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Influence of Student Discipline Referrals on School Climate in a K-12 Urban Public School District

Lori Phillips
Walden University

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Walden University

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Lori Phillips

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Review Committee

Dr. Andrea Wilson, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Donald Poplau, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. Markus Berndt, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University

2018

Abstract

Influence of Student Discipline Referrals on School Climate

in a K-12 Urban Public School District

by

Lori M. Phillips

MA, University of Memphis, 2001

BS, Mississippi Valley State University, 1996

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2018

Abstract

Research indicates a connection between student discipline rates and school climate. In a large, urban K-12 public school district, student discipline concerns were increasing while school climate ratings were decreasing during the last few years. Guided by Bandura's social learning theory, the purpose of this ex post facto, causal-comparative study was to identify differences in teachers' perceptions of school climate, as measured by the New Teacher Project (TNTP) Insight Survey, between schools with high student discipline referral rates and schools with low student discipline referral rates in this school district. The study sample included 6,994 new and veteran certified teachers from $N = 72$ K-12 schools ($n = 36$ high discipline referral rate schools; $n = 36$ low discipline referral rate schools). Teachers' TNTP ratings for Spring 2014-2016 on the overall school climate index, learning environment, and school leadership scales were the dependent variables for the analyses. Independent samples t test results indicated significant differences in overall school climate index, as well as the learning environment and school leadership scales for schools with high compared to low discipline referral rates. Findings showed that schools with high student discipline referral rates had more negative climate ratings than schools with low student discipline referral rates across the three TNTP scales for these teachers. These outcomes suggest that school leaders may create positive social change by identifying and implementing effective strategies aimed at improving student behavior and responses to student discipline as one possible means for fostering a more positive school climate which benefits students, teachers, and staff alike.

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Dedication

I would like to take this time to dedicate this dissertation to all of those family members and friends who believed in me and helped to push me through. This has truly been a long time coming. To my wonderful and loving husband, Faragi Phillips, who was patient and understanding of the long evenings. Thank you for filling in with the kids. To my mother, Lawanda Fleming, who has believed in me and has constantly been the positive voice of encouragement even when I wanted to give up. To my Apostle and First Lady, Tony and Felicia Wade, who continuously spoke into my life about kingdom living and being an example. To my dear friends, Dr. Debra Stanford, Jenifer Eoff, Michelle Hope, and Jessica Stone who have pushed me and been a true shoulder to lean on! To the best chair ever, Dr. Andrea Wilson, words cannot express how much of a blessing you have been. You are firm but so fair! Thank you, Dr. Poplau and Dr. Berndt for pushing me all the way to the very end. I am so grateful for your push and belief in me. To my children, Kylan, Ragi, Kolby, and Little Lorin, please know that Mommy did this for you! Know that whatever you set out to accomplish, you can do it! Remember, just believe in and surround yourself with those who have done and believe also! This was truly a faith walk and an awesome testimony of drive and determination.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	iiv
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	3
Problem Statement.....	4
Purpose of the Study.....	5
Research Questions and Hypotheses	6
Theoretical Framework.....	8
Nature of the Study.....	10
Definitions.....	11
Assumptions.....	11
Scope and Delimitations	12
Limitations	13
Significance.....	14
Summary.....	14
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	16
Introduction.....	16
Literature Search Strategy.....	16
Theoretical Foundation	20
Literature Review Related to Key Variables	21
Defining Climate and Culture.....	21
Organizational Climate.....	23
Organizational Culture.....	23

School Climate and Culture	24
Default Climate	25
Authoritative School Climate	26
Leadership and School Climate	27
Student Behavior	28
Suspensions	29
School Safety	30
Influence of Student Mobility on Behavior	33
Student Mental Health	34
Preparedness of New Teachers	38
The Learning Environment	39
Teacher-Student Relationships	41
Influence of Student Behavior	42
Influence on Teacher Stress Levels	46
Influence on Teacher Retention	49
Influence of Discipline Referrals	51
Influence on Instructional Time	52
Summary and Conclusions	53
Chapter 3: Research Method	54
Introduction	54
Research Design and Rationale	54
Methodology	56
Population	56

Sampling and Sampling Procedures	57
Archival Data	58
Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs	60
Data Analysis Plan	64
Threats to Validity	66
Ethical Procedures	67
Summary	67
Chapter 4: Results	69
Introduction	69
Data Collection	69
Results	72
Research Question 1	72
Research Question 2	74
Research Question 3	75
Summary	76
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	77
Introduction	77
Interpretation of Findings	78
Limitations of the Study	80
Recommendations	81
Implications	82
Conclusion	84
References	85

List of Tables

Table 1. Teachers Surveyed	71
Table 2. Overall School Climate Index Score	73
Table 3. Subdomain Index Score in Learning Environment.....	75
Table 4. Subdomain Index Score Leadership	76

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

During the past 20 years, discipline incidents in schools have increased (Miller & Meyers, 2015). Recently, districts throughout the United States have reported a trend in an increase in student behaviors such as fighting and bullying (Fronius, Pearson, Herely, & Petrosino, 2016). For many reasons, discipline can potentially lead to higher levels of teacher stress and frustration as it pertains to the learning environment. According to Brodsky (2016), public data reports from 2013-2015 revealed New York City Schools experienced a 23% increase in discipline episodes. However, a 2015 audit by the New York Office's state comptroller reported roughly one-third of discipline related incidents went unreported (Brodsky, 2016). The high number of major infractions occurring in the presence of school leaders led to the filing of a class action lawsuit against the New York School District. The lawsuit consisted of approximately 24 students hit, kicked, and bullied by other children (Brodsky, 2016).

Both disruptive and aggressive behaviors interfere with school climate. Disruptive behaviors that are displayed by usually mild-mannered students are generally influenced by aggressive peers (Powers & Bierman, 2013). The daunting task of consistently reducing disruptive behavior continues to be a growing concern (O'Brennan, Bradshaw, & Furlong, 2014). One common method of tracking behavior is to measure the increase or decline of infractions through the number of discipline referrals. Through the referral process, an expectation exists that negative behavior is rectified by the student being sent to the office for a school leader to handle. However, because teacher autonomy is given when writing up a student, some offenses may result in the student being returned to class

without a consequence for the offense. As a result, teachers often become frustrated. In 2015, Bibbs County Public School teachers reported feeling victimized twice, once by disruptive students and again by not being supported by administrators when discussing widespread discipline problems. In an interview, one teacher stated that teacher morale would be destroyed resulting in an unhealthy school climate (Morton, 2013).

Overall, to form a positive school climate, the need to measure student discipline is necessary. New data released by Jefferson County Public Schools revealed that discipline referrals increased by 43% during the 2016-2017 school year. In Lafayette Parish Public Schools, discipline referrals were up 13.5% between August 2015 and November 2015 compared with 2014 (McElfresh, 2016). In contrast, national experts argue that school discipline is declining. Cornell (2016) posited that discipline in schools is better now than 20 years ago. A study by the National Center for Education Statistics, conducted in 2015, found that between 1992 and 2014, incidents in schools decreased by 82% from 181 incidents for every 1,000 students to 33 incidents in 2014 (Zhang, Musu, & Ouderkerk, 2016). Because of overwhelming conflicts in discipline data reports and views on discipline, it is difficult to determine if school discipline is increasing or decreasing. Measuring student discipline form a positive school climate is needed.

In this chapter, I provide background information on the nature of student discipline at the local level as well as its widespread impact nationally. Once I identify the problem, I present the problem statement and the purpose of study. Afterward, I identify the research questions and hypothesis. The study is firmly grounded in Bandura's social learning theory, particularly the idea of reciprocal determinism (1977). The nature

of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance are also provided in Chapter 1.

Background

The topic of student discipline and school climate is a growing concern for educational researchers today. Throughout the nation, a large body of research supports the idea that student discipline is on the rise with few proven strategies to reduce discipline (Roberts, Kemp, & Truman, 2013). The Restorative Justice Model (Skiba & Losen, 2016) and Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (Horner & Sugai, 2015) are two interventions that have shown a decline in negative student behaviors. Restorative justice helps to focus more on the problem and not the child, gives more of a voice to students, and focuses on reflecting. The diffusion component of this model keeps students in school and many times in the classroom. Research posits that exclusionary practices are ineffective, such as in-school and out-of-school suspensions (Butler, Lewis, Moore, & Scott, 2012). However, teacher response data discredits the effectiveness of the Restorative Justice Model (Basar & Akan, 2013). When teachers are faced with habitual minor acts of disruption that are often times considered not office worthy, levels of teachers' stress are elevated, and frustration affects school climate (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). Several articles support the impact of school climate on behavior (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Klein, Cornell, & Konold, 2012; Mitchell & Bradshaw). Because behavior is increasingly highlighted as one of the most crucial factors in promoting positive school climate (O'Brennan et al., 2014) and limited information exists on how

student behavior influences school climate, a need for further research in this area was supported by a gap in related literature.

Problem Statement

The concern about student discipline problems is often noted as one of the main influences of teacher shortages as it serves as a deterrent for those considering careers in the field of education. Student discipline is also a contributing factor to low morale and teachers leaving the study school district (Director of Human Resource, May 11, 2016). For the past 3 school years, one urban public school system located in the southern United States has experienced troubling school climate ratings and high student discipline referrals. However, any possible connections between school climate and student discipline were unclear, which suggested that there was a need to research possible influences that student discipline may have on a school's climate.

Despite limited research on the possible influences of student behavior on school climate, studies explored teacher, student, and parent perceptions of discipline in schools and the effects on school climate. These studies range from measuring school climate (Collie et al., 2012; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins, 2013) to the effects of a positive school climate on academic achievement (Calik, Sezgin, Kavgaci, & Kilinc, 2012; Hanford & Leithwood, 2013) to the perceptions of school climate and the role of classroom management and discipline (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). The lack of progress in identifying solutions has limited the understanding of this issue, which has potentially influenced student learning throughout the country. The growing topic of discipline has been a concern for many years (Micek, 2013; Sullivan, Johnson, Owens, &

Conway, 2014). Anderson and Kincaid (2005) explored the effect of student discipline on academic climate and teacher perceptions of their ability to do their job. In a study with 725 middle and high school teachers, the majority of teachers operating in a culture of challenging student behavior said that it not only prevents them from maintaining order, but also affects their ability to teach. Similarly, 77% of teachers believed that they would be able to teach more effectively if they did not have to deal with disruptive student behaviors. In addition, 52% of teachers admitted to accepting or allowing behaviors due to a lack of school and teacher support. These findings suggest that student behavior impacts teachers' perceptions of school climate (Mulholland, McKinlay, & Sproule, 2013).

The expansive body of literature on student discipline reinforces the fact that student discipline is a local, state, and national issue. However, given the diverse contexts that surround schools and their discipline practices, it was beneficial to further investigate the possible influence of student discipline on school climate on a local level.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this causal-comparative study was to compare school climate scores as measured by The New Teacher Project (TNTP) Insight Survey for schools with high discipline referral rates and schools with low discipline referral rates during the spring semesters of 2014-2016. The scores represent teachers' response to the completed survey. For the purpose of this study, schools with high discipline referral rates were identified as high group and schools with low discipline referral rates as were identified as low group. At the heart of an effective school is a positive school climate (Parker,

Grenville, & Fless, 2011). However, the inability to reduce student misbehavior and its negative impact is a leading concern among many researchers (O'Brennan et al., 2014). Many schools across the country are characterized as effective or ineffective based on the perception of school climate. An environment can be viewed as negative based on a teacher's negative perception around the school-wide systems that are in place to address student behaviors (Simpson, 2014). This quantitative study took an in-depth approach to determine the potential influence student discipline referral rates (independent variable) have on school climate as perceived by teachers' perception (dependent variable).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Using data from Spring 2014, 2015, and 2016, this study was to compare through the TNTP Insight Survey overall index score and two subindex scores the differences in school climate, if any, in schools with high and low discipline referral rates within an urban school district located in the Southern United States. The following research questions and hypotheses guided the data collection process within this study:

1. What is the difference in the overall school climate index score as measured by the TNTP Insight Survey for schools with high discipline referral rates (high group) compared to schools with low discipline referral rates (low group) from Spring 2014 to 2016?
 - a. H_01 : There is no significant difference in school's overall climate index scores for schools with high discipline referral rates (high group) compared to schools with low discipline referral rates (low group)

- b. H_{a1} : There is a significant difference in school's overall climate index scores for schools with high discipline referral rates (high group) compared to schools with low discipline referral rates (low group)
2. What is the difference in the Learning Environment subdomain index scores as measured by the TNTP Insight Survey for schools with high discipline referral rates compared to schools with low discipline referral rates for Spring 2014 to 2016?
 - a. H_{02} : There is no significant difference in the Learning Environment subdomain index scores for high group schools with high discipline referral rates compared to low group schools with low discipline referral rates.
 - b. H_{a2} : There is a significant difference in Learning Environment subdomain index scores for high group schools with high discipline referral rates compared to low group schools with low discipline referral rates.
3. What is the difference in the Leadership sub-domain index scores as measured by the TNTP Insight Survey for schools with high discipline referral rates compared to schools with low discipline referral rates for the Spring 2014 to 2016?
 - a. H_{03} : There is no significant difference in the Leadership sub-domain index scores for high group schools with high discipline referral rates compared to low group schools with low discipline referral rates.

