Teachers' Perceptions of School Safety, Safety-Based Changes, and Their Resultant Impact on School Climate: A Case Study

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL SAFETY, SAFETY-BASED CHANGES, AND THEIR RESULTANT IMPACT ON SCHOOL CLIMATE: A CASE STUDY

by

Laura L. Finley

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Sociology

Western Michigan University
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In the last decade, several high-profile shootings in suburban school districts have drawn attention to the issue of school-based violence. Consequently, schools all over have responded in many ways. The literature reveals that many suburban and rural schools have adopted the same measures as have urban districts, despite the fact that their discipline and violence problems are qualitatively different. These responses have generally been punitive and technological in nature, rather than curricular or structural reforms. This has included institution of metal detectors, more restrictive student dress codes, zero tolerance laws and others.

Some, though, have suggested that these responses may not be helpful; indeed, they may actually impact the school climate negatively and obscure the educational mission of the school. Thus more recent research has begun to address the role of school climate in regards to school violence. While this is a positive development,
few researchers have utilized teachers' voices as a source of information about school violence and responses to it, rather relying largely on the views of administrators.

This research is a case study of teachers' perceptions of school violence issues at one small, rural high school. It focuses on their definitions and understanding of school violence, their perceptions of the changes made at their school as a result of fear or actual incidence of school-based violence and the validity of those responses. It also includes teachers' assessment of the overall school climate. The role that their school's physical structure plays in their feeling safe is explored as well. Data comes from focus group sessions as well as a School Climate survey. Overall results are presented, as well as disaggregated by seniority and gender.
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Finally, I thank the teachers who provided this glimpse into their understanding of school violence. Your voices need to be heard!

Laura L. Finley
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Overview

This research is a case study focusing on the phenomenon of school violence, as perceived by high school teachers in one small, rural high school. While teachers are deeply impacted by school violence, they also affect it in a number of ways. Very little work to date has explored teachers' perceptions, nor has much been done that utilizes teachers as an important voice in making decisions that deal with school violence issues. This, despite the fact that educational theorists generally agree about the importance of teachers' voices. While incidents of school-based violence have occurred throughout history, the Columbine massacre of April, 1999 can be viewed as an instigating event that prompted a variety of responses by public schools, especially in suburban and rural areas. A review of the literature describes some of these responses, and reveals that they have been largely punitive and technological in nature. It is unclear the extent that these same responses have been adopted by smaller, rurally-located schools. Although there is a wealth of research about school violence, one area that has not been extensively explored
in the concern for school safety is the role of school climate, especially how teachers impact and are impacted by it. This chapter explains why school climate is important and introduces the many ways that teachers are involved in it.

The chapter also provides a description of the research project, which involved a description of teachers' perceptions of school violence in one small, rural high school, the responses they have seen their school make as a result, and their understanding of the impact of both school violence and of the changes in response to it on the overall school climate. It is an attempt at hearing teachers' voices about this important issue. According to Smith (1990), "Inquiry does not begin within the conceptual organization or relevances of the sociological discourse, but in actual experience as embedded in the particular historical forms of social relations that determine that experience" (49). The chapter concludes with a brief description of the sample school, a reflexive statement and discussion of the significance of this research.

The Perception of School Violence

Schools in the United States have often been called upon to "fix" social problems. As Caulfield (2000)
notes, schools in the past have added drug awareness and health education problems as a result of societal pressure to address these respective concerns. Lawrence (1998) states that schools are blamed for many problems that actually originate within the family and the community. In addition to issues of origin and responsibility, it is questionable in many cases whether the perceived problem really exists. One example of this is the concern in the last decade about school violence.

While many people believe violence in the schools has reached epidemic proportions, in actuality, school violence is not on the rise. School violence researcher Irwin Hyman, as cited in Skiba and Peterson (1999), tracked many indicators of violence over a twenty year time period and found that “Despite public perception to the contrary, the current data do not support the claim that there has been a dramatic, overall increase in school-based violence in recent years” (373). Gibbs (2001) notes that, “youth violence is dropping, that schools are getting safer, that fewer than 1% of teen gun-related deaths occur in schools...” (22). A 2001 report by the Justice Policy Institute found that 95% of all public school students have never been threatened by a weapon. Further, the percentage of those reporting that
there is no serious violence in their school has remained stable over the last two decades (Jones, 2001). "Today's high school seniors are no more likely than their parents were to be assaulted, injured, threatened, or robbed in high school" (Jones, 2001, 1).

Despite the fact that, overall, school-based physical violence is decreasing, one widely publicized incident triggered a flood of concern and a variety of school responses. The Columbine massacre, which resulted in twelve victims plus the suicides of the two shooters, is the worst example of school violence to date. Greene (2001) notes that Columbine marked a profound change in the nation's thinking about and attention to school violence. Although some schools were taking actions in the name of safety prior to this, Columbine triggered a flood of responses, both by students and schools. Some students responded by issuing, or in a few cases, acting on, threats of their own. Others feared attending schools in case "it happens here." Schools, unfortunately, responded with actions that have been largely technological in nature and have served to further restrict student rights. For example, many schools have added metal detectors, have increased punishment for violations of the student code, and put in place more
restrictive dress codes. Small suburban and rural schools have also taken these measures, in essence blindly adopting urban response models, despite little actual evidence indicating the reality of school violence in these settings. The literature provides more examples of the restrictive trends being utilized in response to the perceived problem.

The Effect On School Climate

There are some, however, who are beginning to question whether these safety measures are the most effective means to address the perceived problem, and whether they may bring with them additional problems. Pedro Noguera, as cited in Skiba and Peterson (1999), says "...the primary function of harsh punishment is not to change the behavior of the recipient, but to reassert the power of authority" (376). Early indications suggest that we may actually be obscuring our educational mission by reacting in these ways. Further, we may be adversely affecting the climate of the school for both students and staff. Cloud (2001) states that "The culture of high schools is changing in a more subtle way. A kind of psychological arms race has broken out" (33). Although some educators are beginning to recognize that technology and restrictions may not solve the problem of school
violence, more work still has to be done to address the specific effects these measures have on both students and staff. Here the work on school climate becomes essential.

Shafii and Shafii (2000) identify school climate and student-teacher relationships as two of the main reasons for school-based violence. A summary of the literature indicates that there are several important components of climate as it relates to school violence. These include collaboration amongst staff and with students and unity of purpose. As Bey and Turner (1996) note: "We must pay closer attention to school climate issues and construct school environments that encourage, nurture and support positive values and behaviors..." (x).

Teachers clearly must be involved in any discussion of school climate, as they are both affected by it and contribute to it. The absence of studies to date that directly seek to understand how safety measures are perceived by teachers, how they effect teachers, and how teachers, in turn, effect students, is a glaring omission. Specifically, we need to know more about teachers' general feelings about safety in their schools, how particular safety measures affect teachers' own feelings of safety and their feelings about the workplace.
climate in general. The literature reveals several reasons why this is critical.

First, teachers are involved most directly with students and are thus asked to deal with violent acts. Additionally, teachers may become, either directly or indirectly, the recipients of student-perpetrated violent acts. Certain types of teachers are more likely to become targets. For example, teachers who have unclear rules or are inconsistent in their application of them are most likely to be victimized, as are those who have punitive approaches (Shafii and Shafii, 2000). Those same teachers also accomplish less in regards to their classroom goals, as they spend more time disciplining than educating. For example, Edith Sweetwine, a veteran math teacher who served 25 years with the Detroit Public Schools, said she was driven to retire because she was “disciplining 80% of the time and teaching only 20%” (“Order in the Classroom,” 1).

Second, teachers are in a unique position to influence students at risk of serious behavioral problems, including violence. As DiGiulio (2000) says, “Teachers are the lynchpins in that socialization process, for it is they who are closest to students and have the potential to make a difference in a student’s
life more than any other professional" (75). Further, those matters that teachers most directly control, including classroom atmosphere and student achievement, are also the most important in creating a non-violent school atmosphere (DiGiulio, 2000).

Third, studies already indicate that what goes on in the individual classroom has a tremendous effect on overall school climate. In an adverse climate, violent acts are more likely to occur. Kandakai, Price and Kay (1999) note that teachers identify "school factors such as overcrowding, a lack of school supervision, and students' academic achievement level as contributing to school violence" (190).

Fourth, teachers who perceive an unsafe school environment are more likely to change schools. But, even more important, teachers who work in an un-supportive, negative school climate are also more likely to leave the education profession. Forty-four percent of Texas public school teachers indicated that poor working conditions were likely to drive them from the profession (Black, 2000). Clearly, a climate where those who are "in charge" do not want to be there, cannot promote student learning, nor is it likely that teachers who feel this way will
form and sustain the types of bonds with students that are likely to prevent violence.

Description of Research

This research looks at teachers' perceptions of school violence at one small, rural school in Midwest Michigan. Also addressed were these teachers' perceptions of the types of changes they have seen made as a result of actual school violence or out of fear of it, and their assessment of the overall climate in their school. While the literature reveals that urban schools have suffered from greater incidence of school-based violence, several polls have indicated that suburban and rural communities are more fearful of school violence. Consequently, many have responded in a variety of ways. This case study begins to explore what those changes have been.

The school studied offers a unique opportunity to look at school violence issues due to its' physical structure. As will be detailed in the literature, the research to date indicates that physical structure can contribute to or deter school violence in a multitude of ways. This particular school is one of a few high schools nation-wide to adopt an "open school" concept, where they essentially have no classroom walls. Pseudo-walls, made of book shelves and other dividing materials, have been
erected, but still allow for a general feeling of openness not associated with most high schools. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this structure has indeed affected the school climate and responses to the fear of school violence. For instance, a bond issue was passed in the fall of 2001 to build several new facilities for the district; one of the main selling points came from a local police officer, who convinced voters that, in the event of a shooting at the high school, the current physical structure would allow for a complete massacre.

Description of perceptions came from four focus groups of two to three teachers each from the high school. Each focus group session lasted approximately one and a half hours, and involved inquiry about teachers’ perceptions of violence, responses to it, and assessment of school climate; specifically, feelings about safety and educational goals. Each member was asked to complete the School Climate survey included as Appendix B, which provides a standardized means by which the various perceptions of school climate can be assessed and compared, as well as a method of triangulating the results from the focus groups.
Reflexive Statement

As a former high school teacher, I have been dismayed at the responses to the threat of school violence that I have witnessed. It is disturbing to see schools fail to assess the needs of their students and community and simply implement procedures because others are doing it. My experience in a rural school was that administrators, community members and many teachers simply panicked after Columbine. While we had all heard about cases of school violence prior to this, we saw so much of the carnage at Columbine on the television that it prompted responses that the other incidents did not. I recall a series of bomb threats by students in the weeks after Columbine, as well as one year later on the anniversary of the massacre. I recall a new policy of locking all of the doors except the main entrance so that no one could get into the building, even during the day. I recall the appearance of a school-police liaison the following fall. I recall staff development sessions where we were dictated “our” crisis management plans. I recall complaints from teachers and parents about those plans. I also recall the introduction of a peer mediation group that essentially fizzled out due to lack of administrative and staff support.
It seems obvious that all citizens would want to prevent violent incidents from happening anywhere, especially amongst our kids at school, yet we rarely seem to emphasize preventative measures, such as curricular or extra-curricular changes. Again, my experience was that no emphasis was ever made on addressing school violence issues in the classroom. Aside from the peer mediation group that fizzled out, only one extra curricular effort was made, and that was my own creation of a diversity club. Too often schools implement short term or “band-aid” responses and rarely address more systemic issues. Aronson (2000) describes these as “pump handle responses,” referring to the 1854 “end” of the cholera epidemic in London by removing the pump handle from wellheads. He says, “Just as it was essential for Dr. Snow to move beyond the pump handle, it is essential for us to understand what is causing these mass murders” (70). Further, few seem to have truly considered the consequences of these responses. Nor have teaching faculty been utilized as a valuable source of information regarding school violence, responses to violence, and implications of those responses. My own experience was that teachers were not allowed input into any of the proposed safety measures; we were merely asked to abide
by them and deal with any resulting implications. Although not empirically tested, my perception was that these measures led to increased negativity amongst both teachers and students, which, in turn, impacted the ability of teachers to teach and students to learn. I am interested in this research for personal reasons, as well as for academic concerns rooted in the literature.

Obviously my own teaching background frames my interest and approach to this study. I am also influenced by my understanding of Therapeutic Jurisprudence and other academic approaches to humanistic public policy.

Significance of Research

This research is important for several reasons. First, as there has been a great deal of media and public attention to school safety, it is imperative that we understand just what responses are being taken and the implications that they might have. If we do not we could unwittingly be doing further damage. As those highly impacted by both school violence and responses to it, teachers can provide a powerful description of what is happening. Further, if the overall school climate has been adversely affected, as the literature indicates, these responses could have significant implications for teacher work environment and, consequently, student

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learning. Additionally, if we find that our current interventions do have negative consequences we could begin the process of changing them. Wenk, as quoted in Lawrence (1998), articulated it well. "Because we know misconduct in school generally precedes misconduct in the community, the manner in which schools react to misconduct may determine whether it will be followed by official delinquency" (123).

Further, research of this nature is intended as an opening dialogue with and amongst teachers about subjects critical to the work and learning environment. Referring to the central position occupied by teachers, Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) state,

"They have been expected to 'shape up' and implement the reforms that others have developed. They have been treated more like uniformed hired hands than professionals to whom we entrust our most precious asset. They have been the last to be consulted when we consider what is broken and how to fix it. Their voices have not and still do not inform the actions taken to rectify what reformers believe to be the matter with education in the United States" (xv).

What follows in the next chapter is a review of the literature, beginning first with the importance of teacher voice. A description of teacher contributions to school safety follows. These contributions are framed by a general discussion of the importance of school climate, including school physical structure, location, and size,
in creating safe, collaborative learning environments.

The discussion then shifts to an examination of the types of responses that have become typical. Columbine is discussed as an instigating event for these responses in suburban and rural schools. Literature regarding moral panics provides a means of understanding the responses made.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology used in this study. Discussion of case study techniques is included. Detail regarding why focus groups were selected as the primary methodology and how they were facilitated in this study follows. Also included is a description of the high school that was studied. Finally, issues of reliability and validity are addressed.

Chapter Four describes the data analysis procedures used and findings from the focus groups and School Climate survey. Each is disaggregated by gender and seniority. Chapter Five discusses these findings and links them back to the literature. Also presented are limitations of the study and recommendations for further work.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

A review of the literature regarding school safety concerns and responses revealed several themes that will be discussed in this chapter. First, the importance of teachers' voices in regards to important school matters is discussed. This is framed by a discussion of the extant literature regarding school climate and how teachers are impacted by and impact it. Recognizing that few empirical assessments of school climate, especially from the perspective of teachers, have been conducted, it is important to examine the types of studies that have occurred. A look at the literature regarding the actual incidence of school-based violence is then described. The various responses that schools have made is then brought into the discussion, and explained through a connection with research on moral panics and the broader "culture of meanness" or "culture of violence" in the U.S. These themes in the literature frame my interest in the study, as well as the formulation of focus group and survey questions.
The Importance of Teachers' Voices

As noted in the introduction, it is my experience that teachers' perspectives and perceptions regarding school policies and curriculum are an underutilized resource. Many educational theorists have noted the importance of teacher voice. Referring to teacher memories, Maxine Green, in the Introduction of Detachment and Concern (1993), says, "Rather than being a source of understanding and illumination, memories are looked at as outside forces" (6). In addition, "If researchers were to acknowledge and develop a concern for memories in this sense, if they were to come to terms with what lies beyond the horizons of empirical science, their evaluations would be sounder" (6-7). McLaren (1998) says, "Teacher voice reflects the values, ideologies, and structuring principles that teachers use to understand and mediate the histories, cultures and subjectivities of their students" (221). Teacher voice therefore offers a glimpse into each teacher's very approach to education. Teacher voice, when allowed opportunities for expression, can be both positive and negative, in that it can maintain as well as challenge the status quo. McLaren (1998) notes, "It is often through the mediation of teacher voice that the very nature of the schooling..."
process is either sustained or challenged” (222). Further, “The stories that schools, teachers, and students construct can form the basis for a variety of approaches to teaching and learning in which hope and power play integral roles” (222).

As Buchmann (1993) notes, we can never fully understand schooling until we allow all the important voices to emerge. She says, “Neither research nor practice will evolve unless members of the two communities create ‘interactive spaces’ to negotiate the meaning of classroom life” (133). Additionally,

“The research community has not mastered the ‘surround’ in which teachers work day to day, beliefs on which they depend to get through the year, the typical interactions between instructional tasks and learning activities, the ways in which teachers reach outside their classroom for information, expertise, and didactic resources—many of them research-mediated” (Buchman, 1993, 136).

Casey, as cited in Goodson (1992), notes,

“The particular configuration of selectivities and omissions which has been built into this research frame slants the shape of its findings. By systematically failing to record the voices of ordinary teachers, the literature on educators’ careers actually silences them. Methodologically, this means that even while investigating an issue where decision-making is paramount, researchers speculate on teachers’ motivations, or at best, survey them with a set of forced-choice options” (12).
In reviewing the literature about teachers' perceptions of school safety, the only information that emerged were survey results indicating that most teachers in non-urban districts are generally not fearful at work. For example, White and Beal (1999) found that, "The severity of nearly every type of problem decreased steadily from urban to suburban and suburban to rural schools" (33). While this is clearly positive, little else seems to be known about what exactly they mean by "feeling safe," why they feel safe, what other concerns they might have about the safety-based measures their school has taken, nor about their general feelings regarding the climate of their school. Given that teacher voice is critical in shaping the educational experience of students as well as in allowing us to understand the institutions called schools, the lack of work including it seems to be a glaring omission. Teachers' voice is especially important when it comes to understanding school climate, as they are equal parts contributors and recipients of the climate at their schools. The next section describes various definitions of school climate, offered by researchers as well as teachers, then addresses the centrality of teachers in the creation of healthy school climates.
School Climate and Teachers

School climate or culture may seem to be a nebulous concept with no clear definition. Many have, however, tried to clarify the parameters of school culture or climate as it relates to violence. Weinhold (2000) says, "There are three critical aspects of the culture of violence in schools. They are a dominator value system that supports violence, an overemphasis on negativity, and the pervasiveness of bullying behavior" (28). In a dominator system, people use power plays involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation, exploitation, and oppression of others in order to get their way; have very little regard or respect for the rights and needs of others; exploit women, minorities and children; are on the defensive and never admit mistakes; blame others for causing their problems; and believe that "might makes right" (Weinhold, 2000). For instance, almost 100% of the students Wienhold (2000) has spoken to "believe that negative rather than positive acts get attention" (29).

