy; (b) a criterion in Race to the Top (RTTT) applications was to turn around the lowest performing schools in a state; and (c) the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) required states to differentiate and support consistently underperforming schools (Hamilton et al., 2014). Unlike previous school improvement efforts that focused primarily on improving instruction, school turnaround emphasized changes related to several aspects of school, including human capital, as a precursor to making improvements in student outcomes (Peurach & Neumerski, 2015).

The human capital aspect of school turnaround often focuses on school leadership. By replacing the principal, the hope is that the new principal will be more effective in inciting drastic changes to improve the school operations and culture (Duke, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2010). The basis for this logic is the recognition that the complex task of organizational turnaround requires competent leaders capable of addressing a variety of school domains (Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019). Governing bodies also believed that the turnaround process might also compel current school leaders to improve other school operations that have been neglected. Turnaround principals often prioritize the development of policies and practices to monitor and manage student behavioral problems with the idea that they can create a more orderly school environment that is more conducive to successful teaching and learning (Bryk et al., 2010; Cucchiara et al., 2015).

As part of school turnaround efforts, studies of high poverty, high performing schools have been conducted throughout the country. Research conducted at the Center for Performance Assessment on the "90/90/90 Schools" has been particularly instructive in the evaluation of the use of standards and assessment (Schmid, 2018). The research includes four years of test data (1995 through 1998) with more than 130,000 students in a variety of school settings in Milwaukee, WI from elementary through high school. The school locations included inner-city urban schools, suburban schools, and rural schools. The student populations ranged from schools whose populations were overwhelmingly poor and/or minority to schools that were largely Anglo and/or economically advantaged.The 90/90/90 Schools have the following characteristics: more than 90 percent of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, more than 90 percent of the students are from ethnic minorities, and more than 90 percent of the students met

or achieved high academic standards, according to independently conducted tests of academic achievement. One of the primary characteristics of these schools was the devoted time for teacher collaboration. Researchers found that collaboration meetings were focused on an examination of student work and there was a consistent collective determination of what the word "proficiency" really means. The most effective of these schools made time for collaboration very frequently. It was also noted that the principals of these schools worked alongside their faculty members.

School turnaround has been a controversial strategy given its emergence from high-stakes test-based accountability and deliberately disruptive approach to improving school operations (Rhim & Redding, 2014; Trujillo & Renée, 2012). Critics question the "teach to the test" methods often associated with the school turnaround movement (Cohen-Vogel, 2011). Others question the efficacy of an approach that is known for prioritizing school leadership and operations over students' underlying barriers to success (Heissel & Ladd, 2018). Despite these criticisms, studies show that school turnaround is associated with improvements in student attendance, math and ELA test scores, and graduation (Redding & Nguyen, 2020). However, there has been an emerging discourse that school turnaround has been an ineffective strategy at sustaining positive student outcomes past the initial three years of implementation (Redding & Nguyen, 2020).

Transformational Leadership: The Role of the Principal on School Climate

In education, transformational leadership is a model that educators—deans, principals, professors, teachers—can use to lead by example. It places a high value on creating community bonds, encouraging both students and educators to greater levels of achievement. At the heart of

the effort to create and sustain a positive school lies the principal, who has direct influence over school-level conditions (Payne, 2018). The principal plays a crucial role in the formation of the school climate. In fact, researchers suggest that the presence or absence of a strong educational leader can directly influence student achievement (Kelley, 2005). Burns (1978) coined the term transformational leadership in his book, *Leadership*, to define a process where leaders and followers work together to advance motivation and morale. According to Burns, transformational leadership is a style of leadership that transforms follower attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to a higher realm of motivation where the leader inspires followers to be motivated to rise above and beyond current levels of achievement and performance to even higher levels of achievement and performance. Exploring leadership styles and approaches that will strengthen education leaders' ability to manage and lead schools in this new era is logical and necessary. Transformational leadership exhibited by principals plays an integral role in school improvement. This type of leadership is evident when principals engage in building a shared vision among all stakeholders (Anderson, 2017).

Given that transformational leaders generally have staff members who are committed to a shared goal or vision and are more satisfied in their positions, this type of leadership can significantly impact the organizational climate (Bass & Riggio, 2006). As a result, there is also the potential to affect student achievement, as intermediate outcomes, such as teacher job satisfaction and school and classroom climate, have impacted the student outcomes required by federal and state guidelines (Brown et al., 2004).

Transformational leadership has also been found to impact teachers' perceptions of school conditions, commitment to change, and organizational learning and student outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). The everyday interactions that principals have with their teachers can

affect trust and collegiality and the teachers' ability to influence decisions. When such relationships exist, they impact student achievement and performance, as teachers feel supported and mutually respected (Edgerson et al., 2006; Friedkin & Slater, 1994). They also work together to problem solve and achieve common goals. As a result, teacher perceptions of support from their principal directly impact teacher commitment, turnover, and collegiality (Singh & Billingsley, 1998).

Finnigan and Stewart (2009) found that transformational leadership behaviors were most frequently evident in high-performing schools, lending credence to the belief that transformational leadership is the most effective leadership. Research has determined that principal leadership can have a significant, yet indirect, impact on student outcomes (Braughton & Riley, 1991; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2008). Finnigan & Stewart (2009) specifically studied transformational leadership and found that this specific style indirectly influenced student achievement. Heck and Hallinger (1996) and Hallinger (2005) also noted that a principal could impact classroom instruction, but indirectly through the development of school climate rather than through direct supervision of classroom practices. Given that a principal is generally not involved in the direct delivery of instruction, the behavior of the principal, especially when supportive, collegial, and not overly restrictive, can have a positive impact on student achievement through the impact this behavior has on school climate and thus their teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011).

High-achieving schools have principals who communicate to all that the school's most important mission is learning (Cotton, 2003), believe that established school goals are attainable (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003), and expect that both teachers and students can meet established goals (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Research related to leaders' roles in monitoring curriculum

and instruction indicates that both teachers and leaders believe it is important that someone is positioned to guide the curriculum and to make decisions about staff development needs (Portin et al., 2003). Also, effective leaders ensure continuity in the school instructional program (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003) and must spend time in classrooms to monitor instructional programs, curriculum implementation, and the quality of instructional practices (Fink & Resnick, 2001). Hoy et al. (1996) and Abu-Saad and Hendrix (1995) affirmed that the principal is the single most important individual in the development of a school's climate. In schools, therefore, principals can become effective change agents who are responsible for creating a healthy school climate.

The Impact of the Pandemic on Teachers & The School Climate

The Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent school lockdown had significant implications on all schools, including high poverty, turnaround schools who were already facing a myriad of challenges (Pressley, 2021). Many districts moved to all virtual instruction during the spring of 2020 and faced the debate of how to return safely to school. Teachers returned to the classroom facing a drastically different instructional landscape. This new teaching environment included learning to teach virtually, learning new technology, and adapting lesson plans for virtual and hybrid instruction (Pressley & Ha, 2020). In addition, there was the added stress and anxiety associated with family and health concerns. However, teachers were still responsible for providing instruction through engaging lessons just as they had in past years (Pressley & Ha, 2020).

Teachers reported a range of challenges related to engaging students in remote learning and balancing their professional and personal responsibilities. Teachers experienced an abrupt

drop in their self-reported sense of success during the pandemic. Kraft et al. (2020) found that 53% of teachers reported a decline in their sense of success and that schools with more supportive remote working conditions were more successful at helping their teachers maintain a sense of success during the pandemic. Teachers were less likely to experience declines in their sense of success when they worked in schools that communicated effectively, provided targeted professional development, recognized teachers' efforts, facilitated meaningful collaboration, and held fair expectations during the pandemic (Kraft et al, 2020). Supporting students and their families in coping with additional stressors can exacerbate an already overwhelming teaching role.

Teachers in high-poverty and majority Black schools perceived these challenges to be the most severe, suggesting the pandemic further increased existing educational inequities (Kraft et al., 2020). Remote instruction seemed to exacerbate existing inequities by severely and disproportionately limiting the learning opportunities for students from low-income and Black communities. In fact, Educators for Excellence (2020) found that just 51% of teachers in high-poverty schools reported that most of their students participated daily in distance learning, in comparison with 84% of teachers in affluent schools. Additionally, teachers working in high-poverty schools and in schools that serve a majority of Black students reported that their students were less likely to have the technology required to access online learning resources and, consequently, less likely to regularly engage in remote learning activities (Kraft et al., 2020).

Teachers' feelings of dissatisfaction may also be related to frustrations with their districts' decision-making. Frustration with their districts' decision-making, lack of clear guidance, fear that they aren't being successful, feelings of burnout, and challenges with new technology may be contributing to teachers' belief that it is not worth it to continue in the

profession (Kraft et al., 2020). In fact, some 42% of teachers in fall 2020 said the stress and disappointments of teaching weren't worth it—up from 28% who had similar feelings before the pandemic began, as reflected by National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) teacher survey data (Kaufman & Diliberti, 2021). With all these new challenges and policies related to C, it is crucial to understand their impact on teachers and students and the school climate as a whole.

Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter provided an overview of the complexities of defining school climate as well as the impact of teacher turnover, teacher self-efficacy, teacher perceptions of school climate, the school turnaround movement, whole child development, and finally the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on teachers and schools. A systems view framework of school climate allowed for the opportunity to separate school climate from other related constructs and to place students at the center of a series of contexts. Following the review of school climate, the impact of how teachers perceive their work environment and the impact of how they feel about their ability to be successful was reviewed. The impact of poverty on schools was then explored to understand the correlation between the challenges that high poverty schools face and school climate. In addition, the role of transformational leadership in developing and maintaining a positive school climate was reviewed. The final section highlighted the post pandemic era by sharing the challenges teachers and schools faced, as well as the impact of those challenges on student achievement and school climate.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter details specific research methods that were used to complete this study. A full discussion of the research design, setting and participants, data collection and analysis procedures is included. An overview of the qualitative design with a case study approach is provided. The following section details the selection of the participants and procedures for gathering and analyzing data. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of methods that will be employed for enhancing the trustworthiness of the study.

Research Questions

This study used qualitative research methods to explore the perceptions of PF Elementary School teachers related to school climate as well as their perceptions of the influence that the pandemic had on the newly established school climate. I sought to answer the following overarching questions:

Research Question1: How do teachers at PF Elementary School describe their school climate from 2016-2022?

Research Question 2: What changes in school climate at PF Elementary School have occurred since the Covid-19 pandemic?

Research Design

The selected research design was a qualitative case study. Qualitative research is an approach to studying individual and group constructions of reality (Merriam, 2015). This design was chosen because of my desire to gain a deep insight and understanding of teacher perceptions related to school climate as well as their perceptions related to the impact of teacher needs and challenges during the pandemic on the existing school climate. According to Crewswell (2013), we conduct qualitative research because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. This detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature. We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study. Qualitative researchers stress the intimate relationship between the researcher, what is studied, the situational constraints that shape the inquiry, and the socially constructed nature of reality (Merriam, 2015).