- b. *H_{a3}*: There is a significant difference in the Leadership sub-domain index scores for low group schools with high discipline referral rates compared to high group schools with low discipline referral rates.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura (1977) introduced the social learning theory, effectively merging elements of cognitivism with the behaviorism premise (influenced by Skinner), which suggests that people learn from each other through observation and modeling. After taking interest in what happens before, during, and after an action, in 1989, Bandura's social learning theory became known as the social cognitive theory. Later, Bandura added reciprocal determinism to the idea that behavior is influenced by the social environment. However, although behaviorism states that a person's environment influences one's behavior, the social learning theory posits that the environment and a person's behavior are mutually dependent. Thus, Bandura believes that one's behavior influences one's environment, just as one's environment influences one's behavior. This belief is coined as "reciprocal determinism" and explains how one concept affects the other and vice versa (Bandura, 1999). In addition, what individuals think, which in turn affects their behavior, is partly due to the experiences generated by the behavior. The thought of people in situations, and environments began to be viewed as interdependent causes of behavior. This conception of human interaction acknowledges personal and environmental influences as bidirectional; however, behavior is treated as only a by-product that played no role in the causal process (Bandura, 1978).

The idea of a social learning view of interaction as a function of reciprocal determinism, describes how behavioral and environmental factors function as reciprocal interacting determinants. Moreover, it presents the idea that internal personal factors such as beliefs and perceptions operate as reciprocal determinants of behavior. In essence, behavior can be thought of as an interdependent rather than a dependent factor (Bandura, 1978). In terms of education, a fair amount of research has been written on behaviorism, social learning theory, and the effect climate has on student behavior. This is based on the premise that, when a positive school climate exists this has a positive effect on students, while when a negative school climate exists, this has a negative effect on students (Hoffman, Hutchinson, & Reiss, 2009). However, although current literature asserts that school climate may negatively or positively influence student behavior, little attention is given to the idea that student behavior can influence school climate. In this study, I investigated the influence of behavior on school climate. The possibility that there may be a bidirectional relationship should be investigated.

The social learning theory, particularly the idea of reciprocal determinism, paves the way for examining student behavior and school climate from both perspectives. This is because behavior is viewed as an interacting determinant, not the outcome of a person interacting with the environment. In the social learning view of interaction, behavior and internal personal and environmental factors function as codependent determinants. Indeed, supporters of reciprocal determinism argue that people do not simply react to external stimuli because most external stimulation affects behavior through cognitive processes. It was further argued that the environment is partly created by a person's own

making. Through daily interactions with the world, people play an active role in creating the social experiences and circumstances that arise. As a result, behavioral, environmental, and cognitive influences are engaged in continuous reciprocal interactions (Bandura, 1978). When applied to the school setting, this theory, as discussed more in depth in chapter two, may highlight the possibility of increased student discipline problems leading to teacher frustration, which negatively affects perceptions of school climate. The current study uses the concept of reciprocal determinism as it compares discipline referral rates (behavior) and school climate (environment) and investigates the influence referrals have on climate.

Nature of the Study

An ex post-facto causal-comparative design was used for this study. The rationale for this design was to attempt to examine differences among variables of pre-existing groups. This quantitative research study was designed to investigate the role that student behavior plays in how teachers perceive school climate. In this instance, school discipline referral rates were retrieved from this large urban school district's research department. The TNTP's Insight Survey, Spring 2014, 2015, and 2016 school climate scores were also retrieved from 72 K-12 schools. Using an independent sample *t* test, comparisons were made to establish the differences between the overall school climate index score, learning environment sub-domain score, and leadership sub-domain score of teachers surveyed at the 36 schools with the lowest discipline referral rates and teachers surveyed at the 36 schools with the highest discipline referral rates. The benefit of this study was to bring about an awareness of how discipline influences school climate across the district.

Definitions

The following is a list of special terms commonly affiliated with the topic of School Culture, School Climate, and Student Discipline that are used throughout this paper.

Discipline referral: A written document that notifies administration when a student has misbehaved and/or violates school policy warranting disciplinary action (Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000).

Leadership: The gift or art to motivate people to want to accomplish what has to be done (Brosnan, 2015).

Learning environment: the alternative description of the classroom. The space, context, and diverse cultures of which students receive instruction (Monsen, Ewing, & Kwoka, 2014).

School climate: The collective perception, mood, and morale of staff and students; the degree to which the learning environment feels safe, supportive, respectful, and disciplined (Hubbuck, 2016).

School culture: is viewed as the organization's system of values, norms, structures, and beliefs that persist over time (Falcione & Kaplan, 1984).

Student Discipline: Control achieved as a result of enforced obedience or order; a methodical or prescribed conduct or exemplar of behavior (Arum, 2003).

Assumptions

This study was based on the following assumptions: I assumed that the discipline referral rates relating to student behavior of the participating schools in this district in the

southern United States were accurately tallied. I also assumed that the protocol for reporting incidents as they occurred were properly entered into the PowerSchool Student Management System (SMS) (e.g., a fight should be entered as a “fight” by all schools, and not as “inappropriate conduct” by one school). I also assumed that all teachers answered TNTP’s Insight survey questions honestly and that it is a true representation of teacher perception of school climate. Finally, because the TNTP Insight survey is reported to survey all certified teachers, I assumed that all participants taking the survey were certified, licensed classroom teachers. The importance of these assumptions would indicate that these study participants would all be held to the same standard of accountability and increase the likelihood of consistency in reporting discipline referrals across the study district.

Scope and Delimitations

I focused on student discipline across all grade levels within an urban school district in the Southern United States. I identified student discipline as the research focus because the research literature around its influence on school climate was limited. Thus, I sought to explore the nature and implications of student discipline as a potential factor influencing school climate, as perceived by teachers. As a result, strategies to improve school climate may emerge. The district of focus for this study had a large number of Title I schools, which meant those schools are federally funded due to more than 40% of students being classified as at or near the level of poverty. In order for a school to continue funding, adequate yearly growth must be met, and schools must continuously show improvement (Malburg & Lorcher, 2015). It is also worth noting that, in this

district, corporal punishment is not allowed, and each school creates its own set of rules and consequences. Moreover, although school discipline issues are increasing in prevalence nationwide, every school or school district experiences these challenges in unique contexts. Thus, the results of the current study may not be generalizable to all states and regions beyond the district of focus for this study.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. The archival data retrieved were from the spring semesters of 2014 through 2016. However, the variable of school leadership was only surveyed in 2016. This retrieval process prohibited the researcher from manipulating the data as the data pre-existed. Even though the participating urban school district within the Southern United States consists of 207 schools, the sample size for this study consisted of 6,994 teachers in 36 schools with the lowest discipline referral rates and 36 schools with the highest discipline referral rates ($N = 72$). The power analysis indicated that 72 schools were needed to have valid results as per the power analysis. Thirty-six high and 36 low were used to create equal groups for the purpose of comparison. Real discipline data were used so that valid comparisons could be made. Therefore, results obtained from this study may be different from results obtained from a larger or smaller pool of schools. Care should be taken in generalizing these results to school districts with different size populations. Biases in teacher responses would not have been detectable as archival data were used.

The discipline referrals written by teachers and other staff members occurred during the regular school day. However, there were no specific times or identification of

the level of infraction. School leaders have the autonomy to address all discipline issues received on a referral or non –referral issues (minor or major). The number of issues in a school that were not on a written document but was resolved cannot be tracked.

Therefore, the data may not represent all infractions.

Significance

This study explored the nature and implications of student discipline as one of the factors that could potentially influence school climate, as perceived by teachers in an urban school district. In urban public schools across the country, educators are making effort to change student behavior (Veenstra, Lindenberg, & Huitsing, 2014). This is particularly significant in that behavior is increasingly highlighted as one of the most crucial factors in promoting positive school climate (O’Brennan et al., 2014).

Each year, behavior issues are known to interfere with the whole flow of the classroom. Negative behaviors prevent other students from learning and require teachers to spend large amounts of time dealing with behavior management and discipline instead of instruction (Monsen et al., 2014). Though more accountability is being placed on teachers for academic gain, the frustration of many teachers with habitual student misconduct has a potentially negative impact on teacher morale, which in turn, negatively impacts school climate.

Summary

For the past few decades, school improvement policies have neglected discipline and climate to the peril of school systems around the nation (Kirkland, Villavicencio, & Fergus, 2016). With this apparent gap, the present study may provide evidence on the

influence of student discipline on school climate. With this information, school leaders will be able to focus on addressing the gaps in practice relating to school discipline in order to provide practical approaches to handling discipline in schools and maintaining or increasing levels of school climate. Chapter 2 provides the literature to support the need for more extensive research in the area of influence of student discipline on school climate.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Student behavior is a rising concern throughout the United States. In a report released by Bill and Melinda Gates and Scholastic (2016), 62% of teachers (in the same school for a minimum of 5 years) agreed that behavior issues had notably worsened. The report revealed that over half of the teachers expressed a high level of frustration when dealing with behaviors that impede on instructional delivery. As a result, the U.S. Department of Education launched a Rethink Discipline campaign to support positive school climate (Cohen, 2016). This campaign was to help address discipline with more positive strategies, to increase teacher morale, and promote a positive climate through less punitive approaches. According to research, where there is a positive school climate, there are fewer discipline infractions (Parker, 2016). With an increased focus on non-academic factors such as climate, schools were urged to begin measuring climate in 2016 (Klein, 2015). As climate is researched, this review of literature focused on student discipline, school climate, and the components that may impact both variables.

Literature Search Strategy

I used the following databases to locate the research for my study: ProQuest, SAGE, Google Scholar, ERIC, and Dissertation and Theses. I used the following search terms for the keyword search used: *Climate; Organizational Climate; Positive Climate; Culture; Organizational Culture; Positive Culture; Negative Culture and Climate; Impact of Climate on Students, Classroom Management; Learning Environment, Impact of Student behavior on Teachers; School Safety; Student behavior; Social Cohesion; Student-Teacher mobility; and the definition of climate, and student behavior on school*

climate. I used keywords until all links were exhausted with searching for current, scholarly, peer-reviewed, approved literature that was from 2012 through 2016. A search of these databases also revealed limited literature on the exact influence of student discipline referral rates on school climate. This also validated the need for further research on this topic.

The topic of school climate has been well researched in relation to student discipline. However, absent from current research are studies specifically focusing on how the aspect of student discipline influences school climate. Previous researchers have focused on the need to study student and parent perceptions of climate and how climate influences the discipline within a particular set of schools. However, while research has supported the need to identify the characteristics of positive school climate and its importance of effective school make-up, it is unclear how factors studied prevent or contribute to school climate being positive. This is despite the fact that significant research on the concept of students' perception of school climate exists (Aldridge & Ala, 2013; Barkley, Lee, & Eadens, 2014; Bear, Yang, Pell, & Gaskins, 2014; Gage, Larson, Sungai, & Chafouleas, 2016; Larson, 2014; Preiss, Arum, Edelman, Merrill, & Tyson, 2016; Shukla, Konold, & Cornell, 2016; Yang, Bear, Chen, & Zhang, 2013; Zander, 2012). Researchers have focused on several topics including student perception of school climate, the impact of student-teacher relationships on climate, and the effects of climate on teacher burn-out. Several other topics surfaced related to climate from these studies: Teacher Perspectives of School Climate at a Low Performing School (Carson, 2012); Effects of School Climate on Student Achievement (O'Malley, Voight, & Renshaw,

2015), and *The Influence of Classroom and School Climate on teacher perceptions of Student Problem Behavior* (O'Brennan et al., 2014). Although these studies are important to the discussion of school climate and behavior, I identified two that focused on student discipline and school climate more closely.

Linares (2012) performed a study on the effects of climate on discipline behaviors in 3 high schools. As this study deepened, Linares highlighted two elements that were found critical to teacher perception as in the TNTP Insight Survey. I looked at (a) how important is school climate perceived by teachers; and (b) the researcher inquired about the perception of school climate perceived by teachers who most often refer students to the office. I looked at possible relationships between teacher perception and discipline referral data and level of infractions. Though archival data was used for discipline referrals from 10th, 11th, and 12th graders and compared it to the school climate in each school, all teachers were invited to be surveyed. Because of the limitation of data, the researcher concluded that the relationship between teacher perception and school climate did not reflect a clear and consistent relationship. Though only three high schools were involved in Linares' study, there was a negative correlation identified between discipline infractions and referral counts. However, as the current study focuses on high discipline referral rate schools and low discipline referral rate schools and its' impact on school climate, I found it interesting that of the three high schools in the Linares' study, one school that was ranked second in teacher satisfaction, also ranked first in the number of discipline referral rates. This study helped to support the need to study if there are differences in the climate of schools where high or low discipline referral rates exist.

Another important component of school climate is that of leadership, which was studied more in-depth by Alston (2017). I found this study relevant, because it attempts to narrow the lens of school climate by exploring the differences in administrators' and teachers' perceptions on school climate as measured by the revised School Level Environment Questionnaire (r-SLEQ). In this study, the independent variable was teachers and administrators. The dependent variable was scores on the r-SLEQ. The intent of Alston's study was to determine if the differences in how the two groups viewed school climate was a factor in hindering leadership from acting to improve school climate. Alston's study helps to enlighten researchers more on a common definition of climate amongst both teachers and administrators. The goal was to prove that the ability to assess climate levels was the first step school leaders needed to take in maximizing school climate. The methodology used was a causal-comparative design. Although in Alston's study four domains were surveyed: physical, social, affective, and physical. The findings most relevant to the current study showed a significant difference in perception of social and affective domains, which further supports the need to look deeply at how one aspect could possibly affect both social and affective domains relating to school climate.

The current study focused on schools with high discipline referral rates and low discipline referral rates and the differences, if any, between the groups on school climate. The approach to this study is broader than Linares' and Alston's studies as it covers elementary, middle, and high school levels. Another difference between the current study

and Alston's and Linares' is that this study focused solely on teacher perception versus teachers and administrators.