Teachers have also attempted to define school climate. These definitions include: "The way we do things around here;" "Patterns of behavior;" "Deeply embedded beliefs that are shared;" and "Unwritten rules that
permeate everything" (Gruenert, 2000, 14). Shein (1992) identifies three levels of organizational culture applied to schools; artifacts, espoused values, and assumptions. Artifacts provide concrete evidence of a culture and may include such things as trophy cases and published mission statements in schools. Espoused values, like the emphasis on high standardized-test scores, guide individual's actions. Assumptions, such as that an individual's social well-being is less important than their academic standing, come from these values. They are often so deeply embedded that individuals are unaware of their existence (Gruenert, 2000). In explaining the difference between schools in at-risk environments that manage to effectively meet the needs of their students and those who do not, Alderman (2000) says the answer is unity. "Unity of purpose, planning and discipline. It takes an entire school, with everyone working together, to teach a child and develop a positive climate and discipline" (22).

Five factors seem to be relevant to the development of a school climate that is unlikely to either create or sustain violent behavior; collaborative leadership, which refers to the degree to which school leaders establish and maintain collaborative relationships with school
staff; teacher collaboration, or the degree to which teachers engage in constructive dialogue that furthers the school’s educational mission; professional development, which indicates the degree that teachers value continuous personal and school-wide development; collegial support, or the degree to which teachers work together effectively; and learning partnership, or how frequently and with what quality teachers, parents, and students work together for the common good of students (Gruenert, 2000). Stated differently, Sweeney, as cited in Bey and Turner (1996), recommends the following for a healthy school climate: cohesiveness, or working together for a common goal; high expectations for both students and staff; esprit, or satisfaction and loyalty; goal orientation, or a sense of shared direction; and leadership.

Clearly teachers are an important component of creating a safe, collaborative school climate. Emphasizing the role of teachers, Alderman (2000) asserts, “We can’t have peaceful schools with ‘piecemeal’ discipline. Stated differently, teachers can’t have the kind of discipline they want in their classrooms if the halls of the school are out of control” (21). Sarason, in Bey and Turner (1996), says:
"The [stakeholders] of educational policy may adopt, proclaim, and take steps to implement a policy, but if that policy is not explicitly and directly geared to alter what goes on in the dynamics of life in the classroom—especially in regards to alteration in power relationships—the policy is an exercise either in futility or irrelevance, or both" (5-6).

As family structure changes and adults are busier than ever, school may now be the primary institution for socialization in this country. "Teachers are the lynchpins in that socialization process, for it is they who are closest to students and have the potential to make a difference in a student’s life more than any other professional" (DiGiulio, 2001, 75). Further, "As part of the school-based social narrative, the teacher must play the central role. Research has shown that the best deterrent to school violence is the presence of a teacher, particularly when that teacher makes supportive interventions, interventions that students characterize as caring" (DiGiulio, 2001, 51).

One reason that teaching staff should be involved in creating and implementing methods to prevent school violence is because they, too, are affected by it. One way that teachers are affected by school violence is as targets. On average, each year there are 133,700 violent crimes against teachers at school and 217,400 thefts from teachers at school (CPSV, 2000). This not only increases
their own fear, but it also changes the way that they interact with students.

"More than in the past, today's teachers fear being sued or fear being seen as heavy-handed or authoritarian. Most worrisome are indicators that teachers who attempt to convey high expectations to students—teachers who are considered to be 'strict'—may be more likely to be targets of student violence than other teachers, according to a MetLife Insurance Company survey of 1993" (DiGiulio, 2001, 66).

Ronald Stephens, of the National School Safety Center, reports that 29% of the nation's teachers even considered leaving the profession because of violence. Teachers from all types of schools indicated this, although slightly more did from urban districts (Greene, 2001).

The threat of school violence not only changes the school climate, but also the work environment for teachers. The work environment, in turn, affects how students are taught as well as socialized. A 1996 survey of Texas public school teachers found 44% were "seriously considering" leaving the profession; over 33% of those said that their main reason was poor working conditions (Black, 2001). Further, teachers are unable to do their work, teaching kids, in a disruptive climate. For instance, 27% of teachers report that student behavior keeps them from teaching a fair amount or great deal of the time (CPSV, 2000).
There is some evidence that kids believe that teachers do not know how to, are afraid to, or are unwilling to intervene (DiGiulio, 2001). This can reduce the credibility of the teacher in all aspects, not just disciplinary, of the educational process. One third of all teachers surveyed in 1993 felt that violence or the threat of it made teachers and students less eager to go to school; one third said that their colleagues are now less likely to discipline students, and half said that students pay less attention to learning (Greene, 2001). Twenty-two percent of students surveyed at the same time admitted that fear of violence made them less eager to go to school, 12% said that this fear actually made them stay home or skip school. Sixteen percent said that they are now less eager to talk in class, 25% felt that the fear of violence lessened the quality of their education, while 42% said that fear of school-based violence made them angry (Greene, 2001).

One way that teachers can affect school climate is through the curriculum they teach. "In the face of the culture of violence that seems to pervade our schools and society, curricula that teach students the attitudes and skills they need to avoid violence seem to provide one sound strategy for violence prevention" (Peterson and
Skiba, 2001, 160). Kandakai, Price and Kay (1999) note that, "...factors such as improper curriculum placement, overcrowding, inferior instruction, inconsistent classroom management, severe action for repeated misbehavior, more years of teaching experience, and assigning students by racial composition" are implicated in contributing to a climate where violence is likely to occur (90). Further, the classroom management techniques used by individual teachers affect climate as well. School control must begin with classroom control.

"...Discipline is not based on a collection of mandated rules and consequences. It is based on a vision, a climate, a way of persons interacting with one another" (Alderman, 2000, 22). As Aronson (2000) notes,

"Instituting a significant change in the social atmosphere of the classroom might succeed in making the school a safer place. This might also succeed in producing the kind of social environment that will make the school a more pleasant, more stimulating, more compassionate, and more humane place for all of the students" (14).

Additionally, teachers can influence school culture or climate in the way that they behave. A social learning perspective, developed by Albert Bandura in the 1960’s, illustrated this notion. Bandura, as cited in Espelage (2000), argued that the school environment contributes, in large part, to the acquiring and maintaining of
aggression. "Children learn from role models, including adults and peers, to use aggressive means to achieve their goals" (326). Casella (2001) says, "To maintain a school ethos that endorses kindness and care, one must institutionalize that expectation" (94).

Teachers cannot change everything about the school climate on their own, though; it is essential that they are supported by administrators. Teachers often feel as though administrators do not listen to them, do not support them, and do not allow them a voice in important decision-making (Plucker and Slavkin, 2000). Twenty-eight percent of secondary school students and 28% of teachers feel left out of things going on around them in schools (CPSV, 2000). The lack of teacher empowerment has an impact on students, as well. Two studies looked at the connection between student vandalism and administrative support for teachers, and found that when support is absent or inconsistent, teachers were more likely to use punitive management methods (DiGiulio, 2001). Punitive management methods increase the likelihood that violent incidents will occur. It appears that when teacher morale sinks, so does student achievement. Other problems also surface, including indifference towards others and a general incivility between teachers and students.
Students then model this behavior and become less civil to one another (Black, 2000).

Another factor in school climate is described by Devine. John Devine (1996) discussed the concept of the mind-body dualism that is now endemic in our schools. He began by saying,

“The role of the teacher in the inner-city high school of the late twentieth century has been reduced to the realm of the intellect, and teachers are being charged purely with the custody of the mind of the student and with the cultivation of academic skills, as defined by state-dictated curricular requirements” (131).

This has not only limited the responsibilities of teachers and administrators, but has also minimized the role that school and education play in the lives of many adolescents. Schools have moved away from the more holistic mission they previously embraced and are now focusing merely on the mandated curriculum and retention and regurgitation of knowledge. Devine (1996) goes on to explain what this new level of educational praxis has done to the climate of schools and the spirit of students.

“This strand of theory may be justly dubbed dualistic, because it dichotomizes the student, dismissing the importance of the teacher’s connection to the body or bodily behavior of the student while emphasizing the teacher’s relationship to the mind” (133).
In sum,

"Schools can prevent violence by ensuring that all children are well served academically and by teaching children to manage conflict and anger. When children learn how to assert their own needs and opinions without trampling on the rights of other people, when they learn to express their angry feelings without losing control or hurting other people, they have mastered skills that enhance their lives and the life of the community. There is no better place than school, where diverse groups of children congregate, to learn these important lessons" (Prothrow-Stith, 1990, 172-3).

School Size

The size of the school seems to have an impact on its' climate, as indicated earlier in the description of important elements of safe, healthy school climates. Eisler (2000) explains that small schools are preferable, not only for their sheer size, but also because of the "Quality of relationships that exist among students, teachers and administrators" (15). Jacobson (2000), in her article about Creekland Middle School, a school with 3100 students, says, "The school’s leaders share the view prevalent among many experts that organizing schools so that children feel connected to one another and to the adults in the building is vital" (1). She goes on to explain how the school-within-a school model for larger schools has become of more interest "Partly in response to incidents of school violence. The hope is that if
adults know students well, they will be able to detect changes in behavior and head off any problems before they turn into tragedy" (2). Large schools, defined as having more than 1000 students, have three times more incidence of school-based violence (DiGiulio, 2001).

The optimal school size, according to the research, is 400 to 600 students, yet the average size of schools has increased greatly in recent years. Thirty percent of all U.S schools now have more than 800 students (Shafii and Shafii, 2000). James Garbarino, as cited in Raywid and Oshiyama (2000), states, "If I could do one single thing to stop the scourge of violence among juveniles, it would be to ensure that teenagers are not in high schools bigger than 400 to 500 students" (444).

Teachers are more likely to be victimized if they teach in junior high, teach large classes with more low ability students, teach under-achievers and/or behavior problems, and work in schools with a high percentage of minorities (Lawrence, 1998). Kandakai, Price and Kay (1999) state that schools in urban communities, as well as those with greater numbers of disadvantaged students, have greater school violence problems. The National Center For Education Statistics finds that, persistently, "The severity of nearly every type of problem decreased
steadily from urban to suburban and from suburban to rural schools" (Shen, 1997, 19). Urban teachers consistently report school-based violence amongst students as serious, while teachers in suburban or rural districts are more likely to report drinking and drug abuse as their "serious" problems (Shen, 1997). This has not stopped suburban and rural schools from fearing possible violence, though, nor has it seemed to stop them from responding as if actual incidents have occurred on their campuses.

School Physical Structure

Additionally, the physical structure of the school can affect the climate, as well as the types of responses schools can take to the threat of violence. Research identifying some of the school features that have the greatest impact on students includes resources available, school buildings, school size and class size (Lawrence, 1998). As Stevenson (2001) says, "A growing body of literature documents that classroom outcomes are related to school physical environment" (40). Studies also show that the physical condition of a school affects outcomes, attitudes, and community support. One way that physical structure affects students is that, "A child in a school with a poor physical environment must spend an inordinate
amount of human energy to overcome his or her surroundings” (41). Stevenson (2001) states that several researchers, after studying school physical planning and design, have found that students in noisy schools have significantly higher blood pressure. High noise levels have also been found to reduce mental concentration, increase errors on difficult tasks, and increase student tendency to give up on assignments before they are complete. Additionally, "In overcrowded spaces, there is a likelihood of less socially acceptable behavior, of more discipline problems, and of less focus on learning" (Stevenson, 2001, 42). Once again there is a lack of research looking at the specific effects of school physical environment of teachers, but clearly these same findings would hold true, at least in part, of teachers working in those same environments. Further, "In a time of severe teacher shortages, schools with modern learning environments, with spacious classrooms, and with the latest equipment can and do attract the best and brightest teachers" (Stevenson, 2001, 41).

Given that climate is important, especially teachers' conceptions of it, it is a glaring omission that no work in this regard is available. In order to understand what research has been done in regards to
school violence, the next section provides a description of the types of responses that schools throughout the country have made as a result of actual or perceived school violence. Columbine, while not the only incident that prompted responses, is highlighted based on the widespread reactions to it. These responses are framed by the literature regarding moral panics, as well as the "culture of meanness" in the U.S that has been manifested in our schools.

School Responses

Despite the fact that addressing school climate is obviously a critical component in any response made to perceived safety threats, schools have generally not addressed climatic issues, instead responding to this fear in punitive ways. This perception has led to many changes mentioned in the introduction. Over the last three decades the U.S has de-emphasized addressing problem behavior through educational approaches, while increasingly emphasizing medical or criminal justice approaches (DiGiulio, 2001). John Devine describes the level of pervasiveness these supposed "safety" measures have taken in New York City schools in his book Maximum Security. There are over 3000 uniformed safety officers
in New York City schools—more than in the entire Boston police department (Devine, 1996).

Eleven percent of schools nationwide have either a security guard or metal detector on campus, in addition to restricted school access (DiGiulio, 2001). As of 1993, the most frequent school response to violence was suspension, with 78% of schools reporting to the National School Board Association indicating they use this response. Seventy-six percent made changes in their discipline codes, while 72% use expulsions. All 50 states plus the District of Columbia now have some type of Zero Tolerance law, which mandates predetermined consequences for a variety of infractions, including drugs and weapons on school campus (Greene, 2001). These punitive and security-related responses reflect reactions to perceived disorder and are now more common than not in schools.

Students' perceptions of these changes provide similar responses. In a MetLife survey, students were asked to report what measures their school had taken to stop or reduce violence. Interestingly, 79% reported disciplinary practices (e.g., suspension/expulsion), 60% reported instituting dress codes, 50% reported starting a disciplinary code, and 50% reported the use of police or security guards. Less than 25% have initiated conflict
resolution programs (Everett & Price, 1995). The literature also indicates that few, if any, have made curricular or structural changes. Once again, teachers’ perceptions are absent in the discussions. The reason for schools' reliance on punitive measures, rather than on addressing structural or climatic issues, can be understood, at least in part, by the coverage of the Columbine massacre.

Columbine as Trigger

Although school violence, in some capacity, has existed throughout the history of this country, Columbine marks a profound change in the nation’s thinking about and attention to school violence. There has been nowhere near the level and extent of focus and concern at any other time (Greene, 2001). Columbine was not unique, however, in regards to the way that the shooters, Klebold and Harris, chose to perpetrate their acts. “Columbine was not the first mass killing at a school, but it was so ornately gory and so profoundly heartbreaking that it became a cultural reference point” (Cloud, 2001, 33). As evidence of the effect of Columbine across the nation, Shafii and Shafii (2000) note that the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency reported that, pre-Columbine, they typically received one to two bomb threats per week.
Within two and a half weeks after Columbine they had received over 200. Kathleen Fisher and Paul Kettle, as cited in Shafii and Shafii (2000), report that over 350 students were arrested across the country on charges related to threats against schools, school officials or peers in the four weeks after Columbine.

Smaller schools located in rural or suburban areas, many of which had previously felt immune to the threat of violence, were very much impacted by Columbine. Cannon (2001) notes that, "There's been no actual violence at Pottsgrove High near Pottstown, Pa., some 40 miles west of Philadelphia. But the school got nineteen bomb threats last year and has gotten ten so far this year" (25). The Superintendent of the school says, "Certainly Columbine and then what happened in California have increased the fear and awareness. There is huge concern" (25). As noted in the introduction, my own experience was similar. My district went from no bomb threats in the school-year prior to Columbine to a number of them in the one-month period following it.

Moral Panics

Fear of school violence, as a result of the attention given to Columbine and other school shootings, has reached the level of moral panic. In fact, the Center
for Media and Public Affairs dubbed school violence number ten on their list of "Top Ten Media Distortions of the 20th century," and this was even prior to Columbine (Killingbeck, 2001). Killingbeck (2001) notes that the Columbine massacre topped the list of crime stories covered by ABC, NBC and CBS in 1999, with 319 stories. This is more than five times the coverage of any other incident.

There is a long history of moral panics directed at youth, both in the United States and in Europe (Thompson, 1998). There are five indicators of moral panics (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994). First, a level of concern about the issue is present. In the school violence panic, concern has largely been measured by public opinion polls of parents. Second, hostility increases towards the group perceived as "responsible." Hostility is clearly being directed at today's youth, as many have labeled them "superpredators." Mike Males (1996) has dubbed today's youth "the scapegoat generation." Third, the population generally believes the threat is real. Again, opinion polls show this to be true. Fourth, moral panics are characterized by dis-proportionality, which refers to the perception that more kids are engaged in school violence than is indicated by the evidence. This is clearly true,
in that only twelve people, including one accidentally and five due to unknown causes, died in or around schools in the 1999-2000 school year (Bailey, 2000). Finally, moral panics generally result in a call for more laws. As Killingbeck (2001) notes, “The response is likely to be a demand for greater social regulations or control and a demand for a return to traditional values” (188). From Zero Tolerance laws to demands for media censorship, to Charleton Heston’s argument that we should arm school principals, a “law and order” approach clearly characterizes the reactions many schools have taken.

The nature of the panic has changed, however. It occurs more rapidly and is more pervasive than were previous panics involving youth (Thompson, 1998). This is undoubtedly true; all kids are now suspect in schools, and are being treated as such. Aronson (2000) notes that students have been asked to “report other students who threaten violence or seem different. Some schools have required that personality tests be administered to all students-tests aimed at profiling those students who might be most apt to go on a murderous rage” (8). In sum, Charles Acland, as cited in Devine (1996), states that, “while violence is deplorable, this crisis is a journalistically constructed ‘moral panic’ that has now
become common sense" (6). Further, "the result is that misdirected policy is being generated to safeguard the schools, even though the real threat may lie elsewhere" (Killingbeck, 2001, 186).