Case Study Method

Numerous researchers (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2015; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2013) have explained that qualitative case studies are common within the field of education. Selecting a qualitative case study design allows the researcher to:

> Gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case study can directly influence policy, practice and future research. (Merriam, 2015, p. 19)

According to Yin (2013), the purposes of a case study are explanatory, exploratory, and/or descriptive. Case studies explain a causal link, depict the chosen intervention, show change, and allow for meta-evaluation. Strengths of this methodology include: "when," "how," and "why" questions are posed; the researcher has little control over the situation, and therefore, the results are more pure; and the focus is applicable and real-life (Yin, 2013). Merriam (2015) asserted that the single defining characteristic about a case study is its "bounded system" that allows the researcher to 'fence in' what is going to be studied" (p. 27). She conceived qualitative case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit" (p. 28). A case study is an appropriate research design for this study to explore teachers' perceptions of the influence of school climate. Investigating these perceptions through multiple data sources will help school personnel better understand the school's successes and challenges.

The results of this study provides much needed insight into this important topic as well as provides a roadmap for struggling schools with similar student populations. It examined the school climate at PF Elementary School over a five year time period and its perceived role in addressing both the emotional and academic needs of students, the needs of teachers and staff, and then the needs of teachers and staff during a pandemic. While poverty and its impact on student achievement has been extensively studied, the role of school climate and its possible mitigating effects have not. According to Tracy (1995), "Good qualitative research captures how practitioners cope with situated problems and provide implications that may help participants develop normative principles about how to act" (p. 846). This study is intended to serve as a replicable framework for other inner city schools who are trying to improve their school climate.

Setting

In 2016, a large city in Georgia named a new principal to PF Elementary School. Although this public school is located in a middle class neighborhood, the student body is transported from several low income apartments located a few miles away. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the school is located in a "City, Large" locale which is characterized by a territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population of 250,000 or more. The school population consisted of 400 students with 92% African American students and 8% Hispanic students. Of the students at PF Elementary School, 100% students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. At the time, there was low student and staff engagement, chronic student absenteeism, and low student achievement. There was also no shared belief system among teachers regarding relationship building, collaboration, and the impact of barriers that exist in the disenfranchised community. The Georgia Department of Education reported that in 2016, PF Elementary School earned a 50 CCRPI (College & Career Reading Performance Index) score with only 9% students scoring Proficient in ELA and Math. By 2019, the school's data showed significant progress and PF Elementary School was no longer considered a failing school by the state.The school's CCRPI increased to a 70 with 22% of students scoring Proficient in the core content areas. In addition, there was a thriving mentorship program, a school wide house system, a new teacher academy, and a parent university. Teacher attrition was low, student discipline occurrences were at a minimum, and parent involvement was at an all time high.

In March 2020, the educational landscape experienced a dramatic and sudden change. It was the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. PF Elementary School transitioned to virtual and remained in a hybrid-style of teaching until August 2021. Students and staff returned at that time

despite high Covid-19 numbers. Since that time, both student attendance and achievement as well as teacher retention have plummeted. While a CCRPI score was not given to schools that year, the percentage of students scoring Proficient decreased to 12%. Teacher attendance, teacher engagement, and school vision buy-in decreased as well.

Participants

Convenience sampling was used to select the respondents in the case study. I reviewed the staff rosters from PF Elementary School for each year of the research period and determined the staff who were employed at the school during that period. During the first phase of respondent selection, I called the teachers or staff who no longer work for the district that fall in the selection criteria and whose contact information was known by me. According to Polit and Beck (2006) as well as Burns and Grove (2001), convenience sampling uses readily available respondents in a study; for example, patients waiting to be seen in a clinic. To prevent bias, only respondents who met the inclusion criteria were selected. Those called were asked if they have the contact information for other staff who fall within the research parameter. This strategy, known as Snowball Sampling Method (SSM), directly addresses the fears and mistrust common in some environments and increases the likelihood of trusting the researcher by introduction through a trusted social network (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). This method could prove useful since oftentimes those who have been employed by a school district are reluctant to share their experiences.

I held individual interviews with six teachers who worked at PF Elementary School for the entire research period (2016-2022). Race, gender, and years of experience were not a criterion but was noted in data collection. To protect the anonymity, identity, and confidentiality of research participants, names were replaced with pseudonyms that participants self-provided.

Data Collection

I sought IRB approval through Georgia Southern University. After the IRB approval from the university, I applied to conduct the study through the school district's Department of Research and Evaluation**.** Once respondents agreed to participate in the study, data point collection and review was completed. This review was concurrent with the interviews. Yin (2013) argued, "because of their overall value, documents play an explicit role in any data collection in doing case studies" (p. 103). Case study research is detailed and pertinent to ensuring the data collected is in-depth using multiple sources of information rich in context (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, I used multiple sources of evidence which triangulate converging lines of inquiry and strengthen the construct validity. Moreover, Yin (2013) added that "the case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews and observations" (p. 11). Patton (2014), Stake (1995), and Yin (2013) all stated that the data collection for qualitative research studies often includes in-depth interviews and secondary documents. The following secondary data points were reviewed using descriptive analysis: the school's Twitter site, student absenteeism and behavior rates, Georgia Milestone scores, and school climate surveys administered by the district.

The school's Twitter site provides a visual representation of the school's journey of improving school climate. The posts on the social media site chronicles the implementation of various school initiatives, programs, and events aimed at both student and staff wellness.

Through the district's data site, the school's student attendance and behavior rates over the course of the research period were reviewed. Quality interpersonal relationships may produce positive developmental assets that provide a buffer against risk factors that cause absenteeism (Adams et al., 2016) while relationships characterized by trust, respect, and fairness among staff,

teachers, and students may generate social capital, positive social norms, and emotional support systems that help to reduce school avoidance (Bandura, 1997; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Furthermore, feelings of connectedness at school may fulfill developmental needs for social attachment and relatedness with others, conceivably increasing motivation to be in school (Lohmeier & Lee, 2011; Osterman, 2000). Different elements of school climate could also provide important social and emotional safeguards that support regular attendance during periods when students are at risk for higher absence (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; Rocque et al., 2017; Williams & Richman, 2007).

PF Elementary's data (2016-2020) from the Georgia Milestones Assessment System (GMAS) was also reviewed. The GMAS is a norm-referenced state assessment administered to all 4th-8th graders in the state in the content areas of math, reading, science, and social studies. This assessment measures not only proficiency in each area, but student growth as well. This review provided a snapshot of student achievement as well as student progress during this time.

PF Elementary's school climate survey results during the research period were also reviewed and analyzed. The local school district administers this annual survey to school staff in every school. The primary goal of the survey is to gauge staff engagement and overall school climate.The Georgia School Climate Survey is widely used for the improvement of school climate reform, with more than 1,400 (over 64% statewide) providing a productive educational climate framework (Durham, 2021). The Georgia School Climate Survey is recognized as an essential component of school improvement to inform its school improvement process (La Salle et al., 2016).

Qualitative interviews represent "conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended dialogue" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 4). Participants in

qualitative interviews are free to respond as they wish and provide as much detail and background as they are comfortable with. Once participants were confirmed, each participant was asked to sign an Informed Consent (see Appendix A) acknowledging their willingness to participate in the study and providing permission for the researchers to record their conversations. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and were recorded. The interview questions were semi structured and conversational (see Appendix B). The purpose of these interviews was to expound upon teachers' feelings and perceptions related to the school climate and its influence on the school environment. Additionally, the conversations were organized around guided questions that allow for open, honest dialogue and discussion. The areas of interest categorized in the interviews were: (a) challenges faced by urban educators in a high poverty school, (b) feelings related to teaching and the influences of the school environment, and (c) teachers' perceived ideas on how schools can address teacher needs. The conversation was structured by questions developed by me which were based on the review of literature and will mirror the categories embedded in the interview questions. To capture demographic information (ethnicity, age, major, and classification), I asked questions at the start of the interview session for all participants to complete. The demographic and professional information collected for this study were: gender, age, race, and number of years teaching.

Data Analysis

Qualitative case study methodology relies on qualitative data analysis guidelines. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), data analysis is defined as a process that involves "working with data, organizing and breaking into manageable units, synthesizing and searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (p. 145). Several methods of data analysis were used for each data collection set.

Rubin and Rubin (2011) recommended two phases be utilized for interview analysis in an effort to highlight patterns and themes as they related to the predetermined categories/themes. Interview recordings were reviewed and transcripts were created from the recorded Zoom interviews. The researcher then used the audio file to manually clean up the transcription. Transcripts were read several times by me, and were coded into themes and categories that related to the research question. The researcher did not have to conduct follow up interviews. Each transcription contained margin notes of necessary details and potential themes based on interview responses and objectives of responses. This strategy is known as memoing and is one of the most important processes to develop and enrich theory (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022). Memoing is the written record of the researcher's thinking and is an analytical strategy that facilitates the researcher to achieve clear concept and truth from the data (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022).This process allows for development and a better understanding of teachers' responses and their perceptions of school climate. "Making comparisons between data, codes and categories advances your conceptual understanding because you define analytic properties of your categories and then begin to treat these properties to rigorous scrutiny" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 178). Participants verified and offered feedback upon review of the interview transcripts. Participant feedback provided the researcher with an opportunity to review for accuracy and continuity (Patton, 2014).

In an effort to truly understand the holistic perspectives and experiences of school staff, I examined the previously mentioned secondary data points related to school climate. Such documentation provided insightful details that would otherwise be unknown to the researcher (Patton, 2002). Descriptive analysis was used for this process. In qualitative research, descriptive analysis allows researchers to provide another context, a richer picture or enhanced

representation, in which to examine the phenomenon of interest (Wolcott, 1994). These data points were reviewed in a systematic nature to promote consistency of content and interpretation. Each data point was analyzed to determine overarching themes and subthemes. I also identified patterns within each data point. After I reviewed each data point a few times, I recorded notes detailing my reactions and those elements that seemed most appropriate to my research questions. As themes emerged to me, I coded them as I saw fit following the format of open-coding (Merriam, 1998).

Role of Researcher

In a qualitative study, the role of the researcher must be considered. Qualitative research is about interpretation, which means the researcher's interpretation of the findings could have been influenced by personal experience and background (Creswell, 2017). I have been employed in K-12 education for over 25 years, both as a teacher and an administrator, in the areas of gifted education, elementary education as well as elementary and middle school leadership and supervision. Because of this experience, I am familiar with the various factors that influence student achievement such as teacher attitudes and perceptions related to school climate and the impact of poverty on schools.

As a previous employee of the local public school district and a former administrator at PF Elementary School, I have had many interactions with students, parents, and teachers. I believe that these experiences help when collecting data because of the familiarity of the school community and the challenges faced by all stakeholders, while avoiding bias. I no longer work at PF Elementary School and no longer work with any of the participants.