Theoretical Foundation

Although many theories were relatable, Bandura's social learning theory was chosen as it was most applicable as it has flavors of behaviorism from Skinner. Bandura proved that with social learning theory, there is interrelationship of the individual, the environment, and the behavior. Bandura's social learning theory supports the idea that one's environment causes one's behavior and that one's behavior causes one's environment (Bandura, 1977). As he battled to make theoretical sense of the modeling phenomenon, Bandura shifted focus from environmental conditioning to informational processing. In 1989, Bandura relabeled his approach "social cognitive theory," after his interest in self-regulation, the response before, during, and after an action, and efficacy (Bandura, 1989). He later adds reciprocal determinism as he further supported the social aspect by determining that a person's behavior can be influenced by the social environment (Bandura, 1978). This further formalized the triangle of reciprocal determinism. The behavior, environment, and other personal factors operate interchangeably and have a bi-directional influence on each other (Bandura, 1977; 1986).

In his study, Bandura found that individuals with obnoxious behavior, tend to breed negative social climates. Meanwhile, those that display non-problematic behaviors are equally skilled at bringing out the best in those around them, which proved the reason for reciprocal determinism to be formed. Bandura studied modeled behavior of children and found that what children see and perceive, they then emulate. As incidents of

discipline are on the rise, this theory may help to identify a possible cause. For the current study, this theory identified differences between a theory of climate and a theory of discipline. The look at student behavior was also chosen as there is a current gap in the large body of research on how school climate affects behaviors (Haynes et al., 1999; Howell, 2014; Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008; Wang & Degol, 2016), but limited research on student discipline and school climate. The research questions in the current study attempted to discover if there was a difference between the overall school climate score and sub-domain scores (learning environment and leadership) on the TNTP Insight Survey, for schools with high and low discipline referral rates. Because this theory looked at both aspects of student discipline and climate in bi-directional form, further supported the methodology of the current study.

Bandura also posits that consequences can potentially condition actions and behavior in the social environment. It was relevant to frame this study after the social learning theory with an in-depth look at the concept of reciprocal determinism to examine the impact of student discipline on school climate. The current study examines the reversal of environment and behavior. Groups developed based on discipline referral rates were the independent variable and climate ratings of TNTP scales were the dependent variable.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables

Defining Climate and Culture

Research posits that there is a lack of agreement on whether climate and culture are the same. Often times climate is based on the experiences that take place in one's

environment (Espelage, Low, & Jimmerson, 2014). According to Drago and Severson (2012), culture takes a longer period to change than climate. For more than 30 years, the terms have been used interchangeably. Since there is no universal definition of either term, many researchers believe it is important to address the relationship between the two (Bitsani, 2013). To provide an explanation of how climate and culture relate, Gruenert (2008) defines the two as being:

Everything around you, including what you see, hear, feel, and smell, are all artifacts of the culture. Reaction to each of these senses is influenced by the culture because culture taps into belief systems and helps to decide preferences, dislikes, who to trust, when to go home, what to wear, how fast to drive, and how to teach. (p. 58).

Culture can then be thought of as the linkage in assisting with the process of understanding people by providing a method for simplifying, categorizing, and describing the state of a human (Lumby & Foskett, 2011). Culture is said by some to actually trump the strategies of an organization because in an organization people actually carry out strategies, while climate controls behaviors (Eaton & Kilby, 2015). Generally speaking, climate is described as the temporary attitude of individuals, while culture can be described as the long- lasting attribute (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). It is also important to note that culture is a crucial component of all organizations (Abbaspour & Noghreh, 2015), and can affect both the external and internal components of an organization.

Organizational Climate

An organization is a collective group of people serving as a social unit that is structured in a strategic way to meet a need (Wrench, Punyanunt-Carter, 2012). The organizational climate is what members believe about the influence or conditions within an organization. Climate is a crucial component of all organizations and can impact both the external and internal components (Abbaspour & Noghreh, 2015). The components of organizational climate include but are not limited to organizational performance, (Prenestini & Lega, 2013; Wei & Howard, 2014), morale, (Iverson & Zatzick, 2011), and leadership (Orta, 2015). The above components were not only linked to a company's effectiveness, but also critical components to a school's effectiveness, which can have a significant influence on school climate.

Organizational Culture

Ideas associated with organizational climate and culture are attributed to commercial organizations and typically either combined or used synonymously. Research suggests that because schools are considered organizations, the climate is better discussed in conjunction with organizational culture (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013). This research offers a deeper understanding of the different work experiences of individuals and can be thought of as what an organization exhibits and not possesses (Colakoglu & Littlefield, 2011). This includes organizational performance (Prenestini & Lega, 2013; Wei & Howard, 2014), efficiency (Neagu & Nicula, 2012), morale (Iverson & Zatzick, 2011), employee satisfaction (Shah, Akhtor & Zafar, 2012), learning (Rapport & Richter, 2013), leading the results of change (Aswandy, Suryadini, & Muliati, 2013), the sharing

of knowledge (Gurdal & Kumkale, 2014), and leadership (Orta, 2015). Moreover, because all of the above components are linked to a company's effectiveness, negative ratings attributed to organizational culture can lead to company-wide decreased performance (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). A school is a unit of people working together to create the best environment for students. Therefore a school is an organization.

School Climate and Culture

School climate is commonly known to be a key factor in educational reform (Voight, Austin, Hanson, 2013). Over the past 30 years, school climate has emerged as significant, especially as it relates to school improvement in the United States (Thapa et al., 2013). School climate encompasses a number of domains: environment, teaching and learning, safety, and interpersonal relationships (Association of Independent Schools, 2017). Climate is a make-up of the relationships between school staff, community, parents, and students. Moreover, when all four domains are addressed simultaneously, improvement endeavors are more effective (National School Climate, 2012). In contrast, the term culture is used to define a school's actual state. One example is to think of how people feel about the building as school climate, and the physical state of a building as reflecting school culture ("School Climate," 2017). Beneath the classified staff roles, teachers, and administration, lies a structure called culture. Through symbolic language, school culture frames and defines the behavior and beliefs of a school. The power of culture is that it is known to exist in the unwritten rules and assumptions, the vocabulary and special languages of students and staff, the artifacts, and the level of expectation about learning that saturates the school's world (Peterson & Deal, 2011). This suggests

that in today's educational environment, it is time to rethink the importance of school culture. Students should have the right to the very best school that can be provided. This can happen by teaching teachers and staff members who can lead the way to an oasis of learning in a successfully built culture (Deal & Peterson, 2016). Culture sharpens focus. A school's culture ignites the focus of daily behavior and helps to remain focused on what is important and valued (Peterson et al., 2011). Keiser and Schulte (2009) had a slightly different view on the relationship between the two terms. They concluded that school climate is created through shared cultures of teachers and students and extends to include the diverse culture that individuals bring from home to school. As noted previously, the current study examined school climate and the potential impact student discipline has on school climate. Prior to discussing this potential impact, a general overview of school climate and an examination of different types of school climate were completed. Interestingly, in an article by NAESP entitled, "School Climate," the author argued that culture could only be altered when the climate is addressed (Gruenert, 2008). Gruenert (2008) compared climate and culture by using the example of Monday and Friday perceptions in the workplace. For example, Mondays are often perceived as miserable and Fridays are thought of as fun. Teachers and students are said to look forward to weekends. To happily report to school on Monday mornings not being excited about the weekend would serve as a challenge to the existing climate (Grunert, 2008).

Default Climate

The current climate in many schools is considered to be in default mode. Default climate is characterized by anger, stress, and boredom. These three characteristics are

most often derived from teacher-student frustration or teacher-administrator frustration. In default climates, teachers feel helpless and out of control. When these types of negative feelings fester, teachers tend to possess control over other people as much as they can. Control over people results in, but not limited to, actions such as blaming, criticizing, threatening, punishing or rewarding to hopefully achieve compliance (Erwin, 2016). These types of behaviors could erode relationships within a building, leading to negative morale and a negative overall building climate.

Authoritative School Climate

Authoritative school climate is most often used when thinking about the key dimensions that link school climate with misbehavior and disorder. The authoritative school climate theory asserts that discipline structure which refers to fair but strict rules and supportive staff and student relationships are central to producing a positive school climate (Gregory et al., 2010). Berg and Cornell (2015) performed a study examining whether schools with a high discipline structure support were linked to less aggression and teacher distress. The study consisted of 9,134 middle school teachers from 389 Virginia Schools with a 7th and 8th -grade enrollment. On the survey, the students reported the degree of support for their schools, and the teachers reported the level of distress, feelings of safety and experiences with aggression. The survey indicated that authoritative schools appeared to experience less aggression and lower levels of distress. In schools where the support level was stronger, data indicated less aggression of students. This study further connected school climate to school leadership effectiveness. Leaders who desire positive morale in their buildings must understand the distinction

between culture and climate (Gruenert, 2008). Most educators use the term climate when referring subjectively to the quality of school life. It was concluded that poor and strong school climates help to identify the effectiveness level of a school leader (Bernhardt, 2016; Velasco, Edmonson, & Slate, 2012).

Leadership and School Climate

The first step in impacting teacher effectiveness is to have school leaders accurately assess school climate (Alridge & Fraser, 2016). A school leader's decision can impact school climate (Jain & Cohen, 2015). The school leader is responsible for establishing the climate for students and staff members within the school (United States Department of Education, 2014). However, being a school leader is different from what it has been in years past (Grobler, 2012). The duties of administrators have increased, and more administrator accountability has been attached to performance on test, professional learning communities, and instructional leadership (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). School leaders must be able to address all of those elements, hold teachers and students accountable, and be sensitive to what impacts the climate of a school in order to maximize outcomes (Bruggencate, Luyten, Scheerens, & Slegers, 2012; Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Principals are expected to be skilled in all areas of leadership, despite the fact that the training programs and preparation for school leaders do not address all areas of leadership, specifically how to build or enhance school climate (Copland, 2011).

It is important for leaders to be in tune with the needs of teachers and provide support and direction if school districts want to increase retention of teachers. According to research, many teachers possibly leave the educational field because of feeling

unsupported and unappreciated (Fernet, Guay, Senecal, & Austin, 2012). In a report identified as “Quality Counts” (2013), the role of the school leader as it relates to ensuring teachers feel supported is critical (Horowitz, 2013). Approximately 1,300 teachers and administrators were surveyed. Three-quarters of surveyed school leaders, but less than 30 % of surveyed teachers, strongly believed that teachers received adequate student behavior support by administrators (Horowitz, 2013). If school leaders do not acknowledge this discrepancy, leadership could become a contributing factor in teacher turnover. The needs of students and teachers cannot be overlooked if the climate is to be positive. Shaping the climate to where the school’s vision can be attained is what an effective leader does (Spiro, 2013). This cannot happen if the school leader does not recognize and embrace the power of the relationships amongst adults and students in the building (Handford & Leithwood, 2013; O’Malley et al., 2015).

Student Behavior

The concept of student behavior has been a focus of researchers for many years (Micek, 2013; Sullivan et al., 2014). Han and Akiba (2011) state that rising levels of problematic behavior and the need for strategies to improve behavior is a nationwide matter. In fact, many teachers believe that increased disruptive behavior of students impedes classroom instruction (Reglin, Akpo-Sanni, & Losike-Sedimo, 2012). *Student behavior* is then defined as disengaging and actions that prevent a teacher from teaching. Though many behaviors that some teachers find difficult to manage in the classroom are minor, identifying solution-based strategies for both minor and major behaviors have been a critical component to classroom management programs (Sullivan et al., 2014).

However, managing challenging behaviors continue to be a frustrating obstacle for classroom teachers (Morgan & Sideridis, 2013). Examples of minor behaviors are gossiping, being uncooperative, talking out of turn, being out of the seat, insulting others, and aggression (Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2013; Sullivan et al., 2014; Xenos, 2012). Teachers find these behaviors significantly concerning and damaging to establishing effective classroom management (Reinke et al., 2013). Typically, one or two students are identified as problems in the classroom. Yet, the behavior exhibited by the two students may produce a ripple effect that leads to more students acting out. The inability to manage challenging behaviors could lead to those behaviors serving as a negative platform for other students as misbehaving students receive positive recognition from peers for engaging in disruption (Power et al., 2013). Thompson (2014) posited that approximately 20% of a school's population is connected to some facet of misbehavior. A form of external discipline such as office referrals and suspensions has become a common response of many schools with students exhibiting misbehavior (Flannery, Fenning, McGrath, Kato, & Bohannon, 2013).

Suspensions

It is a common assumption that suspension prevents a student from engaging in reoccurring problematic behaviors (Massar, McIntosh, & Eliason, 2015). However, although schools that use this “get tough” approach may assume that exclusionary discipline deters future behavior, it has not been supported by research (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Indeed, the issuance of merely one suspension contributes to a higher rate of possible school drop-out and juvenile detention (American Academy of Pediatrics,

2013). However, even though a large amount of research suggests that student suspension actually serves to reinforce (rather than deter) problematic behavior, it is still perceived as a wake-up call for many students (Massar et al., 2015). With the perception that suspensions prove effective, it is expected that students suspended at the beginning of the year will refrain from future discipline incidences resulting in discipline referrals and suspensions later in the school year (Massar et al., 2015). A recent study examined suspension usage in 1,840 middle schools across the United States to assess the effectiveness of suspensions. Of the 16,180 students who received a suspension, only 28.1% of students suspended at the beginning of the school year refrained from further discipline encounters; whereas, 71.9% were issued another suspension or discipline referral by the end of the school year. This data supports the failure of the issuance of suspensions. The short-term solution of suspensions to long-term problems support that in order to change the behavior of students and lessen teacher frustration, other proactive measures must be put in place (Martens & Andreen, 2013). Without having total control over student discipline, teachers may not believe supported which can ultimately lead to heightened frustration throughout the building Cregor and Hewitt (2011) also suggest discipline referral rates could be reduced through research-based prevention approaches for problem behavior.

