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PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINARY CLIMATE AND FIVE  
ORGANIZATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY MEASURES**

Jason Bolden

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS  
OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINARY CLIMATE AND FIVE ORGANIZATIONAL  
PRODUCTIVITY MEASURES

by

Jason Pierre Bolden

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Leadership and Policy Studies

The University of Memphis

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## **Dedication**

This paper is dedicated to my family. To my wife and my Queen, Genita Bell-Bolden, who believed in me and inspired me even when I doubted. Only God knows where I would be without you; therefore, He saved the best of me for you, alone. You are my Good Thing and now, I am now all yours! LOL!!

To my daughter and my forever Princess, Brooklyn Starr Bolden, for you this is a reminder of the value of an education. Brooklyn, you are the reason I can't stop. Every goal I have set in my life that I thought was for me, is for you. My journey is all about clearing the path for you. You are multi-talented and can do and achieve EVERYTHING you set your mind to! Just like JoJo Siwa!!!

To my mother, Monica Scott, step-father, Robert Scott and little brothers, Ronald and Anthony, I am as proud of each of you as you are of me. Each of you has inspired me and imparted knowledge on me to stay the course. Even when I thought I was broken, it was your love that covered me.

I am still that little boy from South Memphis, trying and striving to stand as a righteous example and a positive role model for all the children of Memphis who grew up just like me. **Black Panther Wakanda Forever!!**

I love all of you!! As always:

“Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.”  
-Malcolm X

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## Abstract

Bolden, Jason Pierre. Ed. D. The University of Memphis. May, 2018. Teachers' Perceptions of School Discipline Climate: Correlated with Five Measures of School Productivity. Major Professor: Dr. Charisse Gulosino.

The purpose of this study was to investigate relationships between five school productivity measures at 248 Tennessee high schools and educators' perceptions of these institutions' climate for student discipline. Grounded in archived accountability information stored on the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) website, these five productivity measures were the student attendance, graduation, suspension, event dropout, and cohort dropout rates computed for the 2012-2013 academic year. For these same institutions, the perceived disciplinary climate was calculated from responses to a seven-item section on managing student conduct appearing on the 2013 state-wide administration of the *Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning* survey in Tennessee (*TELL Tennessee*).

After controlling for both student and faculty demographic characteristics, perceptions of the school's disciplinary climate proved to be coextensive with three of the five measures of school productivity employed in this study. In a multiple regression context, positive associations were uncovered between a mean score on the seven "policies and practices that address student conduct issues and ensure a safe school environment" and the school's concurrent attendance rate ( $\beta = 0.18, t = 3.12, p = .002$ ) and its concurrent graduation rate ( $\beta = 0.11, t = 2.27, p = .024$ ). Negatively linked, on the other hand, was a score on school's disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent event dropout rate ( $\beta = -0.14, t = -2.66, p = .008$ ). Zero-order correlations between

perceptions of the school's disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent suspension rate ( $r = -.26, p < .01$ ) and its concurrent cohort dropout ( $r = -.20, p < .01$ ) were also revealed, but these relationships did not remain statistically significant when covariates pertinent to students and faculty were taken into account.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

School disciplinary climate continues to be a concern of teachers, administrators and parents. Although it is recognized that many schools have taken steps in recent years to improve disciplinary climate, it is also true that school personnel must continue to deal with frequent discipline disruptions, which decrease the time available for teaching and learning. The spate of recent shootings and other violent attacks in and around schools has reignited the fierce debate over how safe and orderly schools really are. Several major national news stories reveal that we are in an increasingly violent society, schools reflect the society in which they find themselves, and that a number of multi-sectorial dialogues on school violence and discipline problems have highlighted the need for comprehensive plans to combat school safety and discipline problems. Prior studies show that there are a multitude of factors (internal or external to the school) that will have a significant impact on high school performance, and if teachers and administrators hope to contend with a variety of school safety and discipline issues, they must be able to create, safe, orderly and caring school environment (herein called school disciplinary climate) where educators, students, and schools can flourish (Mayer & Furlong, 2010).

School discipline takes a variety of forms, from minor punishments to more severe sanctions that include suspensions and expulsions. According to the most recent Public School Safety and Discipline, 39 percent of public schools (about 32,300 schools) took at least one serious disciplinary action against a student for specific offenses; 74 percent of these actions were suspensions that lasted five days or more, 6 percent were expulsions, and 20 percent were transfers to specialized schools (Robers, Zhang, Morgan, & Musu-

Gillette, 2015). Although disciplinary practices that remove students from classrooms and schools are widely used, their use is not distributed equally across the population. Research from the 1970s to the present has documented that students who live in poverty and minority students are significantly more likely than their white and affluent counterparts to experience school discipline (Losen, Hodson, Kieth, Michael, Morrison, & Belway, 2015; Noguera, 2003; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Raush, May, & Tobin, 2011). Data collected by the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights from the 2009-2010 school year, encompassing 85 percent of public school students, show that across all school districts included in the sample, African-American students were 3.5 times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their White counterparts. In addition, although 16 percent of public school students are African-American, they account for 55 percent of the students suspended in 13 Southern States (Smith & Harber, 2015).

The statistics on school discipline in Tennessee follow similar national patterns. African-American students in Tennessee are more than four times more likely to receive a suspension than they would if they were White. Tatter (2016) noted that half of suspensions across the state in the 2014-15 school year were handed out in just 8 percent of schools, many of which served predominantly minority students in Memphis. Across the state, 20 percent of African-American male students were suspended at least once that year. African-American students were also more than five times as likely as their White counterparts to be suspended. The Center for Civil Rights Remedies at The Civil Rights Project (2013) showed that 52 of the 90 secondary schools in Shelby County (Memphis) suspended at least one subgroup at a rate of 50 percent of their total enrollment.

## **Problem Statement**

There has been considerable national interest in schools as a locus for the prevention of school violence and discipline problems. Although this study was state-specific, the adoption of creative strategies that build positive school disciplinary climate and develop less punitive approaches to school discipline such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) are now also strongly encouraged, nationally, and even required for states to be competitive for federal funding. Despite much effort, there remains a dearth of information regarding evidence-based practice research that shows an association between positive perceptions of school disciplinary climate and multiple indicators of school performance, including the common dimensions of school disciplinary climate (Enomoto, 1997; Green, 1998a, 1998b, 2001; Noddings, 1999, 2001, 2002).

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between secondary level teachers' perception of their schools' disciplinary climate and five measures of school productivity: specifically, the annually computed school attendance rate, graduation, suspension, event dropout, and cohort dropout rates. Specifically, the aim of this research was to determine if specific school disciplinary climate items under the area of managing school conduct, as rated on a statewide teacher survey, predicted multiple measures of high school performance/productivity.

## **Research Questions**

The following questions were addressed in this research study:

1. Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perceptions of their schools' disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student attendance rate?
2. Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perceptions of their schools' disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student suspension rate?
3. Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perceptions of their schools' disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student graduation rate?
4. Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perceptions of their schools' disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student event dropout rate?
5. Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perceptions of their schools' disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student cohort dropout rate?

## **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

To guide this study, two theories and strands of research were selected based on their suitability to the relationship between disciplinary climate and school productivity measures as the phenomenon of interest. For the purpose of this study, a theoretical framework is defined as a theory that provides a broad framework regarding a phenomenon, including concepts and relationships between concepts. A conceptual

model is a guide to conducting process improvement that provides a visual representation of theoretical concepts and variables within the study. The theoretical model chosen is the school nurturing theory by Noddings (1992; 2006), Green (1998a, 1998b) and other care theory scholars (Enomoto, 1997), as well as the conceptual model on effective schools safe and orderly environment that begins with the work of Ronald Edmonds and spans decades.

The school nurturing theory emerged as the chosen theory for the study based on the importance of caring relationships to student academic performance and overall student success. *The Challenge to Care in Schools* by Nel Noddings (2006) is written in a manner that allows teachers to implement an ethics of care in schools (i.e., modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation) as a launch pad to teach more effectively. Noddings (2006) operationalized caring by saying that: "A caring relation is, in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings" (p. 15). Thus, in the relationship, the caring person and the recipient of care play important roles in building a nurturing school climate.

The conceptual model on effective schools safe and orderly environment is a conceptual model developed by Edmonds (Edmonds, 1979a, 1979b, 1983) and his Harvard colleagues as part of their national research on successful schools, commonly regarded as the correlates of effective schools. In their seminal work, Edmonds and Frederiksen (1979) set out to find a set of characteristics common to effective schools that typically included the following items: instructional leadership, school-wide focus on instruction, orderly and safe environment, high expectations for student achievement, and use of student achievement for decision making and planning. For the purpose of this

study, the correlate “safe and orderly climate” is the most relevant school-level characteristic to consider (Edmonds, 1979a, 1979b, 1983).

### **Significance of the Study**

To date, scant research has investigated the relationships between multiple indicators of high school performance and school disciplinary climate. Although there is a large body of research on school effectiveness, most studies rely on a single measure of school performance/productivity. A limited number of studies considering the relationship between perceptions of school disciplinary climate and multiple indicators of high school performance/productivity exist. Based on the seminal work of Noddings (1984, 1985, 1998, 2002, 2005a, 2005b, 2010, 2012) on the ethics of care, agreement is starting to develop about some of the common dimensions of school disciplinary climate (Tableman, 2004). Most contemporary researchers highlight caring as a core dimension, while others consider safe and orderly climate in the forefront of their operational definition (Noddings, 2006; Enomoto, 1997). Other researchers focus on the existence of nurturing characteristics in effective schools (Green, 1998a). In a follow-up study, Green (2001) identified 13 components of nurturing schools and organized those characteristics into four dimensions: (a) student-teacher relationships, (b) professionalism among administration, faculty, and staff, (c) environment of the school and classroom, and (d) students’ feelings about themselves. In a case study of an urban high school, Enomoto (1997) noted the importance of stricter adherence to student rules of conduct to reduce absenteeism and attrition. Overall, there is a limited body of work exploring how various aspects of school disciplinary climate are related to differences in high school

performance outcomes. Thus, additional research, examining the various aspects of school disciplinary climate may aid in filling in this knowledge gap.

In Tennessee, school climate surveys have been shown to play an important role in the state's policy development guidance.<sup>1</sup> Over the past several years, the Tennessee Department of Education, as well as partner institutions, has invested in large statewide surveys of all teachers that generate rich data on teachers' perceptions of their working conditions. The New Teacher Center (NTC) and Vanderbilt University's Peabody College of Education are the two organizations, which conducted the survey administrations. Both entities are vested in the expansion of working conditions across the state. Therefore, an independent examination of data may add valuable insight. In addition, the Tennessee Department of Education sponsored the New Teacher Center's TELL (Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning) Survey in 2011 and 2013 as part of the Race to the Top grant. Over 60,000 teachers participated in the survey in 2013, weighing in on a variety of climate and work conditions (New Teacher Center, 2013a). Understanding the licensed educators' perspectives of their working conditions, particularly in the area of school disciplinary climate, would help policymakers and practitioners foster a set of organizational conditions that make it more conducive for them to initiate and sustain school-wide initiatives (New Teacher Center Reports for TELL TN 2013a, 2013b).

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<sup>1</sup> For more details, see TNDOE (2011) "TELL Tennessee" survey results set standard and strategy available at <https://news.tn.gov/node/7103>.

## **Limitations**

This study had the following limitations:

1. The study was limited to one state. The state was selected based upon the collection of two data sources. The *TELL* survey and the TDOE school accountability data were used to measure teachers' perception of school disciplinary climate.
2. The study was limited by only focusing on secondary teachers who submitted responses to the aforementioned *TELL* survey.
3. The study was limited by focusing on the aforementioned secondary school teachers' perceptions.
4. The study was limited by only looking at secondary school accountability data.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms and definitions were used:

1. *Annually Computed Student Attendance Rate*. The daily average of all enrolled student's attendance for a school over the entire school year. This is calculated by adding the percentage in attendance each day and dividing by the number of days in the school year. Most schools have a goal of 92%-95%.
2. *Authoritative School Discipline Theory*. A theory that is characterized by Maintaining school-wide disciplinary structures and student supports as conducive to positive academic outcomes for middle and high school students.