I experienced the initial low parental engagement, the minimal amount of initiatives that addressed making school a place where students and families wanted to be, and the lack of

opportunities for teachers and students to feel heard, supported, and valued. I also had the opportunity to witness the ebbs and flows associated with change of school environment over the years and the challenges that went along with these changes, such as resistant staff, difficult parents, and a demanding school district.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of a study is important to evaluating its worth. Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that findings of any research should meet the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to the truth value (internal validity), applicability (transferability), consistency (dependability), and neutrality (confirmability) are all criteria used in qualitative studies. Credibility refers to the truthfulness, which relates to internal validity which determines whether the findings are reliable as it relates to the study. Transferability refers to showing that the findings are consistent and can be used in other contexts. Dependability is a concept used to refer to consistency and duplication of the research. Confirmability refers to the degree of neutrality in the study with regard to the researcher's bias. Qualitative studies utilize several techniques to ensure that findings meet the previously mentioned criteria. These techniques are explained below.

Credibility

To establish credibility, a variety of measures were utilized throughout the study. Member checking and peer examination were utilized to ensure accuracy and to enhance credibility (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I included all of the participants' perspectives by using verbatim phrases from interviews to illustrate the themes presented in the findings. Results were sent to all participating participants for additional validation.

Triangulation

Triangulation is another way to maintain the trustworthiness of the study because it helps to minimize the threat of researcher bias. Triangulation is a method used to judge the validity and accuracy of data by comparing differing points of view (Creswell, 2014). I constantly compared and contrasted all aforementioned data sources. Thus, the analysis of collected data was triangulated using the theoretical framework, recent literature, and constant comparison to establish credibility of the study.

Confidentiality

Indicative of qualitative studies, ethical issues relating to the protection of the participants is a primary concern (Merriam, 2015). Confidentiality is the process of protecting the identity of participants in research. To ensure confidentiality, each participant chose a pseudonym for the study, and the name of the school was kept confidential using a pseudonym as well. The interview files and the data points collected were kept in a locked cabinet, and the pseudonym key was stored separately in a different locked cabinet in order to protect the privacy of the participants.

Transferability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability relies on providing a description of the content and context of the inquiry that is detailed enough to make a judgment about transferability. To ensure transferability, background demographic data was collected from each participant and demographics for the school as well.

Dependability

Dependability shows that the findings are consistent and could be repeated. To ensure dependability, triangulation of the interviews, artifacts, and supplemental documents provided corroborating evidence for this study. Dependability requires consistency of the research process and outcome (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability

The research's study and conclusions drawn from the data can always be shaped by the researcher's personal experiences. As Malterud (2001) pointed out, "A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions" (p. 483-484). As a principal of an urban school, I inherently brought some personal assumptions about challenges that teachers face and the influences that exist related to teacher perceptions of school climate.

Chapter Summary

The case study design was used to examine teachers' perceptions of the influence of school climate on an urban school located in a large city in Georgia over a 5-year period. Data collection techniques included interviews and descriptive analysis of assessment and survey data as well as student behavior and attendance rates, which was used to deepen the researcher's understanding of how participants perceived school climate during their tenure at PF Elementary School. Each point of data collection was analyzed using a variety of methods such as transcript analysis, peer examination, and document review. I compared and contrasted the data of participants, noting any common themes that emerged and analyzed the data for significant

changes for individual participants as well as any common changes that all participants identified.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of school climate on one inner city, high poverty school from 2016-2022. The study examined what school climate related areas were addressed successfully and what areas were in need of further improvement in order to determine what is required for a successful trajectory towards school reform. This study also addressed the multiple influences that exist within the complex system of school.

I elected to gather research qualitatively because the intent was to learn about specific experiences of each participant. The goal was to document the participants' demeanors, emotions, and responses as the interviews proceeded. The development of the semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B) was guided by current literature specific to school climate. This study employed a qualitative design because the goal of the study was to examine teacher perceptions related to school climate and the impact of teacher needs and challenges during the pandemic on the existing school climate. According to Crewswell (2013), we conduct qualitative research because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. Data collection involved interviews with six teachers who were employed at PF Elementary School between 2016-2022. The interviews were held virtually through Zoom and were recorded once the participants gave their permission. Interview transcripts were uploaded into Nvivo which in turn identified common themes and patterns. Data collection also included reviewing the following data points: Georgia Milestones Scores, School Climate Survey results, student attendance and behavior rates, and the school's twitter page.

The research questions that guided this study were: How do teachers at PF Elementary School describe their school climate from 2016-2022? What changes in school climate at PF

Elementary School have occurred since the Covid-19 pandemic? This chapter is divided into three major sections: general description of the participants, an overview of the findings, and the descriptive analysis of secondary data points.

Description of Participants

Six teachers were interviewed for this study. All of the participants worked at PF Elementary School and had the same principal at their school from 2016-2022. The demographics of the interview participants are provided in Table 1. Participants selected a pseudonym prior to the beginning of the interview. All of the participants remain on the staff at PF Elementary School at the time of data collection.

Table 1

Participate Demographics

Participant	Race	Gender	Total Years in Education
Mary	African-American	Female	23
Tina	African-American	Female	12
DW	African-American	Female	25
Jack	African-American	Male	16
Pat	White	Male	21
Flu	African-American	Female	9

Findings

The following section of this chapter provides the findings from the interviews. After all the interviews had been transcribed, I read each transcript multiple times; as each transcript was read, I recorded my thoughts on the margins of each page. Transcripts were then uploaded into Nvivo and I ran an autocode theme query which resulted in a list of themes across all the uploaded interview transcripts. I created a spreadsheet that organized the identified commonalities from both my margin notes and the Nvivo query results. I then identified words and concepts that were mentioned numerous times throughout the transcripts. Additionally, I ran a word frequency query in Nvivo. I noted that within each theme, there were several subthemes. The organization of the data into themes and subthemes made the information much easier for me to read and identify many common threads between all six participants. The major commonalities or themes were identified as: (a) community & collaboration; (b) student-centered environment; (c) increased accountability; and (d) post-covid priority shift. Table 2 shows the themes and sub-themes that were identified.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme 1	Subtheme 2
Community & Collaboration	Sense of belonging	Teacher efficacy
Student-Centered Environment	Whole child focus	Parent engagement

Increased Accountability	Strong vision	Teacher frustration
Priority Shift	Sense of urgency	Feelings of isolation

Theme 1: Culture of Community & Collaboration

The first theme to emerge was what I designated as culture of community and collaboration, which I defined as an environment where teachers feel a sense of belonging and school pride and motivation that fosters a positive and productive work setting. Participants were asked to reflect on the school climate between the years of 2016 to 2022. Staff relationships and a sense of community was the first topic participants spoke about. Participants noted the palpability of the transformation that began in 2016. Mary reflected,

> One thing I definitely remember is people started to speak in the morning and all adults hugging children when they came in. That's something that wasn't happening before, like it would just be a normal hello. But it was more like people had a lot more energy in the morning. It was exciting to be there.

All participants shared that there was a noticeable difference in how the school environment felt as the years progressed. Both Mary and Tina explained that the school environment transitioned from being primarily adult-centered to a more collaborative, student-centered one. Tina stated, “I felt like I was a part of the changes that were happening, and that I was a key player in those changes, and I felt like those people that were invested in that as well.” This theme contained two sub-themes: sense of belonging and teacher self-efficacy.

Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging, which I defined as the feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a certain group, was the most frequently-cited sub theme within the culture of community and collaboration theme. Opportunities to bond as a staff was mentioned by all of the participants. DW stated, "You know no one person is strong by themselves, you know it takes the whole group, takes the whole team. And I just saw it as actually a building block." Tina shared how teachers across multiple grade levels felt like a team and no longer felt a sense of isolation on an island by themselves. Tina explained how the majority of the staff felt like they were a collective unit working towards a common goal. Tina shared, "We became like a team. I didn't feel like I was on an island by myself. We felt like we were a part of something." Flu recalled initially sitting with her grade level during meetings and then how a shift happened where staff had to get up and participate in different team building activities, which forced them to get to know others beyond the current grade level in which they taught. According to Tina, this shift in the meeting format allowed for the opportunity to collaborate with some people who didn't have an idea of what roles others played within the school. They then felt more comfortable seeking support when they had situations or things they wanted to discuss. As a result, the staff became more like a family where they looked to elevate and motivate each other, and make each other feel good.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

For the purpose of this research, teacher self-efficacy was defined as teachers' beliefs in their ability to effectively handle the tasks, obligations, and challenges related to their

professional activity, and plays a key role in influencing important academic outcomes and well-being in the working environment. This sense of success was dependent on the teachers' perception of how students were progressing and improving. Mary shared how teachers' sense of success grew with increased student success.

> Being successful was a direct result of however their kids were performing. Whether it was their social or emotional improvement or in terms of their behavior or their academics. So I think all that stuff just tied in as the kids began to grow and do better, so that the teachers felt more confident they could see growth in students.

Furthermore, teachers' belief in their ability was aligned with how they perceived student improvement in areas beyond academic performance.

Teachers' willingness to be supported was also a common thread. Jack discussed how the culture was one that everyone learned from one another. He stated,

> It was like everyday is a new day to learn something, you know. I'm learning as well as teaching and helping others, and so that felt like freedom. You could communicate, be creative, or just be open. There was nothing punitive but a chance to grow and be vulnerable.

The principal was also mentioned as playing a key role in teachers being willing to be coached and supported. Mary stated,

> Our principal had a very open door policy. Before I think I was kind of closed off. You don't have conversations unless something is wrong. The level of support I was receiving as a teacher over years began to change.I began to receive more personalized support. I feel like that's what I wanted as well as probably what I needed.

Jack talked about how PF Elementary School had the type of environment where people felt like

they could come and talk to the leader to work through issues or problems and to help them with things that they didn't understand. Jack went on to explain,

> "She was very intentional and direct. And I would say unrelenting. But everyone knew they could come to her office any time and share a concern or pitch an idea. She was always excited to hear about anything that could make a difference for the kids.It made us feel like anything was possible."

It was a common theme among participants that the school leader greatly impacted how teachers felt about the work.

Participants made it clear that the increase in teacher self-efficacy was a process that began with teacher buy-in and the opportunity for teacher growth. Jack stated, " It didn't happen overnight at all. To me, it was a process and we were very intentional about it, and innovative and inclusive of every child. And so with that vision, yeah, the school climate definitely changed and transformed." Both Mary and Pat shared their appreciation for having leadership opportunities. Pat reflected on being nominated as a district ambassador and how empowering it was to have a school that was invested in growing him not just as a teacher, but as a leader as well. Their job performance was positively affected because they felt they were able to make a greater impact in different areas because of that investment. Mary stated,

> I think it makes you want to work harder when you believe in the mission, and you feel like your leader believes in you. So oftentimes I would be there after hours completing things and just getting ready for the next day. So it affected my work ethic for sure. And then, when I was in the classroom, it made me super intentional about what I was doing.