School Safety

Disruptive behavior is considered to be one of the main concerns in ensuring a safe and orderly environment. Nonetheless, Kristsonis (2015) clearly states that educators have the huge task of educating students despite disruptive behaviors. For over two

decades, numerous policy makers reacted to concerns about disruption in the learning environment by relying on the implementation of zero tolerance policies and suspensions. When students misbehave, two common approaches are student isolation and suspension. Unfortunately, removal serves as a temporary fix and does not remedy or prevent disruptive behaviors in schools (Lauer & QualQuest, 2014). Research has even proven that such approaches are ineffective and could promote negative social outcomes. To be exact, temporary removal of students from school and punitive actions have resulted in an increase in overall student behaviors and a negative school climate (Hightower, 2016).

In response, educational leaders have turned to alternative models and best practices relating to school discipline (Skiba & Losen, 2015). Throughout the nation, strong models of alternative discipline approaches serve as models to other states and districts that are resisting change from the status quo of the one size fits all zero-tolerance strategy. As discipline infractions occur, schools must find ways to help resolve the issues while ensuring safety. However, the U.S. Department of Education through its safe and supportive program targets school climate as a potential mechanism to reduce discipline infractions.

Research has yet to determine if suspensions or expulsion contribute to improved behavior, safety, or resolve discipline issues. However, research supports that suspensions can cause disruption in learning, and does not improve the behavior or school climate (Osher, Kidron, DeCandia, Kendziora, & Weissberg, 2016). Between 2011 and 2012, Nearly 3.5 million public school students were suspended at least one time and one or more students were suspended for every teacher serving public schools

(Washington, D.C. Department of Education, 2014). A vast amount of research on school safety reveals many students believe emotionally and physically insecure in schools, which suggests that exclusionary discipline does not resolve the problem but rather leads to repeated infractions (Smith & Smith, 2014). Suspensions tend to cause higher rates of continuous behavior infractions or more suspensions (Hightower, 2016). In a 30-day period, a study by the Center for Disease Control and Preventions (2013) revealed that 81% of students in high school had been in a fight, 5.2% for carrying weapons and 19.6% for bullying. These behaviors also create a sense of un-safeness and fear in other students and even many teachers (Robers, Kemp, Truman, & Snyder, 2013). According to Hong, Kral, and Sterzing (2015), the problem of bullying has brought national attention on this growing problem. In the National Survey administered by McMahon (2014), findings revealed that in the past year, 80% of K through 12th grade teachers reported being victimized, 29% physically attacked, and 43% verbally threatened by students. In order for a school to be considered a great school, safety must be a priority. In today's society, there is a struggle to create a safe learning environment. Twenty percent of students nationwide were bullied on school grounds last year. Similarly, seven percent of students did not attend school in the past month for fear of what would happen at school or on the way home (*School-Based Health Alliance*, 2016). According to Snyder & Dillow (2012), in 2009-2010, 74% of the population reported at least one or more violent crimes in schools. School climate plays and intricate role in how students adjust to school (Wang et al., 2014) and lower bullying incidents (Espelage et al., 2014). Considering this, there are several bodies of research relating to school improvement that support Marzano's claim

that having a safe and orderly environment is the first step towards creating a culture of student success. For example, the Chicago Consortium on Chicago Schools Research (CCSR) underscores the implication that at basic, a student-centered learning climate consists of a safe and orderly environment with minimal behavior issues. Likewise, Marzano (2012) identifies five-levels of school effectiveness in his framework to improve school climate with the first level being to promote a safe and orderly learning environment. He presented criterion indicators that schools must not only achieve but also continuously monitor the indicators to be considered authentic at each level. The first three indicators in Marzano's criterion are:

- Few, if any, incidents occur in which student safety is compromised.
- Few, if any, incidents occur in which rules and procedures are not followed.
- Few Surveys of faculty, staff, students, parents, and community indicate high agreement that the school is safe and orderly (Marzano, 2012).

The importance of school safety is also one of the main factors as it relates to teacher and student mobility. When teachers do not feel safe, they are more likely to leave the profession.

Influence of Student Mobility on Behavior

When students have to transition to a new school, this can be damaging to the classroom climate within the new school which could change classroom dynamics and teacher perception of schools (Rumberger, 2003). This is significant because when students come to new schools, grades and conduct grades follow. According to Costley

(2012), families move for many reasons including to choose a better school, escape poor instruction, avoid suspension and expulsion policies, or the desire to choose different academic and social climates. Engec's (2006) study of Louisiana Public School students analyzed suspension data of mobile students. Engec's study found that students who enrolled in four or more schools within a school year had higher out-of-school suspension rates. Research also showed that as children move, they are more likely to have behavior problems. Interestingly, a study on classroom teachers that had received state and national awards found that building strong teacher-student relationships and delivery of effective, engaging instruction, off-set the impact of mobility (Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2011). The kids' mobility project also showed that mobile students demonstrated poor adjustments, which led to increased suspensions (Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004). Parents of mobile students interviewed also reported problems with behavior, esteem, and emotions. Thus, when students move, it has a direct impact on students, teachers, and entire school where the mobile student attends. Costley (2012) suggested that it is in a student's best interest to attend one school for as long as possible as this helps nurture the social need for love and a sense of belonging that comes with stability.

Student Mental Health

Besides behavior challenges teachers face from students who are not known to have a disability, a growing number of students who are identified as having an emotional or behavioral disorder are included in the general education setting. Most teachers have experienced a student who has displayed a type of emotional disorder like

defiance, harmful behaviors, conflict with others, or verbal outburst (Farley, Torres, Wailehua, & Cook, 2012). More than 55% of children with an emotional disorder diagnosis, spent 80% of the day in general education classrooms (Digest of Education Statistics, 2013). While less than 5% of the population in a school setting is made up of students classified as having behavior or emotional disorders, more than 50% of those classified students account for a school's discipline referral rates (Scott, Park, Swain-Bradbury, Landers, 2007).

While emotional disorders in a regular classroom can add to teacher stress and add to burnout, it is important for teachers to be informed of specific strategies to use with students who may have mental disorders, such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Conduct Disorder (CD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Acute Stress Disorder (ASD), and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Children diagnosed with ADHD fall into one of three categories: hyperactive/impulsive, inattentive or combined. Students with ADHD are known to have difficulty paying attention or controlling behaviors (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2003). However, data shows that 20% to 60% also have a learning disability, where children may exhibit behaviors such as aggression, tantrums, anxiety, mood swings, depression, and frustration. These students also may experience inferior peer relationships and lack social skills often leading to school dysfunction. An estimated 6.4 million children have received an ADHD diagnosis, which means that there is likely one student per every classroom who may suffer from this disability (Schwarz & Cohen, 2013).

Students diagnosed with CD often perceive themselves as being threatened and may act aggressively, threaten others, bully peers, use weapons to inflict physical harm on others and rarely display remorse for their actions. CD, which is diagnosed in males more frequently than females, consists of long-term behaviors that go against societal norms often violating the rights of other people. Children with CD require a considerable amount of supervision. Mental health professionals consider ODD to be similar to CD, but milder in regard to symptoms. Students with ADD are typically hostile or defiant towards authority figures (Borelli, Ruiz, Crowley, & Mayes, 2015).

Children with an OCD diagnosis experience compulsions, obsessions, and sometimes both. Obsessions consist of urges too powerful to resist, constant images, ideas or impulses to commit a specific act. Compulsions deal with the urge to act on impulses. OCD includes other disorders, including skin picking, hoarding, and trichotillomania (hair pulling). When students resist these impulses, they experience high-levels of distress and anxiety, which result in social and academic issues (Jaspers, Han, Chan, McKenney, Simpson, Boyle, & Stewart, 2017).

ASD and PTSD are similar mental disorders in that they both stem from traumatic events, such as sexual assault, physical assault, major injuries, car accidents, domestic violence or dog attacks. Symptoms include recurring dreams or memories, flashbacks, distress, avoidance, memory loss, self-blame, social withdrawal, jitteriness, difficulty concentrating, trouble sleeping, and disassociation. Teachers may observe students with ASD as being in a daze and separated from their environment. Children with PTSD typically experience memories, which cause them to relive the traumatic

experience. Flashbacks are the most dramatic of these recollections and are usually caused by something that reminds the child of the trauma (Goldbeck & Jenson, 2017).

Schools have been largely impacted by the state of children's mental health. With such disorders, students cannot maximize their potential (Rossen & Cowan, 2014). Schools, while viewed as ground zero for the effects stemming from mental health behaviors, play an intricate role in providing services (Rossen & Cowan, 2014). However, because of the limitations of community services and the amount of time children spend at school, the amount of time services can be provided is limited, deeming schools in the United States as the "defacto" serving as the mental health system for both children and adolescents (Burns, et al., 1995). However, many schools cannot effectively address these challenges as they are under-resourced with staff specializing in mental health (Weist, Lever, Bradshaw & Owens, 2014). Although teachers play an intricate role in academics, they are also instrumental in identifying characteristics that could be an undiagnosed mental health disorder in students (Johnson, Eva, Johnson, & Walker, 2011; Phillippo & Stone, 2013). However, many teachers are not prepared and unable to handle mental concerns of students that enter the classroom. Mental health can cause frustration and impacts teacher confidence in management and pedagogy. If kids are dealing with mental health issues in a regular educational classroom, they will not master the intended skills, which also breaks down climate. In many urban schools, teachers spend a great amount of time managing behavior problems (Reinke, Stormont, Herman, Puri, & Goel, 2011). These researchers discovered that while the vast majority of teachers acknowledged being the primary person to implement behavior programs among students, many felt ill-

prepared to serve the mental health needs of their students. Ninety-seven percent of teachers identified disruptive behavior as the primary mental-health need. Sixty-eight percent reported that most of the professional development came from in-services where 21% rated their experience with behavioral intervention as little to no knowledge. The lack of knowledge and preparedness around mental health may inadvertently serve to reinforce disruptive behavior (Tran, 2016).

Preparedness of New Teachers

Externalizing behaviors tend to affect novice teachers more than veteran teachers. Feurborn and Chinn (2012) gave an example of a child rolling his eyes in class as a sign of disrespect to an inexperienced teacher, while a more experienced teacher would consider the action as a cover-up for hiding insecurities. The difference in teacher experience with behavior could mean the difference in a student being written up and sent to the office by a novice teacher, whereas, a veteran teacher may not send a student to the office for this type of offense (Fuenborn & Chinn, 2012). The inconsistency could make the novice teacher who sends the student to the office for minor offenses feel non-supported if punitive measures are not given. While disruptive behaviors are concerning to new teachers, O'Neil and Stephenson (2012) reported there is minimal research to ensure teacher programs focus on classroom preparedness of first- year teachers. Disruptive and aggressive behaviors are significant factors relating to the feeling of inadequacy. Youngbloom and Filter (2013) investigated the extent of classroom management preparedness of PK-12 pre-service teachers enrolled in a university-based program. The research suggested inadequate teacher preparation of management of

strategies. A recent study by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2014) confirmed that effective teachers have the ability to build a positive climate in the classroom. In order to do so, Bullough (2014) indicated striving for stronger teacher preparation programs that includes rigorous adjustments and continuous teacher student relationship building efforts. The National Council of Teacher Quality (2014) highlighted in their Teacher-Prep Review findings that managing the classroom is taught most often in coursework during the teacher-certification program instead of on the job. O'Neill and Stephenson (2012) suggested teacher-preparation programs enable pre-service teachers time to learn and practice methods for managing problematic and challenging behaviors by providing opportunities to practice strategy implementation for a wide range of behaviors. Several bodies of research suggest there is a true feeling of unpreparedness of beginning teachers in the area of classroom management (Unal & Unal, 2012). The possible lack of classroom control due to teachers being unprepared could have a negative impact on school climate.

The Learning Environment

In *Education Newsweek*, Chronister (2013) argued that teachers and administrators are responsible for a school's discipline and social environment. Teachers described school principals with low suspension rates as being more concerned with the school climate than school principals with high suspension rates. Chronister suggested that the classroom environment impacts a student's ability to learn. One of the highest priorities of any discipline policy is maintaining the integrity of the learning environment. However, attempting to maintain order by relying on suspensions unnecessarily for minor

behaviors may not only prevent the evolution of improved behaviors, but may also fail to improve the climate. Student suspensions can negatively impact student and school-wide academic outcomes (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Today, most national initiatives focus on testing, curriculum, and personnel as factors for improving school educational outcomes; however, a growing consensus recognizes the ways in which peer relationships, students' sense of safety and security, and discipline policies affect academic success. These are the very elements that makeup school climate. Moreover, the failure to manage the environment of a class is one of the most overwhelming problems a teacher may face (Reeves, 2012). Additionally, student misbehavior is one of the main causes of stress on the job and teacher burnout (Ratcliff, Jones, Costner, Davis, & Hunt, 2010). In order for learning to take place in the classroom, a teacher must be able to handle discipline problems and motivate at-risk students to learn. However, when students act out, it raises the level of frustration of teachers, which impedes their ability to teach (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Reeves, 2012). When teachers stop caring, students begin to act out more than the normal, which directly impedes instruction. This causes instructional delivery to suffer (Kipps-Vaughan 2013). This sort of pessimistic attitude negatively impacts students' learning (Fernet et al., 2012).