Many adults do indeed believe that there is a good chance their child will be hurt or even killed at school. For example, a phone poll of 1004 adults, taken just after the Jonesboro shooting, found 71% thought it "likely" or "very likely" that a similar school shooting would happen in their town. The evening after Columbine the number dropped slightly to 68%, yet two days later it was up to 80% (Brooks, Schiraldi & Zeidenberg, 1999).

The fear that school violence will occur anywhere in the country to any kid is not consistent with the literature. "Contrary to the image of schools as violent places, schools have traditionally been-and remain-the safest places in the world for children and adolescents" (DiGiulio, 2001, 25). Vincent Schiraldi, as cited in Killingbeck (2001), notes that, "Three times as many people were struck by lightening as were killed in school shootings" (193). Despite the focus on guns and drugs in schools, students report that they are more likely to be victimized by more "traditional" means; physical bullying and verbal attacks (Kruse, 2000). It is almost as if
Columbine has normalized some of these other deviant behaviors. As one urban middle school student said, “Kids still get beat up all the time, it’s just like, ‘Well, he wasn’t shot. It isn’t that bad’” (Kruse, 2000, 84).

Between 1997-98 and 1998-99 there was a 40% reduction in school-associated deaths, but the percentage of people fearful of them rose nearly 50%. Seven months after Columbine the percentage of citizens fearful of school-associated deaths had risen to 70% (Brooks, Schiraldi & Zeidenberg, 1999). Interestingly, although the literature shows that students and staff in urban schools face a much likelier threat of school violence, fifty-four percent of rural parents said they were worried about school shootings, while 46% of urban parents and 44% of suburban parents expressed this concern (Brooks, Schiraldi & Zeidenberg, 1999).

The National Center for Education Statistics found in a 1996-97 survey of 1,234 school principals and disciplinarians at elementary, middle and high schools that the “serious to moderate” problems they faced were tardiness (40%), absenteeism (25%), and physical conflicts between students (21%). Those discipline problems that get all the attention were listed among the least frequent. Nine percent cited drug abuse as a
problem, 5% noted gangs, and only 2% cited weapons possession and physical abuse of teachers as major concerns (Skiba and Peterson, 1999). Wood, Zalud and Hoag (1996) conducted a survey of principals at rural South Dakota schools. Twenty-eight percent indicated that student violence was not a problem, while forty-five percent said it was an insignificant problem. Another seventeen percent identified school violence as a slight problem. The most frequent type of violence reported, despite the fear of shootings at school, was fighting, with knives the second most frequent. Gun use was the least frequently cited. Interestingly, there is a general absence of data regarding teachers' fear of violence and teachers' perceptions of the serious problems schools face, despite the fact that they interact directly with students.

The Culture of Meanness

Exacerbating the effects of the moral panic about school violence is a societal climate or culture of meanness. Nikolaus Mills (1999) says, "Meanness is a state of mind, the product of a culture of spite and cruelty that has had an enormous impact on us" (6). He argues that the United States has been without a major international enemy since the end of the Cold war, so we
have applied our Cold war thinking to domestic issues. Mills is supported by the fact that twenty districts in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Oregon have begun to use MOSAIC, a so-called "threat assessment software" referred to as a "mental detector." This software originated with the FBI initially and helps a school to profile potential criminals (Morse, 2000). Mills feels that Americans are demanding more restrictive and punitive policies. He cites New York City mayor Rudy Guiliani's war on prostitution and the homeless, California's unconstitutional Proposition 187, and increasingly restrictive attitudes towards immigrants as examples (Mills, 1999). As Mike Males (1996) notes, this is something almost exclusive to the U.S. We are alone among industrialized nations in our executions of children, and we have the highest rates of childhood poverty amongst western nations.

This culture of meanness can be traced to dominant U.S values that are also stressed in schools. Beckett and Sasson (1996) state, "Analysts of American political culture have long noted the extraordinary salience of two closely related values" (132). They go on to describe self-reliance, which stresses that each individual is responsible for his or herself, and individualism, which

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highlights the importance of individuality, autonomy, and free choice. As they say,

"For many Americans, these core values are important wellsprings of optimism. The belief that individual effort alone shapes the quality of one’s life means that ordinary people can surmount personal hardships...and make something extraordinary of themselves" (Beckett & Sasson, 1996, 133).

However, "the flip side of adherence to the values of self reliance and individualism is the view that crime, like all forms of action, is strictly a matter of individual choice and motivation" (Beckett & Sasson, 1996, 133).

"Insofar as crime is viewed as a personal choice, pure and simple, crime control strategies oriented towards deterrence and punishment make the most sense. It is in this way that the values of self reliance and individualism in American political culture provide fertile soil for punitive rhetoric and beliefs" (Beckett & Sasson, 1996, 133).

According to Iadiccola and Shupe (1998), "...the structure and processes within educational systems in this country emphasize individual achievement, as it is a product of competition in the classroom and self-interested rational action by the student" (10).

Kauffman and Burbach, as cited in DiGiulio (2001), looked at the connection between the culture of meanness and human behavior. They found a "social ecology" that supports and nurtures antisocial behavior. It reinforces
a sense of incivility that is the basis for subsequent violence. This incivility has trickled into our schools as well. "A quickness to bristle, an anticipation of offense" now characterizes most school altercations (DiGiulio, 2001, 3). Additionally, those students who act antisocially may be the most popular within their grade or school, increasing the likelihood of violent responses (DiGiulio, 2001).

This culture of meanness in our schools is problematic. DiGiulio (2001) says, "Instead of fostering an inclination toward collectivity, it appears that schools in America have not only de-emphasized a pro-social orientation toward others, but in many situations schools can also be seen to be fostering antisocial behavior" (7).

School Responses as Problematic

There are a multitude of problems with punitive responses. It is important to critique them, as they have been implemented virtually without opposition in many schools in the U.S. First, they can result in the literal reverse of the intended result; kids may actually become more violent or disruptive. As Kipnis (1999) notes, "The more adults treated me like a bad boy, the more I began to think of myself that way. Eventually,
rather than be crushed by shame, I began to take on that role" (52). Mari McLean, as cited in DiGiulio (2001) says; “When students view schools as prisons and teachers and administrators as guards and wardens, they will begin to behave more like prisoners than students, and violence in the schools will become its own self-fulfilling prophecy” (15). Other responses by the student who has been stigmatized may include what Goffman (1963) called “defensive cowering” or “hostile bravado” (17). Kipnis (1999) says,

“Teachers often sent me to detention or ‘social adjustment’ classes. Though I didn’t show it, I usually felt ashamed for being singled out and punished. If I was tardy, talkative, or missed detention, I was sent to the Vice Principal’s office for punishment. That, however, only made me feel even more rebellious and defiant” (38).

The list of negative repercussions goes on.

“Psychologists say that surrounding troubled young people with the accoutrements of a police state may only fuel their fascination with guns and increase their resistance to authority” (Bonilla, 2000, 36). From DiGiulio (2001), “Much research clearly shows that criminal justice responses and environments that emphasize punitive measures serve to foster aggression, violent behavior, and vandalism” (11).
In sum, "Creating an un-welcoming, almost jail-like, heavily scrutinized environment, may foster the violence and disorder school administrators hope to avoid" (Brooks, Schiraldi & Zeidenberg, 1999, 7). Eisler’s work suggests that when we treat or respond to people using a dominator model, we increase the possibility that they will respond to us using a form of domination as well (Eisler, 2000). "If children are subjected to negative, uncaring, fear, shame and threat-based treatment...they will develop responses appropriate for this type of dominator environment" (Eisler, 2000, 8).

A second problem resulting from oppressive "safety" measures is that they increase fear in schools. Dodd (2000) notes,

"Locked doors and uniformed officers may make the school more secure but will probably do little to make individual students feel safe. If this distinction seems fuzzy, consider the difference between security as presented by a metal detector with the sense of security symbolized by Linus’s blanket in the Peanuts comic strip. Feeling safe in the latter sense is softer and more personal, evoking images of warm places and people who care—the kind of feelings most of us associate with good homes, rather than school" (25-6).

Schools are notoriously bad at conducting needs assessments for their own districts, rather jumping on the bandwagon to implement the simplest, least costly measures. However, "Putting metal detectors in safe,
affluent neighborhoods might create the feeling that the schools are potentially dangerous” (Aronson, 2000, 56). Likewise, implementing technological responses in small rural or suburban schools that have not previously experienced school-based physical violence may have the same effect. Fear may increase amongst students, parents and school faculty. “The result of media influence on our thinking is that we-teachers, students and parents-have, just like the general public, begun to expect that violence will occur in schools” (Bonilla, 2000, 57). Not only will we be more fearful, but, “In a climate of fear people’s concern that they might be victimized will make them more likely to interpret others’ intentions as threatening and to respond aggressively” (Bonilla, 2000, 59). Further, “In a climate of fear, teachers are more likely to see students who are uninterested, uncooperative, or disrespectful as posing a potential physical threat and, consequently, are unlikely to see promise in those students” (Bonilla, 2000, 59).

Because so many schools have responded with technology-based security measures, Crews and Tipton (2001) of the Koch Crime Institute suggest,

“Administrators must be careful with the position that ‘more is always better.’ As a result, some schools have become prisons for American children,
and may actually increase children's fear of victimization. Many children are beginning to look around their school and wonder if things are actually 'worse off' than they thought” (2).

In addition to violence and fear, students may respond in other, no less problematic, ways to an oppressive school environment. Depression and alienation may be the responses of some students. "There is evidence that forceful, prison-like reactions, such as strip searches of students and the use of dogs in school searches, may worsen antisocial behavior and create emotional harm in students” (DiGiulio, 2001, 11). In sum, "There is simply no evidence that visible security hardware or personnel have any impact on reducing antisocial or violent student behavior. These measures may paradoxically increase alienation among students who are cynically resentful of what one student told me were 'Rent-a-cops' in his high school cafeteria” (DiGiulio, 2001, 74).

Devine (1996) notes that the dominating control techniques of the modern school serve to further exclude and alienate the very students most at risk of getting involved in acts of violence.

Third, draconian responses do not address the real reasons why kids are violent or disruptive in school. While people have become aware of some of the issues that might lead students to become violent in schools, such as bullying, access to guns, and depression, few have
responded by looking at the "field," as Bourdieu (1990) referred to the structure, of schools. As Aronson (2000) says,

"Young mass murderers don't mow down their neighbors or shoot up the local video arcade. They kill their classmates and teachers, and sometimes themselves, in or around the school building itself. Looking for root causes in individual pathology is an approach that seems sensible on the surface, but it does not get to the root of the problem. What is it about the atmosphere in schools themselves that makes these young people so desperate, diabolical and callous?" (87-88).

School administrators, as well as teachers, are familiar with how to respond punitively, though, and that is what has generally occurred.

Fourth, the negative effects of school-based technological and punitive responses are not equally spread amongst the population. Data has shown that application of Zero Tolerance laws and many other punitive responses, as in society at large, has come down hardest on people of color. The Justice Policy Institute found that African American males are 2.6 times more likely to be suspended than white males (Jones, 2001).

Fifth, these responses are not consistent with our purported educational mission. Eisler (2000) notes:

"Many of our teaching methods also stem from much more authoritarian, inequitable, male-dominated, and violent times. Like child-rearing methods based on mottoes such as 'spare the rod, spoil the child,'
these teaching methods were designed to prepare people to accept their place in rigid hierarchies of domination and unquestionably obey orders from above, whether from their teachers in school, supervisors at work, or rulers in government" (12).

John Dewey, perhaps the nation's premier educational scholar, emphasized the importance of schools for teaching democracy and respect for fellow man. Dewey said schools should help students to "...form a fundamental disposition, intellectual and emotional, towards nature and fellow man" (as cited in Durant, 1971, 526). This cannot be taught to kids who are not in school due to expulsion, nor to those with chronic apathy. In fact, the expulsion sends them a negative message about the disposition of humans: that we are not accepting of those who make mistakes. Dewey thought that one of the most important goals of school was to build democracy, yet Zero Tolerance laws and other such responses are inherently un-democratic. Skiba and Peterson (1999) say, "The indiscriminant use of force without regard for its effects is the hallmark of authoritarianism, incompatible with the functioning of democracy, and certainly incompatible with the transmission of democratic values to children" (381). Using teaching faculty as law enforcement obscures their main role as educators. "It reinforces a siege mentality that assumes teachers are in

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a perpetual war with students. It simply isn’t so” (Student Advocacy Center, 1999, 29). In sum, “Schools are supposed to represent a democratic society with a mission to educate, not to police children” (Bey & Turner, 1996, 3).

Finally, these responses often prevent us from taking a deep look at what it is about schools that may contribute to student aggression and subsequent violence. Dodd (2000) states, “If situations are thought of as problems that need to be resolved rather than actions that need to be punished, teachers will approach students differently” (29). From Hyman and Snook (1999): “An over-dependence on police interventions can decrease the willingness of school authorities to develop alternate procedures to deal with school disruptions” (9). John Devine (1996) sums it up best, in that, “The continued presence of violence in American schools represents more than just a challenge to the way each school is managed; it calls into question the administrative infrastructure of the entire educational system” (4-5).

The critique of what we know about school responses leads us back to the importance of school climate. Again, teachers’ role in creating healthy school environments is paramount.
Change Possibilities

There are many reasons why school culture or climate is relevant in the analysis of both why violent or disruptive acts occur, as well as what types of responses schools may make to the inevitable conflict between students. However, once again, missing in the literature is any empirical measure of school climate, as perceived by one group keenly effected by it; teachers. Aronson (2000) explains why we need to focus on school climate:

“It is reasonably clear that a major root cause of the recent school shootings is a school atmosphere that ignores, or implicitly condones, the taunting, rejection, and verbal abuse to which a great many students are subjected. A school that ignores the values of empathy, tolerance, and compassion—or, worse still, pays lip service to these values while doing nothing concrete and effective to promote these values—creates an atmosphere that is not only unpleasant for the ‘losers,’ but one that shortchanges the ‘winners’ as well” (70).

Kipnis (1999) adds, “Our schools have come to tolerate a social ecology of punishment, neglect, and even outright abuse of some boys. Highly publicized school shootings have desensitized many teachers to more common forms of violence and made them less likely to report it or intervene in other ways” (42). DiGiulio (2001) says that while we cannot predict all acts of violence in schools, some are,
"Learned from the social milieu—from a culture of violence—that surrounds our young people and shapes their school and social experiences. It appears that a sense of permission is secured from the culture to behave in antisocial ways and that social conditions are more favorable for expression of and support for antisocial behaviors and that potential inhibitors of antisocial behavior are less potent" (3).

According to Deutsch (1993), “Many schools do not provide much constructive social experience for students. Too often, schools are structured in ways that pit students against one another. They compete for teachers’ attention, for grades, for status...” (510). Moreover, “School culture offers a competitive environment, one where a right answer is rewarded, where one’s right to speak is claimed as a right” (Brush, Caulfield & Snyder-Joy, 1998, 309). This is evidence of the fact that the school climate, where students are expected to learn and grow, is actually counter-productive for many and may be a primary contributing factor in the problem of school-based conflict and violence.

Some may question whether schools can really change their structure and thus their climate. Opponents argue that schools cannot operate unless there is some type of hierarchy of authority set up; otherwise chaos would reign. The work of Eisler (2000) suggests differently, and provides a vision of how a safe, collaborative
environment could work. She differentiates between
dominator models, which describe most school structures,
and partnership models. Dominator models rank one half of
humanity over the other. They are characterized by
authoritarian structures with hierarchies of domination.
Institutionalization of fear, violence, and abuse
accompany dominator models. Partnership models, on the
other hand, do not equate diversity with inferiority or
superiority. They are based on linking, rather than
ranking. Partnership models include the
institutionalization of mutual honoring, respect, and
peaceful conflict resolution (Eisler, 2000). The
partnership and dominator models describe more than just
individual relationships.

"They describe systems of belief and social
structures that either nurture and support—or
inhibit and undermine—equitable, democratic, non-
violent and caring relations. Without an
understanding of these configurations—and the kind
of education that creates and replicates each—we
unwittingly reinforce structures and beliefs that
maintain the inequitable, undemocratic, violent, and
uncaring relations which breed pathologies that
afflict and distort the human spirit and are today
decimating our natural habitat" (xiv).

The partnership way in schools can be broken into
three integral components; the partnership process,
partnership content, and partnership structure (Eisler,
2000). Partnership process is about how we learn and
teach. Partnership content is what we learn and teach; the curriculum, both overt and hidden. Partnership structure is about where we learn and teach; the kinds of environments we construct (Eisler, 2000). Clearly, then, the partnership process, content and structure typify the ideal school climate for teachers to work in and students to learn in. As noted earlier, though, a shift to a partnership model will require the input of teaching staff, which has not been thoroughly utilized to date.

Summary of Key Themes

There are several key themes identified in the literature regarding school-based violence and responses to it. First, while it has been largely overlooked as a tool for understanding the nature and impact of school violence, teacher voice can provide an important means to do so. One of the main reasons for the importance of hearing teachers' stories about school violence and how their school has responded is that teachers are an integral component of school climate. It is clear from the literature that teachers both affect and are affected by school climate in a number of ways.

The literature also provides readers with a broader understanding of what types of responses schools have taken to date. Most suburban schools that have responded
have tended to follow an urban model, where they have introduced such measures as metal detectors and security guards. Little is known, however, about whether small rural schools have responded in these same ways. These responses can be explained as a form of moral panic, which has been exacerbated by the general "culture of meanness" in U.S society. The literature also indicates a variety of reasons why the punitive responses many schools have taken are inadequate and problematic. It becomes clear, then, that we need to explore more specifically what certain types of schools have experienced, incorporating the view of teachers. This will allow us to begin to better understand the role of school climate as well.

This study will build on the literature by examining the views of teachers at one small, rural school. The perceptions of teachers about violence in their schools, the responses to it, and the subsequent impact on school climate will be elicited. The following chapter will outline the specific methodology that was used in this study.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODS

This work builds on the literature regarding responses to school violence in a unique way. Rather than only focusing on the responses schools have taken, this work addresses the role of school climate in understanding school violence and responses to it. Further, it begins to fill in some of the gaps in the existing literature, as it emphasizes the perceptions of teachers, rather than students or administrators. It is primarily qualitative in nature.