3. *Cohort Dropout Rate.* The number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class.
4. *Disciplinary Climate.* The norms of a particular school in terms of student codes of conduct, student behavior, and expected consequences.
5. *Discipline Plan.* The school-wide expectations for specific behaviors that violate the code of conduct. In addition to expectations, the plan includes rewards for students who do not violate the code of conduct.
6. *Event Dropout rate.* The percentage of students who drop out in a given 12-month period.
7. *Expulsion Rate.* The percent of students who have been issued a discipline consequence, which caused them to be expelled from the school setting. Expulsions are removal from the school setting for 11 days or more.
8. *Graduation Rate.* The percent of students who receive a regular high school diploma within 4.5 years of entering high school for schools that count ninth grade as high school.
9. *Nurturing School Theory Framework.* A theoretical framework, which illustrates how changes in the four areas for student achievement occur.
10. *School Climate.* The norms, values, and expectations that support feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe.
11. *Suspension Rate.* The percent of students who have been issued discipline consequences, which excludes them from the school setting for 10 days less, for violations of the established code of conduct.

12. The *TELL Survey*. An online anonymous survey administered by The New Teacher Center to all licensed, school-based educators in a district or state.

### **Organization of this Study**

This study was organized into five chapters. Chapter one includes the introduction, purpose, and rationale for the study. Specific research questions and definitions of terms used throughout the study are also included in chapter one. Chapter two contains an extensive review of the literature on the relationship between disciplinary climate and multiple measures of high school performance. Chapter three describes the data, methods and measures used in the analyses. Chapter four presents the results of the analyses. Chapter five summarizes the findings and presents the researcher's recommendations and conclusions.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

In order to provide a theoretical framework for this study, the research on effective schools, school climate, and school nurturing theory was reviewed extensively. Some of the highlights of the review and criticisms of the effective schools, climate research and school nurturing theory are presented in order to give the reader a better understanding of the rationale for this research. This literature review has also assessed a number of school performance and productivity outcomes, namely, student attendance, graduation, suspension, event dropout, and cohort dropout rates.

#### **School Effectiveness Research**

Concern over what causes some students and schools to achieve at different levels than others has frequently been the subject of research inquiry. A report presented by Coleman (1966) noted that variations in family background and in the backgrounds of other students in the school were the primary determinants of students' performance, and ultimately schools' productivity. Critics of the effective schools research stated that much of the data collected was from poor urban schools and low socioeconomic students and that the research was methodologically flawed, as the socio-economic status of students was not controlled. Further, analysts stated that one must be able to define and understand the human interaction factors (i.e., how students, teachers and schools actually work) and combine them with various aspects of schools in order to understand the true nature of school effectiveness (Bowles & Levin, 1968; Hanushek & Kain 1972).

Known as correlates of effective schools, Edmonds (1979a, 1979b, 1983, 1997) and his colleagues at Michigan State and Harvard University identified several variables that are said to be relevant for school productivity/performance. While there are differences in the variables depending on the context, there is agreement on a core group of several variables which are relevant for school productivity/performance, namely, safe and orderly climate/environment; instructional leadership; clear school mission; high expectations for success; frequent monitoring of instruction or assessment; opportunity to learn and student time on task; and parent and community involvement. Further, Edmonds (1979a, 1979b, 1983, 1997) set out with the mindset that all students could be taught and taught effectively. To a larger extent, he is one of the pioneer researchers on school effectiveness, particularly early attempts to explain the unexpectedly high performance of low-socioeconomic status students in high-poverty schools during the 1970s.

For the purpose of this study, the correlate, safe and orderly climate, is the most relevant factor to consider. This factor is also adopted because it addresses some of the criticisms/shortcomings of the Coleman (1966) report. The effective schools scholars described safe orderly environment as “an orderly, purposeful, businesslike environment that is conducive to learning without being oppressive” (Lezotte & McKee, 2002, p. 12). Lezotte and McKee (2002) contend if teachers and students do not feel safe and secure in their school environment, they will not have the necessary psychological energy for creating an atmosphere conducive to order and school productivity. Order is also nurtured through clear and consistent rules of conduct that all adults in the building, from teachers to administrators, must agree upon and enforce; the procedures and routines are

enforced through thoughtful and effective planning (Carter, 2009). Order, akin to teaching and learning, is jointly produced and both, students and adults in the school building, must be accountable in that process (Doyle, 1986).

Subsequent research conducted by Ohlson, Swanson, Adam-Manning, and Byrd (2016) concur with the idea that an orderly environment, free of distractions would lead to greater school effectiveness. Their research showed a correlation between reductions in the number of suspensions and teachers' collaborative behaviors in their own professional working relationships. Thus, if a classroom is focused on the instruction, which was taking place, starting with the teachers and filtering down to the student in the class, distractions are reduced, suspensions are reduced, and the school as a whole is more effective (Ohlson, et.al, 2016).

Many other studies have singled out a safe and orderly environment as critical to school productivity (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Mayers, Mullens, Moor, & Ralph, 2000). While there is a lot of agreement about the role of safety and order in school productivity/performance, there is a broad range of associations that are expressions of safe and orderly environment. For example, Levine and Lezotte (1990), in their work on effective schools, called for a productive climate and culture, requiring collaborative, cooperative and student-centered interaction between students and teachers. Sammons (1995) examined school effectiveness research in a range of countries and called them learning environment, positive reinforcement, and pupil rights and expectations.

In order to be most effective, Carter (2009) noted that part of the total instructional alignment is to help promote a safe, organized, and caring learning environment, which authentically contributes to positive behavior goals that are

recognized, rewarded, and reinforced at every opportunity. In such an environment, Carter (2009) contended positive student behaviors are consistently articulated and expectations are always clear. According to Carter (2009), a reliable and caring adult who will provide support and guidance models procedures and rules that are taught to students, consistently. When this occurs, both, students and teachers maintain a good disciplinary climate in the classroom, not under threat or sanction, but because both parties understand the importance of doing so. Students, teachers and school staff clearly understand classroom discipline plan and rules of conduct and generate a strong sense of shared responsibility in doing the right things. Thus, a safe and orderly environment is a critical component of effective schooling. A school that does not address this specific component risks undermining all other efforts at school performance/productivity.

### **School Disciplinary Climate**

A number of researchers from the effective schools literature have emphasized the importance of a safe and orderly environment and school characteristics, in general, on academic performance (Battistich, Schaps, Watson, & Solomon, 1996; Kellam, Rebok, Ialongo, & Mayer, 1994). However, limited research has been conducted to examine the relationship between school productivity and disciplinary climate or the strategies that schools use to promote good discipline at school levels. A plethora of studies report statistically significant as well as substantively important effects of classroom disciplinary climate on school performance and productivity (Arum & Velez, 2012; Figlio, 2007; Frempong, Ma, & Mensah, 2012; Ning, Van Damme, Van Den Noortgate, Yang, & Gielen, 2015). For example, using hierarchical linear analyses, Ning et al. (2015) found that the differences in effects of classroom disciplinary climate of schools

were associated with better school reading performance. Other studies have shifted their focus from the classroom to the school level.

Adolescents and young adults are influenced by a multitude of factors, both inside and outside of the schoolhouse. Often the contextual effect of disciplinary climate on school performance is attributed to human interaction factors (student and teacher interactions) and the reinforcement of subculture interactions that rejects school values (Epstein & Karweit, 1983). Willms (1986) suggested that contextual effects on school performance may be attributable to a number of factors such as the ability of teachers to maintain a favorable disciplinary climate.

Regarding psychological or human interaction factors, Hartzell and Petrie (1992) stated that the most viable and productive schools were those where interactions were based on order, trust, and respect. Safe and orderly schools tended to be places where the enforcement of rules were consistent and fair, where teachers and students felt safe and secure in their teaching and learning, and where students followed rules of conduct. Lasley and Wayson (1982) and Wayson and Lasley (1984) found that those schools with favorable disciplinary climate were those focused on the total school environment rather than on the consequences of discipline problems.

Cotton and Savard (1982) and Hartzell and Petrie (1992) contends a favorable school climate is characterized by the following: (1) a high degree of structure; (2) clear rules that are consistently enforced; (3) teacher awareness; (4) monitoring, feedback and reinforcement; (5) positive effect on time-on-task and school productivity; and (6) effective strategies for preventing/reducing disciplinary problems. The structure, in turn, helps to define and communicate components of the school's disciplinary climate. Where

teachers, school staff and administration are fulfilling their responsibilities, students must be held to fulfilling theirs. In the words of Owen (1987) as cited in Hartzell and Petrie (1992), “The culture of the school is composed of expectations that inform students, teachers and staff members of what is acceptable behavior, values that identify what is cherished in people and institutions, fundamental beliefs shared by participants, rules that must be obeyed, and a philosophy that guides the relationships between adults and children.”

### **School Nurturing Theory**

Noddings (1984), who has taught and written extensively on the ethics of care, identifies trust and care as essential for school climate. According to Noddings (1984), caring is reciprocal and based on mutual consent and commitment of all involved parties. Noddings’ (1984) philosophy of caring is aimed to ascribe “caring” in a relational context. She described caring by saying that: “To care and be cared for are fundamental human needs. All human beings need to be understood, received, respected, and recognized” (Noddings, 1984, p. 30). A caring community provides the conditions that make it possible and compelling to respond in a caring manner to others. Noddings (1984) specifies themes of care beginning from the self and then moves outward in reciprocity to the relationship with others, requiring interactions between the carer and the cared-for. In care ethics, the unifying theme is called motivational displacement. She also discussed the interconnections of stakeholders in schools, the importance of a sense of ‘caring’ community vis-à-vis a sense of self, and the importance of participating in caring relationships (Noddings, 2005). These interconnections are closely aligned to the four key components of School Nurturing Theory (Green, 1998).

Although Noddings (1992) did not explicitly reference the school effectiveness literature, certain conjectures about school productivity could be made based on her description of caring schools. In order to provide teachers the freedom they need to foster a school disciplinary climate based on the interests and needs of their students, the ‘caring’ school administrators would need to support teachers’ efforts to maintain discipline in the classroom. For teachers and school administrators to consistently enforce rules of conduct, the teachers would have to trust their school administrators to support their efforts, even when they don’t succeed. The relationship between the teachers and the school administrators would need to be based on trust, with the administrators’ motivational energy targeted at assisting the teacher succeed and grow. In the same way, the teachers would have to trust their students to support and follow rules of conduct.

Other well-known researchers have described other models of effective schools (i.e., education administration and leadership-related) that include many of the traits described in the literature as caring traits (Beck, 1994; Blase & Blase, 1998; Blase & Blase, 1998; Donaldson, 2001; Döş & Savaş, 2015; Sergiovanni, 1992; Sergiovanni & Green, 2015; Green, 1998; Lyman, 2000; Noddings, 1984, 1992; Pellicer, 1999). Much of the emerging research on the concept and practice of caring schools has supported Noddings’ (1984) caring school climate research. For example, Enomoto (1997), in her exploration of the competing demands between the ethic of care and the ethic of justice in an urban high school, found no reconciliation between the two, particularly in the context of addressing attendance and truancy problems. Her case study of multiethnic urban high school described a faculty frustrated with the school administrators’ lack of consistency

and support. The teachers who adhered to the school-wide attendance policy were the exceptions, and the teachers who failed to adhere to the school-wide policy were permitted to establish their own policy or have no policy at all, without consequences. On the other hand, the school administrator in charge of the attendance office identified herself as a caring education leader, concerned with the needs of all students. However, by creating a situation where the students could operate in an unstructured disciplinary setting, the school administrator demonstrated a lack of support for the teachers reporting absentees and truants.