Classroom management continues to be essential in creating a positive learning environment (Rosas & West, 2009). Positive learning environments support psychological needs and cultivates learning (Copeland & Bristol, 2011). This belief is based on the idea that classroom management that serves as punishment may prohibit misbehavior, and ultimately severs student-teacher relationships, while, on the other

hand, classroom management that gives choice and displays both reward and punishments could reduce discipline and build relationships between teachers and students (Roache & Lewis, 2011). When teachers and students build a positive rapport with one another, it potentially reduces misbehavior, which in turn could impact school climate.

Teacher-Student Relationships

One way to improve school climate is to improve teacher to student relationships (Coner, 2014). How connected individuals feel is an important component of school relationships and is reflected in school climate (Galvan & McGlennen, 2012). Strong teacher-student relationships lessen classroom behavior problems (Hansen, 2014). Researchers found that the interaction between teachers and students can have a positive impact behaviorally and emotionally.

Brady, Forton, and Porter (2012) posit that students form learned behaviors in many different ways. The way a teacher responds to misbehavior determines how students will behave in the classroom. Research indicates that mild misbehaviors are often ignored. When these misbehaviors are ignored, the behaviors magnify to an uncontrollable level (Brady et al., 2012). As students enter formal school settings as early as pre-kindergarten, positive relationships with teachers establish the foundation for successful adaptation in both the social and academic environments. Teacher –student relationships provide a unique opening point for teachers and staff members focusing on enhancing learning environments (O’Brennan et al., 2014). Through the use of diverse measures and multiple samples, there is abundant evidence that students who perceive

their teachers as supportive are less likely to have behavioral difficulties in school (Hung, Luebbe, & Flaspohler, 2015; Lee 2012; Wang & Dishion, 2012; Zullig & Matthews, 2014). These studies conclude that students who believe that teachers want them to do well, have concern for them, and understand them, are more willing to work in the classroom. According to O'Brennan et al., (2014), students who build close bonds with their teachers are happier about school and get along better with peers. The building of relationships enables teachers to serve as a base of security for young children. They feel more comfortable in the instructional environment and work better. Established relationships allow students to know that if things become difficult, the teacher can recognize the problem. In contrast, students who do not feel supported are more likely to display behaviors such as fighting, bullying, and weapon carrying (Zullig et al., 2014). The quality of the relationships between teacher and student was directly associated with the higher levels of misbehavior and emotional engagement by students (Lee, 2012).

Influence of Student Behavior

Regardless of student behavior, teachers are held accountable for ensuring that students receive adequate instructional time with minimal interruptions stemming from inappropriate student behaviors. Though the majority of behaviors are caused from a small number of students, those students have a significant amount of power over typically good students influencing them to behave in ways that they shouldn't (Anderson, 2012). Negative classroom behavior interferes with instruction and causes teachers to lose valuable time trying to re-engage students (Fueborn & Chinn, 2012). The rejection and negative attitude towards school rules might influence the issuance of

discipline referrals (Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2012). The display of negative attitudes and some behaviors are only resolved through discipline referrals, resulting in discipline actions in a form of suspension. For every day a student is absent due to suspension, the student misses a valuable day of instruction. The National Center for Education Statistics (2011) data revealed student misbehavior is a nationwide problem. According to Bosworth, Ford, and Hernandez (2011), students consider negative behaviors in the classroom to be a threat to not only teaching and learning but also to overall school safety. In fact, it is noted that when students with poor behaviors are removed from the learning environment, climate improves. However, researchers found that the removal actually hurts the climate (Colombi & Osher, 2015). The practice of exclusion does not help in focusing on the spectrum of practices to enhance climate by working to address misbehaviors of students. The direct exclusion promotes a false sense of security where students not only feel less safe but are less likely to build relationships not only with teachers and staff but also with each other. Student behavior has a far-reaching impact on school-wide functions, including teacher satisfaction, teacher retention, and student achievement. Interestingly, studies also show that schools with positive climates tend to show a decrease in discipline problems, less aggressive behaviors, and fewer suspensions (Cohen & Geier, 2010; Gregory, et al., 2010; Lee, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011). It is important for school leaders to understand the importance of a positive climate so that the level of stress on teachers can be minimized.

As researchers admit that student conflict in the classroom can lead to discipline referrals and exclusionary discipline, several strategies have been put in place to diffuse

conflict to keep students in the classroom (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Moreover, even though there is not a national protocol for discipline that can be implemented by schools, many schools have the autonomy to implement their own discipline measures (Ergun, 2014). However, many states have been impacted by legislative changes concerning school discipline as the need for reform increases prohibiting autonomy in schools. In California, a bill was passed by legislature limiting principals and superintendents from suspending or expelling kindergarten through third grade students for minor infractions under the category of disruption or defiance. In other cases, proof of use of non-exclusionary alternatives had to be proven in order for suspensions to be issued (Skiba & Losen, 2016). In Colorado, schools are expected to minimize discipline referrals for minor infractions by allowing authorities of the law to handle such situations in an effort to align the consequence with the offense (Skiba & Losen, 2016). The state of Georgia established a climate management program statewide and now releases annual ratings of school practices relating to discipline and use of research-based intervention (Colomi & Osher, 2015). Recently, Colorado, Denver, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Chicago have supported the abolishment of exclusionary punishment and focusing more on interventions. While this may show a decline in suspension and referral rates, the question still remains, if it helps school discipline or support teacher management. In Colorado, Restorative Justice has become a popular intervention in which many schools are using (Song & Swearer, 2016). This method is gaining popularity with the general public. There are over 17,000 results when searching for news articles on this topic (Google, 2017). The Restorative Justice Model is said to be an effective alternative to

exclusionary discipline. With the use of Restorative justice, suspension rates have been reduced 40 to 90% within the first year of implementation while enhancing positive school climate (High Hopes Campaign, 2012; Wong Chang, Ngan, & Ma, 2011). With the complexity of the components, many use the term restorative practice instead of the term justice, which was initially used in the justice system. The use of Restorative justice is said to identify the underlying problems relating to behavior in schools as opposed to solely targeting the child as the problem (Gonzalez, 2012). The practice of both student and staff members proactively addressing possible disruptive behaviors before they surface reduces the number of behaviors (Sarky & Fenning, 2012), creating a more positive school climate. School leaders who have implemented this approach have been said to notice a change of a more positive climate as well as a positive change in students and staff. At one high school, suspensions were reduced by 51% in one year as well as teacher disrespect declined. Teachers attribute Restorative justice to this result (Garcia, 2016). In contrast, New York, replaced exclusionary discipline with the alternative approach, restorative justice. New York has considered this approach as backfiring. Though suspensions are on the decline since its implementation, the infractions are on the rise. Nationally, many districts have reported more classroom disruptions and violence. Politicians and district leaders are praising declining results but fail to hear the cries of teachers who are the ones left to deal with disruptive students. The Chicago Teachers Union has complained that Restorative justice leaves teachers to control unruly kids (Sperry, 2015). The inability to reinforce consequences for disruptive behavior leaves students and staff at risk, and the delivery of instruction impossible. As research claims

that Restorative justice is an effective intervention, there have been some studies with conflicting results. Another alternative intervention is Mindfulness. The state of Minnesota is launching a new intervention in a charter school for teachers called Mindfulness. Mindfulness was derived from a teacher's battle with high blood pressure and turned to the mindfulness course to help deal with classroom stress. After ten more teachers joined with him and referring to the teacher acknowledgment of fighting with mocking of comedians, violence from rappers, and get rich schemes, mindfulness was created to focus on how to create a culture of kindness. Focusing on five strategies: Celebrating differences, watching the language spoken to others, teaching for understanding, building community, and holding parents accountable should not only impact the culture and climate of the school, but prevent teacher frustration and stress with knowing the intentional direction for students (Nazaren & Krafel, 2017).

Influence on Teacher Stress Levels

Student behavior is a major factor contributing to teacher stress. When teachers are stressed, it causes a detrimental impact on students in the classroom both academically and behaviorally (Kipps-Vaughn, 2013). Now, teachers are not only expected to teach the curriculum, but they are also held accountable for the implementation of behavior interventions due to the rise in problematic behaviors occurring in the school setting (Briesch, Hemphill, Volpe, & Daniels, 2015). High-level infractions are most times supported with more punitive discipline measures, but low-level infractions are considered classroom correctable. Low-level behaviors, minor behaviors, or non-compliance, are all terms to describe common acts that teachers have to

endure on a daily basis. Adding more responsibilities on teachers can lead to undue stress. Studies reveal that interventions implemented to correct behaviors can be time-consuming. Nearly 40% of all mental health interventions require teachers support and 18% of interventions rely solely on the teacher (Franklin, Kim, Ryan, Kelly, & Montgomery, 2012). High-stress levels on teachers can cause burnout. Non-compliant acts such as speaking out of turn, beating on the desk, showing disrespect, or refusing to complete assignments, have been identified as leading causes of teacher stress (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). While teachers find coping strategies, it negatively impacts instruction and classroom climate. Allday, Nelson, and Russel (2011) reveal teachers spend a great amount of time focusing on misbehavior while losing valuable instructional time. On average, 93% of students respond to teacher instruction, while the rest average 4-5 exchanges before adhering to the teachers' request (Dhaem, 2012). These behaviors that are considered low-level have been reported by teachers to be progressively increasing (Reglin, Akpo-Sanni, & Losike-Sedimo, 2012). The high frequency of these type of infractions led to low morale and possible teacher burn-out.

Research noted that over the years, students have changed, and the behaviors of students are more stressful to both novice and experienced teachers at any stage in their career (Aloe et al., 2014). While there are several teachers nationally that have been teaching five or more years, there are many teachers who began their teaching careers without the proper training needed to manage student learning. Inadequate training can lead to an early burnout (Goldhaber & Cowan, 2015). Even though most of the research over the past decade has been on the burnout of new teachers, teacher burnout is a

problem that affects veteran teachers too (Desimone, et al., 2014). Stressed teachers, and those who experience burnout, tend to have little to no patience, which could lead to a negative teacher-student relationship. In contrast, a recent study revealed that experienced teachers who stay in the field of education learn to cope and don't suffer from burn out but it does lead to exhaustion (Gray, Wilcox, & Nordstokke, 2017). When teacher mental exhaustion occurs, the patience level for behaviors is more sensitive. The level of consequence given to a student action can be much harsher (Bracey, 2009). Teachers consider behaviors such as bullying, stealing, and lying to be most significant as it relates to disruption. What results in a severe action, has been found to be subjective and a broad topic amongst classroom teachers. Rubinstein (2012) found that teachers rate any disruptive behavior where one student has a negative observable effect on the other students as severe.

Moreover, as the symptoms of burnout grow, students may suffer emotionally due to the inconsistencies that emerge from that teacher's practice (Gold & Roth, 1993/2013). Additionally, increased teacher burnout also leads to increased teacher absenteeism, which forces other teachers to cover classes putting negative stress on the organization (Berry, Byrd, & Weider, 2013; Zeichner & Liston, 2013). A teacher reports, "If anything makes me quit, it will be the stress caused by classroom management problems" (Mee & Haverback, 2014, p. 47). Increased stress levels of teachers put urban school systems in vulnerable positions such that the loss of talented teachers means that schools are unable to perform at their best (Lloyd & Sullivan, 2012). Therefore, when student behavior is perceived as overly defiant, it often leads teachers to feel negatively

toward students, which amplifies teacher stress (Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011). Due to the fact that exhaustion and teacher discouragement are connected, the result is a low-quality school climate (Spilt et al., 2011).

Influence on Teacher Retention

The rate of teachers that leave the profession within the first three years is close to the turnover rate of rookie police officers. The phrase teacher burn-out is used to describe a teacher that is emotionally exhausted in the realm of education. There are a variety of reasons why teachers leave the profession, including a deficient administrative support, poor student behavior, and a lack of teacher influence over school-based decisions (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014). Because of the teacher shortage that many school districts face, many districts are left to fill vacancies with substitute teachers who serve primarily as place-holders. Astonishing rates of teacher attrition have been recently released with 50% of new teachers leaving the field within the first five years. Of that percentage, 25% left due to student misbehavior (Aloe, Shisler, Norris, Nickerson, & Rinker, 2014). Classroom management is one of the leading causes of teacher-burnout as well as an increase in teacher turnover (Kerr & Valenti, 2009). According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011), there is a strong connection between disruptive behaviors and teachers' ability to achieve their goals. According to Gibbs and Miller (2014), a teacher who continues to work through burn-out exude chronic absenteeism, irritability, and a decline in classroom environment which ultimately leads to student apathy. Educators with effective classroom management encountered fewer behavior issues than teachers who poor classroom management (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003).