Participant responses indicated that instructional leadership, in terms of developing a positive learning climate, directly and positively affected teacher efficacy. Additionally, leadership

practices that defined the school's mission, managed the instructional program, and developed a positive school learning climate, positively affected teachers' sense of success and willingness to learn and collaborate.

Theme 2: Student-Centered Environment

The second theme that emerged was student-centered environment, which I defined as a space where student voices were connected with adult allies (e.g., teachers, families, and communities) toward the goal of improving student life, student achievement, school culture, student communities, and students' overall development. A common thread throughout this theme was the impact of the deliberate focus on students' needs. Participants shared consistently that this focus had a direct impact on student behavior and student attitude towards learning. Children were more enthusiastic in class and were not exhibiting as much off task behavior in class because they wanted to be there. The use of positive reinforcements was mentioned multiple times. Students were aware of the rewards and incentives for engaging and doing the right things. The culture supported the idea of every day being a new day. Students learned that even if they acted out this day, they knew that they could come back tomorrow and have an opportunity to start anew. The principal gave a mini etch-a-sketch toy to each teacher to use as a reminder to extend grace to students by not allowing past mistakes or bad choices to affect future treatment or opportunities. Tina shared,

> Some students knew that they got in trouble all the time and they continued to get in trouble because they knew teachers were going to assume they did it anyway even if they didn't. And then we kind of had a way where every day was a new day for some kids. Sometimes every couple of hours you had to start over because they might not make it that long. So I think the behavior started changing because they knew that there was

> always going to be another chance and that you would be celebrated for even something that may seem small that you did better than you had been doing in the past.

Participants agreed that this strategy was a pivotal point in creating a positive school climate for students. Mary stated,

> It's something that people in education hear all the time. If the kids like you and know that you care, they're going to perform better. So I think that definitely had something to do with it because this was the place the kids wanted to come.

This theme consisted of two sub-themes: intentional focus on the whole child and parent engagement.

Intentional Focus on the Whole Child

Intentional focus on the whole child refers to an understanding that students' education and life outcomes are dependent upon their access to safe and welcoming learning environments and rich learning experiences in and out of school. I noted the frequent mention by all participants of addressing the multifaceted needs of every student by the entire staff. DW discussed how the staff supported students with distinguishing between school and home behavior. This included the way they handled conflict and taking ownership of their environment. Pat pointed out how there was an expectation that the school remain clean and that every student was expected to pick up after themselves. “It was about teaching kids that there's your home life, how you manage and deal with everything at home, which isn't wrong, but it's different from what we do at school and what we expect at school.” Another participant reminisced about the mentoring opportunities including the male student initiative that encouraged male students to dress up on certain days, practice introducing themselves, and

sparking a conversation with others. Tina added, “It was touching because when they go out to the community or go back home, people expect them to act differently, but they knew at PF Elementary School, we held them to a higher standard. It truly transformed them.” The result of such initiatives was that students wanted to come to school and viewed school as a place where they were understood and celebrated.

Addressing the basic needs of students was an aspect of the school culture participants seemed proud of. Staff was keenly aware that many students arrived at school hungry and in need of clean clothing and that it was paramount to meet those needs before learning could begin. Tina recalled a time when someone visited to style the hair of the female students and how this caused a whole different smile on their faces. “Those things are so important, so important to a child, to know that someone really cares about them. It eliminates a lot of the aggression and the fighting.” In addition, the staff realized the frequency of family conflicts that were a reality for many students and understood how that impacted how students showed up at school. Participants proudly shared how PF Elementary School provided supplies, washed clothes, identified emotional support needs, and shared resources to families in crisis. Resources were identified and basic assistance was provided by all stakeholders. Pat shared,

> This focus shifted the culture in a positive way because they saw the children as one of their own. Nothing was too small or too great. Nothing was too much for them. So I think that was a shift with the culture. And those teachers stayed and they were there and invested in the children and understood the situation. There was true empathy.

The sentiment was that this type of grassroots support caused some, especially new staff, to develop a new awareness of the way students lived. And as this awareness increased, teacher attitudes and perceptions began to change as well. The gravity of school impact became

increasingly evident.

Parent Engagement

The second sub-theme expressed in the theme of student-centered environment was parent engagement which refers to the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities. The question related to the influences on school climate elicited several participant responses with the words voice and non-judgement appearing most frequently. Tina cited that when parents realized that their parental choices and personal decisions would not be called into question, they began to engage with the school more frequently. Mary mentioned that many of the parents were reluctant to show up because of past personal experiences related to school and how PF Elementary School developed an expectation of creating a trusting, collaborative relationship with all families.

> We had more parents that were concerned and willing to help, who were willing to come in and participate and be that extra support needed inside the school. There was a clear transformation from people saying ‘I don't have time’ to “Yeah, I'm in it. I'm willing to do it.” It became clear that parents wanted to be a part of our success.

Parents not only began to attend school events, but increasingly became more engaged in the fabric of the school community as well as being invested in the school-based decision making process.

Theme 3: Increased Accountability

From the interviews, the third theme of increased accountability resonated. I defined increased accountability as an assurance that an individual or organization is evaluated on its

performance or behavior related to something for which it is responsible. The principal being the driving force for the school vision and the feelings of frustration that some staff experienced was shared numerous times. While some participants expressed the need for more accountability, which included more administrative presence in classrooms, other participants shared that teacher attrition was an unwelcome result of increased pressure to perform at an optimal level. Two areas of Increased Accountability that were frequently recalled were the sub-themes of strong vision and teacher frustration.

Strong Vision

The sub-theme of strong vision refers to a clear, distinctive, and specific view of the future, and was usually connected with strategic organizational advances. All participants shared the viewpoint that the principal played an integral role in developing the vision for the school. The follow up questions pertaining to increased accountability elicited responses from participants that included frequent mention of unrelenting leader expectations, increased observations and feedback, focus on student data, and consistency of practice. While the principal was described as very direct and somewhat intense, all participants agreed that the principal's ability to communicate "the why" to staff as well as her willingness to to work alongside staff played a major part in creating teacher buy-in despite the increased perception of accountability. Jack shared, "She was there in the trenches with us. But each person on the team brought something special to it. You knew whether this person was compassionate, or this person was the organized one." In addition, Mary stated, "The culture was one that you knew people were going to be watching. Not watching to be punitive, but watching to support, to see how they could help. How they could make your practice better." Participants appreciated the freedom,

flexibility, and expectation to be innovative, yet admitted that not every teacher understood or wanted that level of support and feedback.

Teacher Frustration

Teacher frustration refers to teachers' emotions that arise from the perception of thwarted goals from a number of sources related to factors outside the classroom. Participants shared that the process of creating a positive school climate was sometimes met with negative teacher attitudes and frustration. Jack reflected,

> It was tough for some teachers, especially in those early days. Some days were tougher than others. You might be dealing with the student and you have to talk yourself down because of what you know they have experienced. But, in real time, it could be very, very challenging to equip yourself mentally with those things coming in. So I think it was heavy at times for many.

Both DW and Tina shared that there was a perception of some teachers that the principal expected too much too fast and that all teaching and learning had to conform to the principal's way. Tina stated:

> Some teachers believed that they had to be a certain way in order to get the approval of the principal. I think that was frustrating to people. I don't think people were also used to being held accountable for a lot of things, because that piece was missing. So as the accountability factor increased, the amount of work that we were actually doing definitely went up as well. So the frustration existed for sure.

Perceived pressure from the principal was not the only cause of teacher frustration during this time. The non-academic needs of students in this high poverty school were high and some staff

believed it unfair to expect them to address those needs. Others did not believe the mitigating strategies used at PF Elementary School would make a difference. Jack stated,

> It's disheartening to see how a lot of our kids were living and things like that. So I think that part probably added to the frustration of some teachers who didn't know how far that help was really going, or if it was really making a difference.

Flu shared that because student need was so high, there wasn't much room for not giving your best each day and that some teachers resented the heavy workload and required energy. DW commented,

> I remember teachers being frustrated. I remember people just not wanting to commit to the amount of work, the time, the effort, and the energy that it took to prepare for as well as teach the type of children that we have here.

This frustration resulted in over 50% of the teaching staff leaving over the course of the first two years. Pat reflected, "The pressure felt unrelenting to some, and that aspect of it is where a lot of the uneasiness came from for some of the people that left. They didn't understand it. They didn't understand the why." After the first two years, teacher retention began to improve. Although no participants directly discussed teacher retention, they did share some of the strategies implemented over time that were used to hire teachers with philosophies that were more aligned with the school's vision. The principal, along with the leadership team, revised the teacher interview process to include more scenario-based questions and an opportunity to teach a lesson with actual students. Those that remained were committed to the vision of the school and those that were newly hired were clear on expectations. By the fourth year, teacher turnover was closer to 10%.

Theme 4: Priority Shift

The fourth theme was priority shift. For the sake of this study, I defined priority shift as the movement of what is most important to an individual due to circumstances or seemingly random decisions made by others. There was a noticeable demeanor change when I posed the question related to the effects of the pandemic on the school. This question elicited responses that lacked optimism and enthusiasm. For example, Jack's demeanor immediately changed. He took longer to answer the question and appeared more pensive. There was a common agreement among participants that there was a marked difference with teachers, students, and school climate after the pandemic. This theme contained two subthemes: sense of urgency and feelings of isolation.

Sense of Urgency

Sense of urgency refers to always seeing things as urgent and wanting to take care of them as quickly as possible. Mary and Flu mentioned the decrease in teacher commitment as evidenced by the unwillingness to give time outside regular working hours and the decreased buy-in to the sense of purpose that once permeated the school environment. Teachers seemed less interested in the additional needs of students. Mary lamented, "I think people felt less of a sense of urgency about the work in general. In other words, maybe they were feeling like if something happened to me today, all this stuff will still go on." There was also a demand for work-life balance and a hyper focus on self-care. DW remarked, "Teachers wanted to spend more time with their family and less time being here. There was a definite shift. There was a shift of your focus, your priority, and the things that were important to you." Flu reiterated the change in staff attitude.

> It was like people realized that life is maybe bigger than this job. And so with that people started trying to find that balance at home. People were pretty clear about what they were willing to do after hours, and what they were going to do and not going to do.

Participants also shared how the shift in teachers' sense of urgency impacted students. Tina noted, "Teachers were not as passionate. So then the student leaves the classroom feeling defeated because he can't read. He thinks I must be dumb so I'm going to go around and act up and maybe cause a fight." It was evident that the covid-19 pandemic negatively impacted teachers' social, emotional, and mental well-being, which in turn impacted student behavior and academic achievement.

Feelings of Isolation

For the sake of the study, I defined feelings of isolation as the sense of being alone or separated from others, either socially or emotionally. Participants described the loss of teacher collaboration as well as a loss of sense of community as a result of the pandemic. Mary spoke openly about how the pandemic had a greater effect on education than anyone will be able to quantify. Jack expressed feelings of being disconnected and how those feelings have negatively affected the school's sense of community. Jack stated, "I'm a hugger. The children in our population crave human touch. With the pandemic, everyone felt so disconnected and there was no real way to connect without being unsafe. It was really difficult." Tina reflected on the challenges of virtual learning,

> I think it was very easy to feel alone or isolated, maybe not necessarily alone, but isolated from all the great things that we were doing at [PF Elementary School] and the activities that were always something going on. It was like there was nothing going on besides class, which made it hard to stay connected and motivated.