Primary Methodology

In this study, focus groups were conducted at one small rural school in Michigan. As the sample size is relatively small and narrowly focused, this can also be considered a case study. Buchmann and Floden (1993) say, "Cases are powerful representations of experience, secondhand experience if you will" (265). Focus group technique was selected as the primary methodology for several reasons. First, a review of dissertations available on Dissertation Abstracts On-line revealed that most studies conducted in the last three years addressing a similar research question used either interviews, focus groups, or surveys. One study that also looked at
perceptions of school violence and responses to it, in this case, of mothers, used focus groups consisting of six to ten members as its primary methodology, while another used focus groups of students to assess their perceptions of school violence and responses in their schools. Surveys were ruled out because they do not provide the in-depth view into school-based violence, responses, and implications that was desired. Interviews were also ruled out, as it is difficult to make arrangements with busy teaching professionals during a school day with limited breaks. As Bassey (1999) notes, there are several advantages of using the case study technique. For one, "Case studies recognize the complexity and 'embeddedness' of social truths" (23). They can also "Form an archive of descriptive material" (23). Further, they present data in a publicly accessible manner. Finally, "Case studies are a 'step to action.' They begin in a world of action and contribute to it. Insights may be directly interpreted and put to use" (23). Further, it is suggested that focus groups can provide a forum for fellow faculty to begin necessary conversations with colleagues about the critical issues of school violence and school climate that would not be provided by individual, personal interviews. This work,
then, while expanding the literature, could also serve as an impetus for action in the school studied.

Types of Focus Groups

In Fern’s (2001) work on advanced focus group techniques, he differentiates between theory and effect applications of focus groups. Theory focus groups are designed to either develop or test specific theories. They seek understanding that can provide generalizations. Effects focus groups are used for decision-making (Fern, 2001). Although not definitively within either category, this research falls more under the theory focus group, as it seeks to expand on the existing literature regarding the effects of school violence and punitive responses on school climate. Fern further identifies three different types of focus group research: exploratory, clinical, and experiential (Fern, 2001). This work is an example of what Fern (2001) calls “Experiential applied focus groups,” as the goal is to “observe the ‘natural’ attitudes of participants” (7). “Experiential tasks draw out shared life experiences” (Fern, 2001, 8). Although some may argue that teacher perceptions could be distorted, it is understood in the social sciences that perceptions of reality constitute reality for a given group.
Description of School

The high school that was studied is located in Midwest Michigan. It is generally considered a lower middle class school. Approximately 350 students attend the high school. While predominantly white, there is a small minority of Hispanic students, many of which are migrant workers. There are twenty-two teachers on staff at the high school, although four of them only teach part time. There is one counselor assigned to the high school who will be retiring from the district this year. Of the teachers, ten have been at this district for over ten years. The principal has been in that position for three years. He was a middle school teacher prior to becoming principal, and there was some disappointment when he was named principal over some other in-district applicants. While there has been a number of physical altercations in recent years, none that were documented in official statistics have involved weapons. No teachers have been physically assaulted, although in the course of breaking up fights a few have felt threatened.

The school was selected for a number of reasons. First, as noted in the literature review, there has been a great deal of research conducted that addresses urban, and to a lesser degree, suburban, responses to the school
violence "threat." There has not, however, been much examining smaller rural schools, despite the fact that there has been some fear of school violence in these locations as well. Second, this school provides a unique example of physical structure, as it has no classroom walls. As described in the introduction, pseudo-walls have been erected. Informal conversations with staff members have indicated that this open-ness has impacted the school climate in a number of ways. One of these is the behavior of students. Staff members have stated that students are more assertive verbally than they have experienced in other schools, which they think is linked to the lack of physical constraints. Further, one of the selling points of the bond issue passed in fall of 2001 was that, in the event of a gunman on campus, the structure would be disastrous. These pieces of anecdotal evidence make this a school of interest in assessing school violence issues.

Initial permission to include the school in the research was provided by the building principal verbally, followed by a letter of consent. Teachers provided their own consent to be included in the study. Teachers first heard about and were invited to participate in the study during a staff meeting on February 1, 2002. They were
then given a reminder note that listed the date and location of the sessions, as well as a copy of the informed consent form to preview. All those teachers consenting constituted the focus group participants. These focus groups occurred on March 13, 2002. Four separate sessions were held during common planning periods. Each session included two or three teachers for a total of eleven participants. Six males and five females were included. Members had a range of teaching experience at the school, ranging from 1½ years to 19 years. The small size of the groups was chosen because the literature on focus groups indicates that relatively homogeneous groups of this size should be used for research that attempts to develop or test theory (Fern, 2001). As all of the group members are from the same school, their experiences are relatively similar in regards to school-based violence. Their perceptions are not exactly the same; this, however, is of interest and not problematic.

Each focus group meeting was approximately 1½ hours long. The first hour, approximately, was spent discussing questions that address their general perception of violence at their school, types of changes they have noticed, perceptions of overall safety, and perceptions
of change in school climate. An additional assessment of school climate was made in the last half hour through the use of the School Climate Survey. This scale was created because it is consistent with the literature regarding how climate is typically assessed (Gruenert, 2001; Peterson & Skiba, 2001; Sergiovanni, 1995). All eleven participants completed this survey. In addition, one staff member who was unable to participate in the focus group asked to complete the survey.

Peterson and Skiba (2001) note that climate is generally measured by surveys of students, parents, staff, and sometimes community members. While the literature review revealed a few examples of school climate assessments, most were designed for administrative use. Often these surveys, such as the Profile of A School survey, are quite lengthy (See Sergiovanni, 1995, 272). Because this school climate assessment was to be completed by teachers with limited time, the survey that was created was significantly different than others found in the literature. It was, however, influenced by the Profile of a School survey (Sergiovanni, 1995) and the elements of school climate outlined by Gruenert (2001). Since it has not previously been used, it has not been tested for reliability and
validity. It was used as a standardized measure of climate that is compared across teachers of both genders and different age brackets, and as a way to triangulate the data found in the focus group sessions. The survey results cannot be generalized, nor were they intended to be. Both the focus group questions and the survey are included as Appendix A and B.

All focus group sessions were facilitated by the researcher. In order to minimize the inconvenience to participants, they were held on the school’s campus. With the informed consent of each participant, each session was audio-taped in order to transcribe the conversations for data analysis.

The analysis process from the focus group tapes followed that of Cragan and Shields (1995) in that it involved identifying and describing emergent and recurring themes. Three criteria were used to identify these themes; redundancy, or the frequency in which they were described by participants; intensity, or the degree to which participants were especially emphatic or emotional about a particular response; and individuation, or the description of information that was not specifically elicited by the question but nonetheless was brought up by more than one participant.
Reliability and Validity

Gitlin (1994) is critical of the fact that teachers' experiences are not typically viewed as valid research. Since teachers typically do not have time to conduct their own educational research, which would be the ideal situation, they advocate an alternative method they call "Educative Research." This involves a restructuring of the traditional relationship between subject and researcher to one that is more dialogical (Gitlin, 1994). This, they say, will help develop the voice of those who have been historically silent, and forge a closer link between understanding and everyday practice (Gitlin, 1994). This study, as an example of educative research, not only seeks explanation, but prompts dialogue and school-sponsored action.

Although some criticize focus groups, as well as qualitative research in general, for lack of validity, Gitlin (1994) argues that validity should be viewed as a mutual practice that recognizes the value of the research. Merriam (1998) says that the idea of validity in qualitative research is absurd; she presents the notion of a new quality that we should look for that identifies the critical elements and plausible explanations of the particular research topic. She says
we should think in terms of user or reader generalizability, not necessarily generalizability to broader society (Merriam, 1998). While this study can provide a basis for others to begin addressing teachers’ role in and perceptions of climate as it relates to school-based violence, it is not intended to be generalized beyond this one school. The validity of this type of work lies in the members of the school discussing their own climate and needs. Gitlin (1994) says reliability should not even be desirable, as the goal in educative research should be that those things that are problematic are identified and changed by the school, not for them to remain the same from study to study. It is not about duplication, but about satisfying a voice (Gitlin, 1994)

In sum, the literature reveals that focus groups are an excellent means by which to assess teacher understanding and perception of school violence, the responses to it, and the impact of those responses on school climate. The School Climate survey provided an additional measure that will allow for comparison. Finally, this study should provide results that are consistent with the goals of educative research, as described by Gitlin (1994).
The next chapter will discuss the data analysis of both the focus groups and the School Climate survey. Both will be broken down by gender and seniority.
CHAPTER FOUR
DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The focus group sessions were held on Wednesday, March 13, 2002. They were held in the high school staff room, which is a large open area that contains multiple cubicles, one for each staff member, on one side, and a variety of circular tables on the other side. The principal of the school requested that the sessions be held there. Unfortunately this room houses the copy machine that staff members have access to, so periodically throughout the session people came in to make copies. Further, staff eat their lunch in this area, so the third focus group was a bit louder than others in that we had to speak over the noise from the other side of the room. A few other interruptions occurred throughout the day, and are noted throughout.

After conducting the focus groups and collecting the survey data, analysis of the results ensued. First the tapes were transcribed, which resulted in 52 pages of transcription. Then common themes across each question were identified, using the three criteria described in the previous chapter. Any commonalities across gender and by seniority were also noted, again by using the criteria of redundancy, intensity and individuation. Next
pseudonyms were assigned to each participant and to the focus groups in order to maintain the anonymity of participants. After identifying common themes in each of these areas, selected phrases from various participants were identified that illustrate each theme.

Next descriptive statistics as well as significance tests were performed on the School Climate Survey responses. This, too, was broken down by gender and by seniority. There is one more survey than focus group participants, as one staff member was unable to be involved in the session but wanted to contribute.

Described below are common themes and illustrative phrases by participants overall, by gender, and by seniority. These are described by question. This is followed by tables of the descriptive statistics and the significance tests for the School Climate survey, again broken down by gender and seniority.

Themes from the Focus Groups By Question

What do you see as your role in addressing school problems?

In general, respondents felt that they have a preventative role as well as a role in identifying and dealing with problems as they occur. "John" of group M said, "I see my job as helping to identify problems as
they arise, and I think we can aide in preventing things from happening ahead of time. Also, I think our job is to help solve problems when we can, and if not, find the right person-usually the principal-who will solve it."

"Roland" of group D said almost exactly the same thing.

"Jack" of group M focused more on the preventative role. He said, "One of the things I think is especially important is to be available to students. And I mean all of the students. It's not always the kids we would think who need help; we need to be there and notice things about the quiet ones, too." "Howard" of group D more specifically mentioned discipline issues. He said, "I think teachers just have to be frontline of school discipline." He also emphasized the need for teachers to be objective. "We have to deal with conflict resolution, and that means keeping control of yourself. Not allowing yourself to get involved in an emotional way. I mean, you may have an emotional response, but you have to respond in an emotionally detached way."

"Carol" and "Tammy" focused more on problem diagnosis. "Carol" said "I guess I would hope that a teacher would be able to look at a problem and analyze what it is and why. I would think that would be my role." "Tammy" agreed, adding, "I also think that if there is
something I can do to help prevent the problem or keep the problem from escalating, that would be my role as well." "Joan" of group L qualified her response based on the type of problem. She also indicated a lack of faith in the administration with her response. "Administrative? Can’t get much accomplished there. If it’s a student-related problem? Um, I would address it with the students first, deal with the parents, any other teachers, talk to the administrators. I don’t really have these problems with students...my biggest problem right now is with administrators." "Martha" and "David" of the same group also noted that the administration is the last place they take issues of concern.

Is cooperation stressed in the school? The classrooms?

In regards to whether there is a focus on cooperation in the school as a whole, as well as in the individual classrooms, the general feeling seemed to be that there is, but not in any consistent manner. For example, "John" from focus group M said this in regards to cooperative learning in the classroom: "Yeah, I think we have a lot of teachers who try to use that method in the classroom. I’m not sure it’s always emphasized enough. I think we need to do more of it. It’s pretty much left up to individual teachers to do it or not."
Four total teachers indicated that they use cooperative learning in the classroom; others either do not use this technique or did not mention it specifically. "Tammy" of group F stated, "Since I’ve been teaching, not all of this has occurred within the framework of this school, I don’t lecture at all in my classroom."

There was some inconsistency regarding whether the school administration advocated cooperation or not. Some members made a point of stressing that it was emphasized by the principal, while others purposely said that they did not feel it was. "Jack" from group M said, "Our building principal is real big on that" and "John" agreed. However, "Roland" from group D stated, "The thing I’m uncomfortable with when it comes to cooperation is that it doesn’t happen enough. Here in school." No one seemed to think that, school-wide, cooperation was a value. "Howard" from group D said, "I don't see that kind of cooperative aspect in the school as a whole, from the students, and I'm not sure where that comes from."

"Tammy" from group F said, "As far as the school, no, I don't feel that there's always good cooperation. I feel like there's a lot of differentiation between buildings, and administration and staff and higher administration, and there seems to be a lot of different views on the way
things should happen, what actions we should use in differing circumstances, and I think if there was more cohesion behind it, as a staff, as a faculty and as an administration, we could present a much more united front." "Joan" from group L concurred. She said, "I don't see anywhere where we specifically have a focus as a school to bring about increased cooperation, it's nothing institutionalized."

Interestingly, several participants defined "cooperation" solely as students complying with the demands of teachers. In fact, "Howard" from group D used the phrase "Kids cooperating with my coercions," while fellow group member "Roland" discussed people refusing to comply with staff directives. "...it seems that when you ask somebody to do something there's a wall put up. The first thing they say is 'No, I don't think so, I'm not going to try that,' or 'I'm not going to do that.' You almost gotta beg and plead sometimes to have them do something..."

What safety-related changes, if any, do you recall the school making in recent years?

The following safety-related changes were identified: Additions to the portable walls, doors locked that were not previously, limited keys distributed and
fewer entrances available, changes in safety issues in areas such as the gym and shop area, rules enforced that were not previously, increased staff concern about liability, key pad installed on main staff entrance, ban on bags and jackets in class, stricter enforcement of school dress code, limited guest passes for school dances, and police presence during lunch periods. No curricular or extra-curricular changes were mentioned in response to this question, although some did come up during discussion of classroom-based changes. All changes mentioned were technological or punitive in nature; no one mentioned any conflict resolution or other form of preventative measures.

Most of the changes were administratively driven. Group M especially focused on the principal’s concern about safety. "Eric" said, "That’s the principal’s number one concern" and "He’s very aware of the building being secure..." Staff concern about liability was noted by "Howard" as having driven greater administrative concern about this. He said, "The other thing that I think is part of a safety factor is that we as a staff have become much more concerned about liability, what are we liable for in relation to our students’ safety. That’s been, I think that started as a staff concern." Concern about
easy intruder access to various school entries may also have been staff driven, according to one participant. Absolutely no one mentioned any of the safety-related changes as being student driven. Participants also expressed concern about the way that these changes were communicated. Some of them were written and some were announced at various staff meetings and in-services, but participants felt that changes were not always clearly described nor open to discussion. "Eric" from group M said this in regards to information about safety procedures: "We did receive some written information, but we never did actually practice it or talk about what to do in those situations." "Howard" from group D said, "We've received no emergency training whatsoever."

What were the staff responses to the changes you described?

Staff responses to the changes varied. Several mentioned that they felt the changes were largely a joke. "Howard" from group D said this when asked about staff responses: "Come on, we're teachers, you know how teachers are about changes. Their first response to the change in the backdoor, the key pad and stuff, was that it was not needed. Everyone thought it was kind of ridiculous." "Eric" from group M echoed this perception
in saying "I would say it [staff response] was about 50-50. I would say some people thought it was a joke and some people took it serious."

Others felt that the changes were greeted with apathy, as staff generally do not feel that there are any grievous concerns regarding school violence that needed to be addressed. "Tammy" from group F said, "Overall, I think it [staff response] was a baseline. There were some people who really didn't care, it didn't inconvenience them." "Howard" from group D said, "There was a lot of, I don't think it was active resentment or anything, there was no sign that said 'Stop this' or anything. But I think at first we probably all felt a little resentful, because we're not sure there was really any issue here."

Another feeling that was elicited was that some staff members viewed the changes negatively, and were not entirely cooperative with the initiatives. "David" from group L said, "I still think that there's a perception that they're able to handle it and be responsible. Having keys to certain locks and stuff. There's not a willingness to accept that you're just an employee. I think it just boils down to a perception that you're a professional and you deserve these things." "Jack" from group M said, "One area that I think we lack in as a
group is...trying to circulate, we've been asked to try to do that more, like before school starts, on your planning period or whatever, stay around your room, just be present. I don't know that we've cooperated with that as well as I think we should. I think we are all lacking in that area."

Finally, some participants mentioned that they liked some changes, seeing them as both positive and necessary. For example, "Howard" of group D said, "I personally am very comfortable with it [the changes] now. I like the fact that people can't get into the equipment in the locker room, things like that. Um, I like the fact that the back door is secure. I think it's been a growing positive experience." One person mentioned that he felt people were, on the whole, more compliant with rule and punishment changes as a result of September 11th. "Roland" from group D said, "I think that, even as a society and stuff, with 9/11, a lot of people didn't realize. Like with the airlines and stuff, long lines here and there...OK, if you want to take a little longer than usual, take the time to make sure I'm safe, I'm all for it. You want to make sure the doors are locked so I'm safe, that's fine with me."
What was the student response to the safety changes you described?

The assessment of student response to the safety related changes was similar to that of staff. Some participants mentioned students grumbling or taking on rebellious attitudes. Others noted that students, too, felt that some of the changes were ridiculous and unnecessary. "Eric" from group M said, "I think they're just rebellious. I mean they can't handle any authority. The principal keeps some areas closed down, and they can't have gum or pop or anything outside the commons areas because they're keeping that area secure. I would say they're rebellious on a few things. I don't think rebellious like fighting, or anything, just like copping an attitude." "Howard" from group D said, "We think it's ridiculous, our students think it's completely unreasonable. They absolutely don't think we need to be even as security conscious as we are, so a lot of them are pissed off." "David" from group L said, "Especially in a community like this, there's a perception that they have just as much right to this facility as anybody, as a teacher. They should be able to use this facility as they see fit."
Also like the staff, some students seem to have simply accepted the changes with no apparent resentment. "Tammy" and "Carol" from group F remarked that they were surprised at how well the students accepted the key pad on the door. Both had thought students would vandalize it and try to get code numbers to get in, neither of which they feel have actually occurred. No participant mentioned that students expressed feelings that the changes were positive or needed.