Marinell and Coca (2013), lead a study on teacher turnover in middle school. Student misbehavior was found to be both the cause and result of high teacher turn-over. One teacher expressed that the entire tone of the school is impacted in a negative manner when a teacher leaves. However, according to Adnot, Dee, Katz, and Wyckoff (2016), teacher turnover could have positive effects. Many teachers that abruptly leave the profession are labeled ineffective. This enables schools to replace those teachers that leave, with more effective teachers. This contrasting effect supports the need to deepen the knowledge around school climate as it can create unforeseen shifts in the building in a positive or negative way. In 2009, Chicago public schools reported a low percentage of district turn-over with school climate serving as a contributing factor to reduce teacher attrition. Goldring, Taie, and Riddles (2014) reported that throughout the United States., 7.1% of public school teachers leave within their first three years of teaching, and 50% of teachers in high poverty areas within the first five years, and in some urban districts, teacher tenure can be as short as 3 years. This impacts a students' ability to excel and many times creates frustration or stress on teacher teams and in schools. Annually, out of 1,000,000 teachers, 14% of all teachers either transfer to different schools, change districts, or leave the profession (Gray & Taie, 2015; Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012). Teacher stress and burnout must be identified before it grows into a larger problem especially since a significant number of teachers who are leaving the profession are not retiring but seeking other professions. Differences stood out between teachers who remain in the field and those who leave the field in a study by Hong, (2012) on comparing the beliefs and emotions of seven leavers and seven stayers in the teaching

field. While all teachers agreed about teacher challenges, including difficulty with classroom management, stayers displayed a higher level of optimism, positive emotion, and self-efficacy. Leavers attributed difficulty to their own personality, which leads to emotional burnout. The stayers acknowledged that assistance of administrators helped to set emotional lines between teachers and students so they don't take negative behaviors or actions personally. These studies, along with the fact that teachers are leaving the profession, it is suggested that some attrition could be avoided (Cox, Parmer, Tourkin, Warner, & Lyter, , 2007; Goldring, 2002, Ingersoll & May, 2011). Ultimately, a teacher's ability to teach is impacted by students who act out which adds to frustration levels (Aloe, Amo, & Shanhan, 2014; Reeves, 2012). The impact of student behavior on teacher retention is especially seen in urban schools that typically experience a higher turn-over rate than suburban and rural schools (Keigher, 2010). Increased behavior problems occur because of inexperienced staff, but teachers appear less likely to stay in school where there are persistent behavior problems. The lack of preparation of real-world experiences in teacher education programs for new teachers also causes them to be more susceptible to teacher burnout and attrition. An adjustment has to be made by new teachers to students, parents, school demographics and climate, and district policies; however, a failure to adjust leads to a feeling of being overworked and stressed (Marinell & Coca, 2013). Thus, job satisfaction is a key measure of school-climate (Papay, 2012).

Influence of Discipline Referrals

Many teachers use discipline referrals as a behavior management tool. Yet, this form of management that becomes habitual, can sometimes signal a teachers' inability to

handle behavior. The discipline referral is often a cry for help among teachers that have reached their limits (Fries & De Mitchell, 2007). A student's defiance and refusal to follow rules can attack teachers both personally and professionally. Indeed, when a student is disrespectful or refuses to obey, a teacher perceives this action as a threat and impedes teachers' ability to maintain control of the classroom. Studies focusing on discipline referrals provide the most common forms of displayed behavior as disrespect, habitual disruptive behavior, disobedience, and blatant defiance (Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin, & Moore-Thomas 2012; Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). The disrespect and refusal to obey teachers were found to be most common.

Influence on Instructional Time

The loss of instructional time is another negative outcome of disruptive student behavior. When students are non-compliant, teachers have to contend with issues in classroom management instead of focusing on student learning (Sida-Nicholls, 2012). One disruptive student can be just as distracting as a classroom full of students misbehaving, but the teacher's approach to handling the behaviors can predict what behaviors persist going forward. In some districts, a teacher's ability to manage disruptive behaviors is taken into consideration when categorizing a teacher as effective or ineffective. Students who model destructive behavioral tendencies in front of their peers can make the work of teachers very difficult. Teachers experience stress relating to student behaviors and involvement (Black, 2010, Covey, 2006; Klassen & Anderson, 2009; Spilt, Koomen, & Thiis, 2011; Vassallo, 2014).

Summary and Conclusions

There is considerable research on the influence of school-wide climate on student behavior, suggesting that student behavior can be shaped by school leadership, student mobility, and by teacher created learning environments. There is, however, less research on the role of student behavior in shaping teacher perceptions of school climate. In particular, the research suggests that increased incidences of student misbehavior lead to increased teacher stress, decreased teacher retention, and increased student drop-out rates. Overall, it appears that schools where students feel safe, and there is evidence of high-quality relationships between teachers and students, show decreased incidences of student misbehavior. Conversely, a climate that consists of negative peer interactions, victimization, and bullying fosters an environment where students are more likely to act out. Indeed, whether faced with the consequence of fighting, insubordination towards teachers, or bullying, students who do not perceive that the climate is positive tend to face higher incidents of suspension (Thapa et al., 2013). This does not, of course, mean that the school climate itself does not impact student behavior. Indeed, since school success is inherently dependent on teacher-student interactions, teachers play an intricate part on school climate (Cobb, 2014). Chapter 3, more specifically than other research studies, seeks to examine the influence of discipline referral rates on teacher perceptions of school climate.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this causal-comparative study was to compare teacher perception of school climate as measured by the TNTP Insight Survey for schools with high discipline referral rates and schools with low discipline referral rates during the spring semesters of 2014-2016. In this chapter, I analyzed the context of the study, presented research questions, provided how the data were retrieved, and ensured that the data were valid.

Research Design and Rationale

I used data from this study district to compare discipline referral rates and TNTP Insight Survey scores in order to identify the influence that discipline referral rates have on teacher perception of school climate. The research design was to use archival data to perform a causal-comparative study to investigate the influence of student discipline on school climate. I examined the comparison between the independent variable (discipline referral rates) and the dependent variable (scores from the TNTP Insight Survey). This causal-comparative design has been used to study similar, related variables (Alston, 2017; Linares, 2012).

The rationale for the use of this design was to examine differences amongst the variables of pre-existing groups. This approach was to investigate the role of student discipline referrals on school climate as perceived by teachers. This design was most applicable as I used archival data to determine if there was a relationship between the dependent and independent variables of this study.

In this design, I used archival data from Spring 2014-2016. The data from the PowerSchool Student Management System (SMS) included the number of discipline referrals by school and the number of students enrolled by school. Data on the number of discipline referrals by school and the number of students enrolled by school were retrieved. The number of referrals divided by the number of students enrolled produced the discipline referral rate (independent variable), which created high and low groups. The student discipline referral retrieval was straightforward. Although a categorical approach was not taken to identify the level of behavior, it was understood that the behavior warranted a discipline referral. The retrieval of TNTP Insight Survey results were also archival. With this causal comparative design, there was one constraint: the leadership subdomain category was not added to the TNTP Insight Survey until Spring 2016, thus the reason for results prior to 2016 were not available.

When researching other designs that could be used for this study, several were considered. The true experimental design was considered. The researcher is able to establish cause and effect among a group of variables through the scientific method. This method would control all variables except the independent variable, and randomly assign subjects. However, while cause and effect can be determined through the impact on the dependent variable, random assignments of subjects would not be identified (Lodico, 2014).

Another design considered was the bivariate correlational design, which determines the empirical relationship between two variables (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2013). However, the current study was designed to identify the differences of high

versus low discipline referral rates, if any, on the dependent variable, which is the TNTP Insight Survey climate scores.

Methodology

Population

The current study district had more than 147,000 students enrolled in the 3-year period that I retrieved archival data. African-American student population accounted for 75.7% of the total enrollment. Hispanic students for 14.2%, Caucasian 10%, Asian made up 2.1%. Biracial subgroups made up the remaining 3.7% (School District Demographics, 2017). In addition to the student make-up, 82.4% of the student population fell within the economically disadvantaged (which are students that are from a household that meets the income eligibility guidelines of less than or equal to 185% of the federal poverty guidelines for free and reduced-price meals) category (TDOE, 2017). The school structure of this district is comprised of 81 elementary schools, 26 middle schools, and 27 high schools, of these: 47 schools are optional (meaning all students or a select group of students must meet a high-level set of requirements to obtain entrance) and 18 are I-Zone which stands for the Innovation School Zone (a subset of schools that are geared towards turning around underperforming schools). Within this number of schools are special school structures such as 13 K-8 schools, and eight alternative schools. The alternative placement was designed for meeting the behavioral needs of students that could not be addressed in a traditional school setting. This setting also gives students who have been expelled an opportunity to continue learning while being away

from the traditional school setting. Not included above are two special schools, one virtual school, four Career & Technical schools, and 45 charter schools.

Teaching in those schools were 6,800 teachers with more than 175 being National Board Certified (a voluntary advanced credential in teaching that exceeds state licensure). Of those teachers, 5,400 teachers are female, and 1,400 are male. The diversity within this district is 61% African American, 37% White, 1% Hispanic, and 1% Asian.

The population of teachers for this study were determined by whether the schools in which they taught reflected high discipline referral rates or low discipline referral rates. These groups varied from Spring 2014 through Spring 2016. Data were retrieved from year to year.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

A G*Power analysis was conducted to ensure what the appropriate number of schools for the *t* test (two-tailed) would be to generate data points for identifying differences between the two independent groups. For this study, to compute the sample size, a priori power analysis was used and the following parameters were entered: a two-tailed t-test was selected with an alpha = 0.5, power = .80, estimated effect size = 0.67, and the allocation ratio = 1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). With the input parameters, the output parameters supported an appropriate, quantifiable number for this school district, which was 72 schools that were balanced into two groups of 36 each.

Teachers were surveyed at each school through a contractual agreement with the school district, TNTP administered an online teacher survey to each school. It was required by this study district that a minimum of 80% of teachers completed the TNTP

Insight Survey at each school. After ranking schools by discipline referral rates, a sample of teachers was grouped as surveyed participants by pooling teacher collective responses from the highest 36 discipline referral rate schools and the lowest 36 discipline referral rate schools for each year of study creating a high group and a low group from Spring 2014-2016.

Archival Data

The purpose of this causal-comparative study was to determine whether there were differences in school climate scores of schools with high and low discipline referral rates within an urban school district located in the Southern United States. This study examined referral data generated through the district's PowerSchool SMS and TNTP's Insight Survey Index Scores from Spring 2014- 2016. PowerSchool SMS is a web-based student information system that is widely used by schools throughout the United States. It has a robust reporting system that allows schools and districts to capture, track, and report on data such as scheduling, attendance, grades, and discipline. Because the study examines student discipline referral rates, it is important to understand how the current study district uses PowerSchool SMS to report discipline incidents. First, each school within the district has identified an individual as the PowerSchool SMS Coordinator. The PowerSchool SMS Coordinator is responsible for entering student data on a daily basis. When students are referred to the office due to discipline infractions, the PowerSchool SMS Coordinator enters the date, time, location, and type of infraction. In addition, the PowerSchool SMS Coordinator inputs the actions taken by administrators. Once the information is entered, PowerSchool SMS has the capability of archiving the data for

future retrieval at the district and school level. Although all data, once entered, is housed in this centralized student management system, schools have limited accessibility to student data. At the school level, school personnel can generate reports by gender, ethnicity, grade-level, grade-band, location, time of day, and even individual student discipline reports over a period of time. However, schools cannot retrieve district-wide data needed for this study.

I used archived school climate data from the TNTP Insight Survey. Even though the district has rights to the survey results, I had to communicate with TNTP (the company) to ensure that I would be able to use published research and questions from the actual Insight Survey. After completion of the proposal, I submitted a copy to TNTP for review to ensure that I am not publishing questions from the instrument that are considered proprietary. Once the company received the proposed copy, clearance was granted for use of published questions from the TNTP Insight Survey in this doctoral dissertation. After this process, I submitted the proposal to IRB for review and approval. In addition, a request for data application and a \$25.00 application fee was submitted to this district for official release of the archived data. I evaluated the quality of the proposal, ensured no breach of participant confidentiality, and determined the study's potential impact on instructional time and administrative workload. The benefits that this study has on the district were also considered. Once this district's Office of Planning and Accountability reviewed the submitted application, the department approved and provided me with the necessary reports to conduct my study. This district provided archived data for the Spring 2014-2016 school years. The archived data consisted of a

breakdown of the number of discipline referrals by individual schools, each school's overall student enrollment, and each school's TNTP Insight Survey results were retrieved for the district. The rates for this archival data was determined by taking the number of referrals divided by the number of students enrolled at each school. Neither the type of infraction, nor the level was a factor in this calculation. Federal law requires that data be archived yearly at the district level. Those same data sets are reported to the state. Since the reports were pre-populated at the district-level, there was no way of manipulating the data. The data from TNTP was provided by the school district. TNTP owns the actual survey, but the district owns the schools' results.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

The data that were retrieved for this study were the discipline data from PowerSchool SMS and the data from the TNTP Insight Survey. School secretaries are required to input behavior offenses and referral data into the PowerSchool SMS. This allows schools to track individual student incidents but not in real time as the entering of the time of incident is not required.

Since 2010, the TNTP Insight Survey has been used to capture teachers' perceptions of school climate. Teachers in this particular school district are expected to complete the TNTP Insight survey which rates school climate for individual schools. This survey includes a variety of sub-domains, of which two will be used in this study. The first sub-domain score was Learning Environment, which included questions around school safety and student behavior. The fact that there continues to be high student discipline referral rates and low school climate scores in this district point to the overall

significance of this study. It is also worth noting that classroom climate and classroom management, both of which are determined by classroom teachers, could have an impact on the response to the survey questions. Similarly, teachers in this same school district are also expected to demonstrate strong classroom management skills as a part of their job description. However, teacher classroom management skill sets vary by teacher and implementation looks different across classrooms. This is significant to this study due to the fact that when teachers' classroom management skills differ, students' reactions to school-wide expectations differ. Moreover, when students' reactions differ, the consequences of their behavior tend to differ. The second subdomain score used in this study was Leadership. The questions around leadership ranged from how the actions of teachers influenced goals and school priorities to how if teachers believe that administrators seek or listen to their feedback. Highly committed teachers have been linked to the leadership style of administrators with high expectations regardless of the initiating structure (John, 2017). Also embedded in the area of leadership, teachers respond to the follow through of administrators and if a vision is clearly set (TNTP, 2015). A school's overall climate score could be affected by a teachers' outlook on student discipline. How teachers feel about an administrator's reinforcement of consequences to behaviors or how strong a school-wide behavior plan is, could have a negative or positive influence on the perception of school climate. The possible intersection of these experiences in relation to school climate supported the need for this study. This survey was intended to identify practices schools can use to build stronger environments. It measured how teachers felt about the subject of the environment being a

good place for teaching and learning. It also measured whether there were consistent expectations including consequences for disruptive behavior. Specifically, this survey measured if teachers felt that teachers and school leaders all had the same expectation for addressing student behavior in shared spaces in schools such as the halls and cafeteria (TNTP, 2013).