There was a general consensus among participants that these effects of the covid-19 pandemic were far reaching and that it would take a considerable time for the school to reestablish the school climate. Overall, participant interviews yielded results that were aligned with the notion that teachers value and thrive in a student-centered environment that has a sense of community and belonging and increased accountability. Additionally, the interview results highlight the significant impact of the covid-19 pandemic on teachers and the school as a whole.

Secondary Data Points

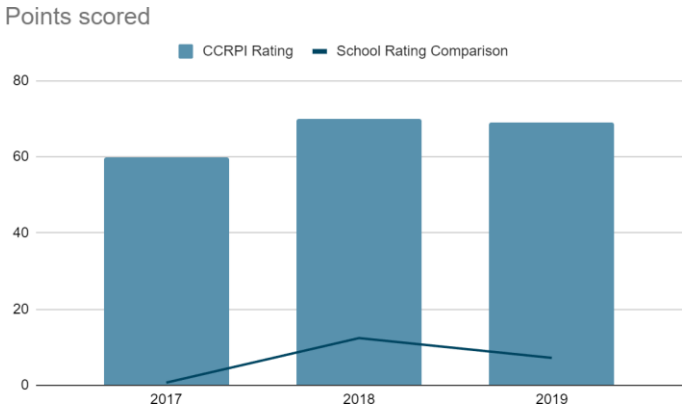
The following section provides findings from the descriptive analysis of secondary data points. These data points consisted of: Georgia Milestone (GMAS) scores, school climate survey results, student absenteeism rates, and the school's Twitter site.

Georgia Milestones Assessment System Results

The College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) is Georgia's tool to annually measure how well its schools, districts, and the state are helping students achieve their goals. This index, which ranges from 0-100, includes four main components: Achievement, Progress, Achievement Gap, and Challenge Points. PF Elementary School earned a rating of 60.4 for the 2016-2017 academic year. This rating increased to 70.5 for the following year, and then decreased slightly to 69.5 for the 2018-2019 academic year. In addition, PF Elementary School scored 0.7 points higher than similar schools in 2017 (according to the state of Georgia), increased to 12.4 points higher in 2018, and then decreased to 7.2 higher in 2019 (see Table 3).

Table 3

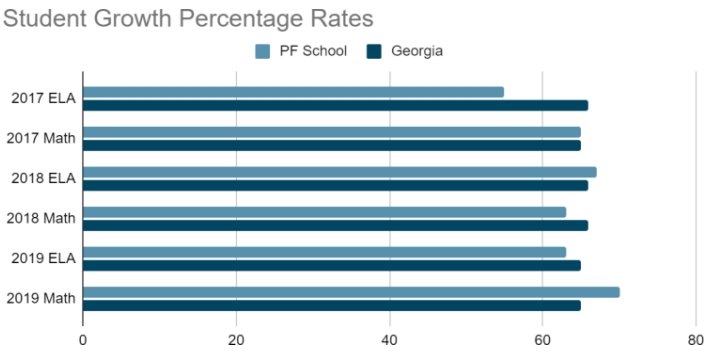
CCRPI School Rating and Comparison



Although performing below the state and city in GMAS Proficiency, PF Elementary School showed a steady increase from 2017-2019 and then showed a sharp decrease in both Reading and Math in 2022. The state of Georgia also measures student growth in both Reading and Math. In 2017, 65% of PF Elementary School students demonstrated typical to high growth in Math and 55% in Reading; In 2018, 63% of PF Elementary School students demonstrated typical or high growth in Math and 67% in Reading, and in 2019 70% of PF Elementary School students demonstrated typical or high growth in Math and 63% in Reading (see Table 4).

Table 4

Student Growth



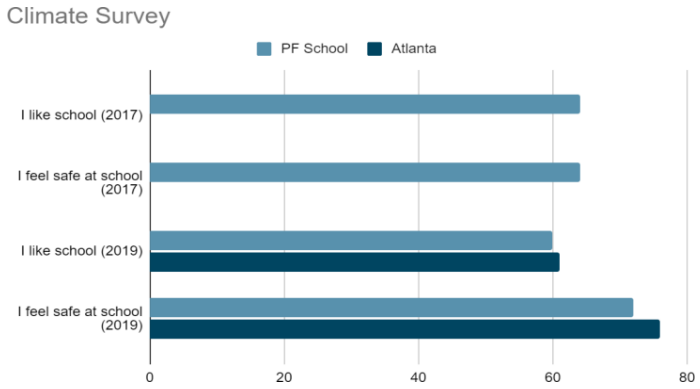
School Climate Results

The School Climate Star Rating is a diagnostic tool to determine if a school is on the right path to school improvement. The School Climate Star Rating is calculated using data from the Georgia Student Health Survey, Georgia School Personnel Survey, Georgia Parent Survey, student discipline data, and attendance records for students, teachers, staff and administrators. Each school receives a 1-5 star rating, with five stars representing an excellent school climate and one star representing a school climate most in need of improvement. In 2016, PF Elementary School earned a one star rating. In 2018, PF Elementary School earned a two star rating. For the next two years, schools in the state of Georgia did not receive climate ratings.

According to the above-mentioned School Climate Survey results, in 2017, 64% of PF Elementary School students responded positively that they felt safe at school. In 2019, that percentage increased to 72% of PF Elementary School students who responded positively that they felt safe at school. The percentage of students who responded positively to I like school decreased from 64% in 2017 to 60% in 2019 (see Table 5).

Table 5

District Climate Survey Results

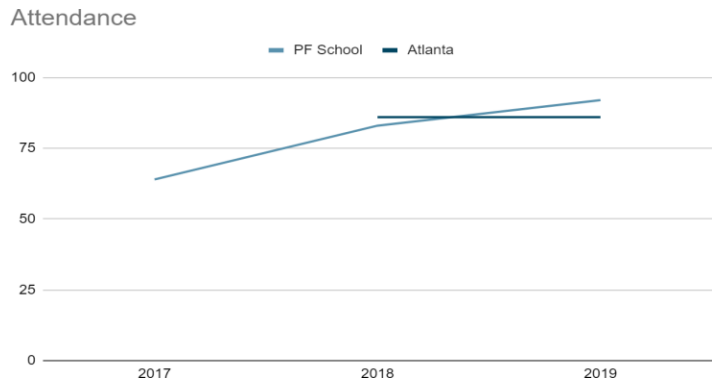


Student Attendance Results

The Student Attendance indicator for Georgia is calculated based on a nationally-utilized metric of student attendance – absent less than 10% of enrolled days. This definition is flexible enough to account for varying school calendars and provides a better representation of chronic absenteeism, which can signal a lack of student engagement, school climate issues, and a lack of preparation for college and career. The percentage of students at PF Elementary School who missed less than six days of school increased steadily from 64% in 2017, 83% in 2018, and 92% in 2019 (see Table 6).

Table 6

Student Attendance Indicator Results



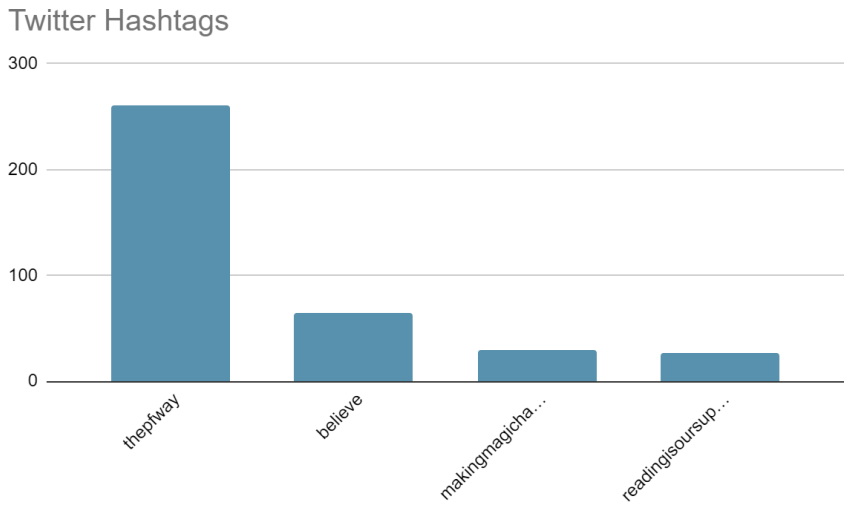
School Twitter Feed

Sources of qualitative data such as social media sites naturally allow researchers to unpack deep meaning within a select group of people, probe for underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions, and obtain more nuanced or novel information than that derived from other methods such as close-ended survey questions (Dudwick et al., 2006). The school in the study is apart of a district that promoted the use of Twitter in order to highlight the great things that were

happening with teachers and students. I reviewed PF Elementary School's Twitter timeline, activity log, and user-generated posts, photos and videos from 2016-2022. I used content analysis to identify key themes. The researcher used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, to determine the most used hashtags and most frequently used words. With more than 250 references, "thePFSchoolway" was the most frequently used hashtag. The second hashtag "believe" had 70 references. The third and fourth hashtags most frequently used were "makingmagichappen" and "readingisoursuperpower"(see Table 7).

Table 7

Number of References by Hashtag

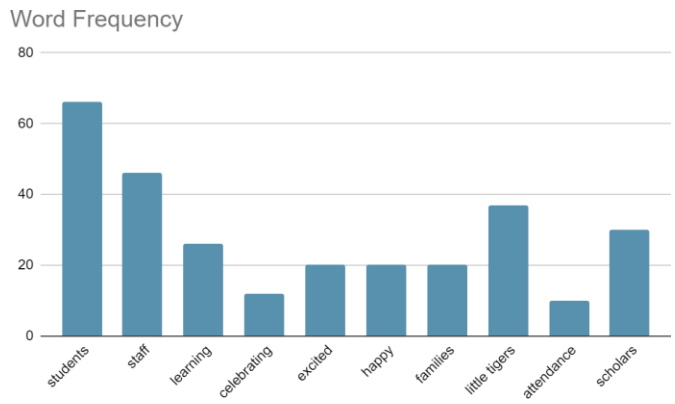


According to the NVivo word frequency query, the words "students" and "teachers" were most frequently mentioned on PF School's Twitter feed between the years 2016-2022. The query also identified sub categories under these two words. Under the word "students," the following terms were used most frequently: student holiday, 1st grade students, pre k students, prepared students, tiny house students, 5th grade students, and upper grade students. Under the word

"teachers," the following terms were used most frequently: 2nd grade teacher, working teachers, art teacher, amazing teachers, special teachers, mathematics teachers, and kindergarten teachers.