Following the 41- item survey on nurturing school inventory for teachers and students, Green (1998) noted that even though teachers and students found common agreement about the influence of caring environment to school attendance and academic performance, it remained largely non-existent. The overall aim of the study was to capture the varied nurturing characteristics in schools and determine their relationship to discipline, attendance, and school performance. Thus, providing insight into the importance of a nurturing and supportive school climate. As a result of the study, Green (1998) contended if there is a positive interaction between school administrators and teachers, there is likely to be a positive interaction (complementarity) between the teachers and students. In his article, Green (1998) defined a *nurturing school* as one

Where there is trust and caring among all individuals; supportive relationships exist in a positive environment. There is a sense of community where all individuals are valued and participate in the decision-making process and the self one brings into the environment is

respected and nurtured, with everyone accepting responsibility for student success. (p. 9)

Sensing the importance of his divergent findings, Green (1998) explained: “When teachers perceived professionalism among administration, faculty, and staff to be positive in the schools, fewer suspensions and higher proficiency scores were found” (p. 11). Green’s (1998) study has provided empirical evidence that school administrators and teachers have an effect on school disciplinary climate, which in turn directly affects various measures of school performance and productivity. By demonstrating nurturing characteristics in schools, the caring teachers and school administrators in the study created a foundation for school productivity.

A series of further studies revealed that a positive school disciplinary climate was correlated with decreased student absenteeism in middle school and high school and with lower rates of student suspension (Lee, Cornell, Gregory & Fan, 2011; Gregory, Cornell & Fan, 2012). Further, a growing body of research indicates that positive school disciplinary climate is critical to effective risk prevention (Berkowitz & Bier, 2006; Okonofua, Paunesku & Walton, 2016). This research also aligns with that, which supports when students perceive rules of conduct are administered fairly and teachers and school administrators will listen to them, the school becomes safer (Gregory, Cornell, Fan, Sheras, Shih, & Huang, 2010). Collectively, these studies show that teachers who are warm demanders or compassionate disciplinarians are more likely to build trusting relationships with students of color and low-income students. Teachers who teach in lower socioeconomic schools or in schools with predominately minority students face a different set of obstacles as they make efforts to develop relationships and improve their

students' academic performances. Students who are poor and/or minority often come to school ill equipped to perform at a high academic level or embrace the social norms required of students in school settings. Thus, teachers must spend time focusing on processes and structures, which limit the time on academic foci. In a similar study, Gregory, Cornell and Fan (2012) found that when students feel that their teachers are caring and concerned, they are more likely to seek help. These are the quality markers of good teachers who help students achieve academically and improve the school discipline climate.

A more recent study conducted by Okonofua, Paunesku, and Walton (2016) noted that the cognitive component of empathy may help teachers understand students' experiences and internal states. The researchers contended with this understanding, teachers may respond more appropriately to misbehavior. According to Okonofua et al. (2016), teachers who understand and share the feelings of their students have a better overall perception of where the students are and what they are able to accomplish. This understanding leads to the build-up of trust and overall positive classroom relationships between empathic teachers and their students. Okonofua et al. (2016) further suggests the quality of students' relationships with teachers is one of the strongest predictors of classroom behavior; therefore, a punitive approach to discipline may give rise to a self-perpetuating cycle of punishment and misbehavior.

Some of the most influential contemporary research that combines elements of both nurturing school and school effectiveness studies is found in Bryk and Schneider's (2002) analysis of the relationship between school relational trust and school improvement efforts in Chicago elementary schools. Bryk and Schneider (2002)

concluded that the degree of "relational trust" (good social relationships) between teachers, and between teachers and students, is related to school performance. According to the researchers, school performance with high relational trust was higher than at schools with low trust, and more importantly, schools that improved relational trust also improved in school performance. While they were cautious to clarify that trust in and of itself does not directly impact school performance, they did find that trust fosters a set of organizational conditions, some structural and others social-psychological, that make it more conducive for educational stakeholders to initiate and sustain school-wide initiatives, such as a commitment to nurture common values and school disciplinary climate. Based on the findings of their research, Bryk and Schneider (2002) concluded effective schools promote and model mutual respect and consistent standards of conduct, high quality professionalism, and transparent accountability based on relational trust among between students, adults and peers in the school setting.

School effectiveness can be assessed through other measures of school productivity. At the secondary level, school effectiveness can be measured via several related measures: suspension rates, attendance rates, event dropout rate, and cohort dropout rate. One reason for using multiple indicators of school performance and productivity is that some secondary schools may perform better on one type of outcome than another. Although there is a large body of research on school effectiveness, most studies rely on a single performance of school performance and productivity, namely test scores as a direct measure of student learning.

## **Suspension Rates**

For the purpose of this research, a suspension is defined as an out of school removal from the mainstream educational setting for an infraction of a school's discipline code of conduct. A suspension may be short-term, which is generally defined between one and ten school days. A suspension may also be long-term in which the student is removed from the school for a period of eleven days up to 180 days for major offenses such as assault of school staff, possession of an illegal substance, or possession of a firearm on a school campus. Schools as a whole are increasing suspension rates in the United States. Okonofua et al., (2016) indicated the number of students suspended for misbehaviors tripled from 1.7 million in 1974 to more than 5 million in 2011. Okonofua et al., (2016) highlighted the increasing concern about rising discipline citations in K-12 schools and a lack of means to reduce them. They characterized this problem as the result of punitive discipline policies, teachers' lack of interpersonal skills, or students' lack of self-control or social-emotional skill. Another part of this problem, according to Mendez et al., (2002), is that the disciplinary action is often delivered in response to an inappropriate act or behavior in the absence of interventions that are focused on teaching or reinforcing appropriate behaviors and responses to difficult situations. Mendez et al., (2002) found schools that are able to implement processes that reduce suspension are able to nurture a favorable school disciplinary climate.

Lee, et al., (2011) found that schools that engage in frequent use of suspension as a disciplinary option perpetuate a school disciplinary climate that is perceived as harsh, punitive, and rejecting of students and their study determined schools with lower suspension rates also had lower dropout rates. Conversely, Steinberg and Lacoé (2017)

found the overuse of suspensions for minor offenses is used too frequently in response to lower-level, nonviolent student behavior. For example, nearly half of all suspensions issued in California public schools, during the 2011-2012 school year, were for willful defiance, a category of student misconduct that includes refusing to remove a hat or to turn off a cell phone. Steinberg and Lacoé (2017) found that high levels of suspensions had a negative impact on overall school disciplinary climate, as students who are consistently suspended for minor infractions tend to believe the school does not care about them and lose focus on academic goals.

### **Attendance Rates**

For the purpose of this study, attendance rates are defined as the percent of students in attendance for the day, week, or quarter. These rates are generally aggregated into an average daily attendance percentage for the academic year. This means that the percent of students present each day is added together and then divided by the number of school days in the academic year. Most schools have a goal of achieving annual attendance rates between 90-95%. The opposite statistic rate of attendance rate is school absenteeism rate. Regular school attendance has been defined as 5 or fewer days missed per year (Balfanz and Byrnes 2012). Additional research has defined problem absenteeism in three ways: (1) as missing at least 25% of total school time for at least 2 weeks, (2) as severe difficulty attending classes for at least 2 weeks with significant interference in a student's daily routine or (3) absences for at least 10 school days during any 15-week period while school is in session (Kearney, 2008).

Consistent school attendance is important for students' personal, emotional, social, and academic development (Havik, Bru, & Ertesvag, 2014). Chronic absenteeism

impacts at least 10% of students nationally and is more prevalent among low-income students (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Missing school regularly has direct impact on the long-term academic success of students and their future success as contributing members of society at large. Those who fall under chronic absenteeism are more likely to drop out prior to graduating high school. They are also statistically more likely to live in poverty as adults (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). However, Havik et al., (2014) state that 20% of all school non-attendance is considered unexcused and termed these absences as school refusal behavior. This behavior is commonly defined as non-attendance due to the expectation of experiencing strong negative emotions while at school. These negative emotions are rooted in the students' belief that school is boring, or antisocial withdrawal due to being behind academically, or based on more rewarding activities outside of school. Regardless of the reason, these students are habitually absent and at high risk for dropout and more likelihood of living in poverty as adults.

Allen (2017) identifies the impact of truancy on vulnerable and already at-risk children and adolescents by saying those who are truant are at significant risk for developing additional difficulties- poor academic performance, delinquency, school dropout, employment problems, and earlier and increased substance use and abuse. Mallett (2016) describes schools in particular are powerful but contested sites of cultural reproduction that reproduce dominant ideologies. Allen (2017) discusses how schools and their institutional actors draw upon and contribute to dominant ideologies of black male identity by positioning black boys as culturally deficient, anti-intellectual, deviant, and intimidating. Schools must provide support/intervention programs to help promote student attendance and thereby provide incentives for the students who are most

vulnerable to truancy issues. These programs have an impact on school disciplinary climate, which in turn influences school performance and productivity.

### **Graduation Rates**

Graduation rates are a school statistic that is unique to high schools. High schools are the end of secondary education in our nation and typically end at grade 12. In general, graduation rate remains a proxy for the percentage of students who remain in schools and earn a high school diploma. Most schools measure graduation rates by measuring the cohort rate. As most high schools are grades 9 – 12, students are expected to spend four years in high school. The cohort graduation rate measures how many students who entered the school as ninth graders receive a high school diploma four years later. Most states and school districts allow 4.5 years, allowing for those students who attend summer school at the end of 12<sup>th</sup> grade to count as a graduate with their cohort group. Some states such as North Carolina measure graduation rates on an annual basis, this means they measure the students who start and finish a school year ([nces.ed.gov](http://nces.ed.gov)).

It should be noted that graduation rates only count regular high school diplomas. Special education certificates of attendance do not count in the total as a graduate. Some students with disabilities do not qualify for regular diplomas and therefore are awarded certificates of attendance or completion based upon their individualized educational plans (IEP). The most recent data show that 36 states allow IEP teams to have some level of input into what counts as a high school completion requirement for students with disabilities (Samuels 2015). In the 2010-2011 academic year, some states reported allowing students with disabilities to take easier substitute courses to count for credit, allowing them to skip end-of-course tests or alternatively, permitting them to earn a lower

score on those end-of-course tests than their typically developing peers, but still receive a passing grade (Samuels, 2015). States also are able to determine their criteria for defining students with disabilities for the purpose of calculating graduation rates. Some states consider any student who started high school in special education to be a student with a disability, while others may only count those who ended high school with an IEP (Samuels, 2015).

The latest federal calculations show that 81 percent of students in the class of 2013 graduated on time. However, only 62% of students with disabilities in the same class graduated on time. These are national averages from the class of 2013 tabulated by using the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR). The ACGR, which states use to fulfill accountability requirements under the No Child Left Behind law, has climbed 2 percentage points since 2011, when the U. S. Department of Education (USDOE) first started requiring states to calculate and report graduation rates using this method. Other methods for calculating graduation rates have shown similar upward trends (Yettick & Lloyd, 2015). The Center for Public Education (CPE) says that schools must use complementary indicators (four-year cohort, five- and six-year graduation rates, dropout rates, and in-grade retention rates) to gain a full understanding of how their system is serving its students (Boser, 2006).

According to Amos (2007), 12 million students will drop out over the next decade, causing a \$3 trillion impact on the national economy. Since 2001, the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and its successor Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) have shifted the focus as to what makes a successful school. The focus is now more on the percentage of students who are passing standardized tests as the largest measure of a

school's success. However, the graduation rate is still a part of the overall computation of success for individual schools and districts. Therefore, growing the percentage of students who graduate is a priority for many schools and school districts and programs are being implemented to help achieve greater percentages of graduates. Adams (2014) recommends states examine income levels and develop practices and programs for closing the gap between low and high-income students. Some states had small variance between these groups, as low as 1% difference in Indiana, while others had a large gap, 28% in Minnesota (Adams, 2014). Identifying the needs of subgroups of students within states, districts, and individual schools and providing best practices and programs in order to increase graduation rates is imperative.