**Do you generally feel safe at work? Has that changed in recent years?**

In general, staff members that participated feel safe at work. However, several mentioned that they feel that certain students are capable of extreme violence. It is more like something that always sits in the back of their heads, though, than a feeling of direct threat. "John" of group M responded to the question of whether he generally feels safe at work in this way: "Yeah, I do, as safe as you can ever really feel anywhere. I have a few certain students, we have some students in the school, who I perceive are certainly capable of violence, but that's in the back of my mind, something that could happen some day and you hope it doesn't, but I feel quite safe." In this regard, several mentioned that stricter
consequences for verbal and small altercations need to be added and enforced in order to deter kids from using violence. "Jack" from group M said, "I think we're very lackadaisical at having consequences for kids that are having altercations with staff members, which are almost always verbal. There are things that some of the students say around here, but the consequences for those kinds of things are so lackadaisical that, what's going to cause someone to not use violence? In the back of their mind, what's really going to happen?" One participant mentioned that students in this school are very immature. "John" from group M said, "I perceive the maturity level of kids, of some kids here, as very, very, low."

"Howard" from group D went on at length about his feelings of personal safety. "I feel more safe and less safe. I feel personally safe if a student comes at me with anything except a gun, they're going to die. But I'm trained. I'm trained by the military, and I'm trained in martial arts. And I have, by law, the right to protect myself. And obviously if anyone had a gun, there's no defense against that, except another gun, which I think would be ridiculous in school. So in that sense I feel personally safe. I feel safe from the standpoint that I think our principal does a good job of going around and
saying to all of us that we need to do things. 'Roland' is not the only one; he's come to me and said this has to be closed, it has to be closed, it has to be closed. It's been emphasized over and over, and I never resent that because I know there's a safety concern for everybody. Not just for myself and the staff, but for everybody here. And so I think that I feel more safe. I feel less safe because of a group of students. And that group of students, just from things I've been hearing, have become very much more personally aggressive. It's not physical at this point in time, but the verbal aggression is increasing, and its becoming more and more all of the time. We are having students with less and less, and I would consider less concerned about violence. And again, I may be crying wolf here, but it concerns me when someone can look at me, know my history and know my background, know that I was a wrestling coach, that I have degrees in three different martial arts, that I was trained by the U.S military, and still challenge me in a way that might be construed as being really provoking conflict. ”

Everyone agreed that the facility makes them feel less safe, especially in the event of a gunman on campus. For example, "David" of group L responded this way when
asked if he ever feels any concern about personal safety at work: "I would say no, but it's gotta be qualified. If you're talking strictly safety, the security features in this building are pretty crappy. So, you know, did you feel safe before 9/11? Yeah. But the chances of security failure that exist in a facility like this, that if one student, and there have been several students in the past, individual cases, we can all think of some names. And if they choose to do it in a facility like this, it would take very little effort. In spring time doors are cracked open, the parking lot's easily accessible, no walls, no doors, no alarms, I mean this would be the perfect spot."

"Tammy" and "Carol" of group F discussed whether any of the safety changes made by the school allowed them to feel more safe. "Carol" brought up the periodic canine searches the school employs. "Periodically we have drug dogs in the school, and it's not announced ahead of time to teachers. I don't know that it's anything the administration is even aware of. But the way that it's announced over the PA once they do get here or are on their way, it's very scary because they say 'Teachers do not let anyone out of your classroom. You are to remain in your classrooms. Students may not leave to the
restrooms or to get a drink until further notice.’ And it’s like you’re wondering what’s going on.” "Tammy" agreed, saying, "Yeah, we use terminology like lock down." Going on, "Carol" said, "I think part of the problem with this building is inherent within the building itself, with so many outside entrances. I think that the new outside entrance keypads have made me more comfortable, but until our building changes, as far as the windows and walls and things like that, it’s like you don’t even know where it would be safe to take your kids if something did happen, if there were an intruder. These are all portable walls, so nothing’s going to stop bullets if that’s what the person has, or whatever.” "Tammy" followed by saying, "Also, with that, if there were some sort of issue where someone was to come into the school threatening violence, it’s not even, it’s not only the construction of this school, but the placement of this building which makes it a danger. We sit in a valley with hills surrounding us. So the idea that if an intruder were in the building there’s nowhere to go within the building that’s safe, then to leave the building, to walk out, you don’t know who is out there and what their plan is; that makes it scarier.” Concluding the exchange, "Carol" said, "A few years ago
the police chief and I don’t know who else, no one to my knowledge from our staff was involved, but there was a meeting that took place at the ISD for school safety, and they were there to think about and design ways to make it safer in your building. And there were no staff people that were involved in that, and it’s like, does the police chief know our building as well as we do? And at that point it was a new principal, so it was like, does the principal know our building as well as we do? I would have thought it would have been important to have a staff member involved.”

One participant brought up other safety concerns, such as sexual violence. "Tammy" from group F said, "Within the classroom and within the school there have been several incidents where I have felt unsafe. There was an incident where a student used very abusive sexual language towards me in another teacher's class. Now, in retrospect, looking back at it, a very expressive individual that was just creating attention. It was abusive and it was sexually related. I'm probably more open to that because of my age and because...there are a lot more commonalities between myself and the students than there might be with someone else. There have been situations in our school where some students had...there
was rumor in the school that a group of students had compiled a hit list of sorts, and the students were all in my class and having behavior problems in my class. It’s like every time you fill out that discipline referral you’re thinking is this going to come back to haunt me? Is this, am I just causing a personal safety issue for myself? But at what point do you protect yourself and at what point do you stand behind yourself as a teacher and have consistency in your discipline?"

Another participant brought up intruders specifically. "Carol" from group F said, "Well, this might just be me, but it makes me very nervous when, say, the grounds people are working outside and I don't know it, and all of a sudden someone's walking by my window. There was one day a couple weeks ago there was a substitute teacher that had come to the building, and she must have parked out back and couldn't get in, so she walked around the building to the front, and as she passed my room it was like, who's out there? And then it was like, should I let her in? And I thought, I really shouldn't, I don't know what she's here for...so that part makes me nervous, but I think it's because of the school violence that has been nationwide."
Concern was also noted about possible repercussions of living in the community. "Tammy" from group F said, "There was also one more incident since I've been here where a student had been arrested for violence in the home towards his parents, and had been out of school in juvenile lock up for a period of time, and was struggling in my class. That student happens to live directly across the street from my parents. It was brought to my attention by the counselor and social worker that this might be something I wanted to be aware of, that the proximity of the situation, in case there was violence. The student was not just acting out against me but all their teachers. As an adult to have to go to my parents and say you have a safety issue because of my job, because of what I do, that's an uncomfortable situation." “Eric” from group M echoed similar feelings. "As far as living in the community, say I discipline a kid or kick a kid off a team—there's always that possibility, they all know where you live. I don't perceive that happening here, but it's always in the back of your head. I have a family and I have to look out for them as well."

In sum, all of the responses focused on individuals or small groups of students, or on the lack of safety inherent in the facility. No one addressed the school
climate or structure of schooling as a source of conflict or violence. Further, everyone seemed comfortable placing the blame elsewhere, suggesting that it was the facility, the kids, or the administration that was to blame for any perceptions of fear.

Do you think that students generally feel safe at school?

Participants were next asked to assess whether students generally feel safe at school. Most feel that students simply are not concerned about this. It was repeatedly mentioned that students feel “it can’t happen here;” that there is some sort of “protective bubble” around the school and community. “Roland” from group D said, “Honestly, I don’t think that they think about it. And when we take measures to make sure they are safe, I think they feel, like “Howard” said, they feel like they’re being bothered.” “Betsy” from the same group had a little bit different take on it. She said, “Society says to be a thrill seeker.” From “Howard:” “I agree. Our students are strange in that respect. They can look at fifteen dead at Columbine, and they continue to say the same thing that you hope they wouldn’t say and that’s Oh, it can’t happen here. It won’t happen here. Who would do that? They think nothing can happen here, as “Roland” said, they’re rather oblivious to it. They think we in
some way have a defense field erected around the school that prevents something bad from happening.” “Carol” from group F said, “I think our kids feel safe here. I think our kids are very naive about what the rest of the world is like.”

Several members mentioned that some intimidation or harassment occurs, yet qualified this by saying that all schools have these problems to some degree. For example, “Jack” of group M said, “I see kind of a roller coaster effect. There was a period of time a couple years ago that there were a lot of students who didn’t feel safe I know that because we had a certain group who would talk about it. They were mostly scared of what they didn’t know, and they assumed some of these kids would use violence or were capable of it. Um, I think there’s some intimidation that goes on, maybe a little bit here and a little bit there, but a lot of kids don’t open up about it.” “Joan” from group L said this in regards to student safety: “I think it depends upon the students. We have some students who are just picked on all of the time; I’m sure they do not see this as a safe place. A few years past we had a few issues that happened in the locker room where kids were sat upon, some real nasty things happened. So I really think it matters who you are. If
you’re one of the beautiful people of the school and are well-liked and popular, you probably look upon this as a pretty safe place. But if you’re the underdog, kids pick on you, I’m sure for some kids this is not a pleasant experience.”

“David” of group L brought up the fact that he feels students perceive certain others who look and act differently as being a possible threat. He described a student that he thinks other students are fearful of. This student dresses “Gothic.” “You don’t perceive that until it happens, and so the issue becomes do you feel secure that 1) it won’t happen, and 2) that if it happens, you’re safe in the facility. And if he decided to do something, and did it, or not just him but anybody, how secure are you in this facility? Do the students feel safe in the facility? They do now, but if they looked at the fact that there’s no walls, no doors…” “Martha” was concerned that this particular student was being stereotyped based on his dress. “Joan” responded: “Yes, it’s exactly because of that. Because he’s been nothing but nice and polite. I’ve never seen any side of him that would make me feel as though I should be concerned.”

Several participants expressed concern that there may be students who feel threatened or unsafe, but that
these students are not comfortable expressing those feelings to staff. Further, the lack of someone in a counseling role was noted. "Jack" of group M stated, "I think something we lack here is for kids...kids don't really talk, we don't really have a central figure in this school that kids can go to and share their concerns. And sometimes it's individual staff members, that's a role we play, but I think we need somebody in that capacity that kids can go to to discuss their concerns with. But part of the problem today is that kids don't want to inform anybody on another student." Fellow group M participants "Eric" and "John" concurred. From "Eric:" I have it every day, every day in the ____area there's kids picking on other kids." "John" said, "I would say that, as in most schools or all schools, there are students probably who are fearful. I think there are always people who get picked on. I'm not sure that we know how much they are fearful. We perceive them as thinking things are pretty much OK, but they don't feel able to talk about it with us, so there might be a lot of kids like that." "David" of group L described his concern that sometimes racial minorities may feel less safe in the school. "There are examples that are due to race, that are problems here."
How do you perceive that the staff feels towards the administration, in light of safety issues?

Many participants assessed staff feelings toward the administration as being negative. Several participants mentioned feeling that the administration does not view them nor treat them as professionals. “Eric” from group M mentioned this concern in regards to recent safety-related changes. “We couldn’t use the copy room in the main office, and as teachers, we’re professionals, and if we’re not capable of using a copy machine it’s ridiculous. And, treat us like professionals or I’ll go elsewhere.” Further, when staff members try to get involved and make suggestions about school improvement, including those about safety concerns, many feel as though their voice is not heard.

One participant specifically mentioned her lack of faith in the ability of administrators to lead in the event of a major act of school violence. “Tammy” of group F said, “I don’t know that I always have 100% faith in the leadership, and that could be trouble.” Others noted that staff simply felt many of the changes were silly and not cost effective. “John” from group M said, “I have a key now to every room that I work in. I really don’t see the need for that. We put up with it, if we have to do
it, we do it, but...I think the whole staff outlook, there’s a lot of negative feelings.” Fellow group member “Jack” discussed his concern that changes made were not the most appropriate. “I think there’s less of a need to have telephones in every classroom than there is to put up some video cameras. It’s not really cost efficient. If safety is a concern, I think the money would be better spent there, no doubt about it.” “Joan” from group L said, “I think that some of the decisions have not been necessarily sound, have just been more arbitrarily done.”

Additionally, a lack of consistency, especially in the enforcement of some of the new rules and regulations, was noted by several participants. The principal just happened to wander in when “Carol” was about to give her response, so we moved on and returned to the question later. She said this in reference to both her attitude towards administration and how violent incidents are handled: “I think that at the beginning of the year...it’s handled much differently than it is as the year progresses, until at the end maybe nothing is done other than haul the kid into the office and say blah, blah...yet in the student handbook we have certain rules that are supposed to be handled... We also have new state laws about intimidation and assault, and there have been occasions
here where it would appear, anyway, that a student has actually been assaulted by another student. If that happens, according to the law, they're supposed to be expelled for 180 days, and yet that hasn't happened. And it becomes an interpretation of assault; their interpretation versus my interpretation."

Several reasons for this apparent negativity amongst staff members came out during the discussions. "Betsy" from group D said, "Staff toward the administration is negative, and I think it is kind of a moot operation." A few members focused on the "weak and ineffectual" Superintendent, while either praising or not addressing the role of the building principal. For instance, "Jack" of group M said, "I've seen someone try to make some changes that I thought were necessary and it didn't look like he got a whole lot of cooperation from the staff or students. I think that perhaps there are some things that could perhaps be eliminated, there are some issues that are not really big issues, gum chewing, for example, some of those kinds of things, but there are some things that are not really being taken care of that the administration has tried to change but I also see that after you get involved in that kind of position your support level...I kind of empathize with the last principal
now that I see someone who came in and tried to be strong, he doesn’t necessarily have the power to do some things that need to be done, and I see this person that’s a little more strict getting soft on some issues where I thought he would stand up and fight and take issue with it.”

As with other questions, “Howard” of group D was quite happy to elaborate. “I have a problem because our staff is, in relation to safety issues, about half of our staff says ‘Oh, that’s not going to happen here,’ but the other half are clearly concerned, but it’s basically, ‘We should do something.’ They express their concern but that’s it; there’s no input. And there are about a third of the staff who have tried to input, who have tried to say ‘This should be done, we should do this and think about this,’ and because we have a weak and ineffectual Superintendent, that doesn’t happen. This is no surprise that I feel this way. Our principal has tried on several points to take control of the situation and do things that were productive, and that has not happened. He’s a strong individual who believes in strong action, he has been over-ridden many times by the upper administration and the school board.”

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Others placed the blame on the principal, suggesting that he is not open to staff input, that he is sexist, and blaming him for lack of adequate materials. "Eric" from group M said, "You know, you’re given an amount of budget, and you have that much to spend for the safety of your kids. Well, you see, if some equipment breaks down, I don’t have the money to do that. If you want to support education that should be number one; give us the support and the materials and supplies we need in our classroom to get the job done. You can’t just monkey this stuff together, you have a safety factor there." "Howard" from group D said, "I think our staff is very negative to the administration, very negative to the principal because they think he’s a chauvinist. Um, that may or may not be true, I’m not in the position to say." Later, "I think we’re very negative toward upper administration because when we do try to be firm and tough, especially on the issue of taking kids out of school who do not belong here, we get absolutely no backing. I could name you five students right now who do not belong in this school. Three of them should be incarcerated, and two of them will be incarcerated before they are done. We all know this. I have attempted to send them out. I have personally spot suspended one of these kids ten times,
and our Superintendent refuses to take action on expulsion." He then went on to describe how differently this was handled by the administration at another school he worked at.

Negativity based on other issues was also brought up, in that it may impact the way that staff responded to any change. "Tammy" from group F said, "I feel like we’re making changes for the positive, slowly, very, very slowly. And I’m appreciative to the administration on whatever level that’s being originated, I don’t know if that’s coming from the Superintendent’s office or what, but they are positive changes. I think that, um, issues with agreeing or not agreeing with administration don’t necessarily stem from issues of safety or violence within the school." "Martha" from group L said something similar. "It’s an interesting question, because a lot of teachers have known each other and the administration for a long time, so they have feelings from that, sort of a predisposition..."

Do you recall any curricular changes in regards to safety or violence issues in recent years?

Shifting gears, the next question inquired about any possible changes in curriculum and/or educational goals. No one mentioned that they were told or even encouraged
to include new curricula regarding conflict resolution, tolerance or any other topic that might be preventative. "John" from group M said, "I really don’t think there’s any...we each sort of do our own thing in that way. I mean, I don’t know...about other teachers. I personally don’t think that’s really dealt with in the class." Some people mentioned that they do include such things, but recognized that it varies a great deal across individual teachers. Specific changes mentioned included more discussion of class rules regarding respect and appropriate language, teaching kids parliamentary procedure and appropriate debating techniques for controversial topics, and simply allowing time to discuss traumatic events, such as September 11th, when they occur. "Eric" and "John" from group M mentioned that they discuss respect in their classrooms. "Martha" said that, while she doesn’t really deal specifically with safety or conflict resolution in the classroom, she does ban certain language. "From the first year I was here I stated that the word fag is absolutely unacceptable in my class. In any classroom. And they looked at me and they were shocked, because they were using that word. And that applies for any kind of racial or other word."

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"Roland" of group D discussed using debate of controversial issues, although he quickly segued into a critique of students. "There's been a lot of heated conversations in there [my classes] dealing with questions of values and stuff. But when it comes to actually talking about stuff, it's like all of a sudden they only know about this much about something. And then it's like 'You're stupid.' That's the final outcome, and then you gotta talk to them about that you need to know a bit more, you need to talk more out loud to be able to come to a conclusion." Later he explains that his perception is that the kids understand disagreement to be some sort of personal attack. "When it comes to arguing with somebody and if someone does disagree with someone, you get the whole 'Why don't you agree with me?' And the reason they ask is because they feel like 'Why don't you like me?' They see it as a personal attack."