Table 8

Percentage of Frequently Used Words

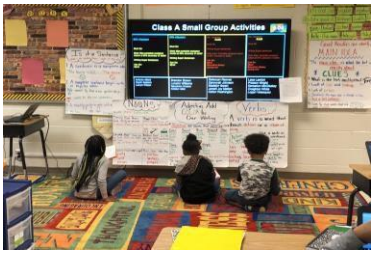


I also conducted a manual review of over 1200 Twitter pictures on the PF School Twitter Feed. As the review progressed, I began to identify recurring themes or topics depicted in the pictures and then began to organize the pictures into those categories. The following themes were identified based on that review: teacher appreciation, teacher collaboration, staff engagement, student engagement, family engagement, and teaching & learning. I then categorized photos into larger groups with similar content and then selected those that truly encapsulated the meaning of that category. Photos that illuminated a particular theme were designated as exemplary (see Table 10). All exemplary photos represent positive interactions between students, teachers, or families.

Table 10

Twitter Exemplary Photos

Theme	Exemplary Photos
Teacher Appreciation	 
Teacher Collaboration	 
Staff Engagement	 
Student Engagement	 
Family Engagement	 

Teaching & Learning	 

Response to Research Questions

This study had two research questions. I gathered data by interviewing six teachers who worked at PF Elementary School from 2016-2022 with a semi-structured interview protocol consisting of eight open-ended questions. This study also included a review of state standardized assessment results, climate survey results, student behavior rates, and the school's twitter page. The research questions that guided this study were: *How do teachers at PF Elementary School describe their school climate from 2016-2022? What changes in school climate at PF Elementary School have occurred since the Covid-19 pandemic?* The participants provided examples of multiple experiences with the staff, students, and families that contributed to a positive school climate. The relationships cultivated between colleagues and between students and staff were portrayed positively, as there was a consistent undertone of pride and respect among all participants. Additionally, the most frequently used Twitter hashtags and words as well as the Twitter photo review underlie a positive tone and focus on positive incentives and acknowledgments.

Four major themes with eight sub-themes emerged from the data to support participants' perceptions that PF Elementary School did an effective job in creating a positive school climate. The four themes were as follows:

- There was a strong sense of collaboration and community among the staff that was encouraged by team building activities and a collective effort to learn and support each other. All participants mentioned appreciation for the opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and how the sense of community permeated the entire school culture.
- The student-centered environment ensured that students felt valued and respected and that their basic needs were met, which resulted in improved attendance and behavior. The majority of twitter posts were related to students and student relationships. Additionally, the exemplar pictures depicted activities and events that promoted positive incentives and behavior celebrations. Attendance data supports the idea that the student-centered environment created a place students wanted to be. The percentage of students who missed less than six days of school increased steadily from 64% in 2017 to 92% in 2019.
- The principal played an integral role in increasing accountability, which resulted in effective, data-informed instruction. The principal's focus on being consistently intentional caused frustration for some teachers. Several of the participants shared that some teachers were frustrated by the high expectations related to consistent quality instruction. The achievement data supports the perception of participants related to the effectiveness of instruction. The CCRPI score for PF Elementary School increased by 10 points in one year.
- Teachers' priorities shifted after the pandemic which resulted in feelings of isolation and a lessened sense of urgency. Participants recounted how difficult it was to establish and maintain connections while teaching virtually.

Participants all shared similar concepts when describing the school climate at PF Elementary School including an environment that developed a growth mindset among teachers by building a sense of collaboration as well as a focus on the whole child. Participants also were aligned with agreeing that the principal played an integral role in creating such an environment. Furthermore, it was evident throughout the interviews that participants perceived the school environment and individual teachers as being negatively impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the characteristics and impact of school climate, as perceived by the participants, and identified if and how the pandemic affected the school climate. The six PF Elementary School teachers who participated in the study identified several common threads that contributed to the positive school climate. Findings indicated that, according to the participants, a positive school climate was established and sustained from 2016 until the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020; that the social emotional needs of students in this high poverty area affected the school climate; that students responded positively to the school's focus on the whole child; that increased accountability improved instruction, but frustrated some teachers; and the school climate was negatively affected by the pandemic. In addition, the improved student achievement and behavior data as well as the school's robust Twitter content support the interview findings that PF Elementary School's school climate had a positive influence on both teachers and students.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

With state and federal public school mandates continuing to increase, schools across the country are finding various means to address the social issues that often exist in high poverty schools. In the past 10 years, the U.S. Department of Education has invested approximately $70 million in districts and state education agencies explicitly for school climate measurement and improvement in secondary schools (Voight, 2016). School climate is one of those social issues. Although all schools face challenges, inner city schools struggle with the components that traditionally comprise school climate, including teacher retention, student engagement, chronic absenteeism, behavioral issues, and poor leadership (Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

This study sought to inform the challenge of developing a positive school climate at high poverty schools. Previous research has analyzed the many definitions of school climate and the reasons why it's critical for schools, especially those in high poverty areas (e.g, school climate as an umbrella term to describe perceptions of acceptance, support, and safety in the school environment; Cohen et al., 2009), descriptions related to the health, spirit, or personality of a school (Richard et al., 2012) or a virtual grab-bag of characteristics, such as teacher assignment patterns and leadership structure, school maintenance and appearance, overarching customs and values, academic emphasis, and fairness and clarity of rules (Lee & Shute, 2010). Past studies have also outlined theories geared towards addressing the complexities of a positive school climate, but there is limited research related to the actual execution of such theories in current schools (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Cohen et al. (2009) argued that even though there is an

abundance of research to improve schools, there is a gap that exists between policy and practice. Therefore, this case study used qualitative methods to examine the influence of teachers' perceptions of school climate on one inner city, high poverty school from 2016-2022. This study also explored the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the newly established school climate.

Findings from this study can provide a roadmap for school and district leaders to begin to address climate concerns in schools. The results of this study suggest that teachers' perceptions impact school climate and that there are a myriad of challenges in schools that can influence these perceptions. The results of this study also show that a positive school climate can improve student achievement as well as teachers' sense of success. This chapter provides a summary and discussion of the findings and how they relate to existing literature, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Research Question 1

The primary research question sought to determine teachers' perception of school climate at PF Elementary School between 2016-2022. Participants agreed that there was a sense of community and collaboration between staff. They also discussed the influence of the social and emotional needs of the students and how the increased accountability of teacher performance ensured the consistency of quality instruction yet caused frustration for some teachers. In addition, all participants agreed that the principal played a pivotal role in establishing the school climate. Teacher self-efficacy was also a common thread when discussing the positive school climate. Additionally, the increase in student achievement scores and student attendance rates support the notion that students perform better when teachers are confident in their craft and are more likely to want to come to school when the adults have made it a place that is warm and inviting. Furthermore, there was a consistent improvement of test scores, which aligned with

participants' perception that the increased accountability of teacher performance positively impacted instruction. Although there was an increase in the percentage of students from 2017 to 2019 who indicated on the district's school climate survey that they felt safe at school, there was a slight decrease during this same time period in the percentage of students that indicated that they liked school. PF Elementary, like many other high poverty schools, is plagued by high student transient rates which could potentially impact how students feel about school or increases the possibility that some of the students completing the survey had not been enrolled at PF Elementary for a sufficient amount of time. Schafft (2009) asserted that poverty-related mobility may only deepen the social and economic instability that precipitates the movement in the first place and that children may be particularly affected because of disrupted social and academic environments.

Research Question 2

The secondary research question explored the impact of the pandemic on the school climate. There was a consensus among all participants that the school climate was negatively impacted by the pandemic, specifically the extended school shutdown. Participants reflected on the feelings of isolation during this time. They also discussed how the "above and beyond" attitude that most of the staff had changed post pandemic as work-life balance and self-care became more of a focus. There was a marked decrease in the student-centered activities, teacher engagement initiatives, and collaborative sessions documented on the school's Twitter page beginning in 2020. The majority of the Twitter content focused on operational related announcements and reminders, such as laptop distribution and registration information. Because the state was aware of the significant impact the covid-19 pandemic had on schools, testing data and CCRPI scores were not calculated for schools in 2020-2022.

Discussion of the Findings

The school climate of PF Elementary School began to change in 2016. Before that time, teachers operated more independently and the focus on meeting the multifaceted needs of the students did not exist. Collaboration among staff was not the expectation. Additionally, there was not a focus on data or intentional teaching practices. Because of low student achievement scores, PF Elementary School was identified as a turnaround school that required support from state officials. In 2016, a new principal was hired. In one year, the school climate began to change from teachers working independently with no common vision to a community of collaboration and community that focused on whole child development and intentional instructional practices. In addition to the environment changing, the school's achievement data also began to shift. The school's CCRPI score increased by 10 points in the first year. The percentage of students exhibiting typical or significant growth in Reading increased by 8% between 2017-2019 and 5% in Math. Within those years, the percentage of students who missed less than six days increased from 64% to 92%. The school's Twitter posts highlighted the many initiatives and incentives that focused on both student and teacher engagement. Research supports the notion that transformational leaders can make a significant impact on both school climate and student achievement (Allen et. al., 2015). This research evidence links principal behavior to positive outcomes for students and schools—and they include but go beyond engagement with instruction (Grissomet al., 2021). All participants agreed that the newly appointed principal was one major key change in shaping a positive school climate.

One hundred percent of PF Elementary School's student body qualified for free and/or reduced lunch. The current study found that student needs were vast and were often made more

complicated by family dynamics and neighborhood realities. Prior research supports the notion that the needs of students in high poverty areas are high and complex. According to Evans et al. (2011), poor children are exposed to risks, and this exposure leads to stress that can hinder a child's academic performance by compromising their ability to develop the kinds of skills necessary to perform well in school. These risks can include high mobility and constant moving which may cause feelings of disconnectedness and gaps in learning parts of the curriculum. Overcrowding living conditions is also a possible risk factor which may impact how a student functions in the school setting (Evans et al., 2011). Students at PF Elementary School often arrived at school without their basic needs being met. In addition, behavior issues were prevalent. Participants of the study believed that if their students felt valued, acknowledged, and taken care of, they would be less likely to misbehave in class. This belief is supported by previous research studies. For instance, Lester and Cross (2015) found that students' social and emotional well-being is improved through the school climate's relationship with school connectedness and belonging. PF Elementary students were greeted by the staff with a warm welcome upon arrival at school each day. Students were provided with breakfast despite late arrivals and showers and clean clothes were offered when needed. The school-based mentoring program was established to ensure the students who struggled the most were provided with an opportunity to build additional adult relationships. Some teachers resented having to be responsible for student needs beyond the instructional ones. In addition to a focus on the needs of the whole child, there were also intentional school-based strategies implemented that encouraged such complex interactions. These strategies addressed how teachers worked together and had a positive effect on how teachers felt about their ability to perform their job.