### **Event Dropout Rate**

The event dropout rate is the percentage of 15 to 24-year-olds in grades 10 through 12 who leave school between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the next without earning a high school diploma or an alternative credential, such as a GED. The event dropout rate, which typically yields the smallest rate, provides information about the rate at which U.S. high school students are leaving school without receiving a high school credential. The measure can be used to study student experiences in the U.S. secondary school system in a given year ([nces.ed.gov](http://nces.ed.gov)).

The event dropout rates presented in this indicator are based on data from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS). CPS data have been collected annually for decades, allowing for the analysis of long-term trends. Many of the event dropout rate estimates are based on responses from a relatively small number of survey respondents. As a result, some differences that seem substantial are not statistically

significant. Total event dropout rates between October 2012 and October 2013, approximately 508,000 15 to 24-year-olds left school without obtaining a high school credential. These event dropouts accounted for 4.7 percent of the 10.9 million 15 to 24-year-olds enrolled in grades 10 through 12 (nces.ed.gov). Over the past 40 years, event dropout rates trended downward, decreasing from 6.3 percent in 1973 to 4.7 percent in 2013, although there has been fluctuation in the rate (nces.ed.gov). Kemp (2006) describes the event method as measuring the proportion of students who drop out of school in a single year and as the most liberal and, consequently, favored by school districts because it underestimates the true number of dropouts.

Research conducted by Finn et al., (2008) shows that classroom misbehavior is associated with low grades and dropping out. Those who are absent from school, due to suspensions, are those who are statistically more likely to have failing grades, not earn necessary credits, and eventually become dropouts. Absenteeism and truancy have clear connections with school outcomes because of the missed opportunities for learning time. According to Maynard et al., (2014), of the known dropout risk factors, student grades is the strongest predictor of dropout and student behavior is a well-established risk indicator for dropout. The suggestion is that establishing school based intervention programs, seeking to alter the cumulative impact of poor grades and disruptive behavior, can positively influence the developmental sequencing of risk factors across childhood.

## **Cohort Dropout Rate**

Cohort Rate, which may also be referred to as the longitudinal rate, measures what happens to a single group (or cohort) of students over a period of time. This measure typically takes the incoming freshman class and tracks them until the end of their senior year. Any student who has not moved away counts and is counted as either a graduate or as a drop out. This method of calculating dropouts typically yields the largest rate, according to the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCEST). In many states, lost students who left school without a standard diploma (i.e., received a certificate of completion, reached maximum age for services, died without the schools receiving formal notification, or moved away without a forwarding school) are calculated as dropouts using the cohort method. NCEST calculates the dropout rate by dividing the number of 9th-12th grade dropouts by the number of 9th-12th grade students who were enrolled the year before (nces.ed.gov). The cohort method, or longitudinal approach, involves following a group of students who are expected to graduate together across the secondary school years and is the most conservative and therefore, accurate method (Kemp, 2006).

The NCSET highlights a few key observations. First, that some districts count students as a cohort from grades 9-12, while others only count grades 10-12. Second, there is variation in the length of time a student is required to miss from school before they are considered a dropout. Third, exclusion of some groups of students from the calculation of dropout rate or variation in defining which programs count towards enrollment (NCSET, 2005). These variations typically apply to students who receive special education services or are in GED programs or alternative schools. Some school

districts have variations in the length of time a student is required to miss school before being considered a drop out. The dropout rates are slowly declining nationally; however, significant gaps remain between student groups associated with race, socioeconomic status, special education status, and location. The many risk factors that impact certain subgroups of students may include family, gang involvement, and depression or other mental health issues. Other risk factors include high absenteeism rates related to being tardy to school (Freeman et al., 2015). Sheldon (2007) states that schools with higher rates of daily attendance generate students who perform better on achievement tests. Variables such as being held back, the number of suspensions, time spent on homework, gender, family composition, and parental involvement are all factors that impact the drop out gap that exists between subgroups of students (Suhyun, et al., 2014). Lee et al. (2011) found that school demographics were predicative of the school's dropout rate. Thus, it is imperative to include family and community involvement in schools that have high rates of dropouts in order to confront the challenges high-risk students face. To assist in getting stakeholders involved, Standard (2003) describes the role school counselors must play in developing outreach programs with law enforcement, social services, and community agencies in order to work with students and their parents and to resolve issues that impact student attendance.

## **Tensions in Nurturing and School Effectiveness Studies**

### **Summary**

This literature review noted that a clear majority of studies in school effectiveness has focused on understanding how various aspects of school are related to school performance and productivity. That is, the factors that influence school disciplinary climate are also the ones that influence multiple measures of school productivity identified in this study, namely, student attendance, graduation, suspension, event dropout, and cohort dropout rates. On the other hand, a differentiated view of safe/nurturing environment and school effectiveness is that different factors may influence different school outcomes. For example, the factors related to suspension, dropping out and absenteeism are multiple and extremely related, but most can be placed in one of four general categories based on prior studies: school experiences, family and external circumstances, economic factors, and individual behaviors. The goal of improving academic climate (failure) may also conflict with the other multiple indicators of school productivity.

Academic failure, in the form of low test scores, when combined with resulting behaviors such as absenteeism can be important precursors of dropping out. The inability to get along with the teachers, disinterest in school, previous suspensions/expulsions and the lack of post-secondary plans are other school-related factors associated with dropping out of school. Family circumstances such as single-parent homes are also related to school performance and impact on a much larger proportion of students. For example, low socioeconomic status (SES) and disadvantaged family backgrounds are consistently shown to be predictors of dropping out of school. Several individual attitudes and

behaviors concerning self, peers, school, teachers, and school administrators can be proximate causes of school productivity measures.

The interrelated consequences of school productivity measures, like the causes, are difficult to untangle, due to the different dynamics of schools. The complex relationships between schooling, ability, income, and other related factors have generated more scholarly debate and hamper accurate estimation of the role of school disciplinary environment to school performance/productivity. This study assumes that while school disciplinary climate in and of itself does not directly affect school performance and productivity, a school disciplinary climate that combines elements of nurturing school and safe and orderly environment fosters a set of organizational conditions that make it more conducive to initiate and sustain the kinds of activities necessary to affect productivity improvements.

This study is a secondary analysis that focuses on the *TELL* teacher perception questions under the area of managing student conduct. Following prior literature considered and addressed in this study, the seven components of school disciplinary climate are identified as follows:

1. Students at this school understand expectations for their conduct.
2. Students at this school follow rules of conduct.
3. Policies and procedures about student conduct are clearly understood by the faculty.
4. School administrators consistently enforce rules for student conduct.
5. School administrators support teachers' efforts to maintain discipline in the classroom.

6. Teachers consistently enforce rules for student conduct.
7. The faculty works in a school environment that is safe.

By exploring teachers' perceptions of the relationship between their school's disciplinary climate and five measures of school productivity, this study helps identify the benefits of a nurturing environment of trust and support and safe and orderly climate as the core of school effectiveness. To date, little research has investigated the relationships between the multiple indicators of school performance/productivity and school disciplinary climate. This study aims at addressing this knowledge gap.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Methodology School Disciplinary Climate**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between secondary level teachers' perception of their school' disciplinary climate and five measures of school productivity: specifically, the annually computed student attendance, graduation, suspension, event dropout, and cohort dropout rates.

After a restatement of the research questions, this chapter begins with an explanation of the general methodology employed in this study—specifically, secondary analysis of an existing set of survey data. Immediately following is a description of the *Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Questionnaire* from which these survey data was derived and a discussion of the instrument's psychometric properties. Therein, particular attention is given to the psychometric properties of the seven items used to operationalize the construct of “school disciplinary climate” that serves as this study's independent variable of interest.

### **NTC *TELL* Survey**

The purpose of schools with emphases on the internal process goal is on maintaining stability and implementing rules and regulations (Tell Tennessee). Effectiveness criteria measured using the *TELL* survey are coordination and monitoring item scales. The human relations quadrant emphasizes cohesiveness, trust and participation. Teachers tend to be participative, considerate, and supportive, and they facilitate interaction through teamwork and mentoring. Effectiveness criteria measured using the *TELL* survey are facilitation and mentoring item scales. The open systems goal quadrant maintains a primary focus on external support, growth, resource acquisition and

adaptation to the external environment. Effectiveness criteria measured using the *TELL* survey are innovation and brokering item scales. Being an effective teacher means being able to create a happy environment for students to flourish. A great teacher is at times a facilitator, an innovator, a hard-driver, and an organizer. An effective teacher plans lessons that take into consideration the personality and unique needs of the students they serve. The effective teacher is not a teacher that is limited to one way of teaching, but rather is flexible and shifts to the needs of their students. This teacher must strive for their classroom community to collaborate or do things that last, create or do new things, compete or do things now, and control or do things right (NTC Validity and Reliability Report, 2013).

The New Teacher Center (NTC) provided a survey to Tennessee schools during the 2013 academic year. NTC's executive summary describes their Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (*TELL*) Survey as consisting of a core set of questions that addresses teaching conditions such as: new teacher support, instructional practices and support, managing student conduct, school leadership, teacher leadership, community engagement and support, use of time, professional development, and facilities and resources. The preliminary findings of the 2013 survey reported over 61,000 educators, 82%, responded to the survey across the state. Of those, 17,113 or 27.9% were high school educators. The report further outlined one of the major constructs was managing student conduct or policies and practices, which address student conduct issues to ensure safe school environments. More importantly, the findings of *TELL* revealed that teaching and learning conditions, theoretically and empirically, were linked to

important school outcomes, including teacher retention and student learning (NTC Validity and Reliability Report, 2013).

Research conducted by Ladd (2009) showed that teaching and learning conditions predicted student achievement in mathematics, and to a lesser degree reading. The Johnson, Kraft, and Papay (2011) research indicated that positive conditions contributed to improved student achievement. The *TELL* Survey utilizes robust and statistically sound approach for measuring teaching and learning conditions (NTC Validity and Reliability Report, 2013). Huang et al. (2015) indicated teachers may also have a distinct perspective on school conditions that may not be as evident to students. This is why the *TELL*, which surveys wide number of educators across the state, provides such valuable insight. Furthermore, Huang et al. (2015) contended perceptions of teachers, not students, could be used to construct measures of disciplinary structure and student support as well as student engagement and aggressive behavior.

The *TELL* survey is linked to the five outcome variables in that they are a core set of questions that address teaching conditions such as: new teacher support, instructional practices and support, managing student conduct, school leadership, teacher leadership, community engagement and support, use of time, professional development, and facilities and resources. This research focused on the *TELL* survey data from managing student conduct. The questions around whether or not a school had practices in place to manage student discipline helped to determine the level of teacher satisfaction and their ability to focus on their primary objective, student academic achievement. The five outcome variables in this research are strongly correlated with the core questions addressed in the *TELL* survey within the subset of managing student conduct. The five outcome variables

are annually computed student attendance, graduation, suspension, event dropout, and cohort dropout rates. By linking core question around managing student conduct, this research sought to isolate conditions that lead to climate perceptions of teachers within schools. By reviewing and isolating data from two primary sources, the effects of teacher empowerment can be more closely measured and solutions prescribed. The two data sources utilized are the *TELL* survey administered across Tennessee by New Teacher Center in 2013 and publicly available school accountability data archived by the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE). The *TELL* uses an externally validated set of questions, which research has shown to be connected to student achievement and teacher retention. The New Teacher Center states *TELL* Survey results give schools, districts and states information about whether educators have the supportive school settings necessary to do their jobs well and to be successful.