The Insight Survey is administered in many schools throughout the state and the country twice in each school year. The instrument yields an overall index score. It measures teacher perceptions related to various categories/subscales such as observation and feedback, the hiring process, learning environment, how clear the expectation for teaching and learning is within the school, and if teachers plan to remain at the current school or seek other opportunities (TNTP, 2015). Out of the ten subscales of the instrument, two were chosen for this study: (a) Learning Environment, sample questions “My school is a good place to learn,” “Teachers and leaders at my school immediately address misbehaviors in shared school spaces such as hallways and the lunchroom.” and (b) Leadership, sample questions “My school leaders model the behavior they hope to see throughout the school community.” “Leaders at my school seek out feedback” (TNTP, 2015). The TNTP Insight Survey instrument is a validated measure of school climate and includes both summative and actionable data. Responses are compiled and returned to district and school level administrators. A school’s overall insight index score is generated from the combined proportion of teachers who responded in the identified target range to three key survey items on the TNTP survey which captures the index score in a single number from 1 (being the lowest) to 10 (TNTP, 2013). This score is

calculated according to the percentage agreeing or strongly agreeing. After the index number is used for the summarization of the teacher responses into 3 items on the survey, the survey items are measured on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1-6. 1= Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3= Slightly Disagree; 4= Slightly Agree; 5= Agree; 6= Strongly Agree. The process of identifying three items have been shown to be reliable in that they not only summarize teachers' performance practices but experiences for a particular school. The survey is validated by going through an annual process where items of the survey are reviewed and analyzed to ensure the alignment of questions within each domain (TNTP, 2013). It is an externally validated survey by the American Institute for Research to survey factors involving student success and teacher retention (TNTP, 2015).

While the independent variable was student discipline rates, the dependent variable was teacher perception of school climate. This survey depicts how teachers feel about the school and how learning environment and leadership contribute to the overall environment. These data were listed by the percentile ranks of surveyed schools by teachers meeting expectation, above expectation, and significantly above expectation against those teachers that domain responses reflects as significantly below and below expectations. Teachers' responses are grouped, which the survey identifies as domains. The data are listed in four columns, (a) historical findings, (b) this school, (c) the district average, and (d) the responses of teachers at the top 25% of schools nationwide (TNTP, 2013).

Though this survey is given twice a year, in the fall and the spring, both data sets were reviewed to ensure that the survey most relevant was used between fall and spring

to capture the data that supports this study. The spring survey provides teacher feedback after 8 months whereas the fall reflects teacher perception after two and a half months. The same semester scores for each type of data were requested. For example, spring discipline data were retrieved then spring TNTP survey scores were retrieved for the same year. This ensured consistency in the reports.

Data Analysis Plan

An independent sample *t* test was used to analyze data to determine if there was a significant difference in the school climate rating of schools with high discipline referral rates compared to schools with low discipline referral rates. Using SPSS 23.0, one independent sample *t* test was used for the dependent variable for each of the three years to examine if there were significant differences in TNTP Insight Survey scores for the two groups. Levene's test was used to determine the homogeneity of variance per year and between the two groups. The overall index score from the TNTP Insight Survey and the two sub-domain scores were used to test the research hypotheses. The overall index score per school in each group and the sub domain scores of Learning Environment and Leadership were extracted from the TNTP Insight Survey.

The archival data from all public schools within the current study district were reviewed. Schools with the highest discipline referral rates ($n = 36$) and schools with the lowest discipline referral rates ($n = 36$) were selected. The overall index scores and sub-domain scores of Learning Environment and Leadership from two categories of the TNTP Insight Survey were examined to determine if there were differences between the two groups from Spring 2014-2016.

The identified high and low discipline referral rate schools were compared on the various measures of climate. I used PowerSchool SMS data and questions from the TNTP Insight Survey of those identified schools to answer the following questions:

4. What is the difference in the overall school climate index score as measured by the TNTP Insight Survey for schools with high discipline referral rates (high group) compared to schools with low discipline referral rates (low group) from Spring 2014 to 2016?
 - a. H_{01} : There is no significant difference in school's overall climate index scores for schools with high discipline referral rates (high group) compared to schools with low discipline referral rates (low group)
 - b. H_{A1} : There is a significant difference in school's overall climate index scores for schools with high discipline referral rates (high group) compared to schools with low discipline referral rates (low group)
5. What is the difference in the Learning Environment sub-domain index scores as measured by the TNTP Insight Survey for schools with high discipline referral rates compared to schools with low discipline referral rates for Spring 2014 to 2016?
 - a. H_{02} : There is no significant difference in the Learning Environment sub-domain index scores for high group schools with high discipline referral rates compared to low group schools with low discipline referral rates.

- b. H_{A2}: There is a significant difference in Learning Environment sub-domain index scores for high group schools with high discipline referral rates compared to low group schools with low discipline referral rates.
6. What is the difference in the Leadership sub-domain index scores as measured by the TNTP Insight Survey for schools with high discipline referral rates compared to schools with low discipline referral rates for the Spring 2014 to 2016?
- a. H₀₃: There is no significant difference in the Leadership sub-domain index scores for high group schools with high discipline referral rates compared to low group schools with low discipline referral rates.
 - b. H_{A3}: There is a significant difference in the Leadership sub-domain index scores for low group schools with high discipline referral rates compared to high group schools with low discipline referral rates.

Threats to Validity

The extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure defines validity (Creswell, 2013; Lodico et al., 2010). While the development and validation of PowerSchool SMS is ongoing to ensure that the System meets the standard, the System requires school personnel to accurately and routinely enter student data for reporting (Pearson, 2014). Prior to the implementation of PowerSchool SMS, schools were expected to write information on forms, collect and verify data, taking a huge amount of time to type up data. The amount of training that schools receive for adding behavior incidents is a threat to validity. For example, one school may classify a fight as

a “fight,” and another school classifies a fight as a disruption, where as another school does not add it into the PowerSchool SMS.

Ethical Procedures

The de-identified data retrieved could not be manipulated as I didn’t have the ability to go back and alter the data from any previous year. Though the school climate scores were released from the district, a review of the proposal was performed by TNTP to ensure none of the content of the instrument that was proprietary was included in the written document. These data were protected and stored in a locked file cabinet, and I was the sole person reviewing the data to ensure its confidentiality. The data were for the use of this study and were not shared for any other purpose to ensure the agreement with TNTP to protect proprietary information was honored. Even though I am a school principal in the current study district, the data were retrieved through a routine process which existed prior to the development of the current study design. The collection of data from the school district’s database followed ethical and IRB guidelines (Walden University IRB approval number 08-10-17-0068647).

Summary

This ex post facto causal-comparative study was designed to examine high and low discipline referral rate schools and teacher perception of school climate for Spring 2014 through 2016. This study was unique to the study district as the exact influence of student discipline on teacher perception of school climate had not been studied. Results from this study will be provided to the current study district and can be used by many school leaders and universities to prepare for how student discipline can potentially

influence the perception of school climate throughout the district. With the exception of the sub-domain of leadership, which was surveyed only in Spring 2016, a look at three years of different pools of high and low groups and climate scores were analyzed. This chapter provided a description of the methodology and the type of *t* test used for this study. In Chapter 4, an analysis of the results will be provided and answers to the research questions will be revealed.

Chapter 4: Results

Although teachers face many more obligations on a day-to-day basis than instruction, it is important for teachers to ensure the best environments to develop students both socially and academically. The current study was intended to examine the influence of discipline referral rates on school climate. By providing quantitative evidence that answers if there is a difference between schools with high and low discipline referral rates, the current study provides researchers with additional data to support the influence of student discipline. The purpose of this study was to compare schools with high discipline referral rates and schools with low discipline referral rates to see if there were differences relating to overall climate index scores. The focus of this research was led by three questions amongst both groups: (a) What is the difference in the overall climate index scores?, (b) What is the difference in the Learning Environment sub-domain index scores?, and (c) What is the difference in the Leadership subdomain index scores?

This chapter presents the findings of the independent sample t tests on the variables stated in Chapter 3. A description of the sample and the teacher demographics is also presented. I used a total of seven independent sample t tests to examine differences in schools with high and low discipline referral rates and school climate scores.

Data Collection

I retrieved archival data for the current study from PowerSchool SMS and the TNTIP Insight Survey for all schools in this study district. As the researcher of this study, I used high and low discipline referral rates to create sample groups (36 high referral rate

and 36 low referral rate each year) and then were compared to the TNTP Insight Survey scores from Spring 2014 to 2016. This survey focused on three areas: the overall TNTP Insight Survey climate index score, and the sub-domain index scores of learning environment and leadership. There were missing data in the area of leadership in 2014 and 2015 as this domain category was not added to the instrument until 2016. The strength and results from the leadership domain is indicative of one year.

The current study district's student population is estimated to be 111,500. The survey that was used for this study was a required survey for every school with at minimum 80% staff completion to be considered valid. The discipline referral rate data were retrieved from PowerSchool SMS. After approval from the IRB of Walden University (08-10-17-0068647, August 10, 2017) and TNTP to use the survey results, the District's Office of Research and Performance Management released the data in Summer 2017. Following IRB approval, all information was retrievable with the exception of Leadership index scores for Spring 2014 and 2015.

I used student-level data to determine the discipline referral rate, and teacher-level data for the overall climate index scores and subdomain index scores. The sample size consisted of the total number of schools in the study district located in the Southern United States. By taking the number of discipline referrals and dividing that number by the total number of students enrolled at each school, I was able to identify referral rates. Once I calculated the rates, schools were placed in descending order, the 36 schools with the highest discipline referral rates (top down), and the 36 schools with the lowest discipline referral rates (bottom up) were identified for each year. The current study used

extant data retrieved from Spring 2014 to Spring 2016. Recent study data served as an indicator of possible influences on school climate for the current year. The other threat to external validity was the generalizability of the results. The results may only be generalized to school districts that are similar in demographics and size. The problem of generalizability potentially extends to the type of district (i.e. suburban, rural, and urban) and similar levels of staffing. The current study may not generalize to a school district located in the Southern United States with a population of over 147,000. The population was comprised of 11,200 students with disabilities, 7,300 English Language Learners, and 82.4% economically disadvantaged. With the aforementioned description, the current study could only be generalized to school districts with similar demographics.

Table 1

Teachers Surveyed

	Total*	Lowest 36**	Highest 36 ***
Spring 2014	2095	1130	965
Spring 2015	2398	1342	1056
Spring 2016	2501	1285	1216

*Number of surveyed participants for all 72 schools.

** Number of teachers in the low discipline rate schools.

*** Number of teachers in the highest discipline rate schools.

Results

Research Question 1

What is the difference in the overall school climate index score as measured by the TNTP Insight Survey for schools with high discipline referral rates compared to schools with low discipline referral rates for Spring 2014 to 2016?

In 2014, the mean for schools with low discipline referral rates ($n = 36$ for each year) had an overall mean index score of $M = 8.50$ with an $SD = 0.86$. Whereas, the high discipline rate schools ($n = 36$ for each year) had an overall mean index climate score of $M = 7.51$ ($SD = 1.32$). I used a Levene's test for equality of variance to determine if there was a significant difference between the two group variances. The test was statistically significant ($p = .014$) indicating that the assumption underlying the t test was not met. Therefore, "equal variance not assumed" was used to examine the t test results. The results of the independent sample t test $t(70) = 3.80$, $p < .001$, $d = .89$ reveal that there was a statistically significant difference between the overall school climate index scores of schools with low and high discipline referral rates. In 2015, low discipline referral rate schools had an overall mean climate index score of $M = 8.90$ ($SD = 0.94$), and schools with high referral rates had a mean of $M = 7.53$ ($SD = 1.29$). The Levene's test for equality for 2015 was statistically significant ($p = .01$) which indicated that the assumption underlying the t test was not met and equal variance not assumed was used to examine the results of t test. The results of the independent sample t test $t(70) = 5.15$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.21$ reveal that there was a statistically significant difference between the overall school climate index scores of schools with low and high discipline referral rates.

In 2016, schools with low discipline referral rates had an overall climate index mean score of $M = 8.54$ ($SD = 1.18$), whereas schools with high discipline referral rates had an overall climate index score of $M = 7.71$ ($SD = 1.33$). The Levene's test for equality of variance was not statistically significant ($p = .40$) indicating that this assumption underlying the t test was met. The results of the independent sample t test $t(69) = 2.82$, $p = .006$, $d = .66$ reveal that there was a statistically significant difference between the overall school climate index scores of schools with high and low discipline referral rates. Based on results of the test for Spring 2014 to 2016, mean scores of schools with high discipline referral rates had significantly lower overall school climate index scores than did schools with low discipline referral rates.

Table 2 presents the results of this analysis and of the overall climate index score.

Table 2

Overall School Climate Index Score

Year	t	Df	Sig.*	MD	SE	95% CI difference	
						Lower	Upper
2014	3.797	70	.000	.9972	.2626	.4735	1.5210
2015	5.148	70	.000	1.3694	.2660	.8389	1.9000
2016	2.815	68.96	.006	.8333	.2961	.2429	1.4238

* 2- tailed.