Teachers' sense of success was associated with the newly established collaborative community. The format of staff meetings and planning periods was redesigned so that both leadership and teachers learned and worked together. Research reinforces the idea that increased collaboration positively influences the school environment. For instance, Meristo and Eisenschmidt (2014) asserted that schools must foster a community where teachers can share ideas and feel comfortable sharing experiences that positively influence the atmosphere. These researchers add that when these relationships exist, they impact student achievement and performance, as teachers feel supported and mutually respected. The focus on instruction and data analysis translated into improved student achievement and student attendance performance. According to research (e.g., Meristo & Eisenschmidt, 2014), data-driven education is an important part of a productive and supportive school culture and that by focusing effort on student understanding, data-driven education supports a problem-solving mindset of continuous improvement. This also aided in the increase in teacher self-efficacy. Studies have shown that teacher collaboration has had a significant positive impact on teachers' professional growth (Egodawatte et al., 2011). Also, research supports that increased teacher collaboration was associated with a higher level of teacher self-efficacy (Yang, 2020).

In addition to increased collaboration, teachers began to receive frequent class visits and support from both administrative and support staff. Because of the focused attention on data and effective instruction, student performance improved. According to Wolters and Daugherty (2007), school environments where teachers have high, attainable goals and that create a serious learning environment tend to have higher teacher self-efficacy. Improvement in student performance caused teachers to feel more confident. Research reinforces the idea that increased

self-efficacy has a positive impact on teacher performance. For instance, Hoy (2003) asserted that if one has a positive perception (i.e., successful mastery), their expectations of teaching will be proficient. As a result, the sense of success began to permeate the PF Elementary School environment.

In addition to becoming more confident in their craft, PF Elementary School's teachers began to appreciate and expect guidance and support from the principal. This study supports previous research that states teacher perceptions of support from their principal directly impact teacher commitment, turnover, and collegiality (Singh & Billingsley, 1998). The principal at PF Elementary School, who communicated a strong vision from the beginning of her tenure in 2016, led the charge of establishing a climate that focused on students, staff, and family engagement and held the entire staff accountable for holding high expectations for themselves and the students. Most teachers appreciated the increased presence and involvement by the principal. Participants in the current study shared that teachers often sought out instructional support from the principal and that the growth mindset of the staff became the norm. Previous research underlies the statements from participants. According to Edgerson (2006), the everyday interactions that principals have with their teachers can affect trust and collegiality and the teachers' ability to influence decisions.

While this increased accountability inspired many on the staff, others became frustrated. Teachers who had been at PF Elementary before 2016 were not accustomed to instructional expectations and a total school commitment towards supporting the whole child. Some resented the newly frequent class observations and having to attend weekly data meetings. Teacher turnover was high the first two years of the principal's tenure. This occurrence supports past

research related to teacher turnover. According to Garcia and Weiss (2019), schools are having difficulty filling teacher vacancies and are leaving vacancies unfilled despite actively trying to hire teachers to fill them. This is especially true for high poverty schools that are often characterized as having challenging learning environments and often provide support and resources outside the realm of instruction (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Research also supports what happened during this time at PF Elementary School. DeMatthews et al. (2022) found that teachers in high-poverty schools are 2.7 percentage points more likely to leave their school if there will be a new principal next year and 2.5 percentage points more likely to leave if there is currently a new principal hired. After the second year, the teacher attrition rate stabilized and there was a marked improvement in the school climate and teacher attitude. Past research has pointed out that principal turnover can be beneficial or harmful depending on many circumstances (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). In addition, Miller (2013) found that a school's test scores tend to fall in the years preceding a principal departure, but achievement returns to prior levels as the new principal gains tenure.

By 2019, however, PF Elementary School had a steady teaching staff and was experiencing both academic and behavior improvements. The principal and teachers were looking forward to completing the school year on a high and celebrating the culmination of all their hard work. In March 2020, there was a Covid-19 outbreak and PF Elementary School and many other schools across the country were forced to shut down. Teachers were forced to teach virtually, which included being required to learn and master technology tools in a short period of time. The strong relationships between PF Elementary School teachers and students began to suffer as everyone was confined to their homes. Despite the school’s innovative attempts to

maintain both instructional and collaborative expectations, students and teachers became increasingly more disengaged. The limited research surrounding the impact of the pandemic on schools support the participants' observances. In fact, Kraft et al. (2020) found that 53% of teachers reported a decline in their sense of success during the pandemic. Once students and staff returned to in-person school, there was a noticeable difference in the school's climate. Participants shared that there was an overall sense of isolation and disengagement and that teachers were less willing to take the additional steps needed to ensure students were prepared for learning. Teachers were no longer willing to spend extended hours at school and were less inspired by the school vision that once sustained their sense of success and purpose.

Connection to Theoretical Framework

The results of this study are in alignment with the Systems View of School Climate (SVSC) theoretical framework that details how each level of the system of school contributes to aggravated perceptions of school climate (Rudasill et al., 2018). According to the SVSC, the school is the microsystem in which school climate is created through the combined perceptions of its members (Rudasill et al., 2018). Participants in the study indicated that how they perceived the school climate influenced their sense of success as well as how students viewed school and their ability to succeed. The improvement of student achievement and growth data also underscored this notion. The levels of conflict or cooperation among teachers and students, academic expectations for students, and the sense of collaboration between teachers are all examples of contributing factors to the formation of school climate in the microsystem (Haynes et al., 1997). The school's newly formed sense of community and collaboration was one of the major themes of both the participant interviews and the descriptive analysis of the pictures

displayed on Twitter. The SVSC theoretical approach, which proposes that the school is a complex system with students at the nucleus, supports the school's strategy of addressing the needs of the whole child (Rudasill et al., 2017). Participants shared the multitude of strategies the school staff implemented to address both the basic and social emotional needs of the students. While safety is a noted component of the SVSC framework, participants did not explicitly talk about it during the interviews. It is important to note that the safety component was implied as participants shared school experiences geared towards addressing the many facets of student wellness. The contents of the school's Twitter feed, which highlighted a series of student incentive and engagement initiatives, also supported participants' claims of an intentional focus on whole child development. Additionally, Bronfenbrenner (1989) asserted that microsystems are contexts that are experienced directly by a student and that this microsystem provides, prohibits, encourages, or restricts opportunities for intellectual and social development through progressively more complex interactions in the environment. This assertion supports the school's efforts of creating systems that encourage and promote student and teacher growth and development.

Leadership is somewhat parallel to teaching and instruction in the taxonomy of school climate within the SVSC (Hoy & Hannum, 1997). According to this theoretical framework, leadership influences the development of school climate within the microsystem. In addition, the SVSC framework contends that school leadership is central to managing the equitable distribution of resources and managing relationships with the wider community, serving as a school process and structural characteristic that may inform the development of school climate. Participants shared the vital role the principal played in establishing and effectively

communicating a school vision that inspired and gave the staff a sense of purpose. Participants also communicated how increased accountability instituted by the principal led to consistent improvement in teacher collaboration and student performance. Although not addressed in the SVSC framework, participants did mention that there was teacher frustration caused by the perceived unfairness of this increased accountability. In addition, this frustration may have been shared by some students, which could potentially explain the slight decrease of the percentage of students who stated that they liked school on the district climate survey.

Implications for Practice

The persistent achievement gap between students from poor families and their peers calls for research that examines risk factors associated with poverty and strategies for promoting a positive school climate. Research demonstrates the impact of school climate on behavior and academic achievement, especially in high-poverty schools (Maxwell et al., 2017). Perceptions of school climate moderate the association between poverty and behavior, such that students from poor families who perceive a positive school climate exhibit similar behaviors to their peers from higher income families (Hopson & Lee, 2011). There is also a high correlation between teacher perceptions related to school climate and teacher performance and total school environment (O'Brennan, 2014). This study examined the impact of a positive school climate on one inner city elementary school with the intent to add to the limited body of case study research related to increasing total school improvement at high poverty schools across the country. Results from the study confirmed that a positive school climate resulted in increased teacher self-efficacy, student achievement scores, and student attendance. The findings from this research study can provide direction and further practice opportunities for educators, and state policymakers.

Due to the relationship found between positive school climate and school improvement, these results should be shared with the local school district leaders and the Georgia Department of Education for further review on next steps. These results should also be shared with teacher and educational leader preparation programs at colleges and universities that could potentially benefit from practical strategies included in the study with the preparation of future teachers and administrators. Specific courses should be developed that focus on the value of building a sense of community and collaboration in schools as well as the role of transformational leadership in creating a positive school climate. In addition, a redesign of courses related to student data and achievement to include non-academic school components that influence student academic perform should occur.

Schools, especially high poverty schools, should work towards creating an environment that reflects a sense of community for all stakeholders and a focus on the whole child. Principals must communicate and execute a strong vision that inspires and holds both students and teachers accountable to high expectations. It is also important for districts to provide training for principals to assist them with obtaining the needed knowledge and skills. The vision at PF Elementary School was the core of every decision and program. Teachers knew that every lesson and every interaction with students had to be intentional. The feedback teachers received reinforced the expectation of intentionality, innovation, and inclusion. If a teacher disagreed with an evaluation, they had to refute it using concrete evidence of alignment with the vision for instruction. Students were also aware of the school-wide norms which outlined student behavior expectations. These expectations were reinforced and celebrated in monthly student assemblies.

This study supports the notion that creating a positive school climate encourages teacher retention, teachers' sense of success, teacher collaboration, and student achievement.

Additionally, the school's Twitter page provided a platform to highlight and promote the vision of the school and provided a space for school stakeholders to communicate how the consistently implemented student and teacher focused programs, activities, and initiatives aligned with that vision. According to Faizi et. al. (2013), social media can be an effective engagement and collaborative tool that provides a platform for learners to gather and share information and resources from both internal and external collaboration networks which encourages others to generate their own learning content and take advantage of collective knowledge. Schools should examine their use of social media and consider how that use could promote and spread the positive climate strategies used to improve the total school environment. The information from social media sites, such as Twitter, can potentially be used by schools as a unique form of data collection for assessment purposes.

This study also highlighted the importance of schools having a whole child approach. At PF Elementary School, students' basic and social needs were addressed in addition to educational goals. The Care Closet housed clean clothes, shoes, and toiletries. The school's food pantry provided food to families in need. Resources to parents were provided that assisted them with job and education resources, such as having access to a parent center and community partners that offered job opportunities and career training. Additionally, there was a school-wide social emotional curriculum that was taught daily to students. The staff was also trained on how to use restorative practices to resolve conflict. High poverty schools should investigate strategies that ensure students who live in challenging environments feel welcomed and valued at school.