In the next section, an outline is provided of the conditions under which the secondary data specific to this study were collected and supplemented by tables that statistically describe the more than 60,000 educators and 1400 Tennessee schools whose responses were included in the present dataset. A final section of the chapter provides a statement of the analytic strategies to be employed in answering the following research questions:

**Research Question 1.** Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perception of their school's disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student attendance rate?

**Research Question 2.** Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perception of their school's disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student suspension rate?

**Research Question 3.** Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perception of their school's disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student graduation rate?

**Research Question 4.** Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perception of their school's disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent event dropout rate?

**Research Question 5.** Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perception of their school's disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent cohort dropout rate?

### **Study Design**

To address the research question posed by this study, the researcher bought together two extant data sources, working in a mode of inquiry commonly referred to as "analysis of secondary data" or more simply "secondary analysis." According to Hakim (1982), secondary data analysis may be defined as "further analysis of an existing data-set which presents interpretations, conclusions, or knowledge additional to, or different from, those presented in the first report on the data collection and its results" (p. 1). On this definition, specific uses to which such analyses may be put include:

1. Condensed reports (such as social area analysis based on selected social indicators).
2. More detailed reports (offering additional detail on the same topic).

3. Reports, which focus on a particular sub-topic (such as unemployment) or social group (such as ethnic minority).
4. Reports angled towards a particular policy issue or question.
5. Analyses based on a conceptual framework or theory not applied to the original analysis.
6. Re-analyses, which take advantage of more sophisticated analytical techniques to test hypotheses and answer questions in a more comprehensive and succinct manner than in the original report (Hakim, 1982).

Given the guideline outlines by Hakim (1982), the present study would appear to lend itself to secondary analysis in at least three respects. First, it focuses on a particular set of “subtopics” included in the original study, namely, the school’s disciplinary climate as captured by one section of the *TELL* questionnaire administered across Tennessee in 2013. Second, in merging these perceptual data with publicly available school accountability data archived by Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE), the study enables additional investigation into the degree to which a positive disciplinary climate might enable better student outcomes, ultimately, leading to improved college and career readiness. Finally, going beyond the original reporting of the *TELL* outcomes as item-level descriptive statistics, the present study applies somewhat “more sophisticated analytical techniques to . . . answer questions” (Hakim, 1982, p. 1) that were either not fully addressed or were unaddressed previously.

## **Instrument: Context and History**

A review of the literature indicates that a wide variety of measures of the school environment—whether conceived of under the aegis of “school climate,” “learning environment” “teacher working conditions,” etc.—are in use. Witcher (1993) reviewed several of these measures and found that those that resulted in the most reliable assessments were those that generated information about multiple aspects of the school—including “an emphasis on academics, an ambience of caring, a motivating curriculum, professional collegiality, and closeness to parents and community.” According to Witcher (1993), the most reliable instruments were those that were easy for respondents to understand, appropriate to several levels of schooling and possessed of adequate evidence of psychometric validity and reliability.

A school climate instrument that is widely thought to meet these requirements is the *Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning Questionnaire (TELL)*. Originally developed in 2002 by the New Teacher Center (NTC), the instrument made its debut in North Carolina, but since then has been administered across 18 states to nearly 1.5 million educators (NTC, 2016). Currently being implemented in six states and in three metropolitan school districts, the *TELL* continues to provide information to both policymakers and practitioners about the following eight research-based constructs:

1. *Time*. Available time to plan, to collaborate, to provide instruction, and to eliminate barriers in order to maximize instructional time during the school day.
2. *Facilities and Resources*. Availability of instructional, technology, office, communication, and school resources to teachers.

3. *Community Support and Involvement.* Community and parent/guardian communication and influence in the school.
4. *Managing Student Conduct.* Policies and practices to address student conduct issues and ensure a safe school environment.
5. *Teacher Leadership.* Teacher involvement in decisions that impact classroom and school practices.
6. *School Leadership.* The ability of school leadership to create trusting, supportive environments and address teacher concerns.
7. *Professional Development.* Availability and quality of learning opportunities for educators to enhance their teaching.
8. *Instructional Practices and Support.* Data and support available to teachers to improve instruction and student learning (TELL Tennessee Research Brief, 2013).

Informed by the *TELL*'s precedent use in the legacy Memphis City Schools as an element of the district's partnership with the Gates Foundation, the TDOE adopted the *TELL* as its measure of choice with respect to school climate issues. Although the state has since moved on to a different instrument with different purposes, the first statewide administration of the *TELL* occurred in 2011 and was succeeded by a second statewide administration in 2013. By special permission, data from this second administration were received directly from the NTC, and were subsequently aggregated to the level of the school, and merged with concurrent institutional information at 248 high schools.

## **Instrument: Psychometric Properties**

Some degree of informal or *prima facie* evidence of the validity of the *TELL* instrument seems inherent in the instrument's longevity and widespread adoption. This sort of testimonial evidence aside, however, resources provided on the *TELL TN* website not only chart the evolution of the instrument's "content validity" but also report on statistical analyses pertinent to the high "internal consistency" reliability (average *Coefficient Alpha*  $\geq .80$ ) and "structural validity" of the eight research-based constructs alluded to previously. As summarized in a Spring 2013 research brief published on the *TELL TN* website, the items developed for the first iteration of the instrument originated in one part from a wide-ranging literature review of research on the role of working conditions on teacher dissatisfaction and teacher mobility and in another part from School and Staffing Survey data. Over and above these issues of "content validity," the same research brief also points to studies done to establish the instrument's "structural validity." Using data taken from 400,000 teachers from 5,000 schools in 12 states, Swanlund (2011) used a combination of factor analysis and "Rasch measurement modeling" to examine the dimensionality of the instrument. In his analyses, Swanlund (2011) found more constructs (13) than the eight that the instrument purported to measure. However, Swanlund (2011) went on to note that the additional constructs seemed also to fit comfortably within the eight-construct framework, with the additional five clusters of items serving to refine four of the original domains. When an early wave of *TELL Tennessee*, data was analyzed using an approach similar to Swanlund's (2011), the analyst identified 10 constructs, with the Facilities and Resources construct and Instructional Practices and Support construct each splitting into two subsets.

Prompted by the results of these analyses, school-level responses to the *TELL*'s seven items that concerned the school's disciplinary climate were re-examined. A principal components analysis followed by a varimax rotation suggested that the structure of the "Managing Student Conduct" section was indeed uni-factorial (81.06% of variance explained), while a reliability analysis suggested that responses to the seven items were highly internally consistent ( $\alpha = .96$ ). For the eight items that are this study's focus, means standard deviations, item loadings, and communalities are provided in Table 1. A simple arithmetic mean of these seven item means suffices as this study's independent variables.

In summary, while there appears to be more constructs being measured by the *TELL* than an eight-construct description would suggest, the difference does not undermine the contention that one can draw valid and reliable inferences from the instrument. Indeed, what subsequent analyses seem to indicate is that groups of the *TELL* items, do in the main, measure what they purport to measure, but that more fine-grained conclusions about rather broad school climate-related topics may be drawn about from specific groups of the *TELL* items, the school's "disciplinary climate" among them.

Table 1

*Summary Statistics for Principal Components Analysis of Seven TELL Items Concerning Managing Student Conduct (N = 248)*

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>h</i> <sup>2</sup>	Loadings
1. Students at this school understand expectations for their conduct.	3.08	0.26	0.89	0.94
2. Students at this school follow rules of conduct.	2.78	0.33	0.82	0.94
3. Policies and procedures about student conduct are clearly understood by the faculty.	3.07	0.24	0.82	0.93
4. School administrators consistently enforce rules for student conduct.	2.88	0.36	0.89	0.91
5. School administrators support teachers' efforts to maintain discipline in the classroom.	3.15	0.31	0.86	0.90
6. Teachers consistently enforce rules for student conduct.	2.82	0.25	0.74	0.86
7. The faculty work in a school environment that is safe.	3.29	0.22	0.67	0.82

### **Sampling: Individual Level**

After the *TELL* data was obtained from the New Teacher Center, they were loaded into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences to obtain a descriptive portrait of the respondents and their responses. As shown in Table 2, about 44% of the 60,000 plus sample counted themselves as being from elementary institutions, roughly equal proportions linked themselves to middle schools (27.5%) and high schools (27.9%), and less than 1% indicated their connection to some “special” educational site (0.5%).

Absent about 2% of all respondents who did not declare what position they occupied at their institution, nearly 90% of the respondents remaining indicated that they were teachers (89.1%), about equal numbers listed themselves as either principals (1.8%) or assistant principals (2.0%), and the rest as some “other” education professional. While about 2% of the respondents also failed to indicate how long they had been an educator, slightly more than 45% indicated that their careers spanned 10 or fewer years (45.1%), while slightly fewer than 54% indicated that their careers exceeded 10 years (53.6%).

With respect to school tenure, more than half of the respondents noted that they had been at their current schools six or fewer years, while a little less than half put their tenure at more than six years.

Table 2

*Demographic Characteristics of the Sample at the Individual Level (N = 61341)*

Characteristic	<i>f</i>	%
School Level		
Elementary	24185	44.3
High	15130	27.7
Middle	15039	27.5
Special	279	0.5
Position		
Teacher	54633	89.1
Principal	1107	1.8
Assistant Principal	1213	2.0
Other Education Professional	3199	5.2
Not Answered	1189	1.9
Years of Experience		
First Year	3552	5.8
2-3 Years	5698	9.3
4-6 Years	8051	13.1
7-10 Years	9782	15.9
11-20 Years	18412	30.0
20+ years	14471	23.6
Not Answered	1375	2.2
Years at the School		
First Year	8392	13.7
2-3 Years	10906	17.8
4-6 Years	11799	19.2
7-10 Years	10394	16.9
11-20 Years	12194	19.9
20+ years	5686	9.3
Not Answered	1970	3.2

### **Sampling: Institutional Level**

As shown in Table 3, with respect to intake variables pertinent to students, TDOE statistics indicated that on average slightly more than 50% of such students qualify for free and reduced lunch (53.36%), a little less than one-quarter could be categorized as being non-White (23.35%) and about 13% might be classified as subject to some sort of learning disability (12.23%). As also shown in Table 2, with respect to intake variables pertinent to faculty, responses to *TELL* items indicated that, on average, somewhat more than half of educators at these institutions claimed more than 10 years of experience (55.14%) while a somewhat smaller proportion indicated their having been employed at their present school more than six years (51.41%).

In terms of the school's functioning as an academic institution, TDOE accountability data indicates that, averaged across three years for computing "value-added" indices, the percent of students proficient and advanced approached 50% in Algebra ( $M = 48.3\%$ ,  $SD = 13.62$ ) and 60% in English ( $M = 59.24\%$ ,  $SD = 12.70$ ). Consistent with these figures, the three-year "value-added" ACT composite for these high schools was approximately 19.0 ( $M = 18.90$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ), significantly less than the national ACT composite norm of 21.0.

More germane to the issues raised in the current study, both the attendance rates and the graduation rates for these 248 schools were quite high. With respect to attendance, the observed rates systematically exceeded 90%, with one year, three-year averaged, and four-year averaged percentages found to be  $M = 93.50$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ;  $M = 93.74$ ,  $SD = 1.83$ ; and  $M = 94.46$ ,  $SD = 2.14$ , respectively. Similarly, with respect to graduation, the observed rates progressively approached 90% with one year, three-year

averaged, and four-year averaged percentages recorded as  $M = 88.77$ ,  $SD = 6.10$ ;  $M = 88.83$ ,  $SD = 6.23$ ; and  $M = 88.99$ ,  $SD = 7.71$ , respectively. Consistent with the robust percentages linked to student proficiency and school effectiveness, percentages linked to student deficiency and school ineffectiveness conversely tended to be modest. For the 248 schools sampled, the average student suspension rate was under 10% for the school year 2012-2013 ( $M = 9.40$ ,  $SD = 9.46$ ), while the average event dropout rate for this same sample of schools for that same year was slightly under 2.0% ( $M = 1.80$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ). Reaching back four years, the so-called “cohort” dropout rate averaged less than 6% ( $M = 5.87$ ,  $SD = 5.11$ ).