Research Question 2

What is the difference in the schools' Learning Environment sub-domain scores as measured by the TNTP Insight Survey for schools with high discipline referral rates compared to schools with low discipline referral rates for Spring 2014 to 2016? Survey results detected perception of the actual learning environments of schools.

In 2014, of 36 schools in each of the high and low groups, the score for schools with low discipline referral rates was $M = 7.94$ ($SD = 1.05$) and $M = 7.22$ ($SD = 1.31$) for schools with high discipline referral rates. The Levene's test ($p = .16$) indicated that the assumption of the t test was met. The results of the independent sample t test $t(70) = 2.59$, $p = .012$, $d = .61$ reveal that there was a statistically significant difference between the learning environment scores of schools with low and high discipline rates.

In 2015, the learning environment scores for schools with low discipline referral rates were $M = 8.32$ ($SD = 0.80$) and the mean for schools with high discipline referral rates were $M = 7.11$ ($SD = 1.36$). The Levene's test was statistically significant ($p = .006$), and the equal variance not assumed was used. The results of the independent sample t test $t(57) = 4.60$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.09$ reveal that there was a statistically significant difference between the learning environment scores of schools with low and high discipline referral rates.

In 2016, schools with low discipline referral rates were $M = 7.93$ ($SD = 1.27$) and the mean for schools with high discipline referral rates were $M = 7.30$ ($SD = 1.26$). The Levene's test was statistically significant ($p = .879$) which indicated that the assumption underlying the t test was met. The results of the t test $t(69) = 2.11$, $p = .039$, $d = .50$

reveal that there was a statistically significant difference between the learning environment sub-domain scores of low and high discipline rate schools. Based on the means, schools with high discipline referral rates showed a significant difference on the school's learning environment in Spring 2016 than schools with low discipline referral rates.

Table 3

Subscale Index Score in Learning Environment

Spring year	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig.*	<i>MD</i>	<i>SED</i>	95% CI difference	
						Lower	Upper
2014	2.593	70	.012	.7250	.2796	.1674	1.2826
2015	4.602	56.560	.000	1.2056	.2620	.6809	1.7302
2016	2.108	69.989	.039	.6278	.2979	.0337	1.2219

* 2-tailed.

Research Question 3:

What is the difference in the schools' Leadership sub-domain index scores as measured by the TNTP Insight Survey for schools with high discipline referral rates compared to schools with low discipline referral rates for Spring 2016? I intended to use data from 2014 to 2016; however, this sub-domain was added to the TNTP Insight Survey in Spring 2016 resulting in only one year of data for this category. Sample questions from the TNTP survey were not able to be shared due to the proprietary agreement made between TNTP and the researcher. The leadership score for schools with low discipline referral rates was $M = 8.18$ ($SD = 1.08$). The mean for high discipline rate schools was $M = 7.59$ ($SD = 1.11$). Levene's test was not statistically significant ($p =$

.961), indicating that this assumption underlying the t test was met. The results of the independent sample t test $t(69) = 2.27, p = .026, d = .54$ reveal that there was a significant difference between the leadership scores of low and high discipline rate schools. This is outlined in Table 4.

Table 4

Leadership Subscale Index Score

Year	t	Df	Sig.*	MD	SED	95% CI difference	
						Lower	Upper
2016	2.272	69	.026	.5911	.2602	.0721	1.1102

* 2-tailed.

Summary

Findings from the t test analyses revealed statistically significant differences in overall climate, learning environment, and leadership between schools with high discipline referral rates and schools with low discipline referral rates from spring 2014-2016. In each case, the null hypothesis was rejected. Discipline referral rates appear to influence a more positive or negative school climate as indicated by teacher perception on the TNTP Insight Survey. Chapter 5 follows with interpretation of findings, limitations, recommendations, potential impact for social change, and conclusion of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this causal-comparative study was to determine whether differences existed in school climate as measured by the TNTP Insight Survey for schools with high discipline referral rates and schools with low discipline referral rates during the spring semesters of 2014 to 2016. The current study was meaningful as this district has placed an emphasis on the importance of a positive school climate; which is also a part of administrator evaluations. Although there is a need to ensure a positive school climate, the primary factors that could affect school climate negatively or positively have not been researched or confirmed. This study took an in-depth approach to identify if there are connections between student discipline in schools and school climate. The results will be shared with the school district to gain a deeper understanding and bring an awareness of factors that impact student discipline and to become more intentional in strategies used to enhance school climate. To strengthen the study, survey data from Spring 2014 to Spring 2016 were retrieved. After ranking schools with high and low discipline referral rates, survey results were retrieved.

The outcomes from the current study were found helpful in explaining the problem. As discipline is on the rise and school leaders are held more accountable for creating a positive climate, the factors that prevent a positive climate are now even more important. In this study, the following 3 research questions were addressed: (1) What is the difference in the overall school climate index score as measured by the TNTP Insight Survey for schools with high discipline referral rates and schools with low discipline referral rates for the Spring 2014 to 2016?; (2) What is the difference in the schools'

Learning Environment sub-domain subscores as measured by the TNTP Insight Survey for schools with high discipline referral rates compared to schools with low discipline referral rates for Spring 2014 to 2016?; and (3) What is the difference in the schools' Leadership domain scores as measured by the TNTP Insight Survey for schools with high discipline referral rates compared to schools with low discipline referral rates for the Spring 2016 school year? Of the 7 *t* tests conducted, results from the overall climate index score domain and the sub domain of learning environment of 2014, 2015, and 2016 indicated that high discipline referral rate schools showed lower climate index scores and learning environment scores. For the area of Leadership, high discipline referral rate schools showed a significantly lower climate score in the area of Leadership compared to schools with low discipline referral rates.

Interpretation of Findings

The data were measured on 2,095 teacher responses in Spring 2014, 2,398 responses in Spring 2015, and 2,501 in Spring 2016, capturing the overall teacher perception of school climate. A key finding that was revealed from these data was that the overall TNTP climate index score, the individual sub-domain score of learning environment, and the sub-domain score of leadership, all had significant differences when comparing schools with low discipline referral rates and schools with high discipline referral rates. This indicates the level of impact that discipline has on the domains. In almost every area significance is revealed. Though the current study targeted the area of discipline referral rates and climate, plus the area of learning environment, and

leadership, there is a need to go deeper in addressing specific actions that warrant a referral and specific domains to see its actual impact.

It is possible that a focus on individual causes of the wide spread topic of student discipline would be beneficial. Results indicate that schools whose results reflect a more positive climate and have lower discipline referral rates could motivate other schools and bring strong discussion to the forefront about student discipline. With the presentation of findings, the protocol of referral reporting and the teacher surveys can also be discussed. These study findings foster a need for groups or committees to discuss discipline reform. In addition, peer reviewed literature suggests that teachers who work in schools with negative climates tend to experience various problems related to discipline (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Malinen & Savolainen, 2016; McClean, Abry, Taylor, Jimenez, & Granger, 2017). For this study, archival survey data were retrieved representing over 6,900 teachers (see Table 1). The astronomical number of teachers working in schools with high discipline rates and having negative climate ratings (3,237 from this research study) concurs with other literature, cited earlier in the study around low teacher morale, teacher attrition, and safety (Aloe et al., 2014; Kipps-Vaughn, 2013; Kristonis, 2015).

As the results reflect that student discipline is a factor that impacts school climate, many more studies are needed to identify solutions and best practices. Like several researchers, the desire to identify root causes of discipline problems are still being investigated (Bear, Yang, & Mantz, 2017; John, 2017; Montuoro & Lewis, 2017; Summers, Davis, & Hoy, 2017). Based on an annual examination of high and low referral

rate schools from Spring 2014-2016, schools with high discipline referral rates showed low learning environment, low leadership scores, and a more negative school climate rating, while schools with low referral rates, showed a more positive school climate rating. The data collected, ignites a need to go deeper with examining habitual behaviors and the specific actions that frustrate teachers most. It is understood that there is a huge concern around student discipline. However, the problem is not about addressing student discipline, but rather how to address it (Skiba, 2014). There is a need to identify best practices used by many schools throughout the district for classroom management strategies and positive reinforcement. A survey to teachers and administrators should be administered and examined by school leaders and district staff around specific behaviors that warrant a discipline referral. Findings from this study reveal that there might be a connection between discipline and how teachers feel. This study supports the need for more studies around how components of discipline specifically impacts the learning environment and what school leaders need to do more of to ensure that teachers feel more supported. With the emphasis on solutions and practices, implementation should help to reduce discipline referral rates and enhance school climate scores.

Limitations of the Study

Even though the study district consists of 207 schools, only 72 schools (6,994 teachers) were used for each of the three years. Out of the 10 domains on the TNTIP Insight Survey, only two were used. As this survey is based strictly on teacher perception, the dynamic subjectivity may impact a school's score as well. In the spring, this survey is administered to teachers during testing season, where many may be frustrated or worried

with the pressures of student success. Also, many teachers are finding out that they are being excessed (released from the school due to budget cuts), and internal and external job postings are posted for teachers to consider. These potential opportunities and challenges in schools could potentially heightened frustration levels. With the change in testing to a more Common Core aligned test and more accountability on schools to grow students, anxiety levels could also increase which could impact teachers' scores on the TNTP Insight Survey.

In addition to the previously mentioned limitations, readers must be careful in generalizing the results of the current study. Districts with a different population may find results that are highly divergent from the current study.

Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that there is a link between student discipline and school climate. The data collected ignites a need to go deeper with examining habitual behaviors and the specific actions that impede on a positive school climate. A survey to teachers and administrators should be administered and examined by school leaders and district staff around specific behaviors that warrant a discipline referral. There is also a need to identify best practices used by many schools throughout the district for classroom management strategies and positive reinforcers. Findings from this study reveal that there might be a connection between discipline and how teachers perceive school climate.

One of the greatest challenges to discipline is the ill-preparedness level and the lack of training from teacher preparation programs for new teachers (McCrimmon, 2015).

According to the National Council on Teacher Quality (2014), teacher preparation had not always been viewed as a factor impacting education. The inability to manage students can influence low morale amongst teachers who are not able to control the class and those teachers who have to help comfort or control other classes outside of their own set of students. As this study supports the need for more research, it has been proven that teachers who participate in special education training displayed higher levels of teaching efficacy and classroom management (Sokal & Sharma, 2013). There should be on-going professional development in teaching special needs students with emotional disorders in the typical setting to help reduce discipline referral rates. The emphasis on solution-based practices should not only help to reduce discipline referral rates but enhance school climate scores. Areas of further research include the following: more professional development around the areas of discipline, more research to identify ways to handle discipline in the classroom before it becomes an office referral, increased sharing amongst schools with more positive climates and schools with negative climates in regards to discipline practices, examining other discipline practices across states, comparing the effects of the one size fits all approach versus the innovative environmental approaches, and examining the local impact of Restorative Justice and PBIS as indicated earlier in this study and its impact on social change.

Implications

As many school leaders prepare to better the educational setting of students for the 21st century, it is important that educators be proactive in minimizing the number of distractions that would prevent learning from taking place, the field of education to

increase and expand, and student-teacher relationships to strengthen. The current study is intended to impact social change. With this intention, the need to look at the issuing of discipline referrals is needed. This is a sensitive topic in schools as when teachers send students to the office, the outcome of what happens, often speaks volumes to the teacher regarding whether they are truly supported by their administration or not. However, school leaders are limited in reaction as well. One study refers to the accountability to fix it as the cycle of exclusion. Teachers create the wall of helplessness that shapes the way they feel towards student behavior. This cycle also pressures the school leader to assume the role of savior as he or she believes that it takes their stand-alone strength to prevent chaos and a descending climate (Razer & Friedman, 2017). Many times, referrals are handed out to teachers to use when they have reached their limits. However, many teachers tend to use referrals as a zero-tolerance method for the classroom. The abuse of referrals can be found in many classrooms, but when schools are data driven and administrators begin to focus on the reported behaviors of students from teachers having multiple referrals, teachers begin ignoring behaviors instead of addressing them for fear of repercussion or to avoid embarrassment. Similarly, high or low discipline referral rates may also reflect the quality of school leadership. In looking at 72 schools, a pattern was identified in schools that had high and low discipline referral rates compared to climate scores over a period of three years. While a pattern was identified, there is a need to expand this same study throughout the state to understand how discipline influences other school districts in the state. For example, Roch, Mahmoud, Elsayed, and Edwards (2017), examined the effects of symbolic representation. They found that the negative effects

relating to discipline actions were smaller when there was a closer match racially amongst students and teachers. With this said, ratio and race could also play a role in the number of discipline referrals issued in schools.

Conclusion

This study district has over 111,500 students and over 200 schools in the Southern United States. A solid plan for discipline in ailing schools is critical. Due to the suspected limited amount of consequences a student faces once a referral is written, it may also equate to more referrals issued for the same behaviors. The more possible returns to the classroom, the more teachers may feel rejected, leading to low morale. With each variable, numbers reflected the powerful impact of student discipline. Though discipline referral data is used to identify and track behaviors (Gion, McIntosh, & Horner, 2014), the recipe of resolve for those type incidents is often left un-noted. The goal is to have the current study ignite conversation and strengthen the gap in teacher and administrative preparedness relating to student discipline. The need for this study in this district is great; however, research proves this topic to be a nationwide concern. Research proves that students who are issued at least one referral during the year are highly likely to be issued another referral before the end of the year (Massar et al., 2015). Now that the influence of student discipline has been examined more closely, there is a need to look at the individual factors or key behaviors of student discipline to implement best practices in order to enhance school climate.

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