In order to create such a welcoming environment, there must be a committed teaching staff. The walls of the school were lined with photographs of the students. The brightly painted walls also had positive messages, a wall size world map, and positive affirmations. The principal greeted students at the front door each day and told them they were loved and that they could do anything. Teachers were required to stand at their doors each morning and greet students individually when they entered. A fresh pot of coffee was made for staff each morning as well. PF Elementary School teachers felt empowered and motivated to work together. During Work Together Wednesday and Teamwork Tuesday, teachers participated in vertical planning as well as grade level planning. Expert teachers often led the planning sessions and teachers volunteered to be videotaped so that best practices could be shared with others in the school. Schools must develop a space for teachers to build relationships and collaborate on common goals. It is also important to note that when teachers perceive a positive school climate, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and success which ultimately leads to improved class student performance (Zhao et al., 2023). Schools should take the time to determine how teachers perceive their environment and then implement steps to address any concerns or gaps. It is critical for building leaders to host frequent individual and group forums as well as anonymous surveys which provides an opportunity to share honest feedback for improvement. One of the components of the SVSC framework is the idea that a sense of trust, cooperation, and openness that encourages interactions among teachers is a key characteristic of a positive school climate (Fraser & Walberg, 2005). Therefore, teachers should be invited to be a part of the decision making and their voices should be included and valued on all committees and planning groups.

Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative case study provided insight into teacher experiences and perceptions of school climate at one high poverty school in a large urban school district. It is important to note that this study was limited to the experiences of six classroom teachers and five data sets. The participants in this study were all employed at one time in the same school. They were limited to elementary, general education teaching positions specific to PF Elementary School.

Based on the findings and conclusions, I recommend that a similar study be conducted with a larger number of participants as well as a wider scope of participants which should include students. The increased number and types of participants could improve the trustworthiness of this research. I also recommend that a similar study be conducted in other schools within the same district and in other districts. This would allow for comparison among schools and across districts and determine whether the results from this study are limited to PF Elementary School. Another recommendation is to adjust this study to include interviews with school principals and students in order to identify their perspectives related to school climate which would allow multiple perspectives and allow the interpretations of principals, teachers, and students to be compared. I also suggest that these findings from this study be used to create a survey to gather input from a larger number of teachers who were employed at PF Elementary School during the research period to ascertain whether or not these findings hold true across a wider audience.

I also recommend that more research studies use social media platforms as a data point. Web-based applications are often used to promote and share effective strategies as well as to provide an avenue to express creativity or share collaborative ideas. Researchers could

potentially use social media sites to examine the many strategies and initiatives implemented by schools in an effort to improve school climate.

The final recommendation is to share information from this study with the local school district's Office of Innovation and Design in the hopes to pilot a school climate cohort program that includes a specific number of schools that could be used as a model for other schools. This pilot could consist of schools who are willing to have teachers participate in periodic surveys and small group interviews that could provide insight on perceptions of school climate over time. The achievement and attendance data from each school would also be documented and analyzed to determine if teacher perceptions influenced student success across multiple schools.

Furthermore, it is important to note that this study did not explicitly address the role that race may have played in the development of a positive school climate at PF Elementary School. Applying a critical lens specifically related to this topic may result in different findings. According to Jones et al. (2020), it is important that schools and school districts understand the potential for levers of change - social emotional learning and school climate - and the school based interventions that target these levers can have on racial equity in student success. Therefore, I recommend that future studies explicitly examine the implications that race has on developing a positive school climate.

Conclusion

It is clear that a positive school climate leads to beneficial outcomes for all members of the school community. Given that emotions and relationships strongly influence learning, and that these are byproducts of how students are treated at school and at home and in their

communities, a positive school climate is at the core of a successful educational experience (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Although the school climate improvement process is complex and will likely involve different considerations for each district and school, focusing on the perceptions and experiences of teachers would go far in aiding schools in the creation and maintenance of a positive climate. All schools face challenges related to school climate; however, inner city, high poverty schools struggle more with many areas associated with a positive school climate, such as teacher retention, student engagement, chronic absenteeism, and poor leadership. For instance, Jackson and Addison (2018) found statistically significant differences between high and low poverty schools existed for each school climate variable, favoring the schools serving a low concentration for students in persistent poverty.

By understanding the relationship between school climate and school improvement, high poverty schools can implement strategies to improve school climate and, ultimately, have a positive effect on all aspects of the school environment, including student achievement, teacher success, and community and collaboration. This study suggests that teachers' perceptions impact school climate and that there are a myriad of challenges in schools that can influence these perceptions. The findings of this study also show that a positive school climate can improve student achievement as well as teachers' sense of success. More research can and should be completed to determine if this same correlation can be found in other schools and districts in Georgia. Additionally, schools, especially high poverty schools, should work towards creating a communal environment that prioritizes teacher collaboration as well as the development of the whole child. Principals must communicate and execute a strong vision that inspires and holds both students and teachers accountable to high expectations. In order for school improvement to

be successful, educational leaders must seek a more complete understanding of how to establish a positive school climate. Given that schools continue to play an integral role in the educational, emotional, and social development of students, especially those students in high poverty areas, it is imperative that educators across the country continue working towards establishing a positive school climate that will ensure all students succeed.

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College of Education
Program: Educational Leadership

Appendix A

Informed Consent for

Promoting the positive: A case study of the influence of school climate on one turnaround school from 2016-2022

1. Investigators/Researchers: Cynthia Gunner is the PI on this research project. Ms. Gunner is a principal at an Atlanta Charter School. She is performing this study due to her interest in school climate in high poverty schools.

2. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions of teachers of school climate at an Atlanta urban elementary school.

3. Procedures to be Followed: Participation in this research will include completion of one interview session lasting about one hour in length via Zoom.

4. Discomforts and Risks: Most teachers' recollections are likely to provide minimal risk at most; however, it is possible teachers will experience discomforts and inconveniences relating to difficult topics from their experiences during that time. Teachers will be assigned pseudonyms, never referring to them by their given names either in written materials (transcripts, reports) or in presentations. In this way, no connection will be made between the teachers and the data about them. Since interviews will be virtual, I will be careful to ensure that the information you voluntarily provide to me is as secure as possible; however, you must be aware that transmissions over the Internet cannot be guaranteed to be completely secure. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology being used. You will be subject to the privacy policy of Zoom.

5. Benefits:
    - Benefits for Participants: We cannot and do not guarantee or promise that participants will receive any direct benefits from this study. Teachers may, however, benefit from talking and reflecting on the topics included within this study.
    - Benefits for Society: Data from this project may be utilized within publications and presentations to assist in the understanding of the impact of teacher perceptions on school

climate. This work, therefore, may benefit future students and educators relating to this topic.

6. Duration/Time Required from the Participant: Each participant will be asked to participate in one interview session of about one-hour in length.

7. Statement of Confidentiality: We will minimize this risk by assigning pseudonyms to all participants, never referring to participants by their given names either in written materials (transcripts, reports) or in presentations. Audio recordings and transcriptions of the interviews will be saved to password protected computers. Any written notes taken during the interviews will be kept in the locked office of Ms. Gunner, and if they are typed will be saved to password protected computers. The data will be maintained by Ms. Gunnerfor a minimum of three years following the completion of the study.

8. Future Use of Data: Deidentified or coded data from this study may be placed in a publicly available repository for study validation and further research. You will not be identified by name in the data set or any reports using information obtained from this study, and your confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

9. Right to Ask Questions: Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher named above or the researcher's faculty advisor, whose contact information is located at the end of the informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board at 912-478-5465 or irb@georgiasouthern.edu.

10. Compensation: No compensation will be offered.

11. Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without any penalty. Questions during the interviews can be skipped and you have the right to refuse request to be recorded.

12. Penalty: There is no penalty for deciding not to participate in the study. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relations with the investigator or Georgia Southern University. If you decide at any time you don't want to participate further, you may withdraw without penalty or retribution.

13. Mandatory Reporting: All information will be treated confidentially. There is one exception to confidentiality that we need to make you aware of. In certain research studies, it is our ethical responsibility to report situations of child or elder abuse, child or elder neglect, or any life-threatening situation to appropriate authorities. However, we are not seeking this type of information in our study, nor will you be asked questions about these issues.

14. Age Requirement: You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GS Institutional Review Board under tracking number _____.

Title of Project: Promoting the positive: A case study of the influence of school climate on one turnaround school from 2016-2022

Principal Investigator: Cynthia Gunner.,404-218-6444, cg20135@georgiasouthern.edu

This consent is being provided electronically. The researcher(s) will ask you to verbally consent before completing the interview. Participating in the interview indicates your willingness to participate in this research.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Introduction (5 minutes)	Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today as part of my dissertation. As part of this interview I must include a brief consent statement before we continue. The contents of this interview will be analyzed as part of my dissertation at Georgia Southern University. All information on your identity will be kept confidential unless otherwise required by law. If information about this interview was published, it will use pseudonyms or fake names. This project is for research and educational purposes only. The research is not expected to cause any discomfort or stress; however, some people may feel uncomfortable talking about these subjects. If you feel uncomfortable during the interview you may decline to answer and stop participating in any time without penalty. No risks are expected. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes to an hour. **Do you have any questions about the study?**
Topic 1 (20 minutes)	***Topic #1: School Climate over time*** 1. How do you perceive the school climate during the years 2016-2022 at PF Elementary School? a. PROBE: Tell me how you perceive school climate in general. b. PROBE: Tell me about specific changes that happened related to school climate as the years progressed c. PROBE: Tell me about the role you think the principal played in creating the school climate 2. What influences or factors do you think contributed to the school climate? a. PROBE: Tell me about if and/or how frustrated teacher behavior affected the school climate at this school b. PROBE: Tell me about how the social needs of the students affected the school climate 3. Describe the role you think school climate played in the school's transformation during the 2016-2022 school years? a. PROBE: Tell me about why you think school climate was the reason for the observed transformation

	b. PROBE: Tell me about the changes you observed related to student behavior & achievement during this time. 4. How do you think the school climate affected your total job performance? a. PROBE: Elaborate on why you think the school climate affected your performance. b. PROBE: Tell me about specific aspects of your job performance that were affected by school climate 5. How do you think the school climate affected your self-efficacy? a.PROBE: Tell me about what a teacher who demonstrates high expectations looks like and how you create a classroom culture of high expectations. b.PROBE:Tell me how you think your sense of success changed over time and how the changing school climate impacted that. c.PROBE: Tell me about a time when you went above and beyond for students and what was the outcome of that action.
Topic 2 (20 minutes)	***Topic #2: Impact of Pandemic on School Climate*** 6. Describe the challenges you faced in the post pandemic school environment a.PROBE:Elaborate on how those challenges manifested in the school environment on a daily basis 7. How have teacher challenges changed since Covid-19? a.PROBE:Tell me how these challenges impacted the total school climate
Final thoughts (5 minutes)	Those were all of the questions that we wanted to ask. 8. Do you have any final thoughts about the school climate at PF Elementary School that you would like to share? Thank you for your time.

Appendix C

Demographic Form

In order to submit this form, you should open it with Adobe Acrobat Reader.

Demographic Survey
Please fill out this survey for a great research

Gender

Age

- 0 - 17
- 18 - 24
- 25 - 34
- 35 - 44
- 45 - 54
- 55 - 64
- 65 - 74
- 75 or more

Ethnicity

- White
- Asian
- American Indian
- Black or African American
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Hispanic Latino or Spanish origin
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

Years of Experience

- 0-3 years
- 10-12 years
- 4-6 years
- 13-15 years
- 7-10 years
- 16 or more years

Submit Survey