Table 3

*Demographic Characteristics of the Sample: Institutional Level (N = 248)*

Characteristic	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Students on F/R Lunch (%)	53.36	17.17
Minority Students (%)	23.35	26.07
Students w/ Disabilities (%)	12.23	6.00
ACT Composite Score 2010-2012	18.90	1.76
Algebra I Proficiency 2010-12 (%)	48.30	13.62
English II Proficiency 2010-2012 (%)	59.24	12.70
Graduation Rate 2010-2013 (%)		
Current Year (%)	88.77	6.10
Three Years (%)	88.83	6.23
Four Years (%)	88.99	7.71
Attendance Rate 2010-2013 (%)		
Current Year (%)	93.50	1.91
Three Years (%)	93.74	1.83
Four Years (%)	94.46	2.14
Suspension Rate 2012-2013 (%)	9.40	9.96
Event Dropout Rate 2012-2013 (%)	1.80	1.52
Cohort Dropout Rate 2012-2013 (%)	5.87	5.11

## **Proposed Analyses**

Hierarchical multiple regression will be the analytic strategy used to answer this study's four research questions, with each of the four regressions entailing two blocks of variables. Three student-oriented variables will be entered in the first block (Percent Free/Reduced Lunch, Percent Minority, and Percent Students with Disabilities). So that the effect of teacher empowerment can be isolated, the two indices of teacher empowerment will be entered in the second block as factor scores, computed using the regression method available in SPSS. Irrespective of the outcome targeted, where statistical significance is observed with respect to the two independent variables, it may be concluded that either one, both, or neither encourage, detract, or have no empirical impact on the four student outcomes examined in this study, whether attendance, graduation, "acting out" (suspension) or dropping out.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between secondary level teachers' perceptions of their school' disciplinary climate and five annually-computed measures of school productivity related to student achievement. Deriving from this overall purpose are the more specific research questions that follow:

1. Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perceptions of their schools' disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student attendance rate?
2. Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perceptions of their schools' disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student suspension rate?
3. Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perceptions of their schools' disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student graduation rate?
4. Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perceptions of their schools' disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student event dropout rate?
5. Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perceptions of their schools' disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student cohort dropout rate?

The chapter opens with an inspection of the descriptive statistics underwriting the multiple regression analyses employed to answer the five research questions.

Accompanied by brief discussions, summaries of the aforementioned multiple regression analyses are provided for each research question in turn. A brief synopsis of what was learned from these analyses concludes the chapter.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

Inspection of the zero-order correlation matrix in Table 4 reveals that, of the variables included in this study, all but two are statistically significantly associated with the school's disciplinary climate: namely, the percent of LD students ( $r = .10, p = .11$ ) and the percent of teachers with more than six years' tenure ( $r = .12, p = .06$ ). With respect to the outcomes encouraged by productive schools, student demographic variables tend to be systematically negatively related, with the percent of students on free and reduced lunch and the percent of minority students linked to lower attendance ( $r = -.47, p < .01$ ;  $r = -.29, p < .01$ , respectively) and lower graduation rates ( $r = -.50, p < .01$ ;  $r = -.55, p < .01$ , respectively). As regards to outcomes discouraged by productive schools, student demographic variables conversely tend systematically to be positively related. Specifically, the percent of students on free and reduced lunch and the percent of minority students are linked to higher suspension rates ( $r = .46, p < .01$ ;  $r = .80, p < .01$ , respectively); higher event dropout rates ( $r = .46, p < .01$ ;  $r = .55, p < .01$ , respectively); and higher cohort dropout rates ( $r = .47, p < .01$ ;  $r = .49, p < .01$ , respectively).

Less robustly and in ways opposite to those seen for students, the two faculty demographic variables are also systematically associated with the outcomes examined in this study. With respect to outcomes encouraged by productive schools, faculty

demographic variables tend to be systematically positively related, with the percent of faculty with greater experience and the percent of faculty with greater tenure linked to higher attendance ( $r = .17, p < .01$ ;  $r = .21, p < .01$ , respectively) and higher graduation rates ( $r = .18, p < .01$ ;  $r = .29, p < .01$ , respectively). As regards to outcomes discouraged by productive schools, faculty demographic variables conversely tend to be systematically negatively related. Specifically, the percent of more experienced faculty and the percent of faculty with more tenure are linked to lower suspension rates ( $r = -.29, p < .01$ ;  $r = -.47, p < .01$ , respectively); lower event dropout rates ( $r = -.20, p < .01$ ;  $r = -.29, p < .01$ , respectively); and lower cohort dropout rates ( $r = -.17, p < .01$ ;  $r = -.28, p < .01$ , respectively).

As regards to zero-order correlations with the school's disciplinary climate, the percent of students on free and reduced lunch ( $r = -.13, p < .05$ ) and the percent of minority students ( $r = -.29, p < .01$ ) are linked to perceptions that are less positive, while the percent of more experienced faculty ( $r = .14, p < .05$ ) is linked to perceptions that are more positive. Apropos the five outcomes examined in this study, statistically significant zero-order correlations are observed with respect to the perceived behavioral climate and the attendance rate ( $r = .26, p < .01$ ); suspension rate ( $r = -.26, p < .01$ ); graduation rate ( $r = .23, p < .01$ ); event dropout rate ( $r = -.29, p < .01$ ); and cohort dropout rate ( $r = -.20, p < .01$ ).

Table 4

*Zero-Order Correlations among the Control, Independent, and Dependent Variables Employed in the Study*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. F/R Lunch (%)	1	.41**	.22**	-.22**	-.24**	-.47**	.46**	-.50**	.46**	.47**	-.13*
2. Minority (%)		1	.05	-.28**	-.53**	-.29**	.80**	-.55**	.55**	.49**	-.29**
3. LD (%)			1	-.00	.01	.03	.05	-.37**	.07	.31**	.10
4. Experience > 10 Years (%)				1	.70**	.17**	-.29**	.18**	-.20**	-.17**	.14*
5. Tenure > 6 Years (%)					1	.21**	-.47**	.29**	-.29**	-.28**	.12
6. Attendance Rate (%)						1	-.45**	.38**	-.46**	-.38**	.26**
7. Suspension Rate (%)							1	-.62**	.67**	.62**	-.26**
8. Graduation Rate (%)								1	-.76**	-.87**	.23**
9. Event Dropout Rate (%)									1	.86**	-.29**
10. Cohort Dropout Rate (%)										1	-.20**
11. Disciplinary Climate ( <i>M</i> )											1

\*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed); \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed).

Given the high level of inter-correlation with the student demographic variables and the outcomes—in particular, the previously-cited association between the percent minority of students and the suspension rate—it is not expected that all five of these outcomes will evidence a statistically significant relationship with perceptions of the school disciplinary climate. Via multiple regression analysis, the “partialing out” of confounding influences and the estimation of the unique effects of independent variables on dependent variables is enabled. In fitting regression models to the data, apropos the five research question driving this study, procedures outlined by Field (2013) were followed to check for linearity and unusual cases and to determine whether the statistical assumptions of homoscedasticity, normality, and independence were tenable. With no violations of these assumptions observed, final regressions were conducted in a “block entry” or “hierarchical” manner with the results following.

### **Research Question 1.**

Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers’ perception of their school’s disciplinary climate and the school’s concurrent student attendance rate?

Consistent with the zero-order correlations presented in Table 4, a nearly 3% change in the proportion of variance explained results when the average Disciplinary Climate scores are added to the final block of the multiple regression model for the concurrent student attendance rate ( $F$  Change (1, 241) = 9.75,  $p$  = .002). As Table 5 shows, the percent of minority students and both teacher demographic variables never emerge in this model as statistically significant predictors of the outcome. While the

percent of LD students proved to be statistically predictor of the concurrent attendance rate when first entered, its status changed when scores on the school's Disciplinary Climate were included in the final block. In this final block, only the latter variable ( $\beta = 0.18, t = 3.12, p = .002$ ) and the percent of students on free and reduced lunch ( $\beta = -0.45, t = -7.26, p < .001$ ) contributed significantly to explaining 28.2% of the variance in the school's concurrent rate of student attendance.

### **Research Question 2.**

Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perception of their school's disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student suspension rate?

Consistent with the zero-order correlations presented in Table 4, prediction of the student suspension rate is dominated by the student demographic variables. Although faculty demographics and the school's disciplinary climate might offset the impact of student demographics, it is the effect of the percent of minority students ( $\beta = 0.71, t = 14.34, p < .001$ ) and the percent of students on free and reduced lunch ( $\beta = -0.15, t = -3.51, p = .001$ ) that serves to explain more than 66% of the variation in the school's suspension rate. As indicated in the final block of the regression shown in Table 6, knowledge of the school disciplinary climate adds nothing to the explaining the school's suspension rate when the composition of the student body is known ( $F$  Change (1, 241) = 0.295,  $p = .587$ ).

Table 5

*Hierarchical Regression Summary of Educators' Perception of Their School's  
Disciplinary Climate on the Concurrent Student Attendance Rate (N = 248)*

Source on Attendance	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.B.</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> =
Block 1: Student Demographics Model Fit: $F(3, 244) = 27.18, p < .001, R^2 = .250$					
F/R Lunch Students (%)	-0.06	0.01	-0.46	-7.34	0.000
Minority Students (%)	-0.01	0.01	-0.10	-1.70	0.090
LD Students (%)	0.05	0.02	0.13	2.35	0.019
Block 2: Student Demographics + Faculty Demographics Model Fit: $F(5, 242) = 16.39, p < .001, R^2 = .253,$ $F$ Change (2, 242) = 0.574, $p = .674$					
F/R Lunch Students (%)	-0.06	0.01	-0.46	-7.20	0.000
Minority Students (%)	-0.01	0.01	-0.08	-1.08	0.282
LD Students (%)	0.05	0.02	0.13	2.31	0.022
Faculty Experience (%)	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.20	0.838
Faculty Tenure (%)	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.49	0.623
Block 3: Student + Faculty Demographics + Disciplinary Climate Score Model Fit: $F(6, 241) = 15.77, p < .001, R^2 = .282,$ $F$ Change (1, 241) = 9.75, $p = .002$					
F/R Lunch Students (%)	-0.06	0.01	-0.45	-7.26	0.000
Minority Students (%)	0.00	0.01	-0.01	-0.21	0.838
LD Students (%)	0.04	0.02	0.11	1.94	0.053
Faculty Experience (%)	0.00	0.02	-0.01	-0.17	0.863
Faculty Tenure (%)	0.01	0.02	0.08	0.87	0.383
Disciplinary Climate ( <i>M</i> )	1.53	0.49	0.18	3.12	0.002

Table 6

*Hierarchical Regression Summary of Educators' Perception of Their School's**Disciplinary Climate on the Concurrent Student Suspension Rate (N = 248)*

Source on Suspension	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.B.</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> =
Block 1: Student Demographics Model Fit: $F(3, 244) = 161.70, p < .001, R^2 = .665$					
F/R Lunch Students (%)	0.09	0.02	0.16	3.71	0.000
Minority Students (%)	0.28	0.02	0.74	18.16	0.000
LD Students (%)	-0.02	0.06	-0.01	-0.39	0.700
Block 2: Student Demographics + Faculty Demographics Model Fit: $F(5, 242) = 97.63, p < .001, R^2 = .669,$ $F$ Change (2, 242) = 1.17, $p = .311$					
F/R Lunch Students (%)	0.09	0.02	0.15	3.53	0.000
Minority Students (%)	0.27	0.02	0.72	15.08	0.000
LD Students (%)	-0.02	0.06	-0.01	-0.33	0.745
Faculty Experience (%)	-0.04	0.05	-0.04	-0.80	0.425
Faculty Tenure (%)	-0.02	0.05	-0.02	-0.41	0.682
Block 3: Student + Faculty Demographics + Disciplinary Climate Score Model Fit: $F(6, 241) = 81.17, p < .001, R^2 = .669,$ $F$ Change (1, 241) = 0.295, $p = .587$					
F/R Lunch Students (%)	0.09	0.02	0.15	3.51	0.001
Minority Students (%)	0.27	0.02	0.71	14.34	0.000
LD Students (%)	-0.02	0.06	-0.01	-0.25	0.799
Faculty Experience (%)	-0.04	0.05	-0.04	-0.73	0.469
Faculty Tenure (%)	-0.02	0.05	-0.03	-0.47	0.638
Disciplinary Climate ( <i>M</i> )	-0.84	1.54	-0.02	-0.54	0.587

### **Research Question 3.**

Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perception of their school's disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student graduation rate?