"Howard" uses similar techniques, especially emphasizing parliamentary procedure. "I teach conflict resolution all of the time. The first thing we talk about is the necessity of compromise in our form of government. We try to do that using the rules of parliamentary procedure, so it's very easy for me. I know that the people I teach next to basically do the same things."
"Jack" from group M mentioned trying to identify and inspire leaders. "What I try to do with that is search for leadership, and try to challenge the whole group to become leaders, and give some examples of how you can do that amongst your peers. Perhaps, you know, there are some kids in the school that they are disgusted with some of the behaviors they see. Most of the kids aren't really like that, and they get disgusted." Later he says, "We have some kids who want it to be different, who are asking for opportunities to change this, but who are afraid to lead in that way. That wasn't a problem, you know, twenty years ago, but I see it as a problem outside the school too."

One participant mentioned using role-plays to allow students to assess appropriate ways to react in conflictual situations. "Betsy" of group D said, "In my area we do a lot of role playing. Like you're in a situation where you want to leave a room, and they look at me and it's like, 'Ok, you can leave the room, but this is what's going to happen.' So it's practical application of what they should know."

"Tammy" and "Carol" of group F discussed simply making time for students to discuss and deal with their emotions, in light of traumatic national events such as
9/11 and Columbine. From "Tammy:" "I remember when the
Columbine shooting happened and I was teaching fifth
grade at the time, and those kids were just blown away by
it. Just driving to work that morning and thinking about,
like what do I do if some of these young children ask me
about it? What's appropriate for this age group? How do
I, as a person, deal with this, and handle it
appropriately within my class and in reference to my
students? And that has certainly changed. Even going
along with the idea of 9/11, what I found myself doing in
my classroom, just spending time, whether it be one class
period or a week, I don't care. If something like that
happens that's that devastating to myself personally, to
my student body, and to the community and nation, dealing
with the emotions of my students as well as my own
emotions is more important than learning much else."
"Carol" said that she did not think the way she teachers
her subject matter has changed, but that she has "been
able to ease up a little bit more when kids want to talk
about something. When 9/11 happened, some of the older
kids that I had that semester, they were juniors and
seniors, they really appreciated being able to talk about
what was happening and what they were seeing on TV weeks
afterwards, not just initially, but it was still
bothering them." "Tammy" added, "A lot of our kids have never met anyone of Middle Eastern descent, or never had any kind of experience with someone that may be of the Islamic faith, or whatever the given situation is, and, um, it's a natural instinct to think anything that's different is bad. That's something that, as teachers, we need to be very careful about, diffusing those ideas."

She then went on to describe an activity she used in class where students free-wrote about a collage of images dealing with 9/11 and what a great emotional as well as critical thinking activity it turned out to be.

"Joan" of group L uses similar tactics as those described by "Tammy" and "Carol." She said, "I am now more careful about approaching certain students, handling certain students maybe more carefully than I would have fifteen years ago. I try and find out a little bit about the background of the kids, particularly if they've been gone for a while, so that...I teach a lot of sensitive topics, and I don't want to introduce one at a bad time. So I think with experience I've gotten better at being in tune to things. I still think that my job is to try to diffuse things when they happen. I make a lecture at the beginning of the year that my classroom is a safe place where everyone should feel respected and feel safe. I
didn’t do that before and I do that now. And I do watch out…I think my mental processes have changed. I’m trying to be aware of more, because they go through so much, much more than I did when I was a kid.”

“David” was the only participant who admitted he does nothing in his classroom to deal with these issues. He said, “I don’t do any of that stuff. All of the decisions…everything has to go through me I guess. The thing that’s going to make them feel safe in my room is the fact that I’m in control. There’s not group discussion about many, many issues. And they know that’s the case. They know that I make the decisions. So, like most children, if there’s a fight, or if you’re thinking about fighting, I won’t say I’m a parent, but in some ways I act like that, it’s just that simple.”

How would you assess staff pride in the school?

In general, pride at the school is low. No one felt that staff had a great deal of pride. “Carol” of group F said, “I guess I don’t really sense a lot of pride by staff or students.” When asked if that has changed in recent years, she said that it has been decreasing. “Eric” of group M said this in regards to whether there was a lot of pride in the school: “I’m gonna say no. I’m guilty of it. These dress up days, spirit week or
whatever, there's a few staff members who dress up and participate in that, and again I'm guilty and I don't do it." "Jack" of the same group said, "I see some lack in that area, just being disgusted with some things they see around them. I mean, myself specifically, I see some things that disgust me. There's grumbling about the facility, and I think that affects their job." Pride was also generally described as getting worse, with the district described as being a "stepping stone" school for young teachers to get experience and then move on. "Joan" made this point. "I think ____ is going downhill. It is on a downhill slide. I think it's evidenced by the number of teachers looking elsewhere. I think ____ has now become a stepping stone in the beginning so that you can get a couple years experience and a better school will take you."

Several participants mentioned a lack of camaraderie or closeness amongst staff members. "Howard" of group D said, "We don't have a camaraderie. There are groups of us that do, groups that coach, groups that talk outside of school, but as a staff we don't have a sense of camaraderie that I would call pride. I don't see a lot of pride in our staff." "Betsy" of the same group expanded on the lack of closeness amongst staff. "I personally
feel like an outsider to a very large degree.” Others mentioned the feeling that there were low expectations for students, and consequently for staff. Three participants discussed the differences in the way that teaching faculty approach their work, whether it was considered merely a “job” or a career. “Roland” and “Howard” were two who brought this up. From “Howard:” “See, “Roland” and I have talked about this a number of times. Neither of us approach teaching as a job. It’s our vocation, but it’s our avocation as well. We like working with kids. The problem is that there are enough people here who feel like it’s a job, that when you show some pride, when you act excited about what you do, they give you a bunch of snide remarks about ‘Who are you trying to impress?’”

Finally, two participants specifically mentioned that the staff do not respect the students. “Howard” and “Betsy” from group D discussed this lack of respect. From “Howard:” “I think our school, from the school board down, we’re too oppressive to our students. You can’t color your hair, you can’t pierce your eyebrows, you can’t wear shorts, you can’t, you can’t you can’t. All we do is say the thou shant’s, we don’t talk about the thou shalt’s. Thou shalt be prideful of your school, thou shalt come
with a smile on your face in the morning, we don’t do anything like that. We don’t promote camaraderie in any sense, in our school, between students, between staff. I’ve been accused of being negative with my students because I talk about these things with them about people. They ask me what I think about school policies and I tell them. I was asked, actually told, by a school board member to keep my mouth shut about the policy on hair color. And I essentially said I will not do it. I said you can’t tell me what to say in my classroom, if they ask me I’m going to tell the truth. I am proud to be a part of the ACLU and talk about civil liberties. We suppress their expression and expect them to smile and say ‘Thank you sir, may I have another.’ “Betsy” then said, “We don’t respect them.” “Howard” replied, “We don’t respect ourselves enough to say it’s not our damn business what color their hair is, or if anything is pierced on their body. I’ve taught kids with a safety pin in their eyebrows connecting to other parts of their body. I could give a flying fig about this. We’re too obsessed about these things. We’re fortunate, we have great new teachers like _____. I’ve seen ____ teach and ____ has great skills, because ____ says ‘This is the way it is and this is what you have to do.’ ____ is a great
example for our young people. ____ doesn't go out of the way to be rude, but is firm in the use of disciplinary policies and is fair in everything. We get a fine young teacher, and do we do anything to celebrate that? Absolutely not. We eat our young around here.”

How would you assess student pride?

Student pride was not evaluated any better than staff pride. Interestingly, the first topic that came up in assessing student pride was sports, and the fact that the athletic teams, especially the football team, at the school were not particularly good. “Jack” from group M said, “Oddly enough, I see trends in certain classes that seem to have more of a pride, particularly with athletic teams. It’s kind of a roller coaster effect. I can see it in individual classes. The senior class this year lacks individual leadership tremendously. Um, the junior class this year, there’s more of a pride, an energy, but I think the seniors really lead the school. The success of sports programs has a lot to do with that. When you’re doing better a lot of kids follow that.” “Howard” of group D concurred. “This sounds really simplistic and it sounds stupid, but the football team hasn’t been doing very well lately. Like most small schools, pride is tied to our athletic accomplishments. Football is a macho
sport so it's important." He then went on to describe the fact that, despite "creaming" everyone in the state Cross Country championships, students could care less."

"Roland" of the same group said, "I think as far as the students go, I overheard some kids talking in the gym. The girl was on the volleyball team and said to this boy 'Are you going to come to our game tonight?' And he said 'No, you guys suck.' And she said 'Hey, we won conference,' and he said 'So what? Who cares?' The girls were upset. And I said to the girls, 'Don't worry about it, when was the last time they won? He's jealous.' So, when there's a large group of people who are jealous of success or envious, all of a sudden the people who do succeed get quieter and quieter." Later, "Roland" said, "You know, the thing that builds your pride is the football team. That's where everyone goes on a Friday night. It's one of the institutions we have in America."

After discussing sports, most people eventually came around to the topic of academics, arguing that there is little pride in this regard either. "Howard" of group D said, "We don't have a celebration of learning, we don't...our expectations for our students are so low as to be ridiculously laughable." He then described his method of "challenging" students by essentially berating them.
In discussing the first class he tried this technique with, he said that he told the students, "'You are incredibly stupid, you're unbelievably ignorant, and you don't try, your values stink, you can't learn.' So, you know, I stressed that, and they responded. They responded extremely positively from all of the stress, and they had pride in themselves. So, 'OK, we don't like you, so we're going to prove you wrong.' This year's class has done nothing but whine and complain. They don't care what anyone says. I say 'Look, you guys are going to be ignorant,' and they say, 'Who gives a shit.'" Further, "Howard" described how there were 39 students who were eligible to be inducted into the National Honor Society, yet only ten chose to complete the applications. Finally, "Howard" noted, "It's a source of embarrassment. I teach at a school that hasn't had a National Merit Scholar in so long they can't remember the last one."

The general assessment is that students feel that their school is a "loser" school. "Joan" from group L said, "I do feel that there's an inferiority complex our kids have so far as their perception of themselves and other schools." "John" from group M said, "Every once in a while we hear the kids say how cheap the school is." "Howard" of group D noted the "bubbling drug problem."
He said, "This county is the largest producer of methamphetamine in the state. Many of our children use meth, whether we want to think that or not. It affects their mental outlook, and it affects their values in everything. And I really think we have a problem in multiple levels of the school that we are not capable of dealing with. We don’t have pride down because from the top down we don’t have pride."

Two participants specifically mentioned that there are few student-driven activities. "Carol" of group F said, "I don’t see a lot here that’s student-driven. I just would think that in a school that’s prideful of their school and their community that there would be more student-driven activities." One participant, "David" of group L, took a broader view, arguing that students encounter more and more competing sources of pride, making it difficult for them to feel the intense pride in their school that students once did. Two people did mention positive events. "Martha" of group L mentioned that shortly after the new principal came in the school got much cleaner. "Joan" from the same group disagreed that this was a function of pride, however; she felt that it was due to better work by the janitorial staff. "Tammy" of group F described a student-driven homecoming
float that was in tribute to September 11th. Further, her perception of the state championship Cross Country team was that it did increase the student pride somewhat.

How would a violent incident be handled at the school?

In regards to fighting without weapons, feelings were mixed. Several felt that they were handled fairly and efficiently by staff and administration. "Tammy" from group F said, "I feel that for the most part situations are handled fairly and efficiently." On the other hand, several others mentioned that these incidents were handled inconsistently, depending on who the student is and when in the school year the incident took place. "Betsy" of group D said, "It's not across the board, everyone doesn't know it. Same with consequences. Oh, I know your dad and I understand the situation, but student over here, you're a real ____ and your family's a _______, so you get the book thrown at you." "Carol" of group F said, "I think that at the beginning of the year...it's handled much differently than it is as the year progresses until at the end maybe nothing is done other than haul the kid into the office and say blah, blah, blah...yet in the student handbook we have certain rules that are supposed to be handled..."
Several participants did note that no real conflict resolution takes place, nor are there enough counseling opportunities. "Eric" of group M said, "If there is a case, I'm all into the counseling rather than send them home or suspend them, or ten Saturday schools or eight one hour detentions. That doesn't serve any purpose, because you're just going to sit there and sleep and monkey around." "Jack" of the same group also expressed this concern. "I had a student just the other day who came into class and said something was going to happen...I went down to the office because he was very depressed, his attendance has been bad, he's having emotional problems. My concern is those kinds of people that are at risk, as we doing enough to reach them? We don't discuss what we should do, I don't think we have the people we need to deal with this, or the time to deal with those kinds of things. It seems like we should have some kind of counselor for those kids." "Betsy" of group D said, "As far as conflict resolution, it's like, Ok, he got detention, so what? What's going to happen the next time he's in the same situation? He's going to use his fist. I thought we would do some type of conflict resolution."

Further, several noted that, while they felt that fights were generally handled fairly and efficiently,
they were never explicitly told how they should deal with them. This was the nature of the discussion in group M between "Jack," "John," and "Eric." In describing how he generally allows kids who are already swinging at one another to continue to do so until the fight ends up on the floor, "Eric" said, "That's how I feel. It may not be the right way, but no one's ever consulted with me about that."

No one felt that enough consideration about what to do in the event of a gunman had occurred. "John" of group M said, "I don't know exactly how I'd handle that situation. I don't think anyone really thinks it would happen here. Of course we have all heard about it, but no one really worries or plans for if it does." Each staff member has essentially developed their own "crisis" plan, as they feel that little direction has been provided by school administration. "Eric" of group M said, "I have several exit ways. I'm looking out for myself. They know the route, the doors are right there, they're on their own. We've never had a drill on what we would do. We've never even had a tornado drill or a fire drill, so I'm looking out for myself." Per usual, "Howard" presented a unique outlook. "We've received no emergency training whatsoever. The kids in my class say 'If someone comes in
the class with a gun, what are you going to do'? And I say, 'Exactly what they tell me.' They ask, 'Aren't you going to try and take it away from them?' And I say 'no.' 'What do you mean?' I say, 'If somebody's got a gun, it's personal and it's long range.' 'What if they have a knife?' And I say, 'That's a different story.' I'd probably take out a yardstick and break their arms and their face and they'll put the knife down and they probably won't do it again. But that's a whole different story than a gun.' He then went on to describe the detailed procedures and strict consequences at another school in which he had worked. "You knew the consequences that were going to happen. We are way too flexible here. We don't have good guidelines, and we have no conflict resolution whatsoever." Later he described the poor logistic situation his class is in in the event that a gunman was in the school. "If a gunman comes in he can stand there and pick people off no matter which way I go with my kids. Um. We're gonna circle the wagons if that happens. I already know what I'm gonna do. We'll pull all of the cabinets in, and start throwing computer parts at them." When asked about a gunman on campus, "Joan" of group L said, "I think it would be chaos, because we don't have a plan, we have nothing. And the facility
causes some problems that most schools wouldn’t have, so I think it would be disastrous.”

As in an earlier question, several members brought up a lack of faith in the ability of school administration to deal with this type of situation. "Jack" of group M noted, again, that he perceives a lack of consequences. In referring to a student caught with a gun on campus several years ago, he said, "I don’t remember that the kid with the gun was dealt that harshly with; I wasn’t here, but that’s what I heard. They kept things pretty hushed up about it, and I don’t think that could happen today.” As noted earlier, "Tammy" of group F said, "I don’t know that I always have 100% faith in the leadership. And that could be trouble.”

Summary of Focus Group Findings

It is possible to draw together some commonalities across all of the participants’ responses. One theme that became evident is that there are some school climate concerns amongst the staff. Concern about student and staff pride, camaraderie, adequate supplies, support by the administration and simple faith in the leadership abilities of administrators were noted, at least to some degree, by all participants.
Another theme that clearly came out in the results is the importance of an adequate physical structure in regards to feelings of overall safety. While none of the participants seemed to think that this school has a lot of discipline or violence problems, all expressed concern that this was the case not because of the safety of their environment, but in spite of it. Further, what exactly it means to feel “safe” anymore seems to have changed. September 11th and Columbine came up in a number of conversations, suggesting that these events have indeed impacted the degree to which these teachers feel safe. Following this, most participants felt that more should be done in order to prepare for possible violent outbreaks. While a few mentioned that some of the changes made were probably not necessary, they did not seem to be implying that no changes were necessary, just that the administration had implemented the wrong ones.

Finally, while teachers admitted that they could and should have a preventative role, in addition to dealing with problems as they occur, they did not seem to be taking many actions in this regard. Several complained of the lack of student and staff-driven activities, yet did not mention anything that they had initiated or helped kids to initiate. Further, while many were critical of
the top-down approach that seems to have been taken in regards to safety-related changes, no one mentioned that they had ever initiated a conversation about this with any administrator. Few seemed to have even taken specific steps within the confines of their own classrooms.

Focus Groups Results By Gender

Several differences were noted by gender. Females tended to describe cooperation in different terms than did males. Females mostly spoke of cooperation as a teaching and learning technique in the classroom. For example, "Tammy" of group F described using cooperative techniques in the classroom exclusively. "Martha" of group L said, "I think a lot of people do cooperative learning, have kids work together in groups and pairs. They don't just do shared work, but ask them to actually problem solve." Males generally defined cooperation as students complying with staff instructions. As described earlier, "Howard" of group D used the phrase, "cooperation with my coercions," while "Roland" of the same group described the resistance, or "wall," he notices when students are asked to do something.

In regards to feelings about the staff administration, females assessed the administration more negatively. "Joan" of group L was probably the most
negative, remarking on the fact that little can get accomplished when working with the administration.

"Carol" was also less-than-impressed with the administration, especially in regards to consistent enforcement of rules. "Tammy" expressed a lack of faith in the administration in regard to safety precautions. Three either directly stated or strongly implied that they felt the building principal to be sexist. "Kristy," who completed the survey then spoke to me individually about some of the focus group questions, expressed concern that, while the principal is liked by many, he is the sort of person that has to be in control. She feels that any ideas presented to him are not really given complete consideration, nor are teachers who "go the extra mile" praised or rewarded for their efforts.