As shown in Table 7, adding school personnel's perceptions of the disciplinary climate results in a statistically change in the percent of variance explained in the concurrent graduation rate ( $F$  Change (1, 241) = 5.13,  $p = .024$ ) and increases the  $R^2$  value by some 1.1%. While the *beta* value associated with the climate variable is robust ( $\beta = 0.11$ ,  $t = 2.27$ ,  $p = .024$ ), it is still smaller than the values associated with the percent of students on free and reduced lunch ( $\beta = -0.25$ ,  $t = -4.78$ ,  $p < .001$ ), the percent of minority students ( $\beta = -0.39$ ,  $t = -6.26$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the percent of LD students ( $\beta = -0.32$ ,  $t = -6.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The faculty demographic variables regressed on the student graduation rate apropos the present research question are not statistically significant.

### **Research Question 4.**

Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perception of their school's disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent event dropout rate?

Adding 1.8% to the proportion of variance explained, the regression of faculty perceptions of the school's disciplinary climate is statistically significant rate ( $F$  Change (1, 241) = 7.07,  $p = .008$ ). As can be seen in Table 12, the beta weight associated with the climate score is the last in importance of the three linked to the outcome ( $\beta = -0.14$ ,  $t = -2.66$ ,  $p = .008$ ), the others being the percent of minority students ( $\beta = 0.39$ ,  $t = 5.81$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the percent of students on free and reduced lunch ( $\beta = 0.27$ ,  $t = 4.67$ ,  $p <$

.001). As with previous regressions, the percent of LD students and the percentages of experienced and tenured faculty do not contribute to the prediction of the event dropout rate.

#### **Research Question 5.**

Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perception of their school's disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent cohort dropout rate?

As with the event dropout rate, there is a negative relationship between perceptions of school's disciplinary climate and the school[s] cohort dropout rate, but the relationship is not statistically significant ( $\beta = -0.09$ ,  $t = -1.76$   $p = .079$ ). As Table 9 reveals, roughly 39% of the variance in that outcome may be attributed to the influence of the percent of minority students ( $\beta = 0.32$ ,  $t = 4.81$ ,  $p < .001$ ), the percent of students on free and reduced lunch ( $\beta = 0.25$ ,  $t = 4.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and the percent of LD students ( $\beta = 0.25$ ,  $t = 4.85$   $p < .001$ ). Not statistically significant are the two variables representing faculty experience and faculty tenure, although the statistics computed for the latter are negative and directionally appropriate ( $\beta = -0.06$ ,  $t = -0.68$ ,  $p = .499$ ).

Table 7

*Hierarchical Regression Summary of Educators' Perception of Their School's  
Disciplinary Climate on the Concurrent Student Graduation Rate (N = 248)*

Source on Graduation	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.B.</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> =
Block 1: Student Demographics Model Fit: $F(3, 244) = 73.03, p < .001, R^2 = .473$					
F/R Lunch Students (%)	-0.11	0.02	-0.25	-4.85	0.000
Minority Students (%)	-0.13	0.02	-0.43	-8.38	0.000
LD Students (%)	-0.39	0.06	-0.30	-6.32	0.000
Block 2: Student Demographics + Faculty Demographics Model Fit: $F(5, 242) = 43.46, p < .001, R^2 = .473,$ $F$ Change (2, 242) = 0.006, $p = .994$					
F/R Lunch Students (%)	-0.11	0.02	-0.25	-4.78	0.000
Minority Students (%)	-0.13	0.02	-0.43	-7.09	0.000
LD Students (%)	-0.39	0.06	-0.30	-6.29	0.000
Faculty Experience (%)	0.00	0.05	0.00	-0.01	0.994
Faculty Tenure (%)	0.00	0.05	0.01	0.09	0.931
Block 3: Student + Faculty Demographics + Disciplinary Climate Score Model Fit: $F(6, 241) = 37.69, p < .001, R^2 = .484$ $F$ Change (1, 241) = 5.13, $p = .024$					
F/R Lunch Students (%)	-0.11	0.02	-0.25	-4.78	0.000
Minority Students (%)	-0.11	0.02	-0.39	-6.26	0.000
LD Students (%)	-0.41	0.06	-0.32	-6.58	0.000
Faculty Experience (%)	-0.01	0.05	-0.02	-0.28	0.777
Faculty Tenure (%)	0.02	0.05	0.03	0.36	0.718
Disciplinary Climate ( <i>M</i> )	3.38	1.49	0.11	2.27	0.024

Table 8

*Hierarchical Regression Summary of Educators' Perception of Their School's**Disciplinary Climate on the Concurrent Event Dropout Rate (N = 248)*

Source on Event Dropout	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.B.</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> =
Block 1: Student Demographics Model Fit: $F(3, 244) = 45.96, p < .001, R^2 = .361$					
F/R Lunch Students (%)	0.02	0.01	0.28	4.80	0.000
Minority Students (%)	0.03	0.00	0.43	7.65	0.000
LD Students (%)	0.00	0.01	0.00	-0.07	0.941
Block 2: Student Demographics + Faculty Demographics Model Fit: $F(5, 242) = 27.49, p < .001, R^2 = .362,$ $F$ Change (2, 242) = 0.23, $p = .797$					
F/R Lunch Students (%)	0.02	0.01	0.27	4.66	0.000
Minority Students (%)	0.03	0.00	0.44	6.71	0.000
LD Students (%)	0.00	0.01	0.00	-0.07	0.943
Faculty Experience (%)	-0.01	0.01	-0.05	-0.67	0.506
Faculty Tenure (%)	0.01	0.01	0.04	0.53	0.596
Block 3: Student + Faculty Demographics + Disciplinary Climate Score Model Fit: $F(6, 241) = 24.66, p < .001, R^2 = .380,$ $F$ Change (1, 241) = 7.07, $p = .008$					
F/R Lunch Students (%)	0.02	0.01	0.27	4.67	0.000
Minority Students (%)	0.02	0.00	0.39	5.81	0.000
LD Students (%)	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.26	0.794
Faculty Experience (%)	0.00	0.01	-0.03	-0.35	0.730
Faculty Tenure (%)	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.21	0.832
Disciplinary Climate ( <i>M</i> )	-0.86	0.32	-0.14	-2.66	0.008

Table 9

*Hierarchical Regression Summary of Educators' Perception of Their School's**Disciplinary Climate on the Concurrent Cohort Dropout Rate (N = 248)*

Source on Cohort Dropout	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.B.</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> =
Block 1: Student Demographics Model Fit: $F(3, 244) = 49.31, p < .001, R^2 = .377$					
F/R Lunch Students (%)	0.08	0.02	0.26	4.49	0.000
Minority Students (%)	0.07	0.01	0.37	6.74	0.000
LD Students (%)	0.21	0.04	0.24	4.65	0.000
Block 2: Student Demographics + Faculty Demographics Model Fit: $F(5, 242) = 29.43, p < .001, R^2 = .378,$ $F$ Change (2, 242) = 0.14, $p = .867$					
F/R Lunch Students (%)	0.08	0.02	0.26	4.43	0.000
Minority Students (%)	0.07	0.01	0.36	5.47	0.000
LD Students (%)	0.21	0.04	0.24	4.65	0.000
Faculty Experience (%)	0.00	0.03	0.01	0.12	0.901
Faculty Tenure (%)	-0.02	0.04	-0.04	-0.47	0.642
Block 3: Student + Faculty Demographics + Disciplinary Climate Score Model Fit: $F(6, 241) = 25.26, p < .001, R^2 = .386,$ $F$ Change (1, 241) = 3.11, $p = .079$					
F/R Lunch Students (%)	0.08	0.02	0.25	4.42	0.000
Minority Students (%)	0.06	0.01	0.32	4.81	0.000
LD Students (%)	0.22	0.04	0.25	4.85	0.000
Faculty Experience (%)	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.34	0.735
Faculty Tenure (%)	-0.02	0.04	-0.06	-0.68	0.499
Disciplinary Climate ( <i>M</i> )	-1.90	1.08	-0.09	-1.76	0.079

## Summary

Controlling for student and faculty demographic characteristics, perceptions of the school's disciplinary climate at 248 Tennessee high schools are coextensive with three of the five concurrent measures of school productivity employed in this study. A mean score on the seven items constituting that section of the 2013 *TELL Tennessee* questionnaire devoted to assessing "policies and practices that address student conduct issues and ensure a safe school environment" proved to be positively linked to the school's concurrent attendance rate ( $\beta = 0.18, t = 3.12, p = .002$ ) and its concurrent graduation rate ( $\beta = 0.11, t = 2.27, p = .024$ ). Zero-order correlations computed between perceptions of the school's disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent suspension ( $r = -.26, p < .01$ ), cohort dropout ( $r = -.20, p < .01$ ), and event dropout rates ( $r = -.29, p < .01$ ) proved to be statistically significant. However, only the event dropout rate evidenced a statistically significant link to the climate predictor variable in a multiple regression context ( $\beta = -0.14, t = -2.66, p = .008$ ).

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative research was to determine if a relationship existed between multiple measures of school performance/productivity and school disciplinary climate.

Of increasing importance in current research (Lee, Cornell, Gregory & Fan, 2011; Gregory, Cornell & Fan, 2012), is the role of school disciplinary climate as it relates to school performance/productivity. This study identified seven items under the area of managing student conduct from the 2013 *Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Tennessee* survey, aligning five questions with the relationship between disciplinary climate and school outcomes. Three student demographic variables [percent free/reduced lunch (F/R), percent minority, percent learning disabled (LD)] and two faculty demographic variables [years of experience, years (tenure) in the assigned school] were used to investigate five school performance/productivity measures: specifically, the annually computed student attendance, graduation, suspension, event dropout, and cohort dropout rates. After merging all of these data with covariates pertinent to student and faculty characteristics, five sets of hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted to determine the effect of school disciplinary climate on these school performance/productivity measures.

The following questions were addressed in this research study:

1. Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship

between secondary-level teachers' perceptions of their schools' disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student attendance rate?

2. Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perceptions of their schools' disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student suspension rate?
3. Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perceptions of their schools' disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student graduation rate?
4. Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perceptions of their schools' disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student event dropout rate?
5. Controlling for student and faculty characteristics, what is the relationship between secondary-level teachers' perceptions of their schools' disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student cohort dropout rate?

### **Effect of Teachers' Perceptions of Discipline Climate and Attendance Rate- Research**

#### **Question 1**

The aim of the first question was to determine if a relationship existed between secondary-level teachers' perception of their school's disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student attendance rate. Attendance rate offered the highest percentage of explained variance in hierarchical linear regression compared to other school productivity measures. The percent increase in the amount of variance explained by the school's concurrent student attendance rate is nearly three percent, controlling for all other variables in the model.