Males evaluated the principal more highly, although they were more critical of the Superintendent. For example, "Roland" of group D said that he had the "utmost respect" for the principal, while "Jack" of group M expressed that the principal was trying hard to change things and is a "strong person." The Superintendent, however, was called "weak and ineffectual" by "Howard" of group D, and "Jack" of group M expressed the notion that the principal is stymied by the upper administration. A
common concern that males expressed in regards to the administration was a perception that they were not always treated as professionals. "Eric" of group M and "David" of group L specifically noted this.

A third difference by gender was the overall perception of safety while at work. Females were more apt to mention that they felt unsafe at work. "Tammy" of group F described three situations that were particularly scary for her, none of which came up in any of the other groups. These included a sexually violent remark made by a student about her, an alleged "hit list," and a concern about retaliatory violence that was brought to her attention by the school counselor and social worker. Her fellow group member, "Carol," noted concern about intruders in the building. "Martha" of group L stated that she actually feels more safe now, based on the character of her students and her own self confidence in being a more veteran teacher, but that there was a time when she felt physically threatened by some students. Male participants, however, were more likely to describe the sort of "what if" fears rather than any specific kind of fear.
Focus Group Results By Seniority

There were more staff members from the less experienced seniority brackets than from the more senior ones. Eight participants had worked at the school ten years or less, while three had more than ten years experience. This reinforces the notion mentioned by "Joan" of group L that the district is becoming a "stepping stone" district. It also shows which staff members will voluntarily get involved in something like this, perhaps indicating who does and does not value school improvement. Seven of the ten full-time staff members with ten or more years experience chose not to be involved. Some differences were noted based on teaching experience. Those with ten years or less experience were more likely to describe using cooperative learning techniques in the classroom. In fact, six of the eight specifically mentioned either cooperative learning by name or described some type of cooperative endeavors they use in the classroom. Only one of the three more senior members spoke about this.

Further, about half of the less senior group specifically mentioned feeling at least some fear at work, while only one member of the more senior staff expressed any concern in this regard.
The more senior staff all mentioned inconsistency in the way that the administration deals with discipline problems. None of them praised the administration in any way, unlike the less senior staff. They also seemed to feel more negative or resentful of the safety initiatives recently implemented. As noted by one of the less senior staff members, "Howard" of group D, there seems to be some preexisting conditions that have created and sustained a more negative perspective in the more senior teachers in regards to the administration.

The following three tables present findings from the school climate survey. Table One includes descriptive statistics from all participants. T test results by gender and seniority, Tables Two and Three, respectively, indicate whether any findings were statistically significant in regards to these variables.

Table 1
Overall School Climate Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The principal seeks &amp; values teachers' ideas.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.35</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Teachers are not involved in decision-making.</td>
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<td>2.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>1.27</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Teachers are kept informed about school issues.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>.866</td>
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Table One—Continued

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. The principal is friendly and supportive.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The principal seeks and values students’ ideas.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Teachers are rarely praised when they do well.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Teachers are encouraged to be innovative.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The school mission provides a clear sense of direction for teachers.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Teachers generally support the school mission.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Students help one another to accomplish things at the school.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Teachers are rarely supportive of each other.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Teachers are willing to help when something needs to be done.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Teachers do not generally trust one another.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Teachers and parents have common expectations for student performance.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Parents trust teachers’ judgment.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. My school has adequate equipment and supplies.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I seek and value students’ ideas in the classroom.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. My behavior is viewed by students as friendly and supportive most of the time.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Students generally feel pride in their school.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table One—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
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<th>2.0</th>
<th>3.42</th>
<th>1.08</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20. Students generally dislike coming to school.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I generally enjoy my job.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. I feel loyalty to my school</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.90</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. Teachers at my school are role models for students.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. Teachers emphasize empathy, tolerance and compassion in the classroom.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Teachers value school improvement.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>1.44</td>
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<tr>
<td>26. In general, my school has high expectations for students.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>1.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>27. Teachers have few opportunities for collaboration and dialogue.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>1.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>28. Different departments collaborate on school and classroom projects.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>.94</td>
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<tr>
<td>29. Students are frequently asked to work together in the classroom.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>.78</td>
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<tr>
<td>30. Competition, rather than cooperation, is stressed in this school.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.62</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The highest mean response overall was to the statement, "I generally enjoy my job." This was followed by "I seek and value students' ideas in the classroom." Participants also generally feel loyalty to their district (3.583) and feel as though students view their behavior as friendly and supportive most of the time (3.583). These responses are similar to information.
discussed during the focus group sessions. The principal was, overall, viewed as friendly and supportive (3.5). This is of interest, as feelings about the principal tended to be quite extreme during the focus group sessions. While responses to statements one and two may appear contradictory, they are not, as statement number two is written in the negative while statement one is written in the affirmative.

Participants do not feel that the school’s mission provides a clear sense of direction for teachers (1.75), nor do they feel that students’ generally have pride in their school (1.75). Participants were also critical of the school’s equipment and supplies. Also negatively assessed was the principal’s seeking and valuing student ideas (2.33) and collaboration between departments (2.166). These are all consistent with information elicited during the focus group sessions.

There was a great deal of variation in many of the responses, reflecting the fact that teachers each perceive these issues differently. The standard deviation of fifteen of the statements was over 1.0. The most variation was on statement six, “Teachers who do a good job at my school are rarely praised for their work,” with a standard deviation of 1.47. This was followed closely
by statement twenty-five, "Teachers at my school value school improvement," with a standard deviation of 1.44.

On the other hand, there was more consensus in the responses to statement eight, "The school mission provides a clear sense of direction for teachers," nineteen, "Students generally feel pride in their school," twenty-one, "I generally enjoy my job at the school," and thirty, "Competition, rather than cooperation, is stressed at this school." These statements, then, can be taken as relatively representative of the teaching faculty at this school. To sum up, teachers here generally all agree that their mission is not a source of educational direction, that students lack pride in the school, and that the school provides a competitive atmosphere. Despite these seemingly negative qualities, there is general agreement that teachers enjoy their jobs.
Table 2

School Climate Survey Results By Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The principal seeks &amp; values teachers' ideas.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2.166</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>-2.67</td>
<td>.023*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3.833</td>
<td>.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Teachers are not involved in decision-making.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>.18</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Teachers are kept informed about school issues.</td>
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<td>1.09</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
<td>.34</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. The principal is friendly and supportive.</td>
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<td>.095</td>
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<td>4.17</td>
<td>.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. The principal seeks and values students' ideas.</td>
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<td>6. Teachers are rarely praised when they do well.</td>
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<td>.71</td>
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<td>7. Teachers are encouraged to be innovative.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>1.9</td>
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<td>3.66</td>
<td>1.21</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. The school mission provides a clear sense of direction for teachers.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>-1.5</td>
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<td>9. Teachers generally support the school mission.</td>
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<td>10. Students help one another to accomplish things at the school.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>11. Teachers are rarely supportive of each other.</td>
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<td>3.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Teachers are willing to help when something needs to be done.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.55</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Teachers do not generally trust one another.</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.78</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>.98</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Teachers and parents have common expectations for student performance.</td>
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<td>.85</td>
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Table Two—Continued

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15. Parents trust teachers' judgement.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. My school has adequate equipment and supplies.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>17. I seek and value students' ideas in the classroom.</td>
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<td>18. My behavior is viewed by students as friendly and supportive most of the time.</td>
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<td>19. Students generally feel pride in their school.</td>
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<td>23. Teachers at my school are role models for students.</td>
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<td>24. Teachers emphasize empathy, tolerance, and compassion in the classroom.</td>
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<td>25. Teachers value school improvement.</td>
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<td>26. In general, my school has high expectations for students.</td>
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<td>27. Teachers have few opportunities for collaboration and dialogue.</td>
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<td>28. Different departments collaborate on school and classroom projects.</td>
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<td>29. Students are frequently asked to work together in the classroom.</td>
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<td>30. Competition, rather than cooperation, is stressed at this school.</td>
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*Significant at the .05 level.
Only one of the responses was statistically significant by gender at .05; "The principal seeks and values teachers' ideas" at .023. This reflects themes identified in the focus group sessions, in that females generally assessed the administration more negatively. While not statistically significant, females rated the following elements of school climate lower than did their male counterparts: Teachers involvement in decision-making, teachers being kept informed about school issues, the principal as friendly and supportive, the principal seeking and valuing students' ideas, teachers are rarely praised when they do well, and teachers are encouraged to innovate.

Females were also more critical of colleagues. Statements with lower or more negative mean responses include: teachers are rarely supportive of one another, teachers do not trust one another, teachers are role models for students, and teachers emphasize tolerance, empathy and compassion in the classroom. In general, females were less likely to feel that the school has high expectations for students and that teachers at the school value school improvement.

Female respondents generally enjoy their job (4.0) and feel loyalty to the district (3.83). These two
responses were higher than for male respondents, although still not statistically significant. Females also feel that students view them in a positive manner (3.83) and that they seek and value students' ideas in the classroom (3.83). Further, females felt that teachers at the school are generally willing to help out when something needs to be done (3.66).

Female participants feel that staff members are not involved in school decision-making. They do not feel that the mission provides a clear sense of direction (1.5), nor that students generally feel pride in the school (1.66). Again, female staff members do not feel that they are kept informed (2.0), nor that the principal seeks and values staff or student ideas (2.16 average each). Further, the general assessment by females is that the school does not have high expectations for students (2.0). Finally, female staff members were critical of the supplies and equipment at the school (2.16) and do not feel as though there is a great deal of collaboration between departments (2.16).

Male respondents felt fairly strongly that the principal is friendly and supportive (4.1). They generally enjoy their job (3.83), feel that the principal seeks and values their ideas (3.83) and that they seek
and value student ideas in the classroom (3.83). Further, male respondents feel that staff are encouraged to be innovative in the classroom (3.66).

Negative responses by male respondents include that students generally dislike coming to school (3.66) and feel pride in the school (1.66). Males were also critical of the school mission. Equipment and supplies are a concern for males as well. Males do not generally feel that teachers support the school mission (2.16), nor that departments collaborate on projects (2.16).

Male respondents were more critical than females in regards to assessing school equipment and supplies and students’ general feelings towards school.

Table 3
School Climate Survey Results By Seniority

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<th>Statement</th>
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<th>S.D.</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. The principal seeks &amp; values teachers’ ideas.</td>
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<td>3.44</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>2.35</td>
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<td>2. Teachers are not involved in decision-making.</td>
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<td>3. Teachers are kept informed about school issues.</td>
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<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-3.22</td>
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<td>4. The principal is friendly and supportive.</td>
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<td>5. Teachers are involved in decision-making.</td>
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<td>6. Teachers are kept informed about school issues.</td>
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<td>24. Teachers emphasize empathy, tolerance and compassion in the classroom.</td>
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<td>25. Teachers value school improvement.</td>
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<td>26. In general, my school has high expectations for students.</td>
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<td>27. Teachers have few opportunities for collaboration &amp; dialogue.</td>
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<td>28. Different departments collaborate on school &amp; classroom projects.</td>
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<td>29. Students are frequently asked to work together in the classroom.</td>
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<td>30. Competition, rather than cooperation, is stressed in this school.</td>
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*Significant at the .05 level

Statistically significant differences by seniority status were found in regards to the following statements: number one, "The principal seeks and values teachers' ideas," number two, "Teachers are not involved in decision-making," number four, "The principal is friendly and supportive most of the time," number seven, "Teachers are encouraged to be innovative in the classroom," number...
ten, “Students help one another to accomplish things at the school,” and number twenty-seven, “Teachers have few opportunities for collaboration and dialogue.” Each reflects a more negative assessment of school climate by more senior staff, which is consistent with the focus group results. While not statistically significant, more senior staff also felt that teachers are not praised enough and are not supportive of one another. This reflects focus group findings, in that less senior staff generally viewed the principal in more positive ways.

Mean responses for the more senior staff were more positive than for their less senior counterparts in regards to teachers’ trust of each other, parents’ trust of teachers’ judgment, their own ability to seek and value students’ ideas, their perception that students view them as friendly and supportive, their general enjoyment of their job, and asking students to work together in the classroom. The last statement seems inconsistent with focus group findings, in that less senior staff were more likely to mention cooperative learning or other collaborative efforts in the class. However, the statement does not say that the individual responding asks students to work together, so more senior
respondents may have been responding in regards to what they see going on in other people’s classrooms.

The next chapter assesses the findings from the focus groups and school climate survey in regards to the extant literature regarding teachers’ perceptions of school violence, responses to it, and impact on school climate.
CHAPTER FIVE

LIMITATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, and RECOMMENDATIONS

Limitations of the research are first discussed in this chapter. The chapter then assesses the ways that findings from the focus group sessions and the School Climate survey are and are not consistent with the literature described in Chapter Two. Each area is addressed in the order they were presented in the literature review, with issues of teacher voice being presented first, school climate concerns next, followed by an assessment of the utility of the moral panic literature as applied to this case study. Columbine as an instigating event is then connected to research findings and is framed by an analysis of whether the culture of meanness literature holds true for this case. Finally, sample school responses will be compared and explained by the literature regarding punitive responses.

This chapter also includes overall conclusions. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research about perceptions of school violence.

Limitations

As with any study, there are some limitations. First, while teacher voice was essential and every effort was made to utilize that voice in this writing,
conclusions drawn are still a product of researcher selection. As a former teacher, I am influenced by my own experience. As noted in the Introduction, I was and am still quite dismayed by the oppressive measures my own school took in the name of safety, to the exclusion of any preventive or humanistic endeavors. As a Criminologist, I am influenced by my own critical and humanistic background. I have been influenced by the literature on Therapeutic Jurisprudence, which asserts that we need to consider whether a particular rule, law or public policy can be re-worked so as to maximize the therapeutic value of it for all involved.

Second, the setting for the focus groups may have impacted the participants. As was noted, the focus groups were held in a large room, where other faculty members, including the principal, came in and out on occasion. This distraction may have prevented certain participants from being entirely forthcoming, especially in regards to any critique of the administration or colleagues. These critiques, however, were likely to have come out in the anonymous School Climate survey.

In regards to the survey, the main weakness of any conclusions found is the small sample size. Few statistically significant results were identified by
gender, for example, but this might merely have been a function of the sample size. Additionally, it is clear that these results cannot be generalized to other schools; this, however, is never the goal of descriptive, case study research such as this.

Finally, it is not possible to assess which actions or events drove teachers’ perceptions, or whether teachers’ perceptions are a result of other factors not explored in this research. For example, while some participants discussed the effect of Columbine specifically, others may have been influenced by it but not brought it up, or might not even consciously realize the impact it has had on them. The September 11, 2002 attacks also had some impact on participants feelings of safety, as they were brought up by each group. Likewise, while it is clear that there are some negative feelings towards the administration in this school, it is not entirely clear whether all or merely part of that is due to safety-related issues; in fact, one participant specifically mentioned that there might be some other reasons for staff negativity.
Conclusions

Teachers' Voice

These findings reflect the importance of teacher voice in assessing school violence and related issues. As Green (1993) noted, evaluations of school policies would often be much sounder if more credence was given to other, non-administrative, perspectives. Smith (1987) stated, "Inquiry does not begin with the conceptual organization or relevances of the sociological discourse, but in actual experience as embedded in the particular historical forms of social relations that determine that experience" (154). Teachers at this school wanted to be heard, and expressed this desire in numerous ways. However, as Smith (1987) said, they have "learned to discard their (our) experienced worlds as a source of concerns, information, and understandings of the actualities of the social world and to confine and focus their (our) 'insights' within the conceptual frameworks and relevances given in the discipline" (73). In essence, these teachers feel as though they have been silenced, and have come to expect someone else to lead them. Yet they resent this silencing and the perceived dictation of their work environment to them.
First, several of the participants mentioned explicitly that the discussions we were having were critical and that they felt more of them should occur. “John” from group M was one example when he said at the closing of his focus group session, “I just don’t think we’ve talked about these things as much as we should.” Second, many of these teachers noted that they feel they are not being heard by the school administration, whether intentionally or simply by omission. Most felt that the principal does not seek and value teachers’ ideas, as indicated in the School Climate results. Many mentioned that the school-safety initiatives at the school thus far were generally top-down. These people sometimes stated that they were resentful of their lack of voice within the workplace, while at other times they did not specifically state this but it was clearly implied. “Joan” from group L definitely gave the impression that she felt a lack of decision-making power, as did “Carol” from group F.

Some participants also mentioned that this lack of voice in decision-making did indeed impact their perceptions of school violence issues, especially responses made by the district, and it affected the way that they did their job. As noted in the previous
chapter, “Eric” of group M and “David” of group L described the importance of being considered professionals, something they felt was lacking in this district. Consequently, these two teachers, among others, are looking for employment elsewhere. In fact, as much as one third of the staff is considering leaving and has sent resumes to other districts.

These results are somewhat mixed regarding fear of school violence at this location and the extant literature from small and rural schools. While in general these teachers feel safe, as the literature review suggested they would, there seems to be a simplistic understanding of what it means to be "safe." Only one of the respondents described a specific instance of fear at work, "Tammy" of group F. Yet most identified some type of hesitation or "what if" type of fear. While less direct, fear of this nature is no less problematic in regards to the type of responses it elicits, nor in its' possible effects on teachers' ability to teach or students' ability to learn. Many noted that this had indeed changed in recent years. For example, “Carol” of group F, who described being concerned about who might be walking past her classroom window, specifically stated that she was not worried about this years ago.
As noted in the previous chapter, these teachers were very much concerned that, in the event of some catastrophic incident of school violence, the facility that they teach in would make them especially vulnerable. For example, "Joan" of group L said, "We don't look upon our students as being so rough that I'm concerned walking the hallways. But this facility is a security and safety nightmare by design. Not by the way that we do things or the population that is here so much, but the physical plan is absurd." Although hinted at in the literature about school structure, this notion has not been thoroughly explored to date. Surveys of teachers', as well as others', perceptions of school violence rarely assess the degree to which respondents feel secure in their physical surroundings. This very clearly came through as a critical element of teachers' feelings of workplace safety, and needs to be more thoroughly researched.

School Climate

"I feel that the best way [to prevent violence] is to just work to create a good atmosphere here." "John" of group M highlighted the importance of school climate with this statement. This district's policies regarding school violence also reflect those characteristics identified in
the literature review as indicative of a negative school climate. One such characteristic, identified by Weinhold (2000), is a dominator value system. This involves the use of power plays, violence or the threat of violence, and general oppression, exploitation and intimidation. It was noted by many participants that intimidation between students occurs. Further, while no one admitted that they or other teachers intimidate students, the words used by "Howard" and "Roland" of group D, as well as "David" of group L, certainly imply that this is the case.