## **Effect of Teachers' Perceptions of Discipline Climate and Student Suspension**

### **Rate- Research Question 2**

The aim of the second question was to determine if a relationship existed between secondary-level teachers' perception of their school's disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student suspension rate. The subsequent hierarchical linear regression involving this relationship did not explain a significant proportion of variance in student suspension rate.

## **Effect of Teachers' Perceptions of Discipline Climate and Student Graduation Rate-**

### **Research Question 3**

The aim of the third question was to determine if a relationship existed between secondary-level teachers' perception of their school's disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent student graduation rate. While the beta value associated with the school disciplinary climate variable is robust, it is still smaller than the values associated with the demographic control variables. The addition of disciplinary climate variable at step 3 only increased the amount of variance explained by 1.1 percent.

## **Effect of Teachers' Perceptions of Discipline Climate and Event Dropout Rate-**

### **Research Question 4**

The aim of the fourth question was to determine if a relationship existed between secondary-level teachers' perception of their school's disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent event dropout rate. The addition of disciplinary climate variable at step 3 increased the amount of variance explained by nearly two percent. However, the disciplinary climate variable remained the least important variable relative to the other

significant variables in the model, namely the percent of minority students and students on free and reduced lunch.

## **Effect of Teachers' Perceptions of Discipline Climate and Cohort Dropout Rate – Research**

### **Question 5**

The aim of the fifth question was to determine if a relationship existed between secondary-level teachers' perception of their school's disciplinary climate and the school's concurrent cohort dropout rate. The addition of school disciplinary climate at step 3 led to very little increment in the amount of variance explained. The perceived disciplinary climate was not a significant of cohort dropout rate.

### **Commonalities in Five Control Variables across the Research Questions**

First, the five hierarchical regressions included three student demographic variables. Examining these variables, two had statistical significance (percent of free/reduced lunch students and minority students). Both variables had statistically significant negative influence on all measures of school performance/productivity.

Second, the two faculty variables of experience and tenure were included in the regressions. Both variables did not contribute to prediction of school performance/productivity outcomes.

Finally, of all factors considered in this study, the percentage of minority students had the strongest association with school performance/productivity outcomes. The elephant in the room scenario that students of color drive the relationship between school disciplinary climate and school productivity must be addressed.

### **Interpretation and Theoretical Implications**

The results of this study have several logical interpretation and theoretical implications. One is that a school's disciplinary climate is not necessarily more effective in reducing dropout and suspension rates or raising graduation rates. In fact, high school disciplinary climate has relatively modest influence on event dropout and graduation rates and insignificant influence on suspension and cohort dropout rates after controlling for relevant other variables. Attendance rate emerges as significantly related to school disciplinary climate, but second only in importance after the percent of free/reduced lunch students. The prediction of multiple indicators of school performance/productivity is dominated by the student demographic variables.

Theoretically, school disciplinary climate is grounded in school effectiveness research and school nurturing theory that recognize developing relational trust and a caring school climate and other layers of the safe and orderly environment impact school performance. Following the literature on school effectiveness, Coleman (1966), Edmonds (1979), and Bryk (2002) found that school effectiveness was impacted by external and internal factors. The Coleman (1966) report detailed how external factors like socioeconomic status and family circumstances influenced the effectiveness of schools. Research revealed that while external factors were correlated to the effectiveness of schools, there were internal factors that schools should be aware of. Schools that focus on internal factors, in particular, a safe and orderly climate – demonstrate an increase in school productivity. Ronald Edmonds (1979) acknowledged the correlation between the external factors found in the Coleman (1966) report, but he placed a stronger emphasis on the internal factors in which schools could utilize to help improve the multiple indicators of school performance. Although most individual

schools, or at least most public high schools, have little control over student characteristics and external factors, they can and do have a fair amount of control over how they are organized and managed, particularly in terms of ensuring that schools are safe and orderly.

On the other hand, the relatively modest small effects of school disciplinary climate on attendance rate, graduation rate and event dropout rate in comparison with student demographics support one of the original findings of the landmark Coleman (1966) report. Contemporary school effectiveness studies claim that students from low-SES families enter high school at lower levels (i.e., average literacy skills five years behind) than do students from families of middle and high socioeconomic status (SES) (Reardon, Valentino, Kalogrides, Shores, & Greenberg, 2013). In this study, the combined student demographic variables account for as much as 86 percent of the overall variability in student suspension rate. The student demographic variables contribute 45 percent of the overall variability in student attendance rate. Finally, the combined student demographic variables contribute 96 percent of the overall variability in student graduation rate. One interpretation of this finding is that school disciplinary climate has relatively more impact on attendance rate relative to the other school performance/productivity outcomes.

The strong association of student demographic variables (particularly the percent of minority students) with school performance and disciplinary climate makes it difficult to disentangle the association of school resource input factors (i.e., disciplinary climate) that are most amenable to school productivity after adjusting for specific sub-groups of students. For example, it could be argued either that high school students from more

affluent or non-minority backgrounds choose better disciplinary climate or that high school students actively create better disciplinary climate as schools respond to higher demands related to multiple measures of productivity. In other words, school disciplinary climate is more closely associated with student demographics and, thus, relatively less easily controlled by the school than school-level inputs and policies, or that students from more advantaged backgrounds bring more disciplined habits and a more positive perception of goals and values to the school. It should be noted that while this study cannot establish a causal connection, it present grounds for an argument that a disciplinary climate fosters a set of organizational conditions that makes it more conducive to nurture the kinds of activities necessary to impact school productivity. On the other hand, the modest and mixed effects of disciplinary climate on school performance support a differential perspective of effective schools, following prior research (Ning et al., 2015). That is, the varied aspects of school disciplinary climate that impact attendance rate, graduation rate, and event dropout rate are not likely to be the ones that impact cohort dropout rate and suspension rate. More research is needed to determine whether more specific measures of school disciplinary climate would still result in different effects on these multiple indicators of school performance. Limited research to date has directly explored the relationship between high school disciplinary climate and multiple indicators of school productivity.

There remains a dearth of information regarding evidence-based nonpunitive approach to school disciplinary climate, including the varied options available to schools as they attempt to create an educational environment conducive to learning. School disciplinary policies disproportionately affect Black and Latino youth in the education

system, a practice known as the discipline gap. Consequently, the students who are affected the most by school administration that cause student suspension are minority students. Schools suspend minority students at much higher rates than their peers. In particular, African American students have been found to be exposed frequently to a wide range of punitive school discipline measures. This study provides solid support for the strong relationship between rates of suspension and minority status. There is a great need for evidence on the impact of school disciplinary climate and on their potential unintended consequences (i.e., whether the difference in suspension rates is a product of racial bias).

Although care ethics and nurturing school theorists such as Noddings (1992), Enomoto (1997) and Green (1997, 1998a, 1998b) did not explicitly reference the school effectiveness literature, certain conjectures about school performance could be made based on their description of ‘caring’ schools. By examining school disciplinary climate in the context of caring relationships and nurturing school environments, future researchers can contribute to the understanding of the effect that adult care has on student conduct and, ultimately, multiple measures of high school performance. On the other hand, the mixed findings of this study support the findings generated from prior research on fostering caring and safe climates (O’Malley et al., 2012; Orpinas & Horne, 2010). There is a long tradition in education sociology and psychology that demonstrate achievement motivation, readiness, school engagement, effort, expectations, aspirations and other family background characteristics as central to understanding students’ educational trajectories (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001). For example, Lee et al. (2011) found that school demographics were predicative of the school’s dropout rate.

Disciplinary climate could also be the result of other underlying explanatory factors such as prosocial behavior (i.e., student sharing and volunteering), students' perceptions of positive teacher-student relationships, connection to school, and engagement (Cohen & Greier, 2010; Tableman, 2004; Wilson, 2004).

### **Implications for Practice**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations emerged:

1. School disciplinary climate is heavily influenced by the student demographics.

However, there are areas over which schools have more control (i.e., the area of managing student conduct) and efforts could be made to ensure a safe, orderly and caring school climate. Disciplinary efforts on improving school climate must be spearheaded jointly by the teacher, administrator, parents and students. Students are constantly informed of the rules and consequences. An effective school-wide disciplinary environment that includes the values, structures, and philosophy of student conduct must involve parents and students in order to generate buy-in. Professionalism among administrators and faculty/staff is needed in fostering caring, safe and orderly climates. Evaluation is also necessary to determine the success of a school disciplinary program and uses subjective (attitudinal) and objective (observable) perspectives. The pressures on teachers and administrators to provide caring, safe, and orderly school environment cannot be overstated. Schools that engage with students, families and their communities need to be conscious of the potential negative effects of school disciplinary policies that create exclusionary, unwelcoming, and even unsafe climate. Care ethics and

nurturing school theorists such as Noddings (1992), Enomoto (1997) and Green (1998a, 1998b) noted that heavy handed, one-size-fits-all disciplinary interventions imposed by external forces of authority after extended periods of neglect have not proven educationally successful.

2. Another approach to school disciplinary climate, the effective schools movement,

directs attention to the effectiveness of schools for all students, especially those ultimately at risk of dropping out or being suspended (Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, 1983). The school disciplinary climate strategy of this movement is based on the correlates of schools found to be effective for all students, especially minority students in inner-city schools.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The following suggestions for future research are made to provide a better understanding of the relationship between multiple indicators of school performance/productivity and school disciplinary climate:

*A diverse sample and individual-level data:* A more diverse sample from other states would help provide more generalizability to the results of the research. Another limitation of this study is rooted in school-level data analysis, which likely masks differences in ratings of school disciplinary climate and productivity improvements that exists between teachers in schools. A study using teacher-level data could be conducted in an effort to identify specific teacher-level attributes and perceptions of school disciplinary climate associated with productivity improvements.

*Other grade bands:* Other grade bands (elementary and middle schools) should be studied to determine if the same influence on school productivity measures remain consistent. For example, student discipline in middle school continues to be a major concern for teachers, administrators, and parents.

*A longitudinal study:* This same study could be replicated as a longitudinal study. This study would be useful as school leadership changed, the academic performance of the school rose or fell, or the neighborhood shifted populations. The school performance measures and perceptions of school disciplinary climate are limited to a single time frame. This study only presented a snapshot in relationship to long-term school performance/productivity trends and developing school disciplinary climate. No doubt, instructional practices and school conditions prior to the time frame of this study played an important and influential role in nurturing a favorable school disciplinary climate and its relationship to the five measures of school productivity.

*Use of qualitative methods:* The same questions could be asked using qualitative methods of data collection, such as interviewing, observation, and document analysis. Case studies could be conducted to explore how and why educator ratings differ across the seven components of school disciplinary climate. Teachers would have an opportunity to be more expressive and detailed compared to the limitations of a questionnaire. Using a qualitative approach could provide answers as to why teachers answered the way they did.

*An expanded list of disciplinary climate indicators:* Although this study identified the seven components of school disciplinary climate under the area of managing school conduct, it is limited in scope. Further studies could expand the items of school

disciplinary climate beyond the student rules of conduct using less subjective assessments than educator perceptions. Because school disciplinary climate is an umbrella term, an expanded list of dimensions of a caring, safe and orderly school disciplinary climate could be included within this construct, such as index of teacher support, index of student-teacher relations; index of students' sense of belonging in school; and index of teachers' and administrators' perceptions of student-related factors affecting the school disciplinary climate.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the contribution and the growing interest in determining the relationship between disciplinary climate and school performance/productivity, the field lacks consensus about operational measurements and careful delineation of constructs. Clearly, the field is evolving and calls for rigorous and empirically sound research that focuses on relating specific aspects and activities of school disciplinary climate into multiple measures of school performance/productivity. This study provides a systematic inquiry into the disciplinary climate's relationship to high school performance. Further insights are likely to be produced from ongoing research into school nurturing theory, school disciplinary climate and school effectiveness.

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