As noted in Chapter Four, "Howard" described cooperation in terms of "cooperate with my coercions," while "Roland" complained that neither students nor colleagues complied well. "Howard" of group D described "challenging" his students in a way that many might consider hostile of antagonistic. This involves telling students, "You are incredibly stupid, you are unbelievably ignorant, and you don't try, your values stink, you can't learn." "David" came close to actually admitting that he is an authoritarian, when he said, "All the decisions...everything has to go through me, I guess." Despite the literature suggesting that student participation in rule-making and decision-making empowers them and can prevent them from disobeying or acting out,
“David” is convinced that “The thing that’s going to make them feel safe in my room is the fact that I’m in control.”

Overemphasis on negativity and allowing bullying behaviors are the other two characteristics identified by Weinhold (2000). As outlined in Chapter Four, negativity exists in this school on a number of different levels. Many staff members were quite negative towards the administration, as well as towards their colleagues. This is indicated by this statement made by “Howard:” I think we’re very negative toward upper administration because when we do try to be firm and tough, especially on the issue of taking kids out of school who do not belong here, we get absolutely no backing.” “Betsy” of group D described feeling like an outsider because she doesn’t live in the community, and that this perception impacts her level of involvement in activities outside of the classroom. One participant even admitted that there is a negative approach used with students. “Eric” of group M said, “I think there’s a huge, huge, negative approach with the kids we have here.” These teachers perceived that students, too, have negative attitudes towards administration and, in general, feel little pride or joy in their school. For example, “Roland” of group D said
this in reference to students' perceptions of safety: "I think, honestly, I don't think that they think about it. And when we take measures to make sure that they are safe, I think they feel, like "Howard" said, they feel like they're being bothered."

It was noted by several participants that there was a bullying problem, at least to some degree, in the school. They generally chalked this up to being a universal school problem, however. This attitude, that it happens everywhere and is thus inevitable, prevents schools like this one, as well as individual teachers, from intervening. For instance, while "Jack" of group M expressed concern that students in the school may feel intimidated, he generally offered the notion that a counselor of sorts should be hired to deal with it, rather than teachers assessing and intervening when bullying occurs. This is not to blame individual teachers, but to note that they seem to feel that certain types of interventions are not appropriate for them to take. This is consistent with Devine's (1996) work on the mind-body dualism in education. Applying the work of Memmi (1965) here, teachers are often viewed as colonizers who, "no matter what happens justify everything—the system and the officials in it" (46). Yet
many of these teachers did in fact express a desire to have more training in conflict resolution.

Other characteristics of a school's climate are its artifacts, espoused values, and assumptions (Shein, 1992). Each of these characteristics came out in one way or another in this research. Shein (1992) describes school mission statements as one of the key artifacts related to a positive school climate. Clearly these teachers do not feel that the school mission provides any sense of a positive climate, as they rated it very low (1.75) on the School Climate survey. Further, as “Joan” of group L was completing her survey she chuckled, stating, “How can the school’s mission statement provide a clear sense of direction for teachers when most of us don’t even know what it says.” While this research did not attempt to ask participants to state the espoused values of the school, several seemed clear. Success in sports was very important to most participants, and was an area they felt the school was lacking. Achievement in academics was also noted, although it seemed quite secondary to athletic success, based on the amount of time devoted to it. Obedience and respect from students were also fairly clear espoused values. Interestingly, nothing that participants said suggested that tolerance,
empathy, or civic engagement were important. An average overall score of 2.92 was given to the statement, "Teachers emphasize empathy, tolerance and compassion in the classroom." While not the lowest overall response, it lies on the scale between neutral and disagree.

Another characteristic that was identified as important in establishing and maintaining a safe, healthy school climate is unity. Participants here repeatedly emphasized the lack of unity at many levels in the school; between staff members, between staff and administrators, between various buildings, between students and teachers, and between students and administrators. Results were mixed for unity between students. It seems clear that the perceived lack of administrative support is obscuring the unity of staff. As noted in the literature, a lack of support can also lead to more punitive discipline methods, as teachers are not personally prepared to deal in more creative ways with disruption (DiGiulio, 2001).

Comments such as those of "Howard" and "Betsy" of group D note the lack of camaraderie between staff. "Howard" said, "As a staff we don't have a sense of camaraderie..." While males did find the principal to be friendly and supportive most of the time, females clearly
did not. More senior staff evaluated this statement even lower; with a statistically significant mean score of 1.67. Although no questions specifically inquired about the Superintendent, several teachers brought him up in their responses. Those that did were quite critical, generally labeling him as "weak and ineffectual." "Carol" of group F remarked about the lack of unity between buildings within the district. She said, "I don't think there's a lot of inter-building cooperation between the three buildings. I think we all kind of do our own thing."

As noted earlier, many participants remarked about the lack of cooperation between students and teachers. "Roland" of group D discussed the "wall" that goes up when ever they are asked to do something, especially something new. Many others, such as "Eric" of group M, remarked about the rebelliousness or resentment they perceive students having in regards to administratively driven decisions. Students do not seem to generally help each other reach common goals in this school. The mean score for this statement was 3.0, which is decidedly neutral. More senior staff were very critical of students' collaboration towards common goals, as their mean score for this item was 1.67. Further, focus group D
participant "Betsy" noted the lack of student-driven activities at the school.

On the other hand, "Martha" of group L noted that she does see students cooperating outside of the classroom. She said, after describing the fact that she thinks quite a few teachers use some type of cooperative activities in their classes, "What I’ve seen is students in other places is that they do know how to cooperate with each other." Fellow group member "Joan" generally agreed, although noted that it is generally cliques of kids who cooperate with one another. "David" of the same group had a slightly different take. "The cooperation I think is as much survival skills as it is actually liking each other. Because in a community this size, you’ve only got so many friends."

In regards to the five factors identified by Gruenert (2000) as being important to a healthy school climate, the perceptions of these respondents seem to be that the school is lacking in all of the areas. For instance, there is clearly no collaborative leadership, as participants identified a great deal of discord between building-level administration and district-wide administration. Further, teachers definitely do not feel that their ideas are sought after and valued by the
principal (3.0 mean), that they are kept informed about school issues (2.25), or that they are involved in decision-making (3.17). As noted in the previous chapter, males and less senior staff were much more likely to feel that these statements were true than were more senior and female staff members. Teacher collaboration in order to further the school’s mission is also generally absent in this school. These teachers do not feel that the school mission provides a clear sense of direction for them (1.75), nor do they generally support it (2.25). Additionally, teachers here do not feel that they are given much opportunity to collaborate with other departments (2.17).

Valuing professional development is the third characteristic described by Gruenert (2000). He is referring to teachers valuing personal and school-wide improvement. While none of the questions asked during the focus group sessions addressed personal development, “Teachers value school improvement” was a statement on the School Climate survey. The mean score of this was 2.92, below the “neutral” response category. Females rated this statement lower than did males (2.67 to 3.17), and more senior staff rated it lower than did their less senior counterparts (2.33 to 3.11).
Collegial support, or teachers working together, is Gruenert’s (2000) fourth key characteristic of a healthy school climate. Results are mixed on this area. While many participants remarked that they did not feel camaraderie or a real “united front,” the mean score for the statement, “Teachers are willing to help when something needs to be done,” was 3.5. This is probably due to the fact that, as with students, teachers noted that there were pockets of camaraderie or closeness; groups of people who get together and support one another, but not on a school-wide scale.

Gruenert’s (2000) fifth characteristic of a healthy school climate is that there is a learning partnership where teachers, administrators, parents and community members work together to foster student achievement. This was not the impression given by participants during focus groups, as a number of them discussed the sort of “small world” syndrome they see in both students and parents, implying a lack of concern with academic success and perhaps a complete disregard for the schooling process. For instance, “David” of group L said, “A student several years ago had access through a family member to get into this facility and vandalized the facility. And a large majority of the students felt that there was nothing
wrong with that because the student lived in the community, they go to school here, so they should have access. The only punishment that should have been delivered should have been maybe just cleaning it up.”

The mean scores for two statements related to parents’ expectations were also quite low. “Teachers and parents have common expectations for student performance” received a 2.42 mean, while “Parents trust teachers’ judgment” received a 2.75. Sweeney’s, as cited in Bey and Turner (1996), five characteristics of cohesiveness, high expectations, esprit, goal orientation and leadership reveal similar assessments.

In sum, the climate in this school would most likely be considered negative based on these findings. Despite this, many focus group participants noted that they were quite pleased with how few physical altercations actually occur at the school. This does not mean, however, that no violence occurs; it merely means that the violence does not occur in the actual building very often and that it is not necessarily physical when it does. These results suggest a need to expand our definitions of what is meant by fear, safety at school and security at school.

As noted in the literature review, teachers are central in creating and maintaining a healthy, productive
school climate. These teachers, however, did not seem to feel as though they had a great deal of personal agency in making the changes required to foster a more positive atmosphere. While some did note that their role in addressing school problems was partly preventative, this seemed to be more lip-service, as few described any real ways that they helped to prevent problems. As Aronson (2000) noted, paying lip-service to the importance of tolerance, empathy and compassion yet doing nothing to make these values reality, "creates an atmosphere that is not only unpleasant for the 'losers,' but one that shortchanges the 'winners' as well" (70). One strategy mentioned was to simply be present, but the way that it was stated almost seemed as though presence was a form of surveillance. It did not seem to be consistent with DiGiulio's (2001) notion that "the best deterrent to school violence is the presence of a teacher, particularly when that teacher makes supportive interventions, interventions that students characterize as caring" (51). On the other hand, it is their perception that students view them as mostly friendly and supportive, with an overall mean of 3.58. Thus perhaps these teachers already feel that they are doing all they can in this regard. Another possible explanation is that
there is a refusal on the part of these teachers to admit their own individual deficiencies.

Several participants mentioned discussing respect and leadership in their classroom, especially as classroom rules. Their actions in the classroom, however, did not seem consistent with these statements, as few mentioned any specific curriculum or efforts they have made to allow this to hold true. It's as if mandating that students respect one another and the teacher, without somehow modeling this and addressing it throughout the curriculum, will lead to positive results. In fact, participants were not really sure that teachers at the school are role models. The mean score for this statement was 3.25. Females rated it lower than did males, 3.17 and 3.33, respectively. More senior staff were also more critical of teachers as role models (3.0 to 3.33).

The literature revealed that one way school climate is important to teachers is because they may be the targets of school-based violence. While only one participant, "Tammy" of group F, noted that she was the recipient of student threats, others maintained a certain apprehension that it could happen to them. Results here are consistent with the literature, in that this fear
does indeed impact the ways that teachers interact with students. Specifically, the concern about reprisal violence based on a student’s anger over some type of disciplinary sanction was mentioned. "Tammy" of group F and "Eric" of group M noted that they were concerned that, because they live in the community, they would be targeted by students who were upset with them based on disciplinary issues. While neither stated that this did result in a change in their disciplinary policy, it is certainly likely that it impacted their classroom discipline in some way.

Many of the teachers involved in this research were concerned that verbal violence directed at teachers could escalate into physical violence if left "unchecked." "Howard" of group D noted this, as did "Jack" of group M. They mentioned "calling out" students who had exhibited some verbally harassing behaviors.

Another way that the literature revealed teachers impacting school climate, especially as it relates to school violence, is through their curriculum. As noted above, little seems to be occurring in this regard at this school. While a few teachers described specific activities, these were in response to world events, like Columbine and September 11th. They were not necessarily
preventative as much as they were one-time, reactive methods. Only one participant made the connection between violence prevention and cooperative classroom strategies. "Tammy" of group F said, "I just think it creates a much more positive environment." Additionally, while several seemed to recognize that more extra curricular involvement by students, in essence, more attachment to the school as a source of pride and joy, can reduce problem behaviors, few seemed willing to get involved in this regard. "Kristy" who completed the survey only, expressed the feeling that when she involved herself in extra work, there was no reward. "Betsy" critiqued the extra curricular activities available for students, but is not actually involved in coaching or monitoring any school sports or clubs.

Instead of incorporating violence prevention strategies and content into the curriculum, these teachers generally feel that more teacher control will prevent violence and disruption. These teachers either are not familiar with the literature regarding school climate and school violence, or they do not see themselves as able to make change in this regard. Perhaps it is a mixture of both. Above all, it seems as though these teachers are critical of the top-down management...
style of the administration, yet do not express that in any way to the actual administrators in order to make change.

Results from this study do reflect the little bit available about school size and physical structure in regards to violence. The literature indicates that smaller schools are safer than are larger ones, and these teachers generally felt that there were very few actual violent incidents in their school. In order for the school climate to be considered actually healthy and educationally sound, however, the quality of relationships within a small school are still important. It is questionable whether relationships in this school would be considered of good quality. Also revealed in the literature was the fact that small, rural schools tend to suffer from greater problems with drinking and drugs than with violence. This was noted by participants, especially "Howard" of group D, who described the "burgeoning drug problem" in regards to methamphetamines.

One very important characteristic of a physically safe school is that there is adequate equipment and supplies. This was noted repeatedly as being a major concern for teachers, especially by "Eric" of group M. It was also one of the lowest rated statements on the School
Climate survey, with an overall mean of 2.08, a mean for females of 2.17 and males of 2.0, and mean scores of 2.33 and 1.33 by less senior and more senior staff, respectively.

School Responses to Actual or Feared Violence

All of the school responses described in this research can be considered technological and punitive in nature. Technological examples include the change in locks and the key pad and additions to portable walls. Punitive examples were the enforcement of previously existing rules and addition of others, such as a ban on book bags and coats in the classrooms, and police and drug dog presence in the building. These are consistent with the types of responses found in the literature, although there were considerably less than those described by some schools and in my own experience. Participants admitted that this is due, at least in part, to the physical structure of the building. It is also partly due to the “it can’t happen here” outlook that participants felt many students, parents and even some colleagues hold.

Despite the admission that few incidents have occurred at this school, many participants felt that more technological measures, such as video cameras, should be
instituted. Others felt the need for more punitive measures, indicating that tough consequences are what will prevent students from acting out. “Jack” of group M, for instance, expressed concern about the principal, who he considered to be a strong person, “going soft.” He also said, “One area that I am concerned about is how certain things students would say, are handled—the very liberal punishment, I guess. We do have limited violence here, but...There was a situation 8–10 years ago where a gun was found, and even back then I think that whole thing was really handled poorly, in my mind. Every time I hear about a kid getting in trouble, this is what they did, I’m real critical of what would be the consequence.” “Betsy” and “Howard” of group D did have a short exchange about being too oppressive to students, and “Eric” of group M described taking a more counseling-approach to fights; these represent the only real mention of anything besides the familiar “law and order” approach. “Howard,” however, had earlier stated that the administration needed to kick more kids out of school and in general come down harder on students, so it is hard to make out where he truly stands on the issue.
Columbine as Trigger

It did seem as though Columbine, as well as the other high-profile school shootings, served as an instigating factor at this school. No one mentioned that it triggered actual violent incidents among students, like those described in the literature and the bomb threats in my own experience. “David” of group L spoke about this: “A lot of people say, especially about the media, say it [a media effect] doesn’t exist. It doesn’t affect students. But if you were to come in and watch a student body and say that it doesn’t have an impact, even on the way they perceive each other…” What it did seem to trigger were responses to a perceived sense of school violence, as it was noted that a number of these safety-related changes occurred around this time. Columbine also created fear amongst several of these teachers. “Tammy” of group F and “Roland” of group D specifically described increased fear post-Columbine. Interestingly, it was the less senior teachers who brought up this concern.

These responses validate the work of Bonilla (2000) described in the review of literature in that the result of media attention may be an expectation of violence in schools. They also echo the notion, proposed by Kruse (2000), that Columbine normalized school violence, and,
consequently, punitive responses to it. Further, Bonilla (2000) noted that, “In a climate of fear people’s concern that they might be victimized will make them more likely to interpret others’ intentions as threatening and to respond aggressively” (59). The fact that various teachers interpreted high profile events like Columbine differently is consistent with the work of Giddens (1991). He said, “All individuals actively, although by no means always in a conscious way, selectively incorporate many elements of mediated experiences into their day-to-day conduct” (188).

Moral Panics

September 11th had a similar effect in that it increased fear amongst teachers as well as, to a lesser degree, students. Several participants noted a change in their feelings regarding whether they were truly safe anywhere. However, several participants specifically mentioned their dismay at their students’ apathy about these catastrophic world events. “Roland” of group D described some of his students’ responses to 9/11: “Just to show you an example, on September 11th when we had the TVs in the room and were showing pictures of what was happening and stuff, a couple of kids were like, ‘That’s cool.’ And one kid comes up to me laughing and is like,
'What are you gonna do about it?' And I said, 'What am I gonna do about it? You're 18, you're signed up for the draft, right?' And then things got serious. You know, but until it effects them they're just totally oblivious to things around them." "Howard" of the same group responded: "I agree, in fact, that's a good point. I had a whole class of students, 37 seniors, 17/18 years old, and we watched the whole thing during class. And I told them, boy this is a sad day for us, and there were several of them like, 'It's not like they're gonna bomb us in ____, what do I care?' And I took a poll, of 37 there were two students who said that this was something that will eventually effect me, effect me directly." This apathy amongst students in general is consistent with the description of the colonizer/colonized relationship described by Memmi (1965), in that many of the colonized, "feel(s) nether responsible nor guilty nor skeptical, for he is out of the game. He has forgotten how to participate actively in history and he no longer even asks to do so" (92).

Both Columbine and September 11th are instructive in regards to the moral panic literature. Columbine set the stage for concern amongst many of these teachers. Hostility towards the group perceived as responsible, the
next phase of a moral panic, is only somewhat visible. It is difficult to tell whether these teachers are openly hostile towards their students, but several did come across as very authoritarian, which students might interpret as hostility. As Memmi (1965) stated, "Another sign of the colonized's depersonalization is what one might call the mark of the plural. The colonized is never characterized in an individual manner; he is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity" (85).

The third phase occurs when people believe the threat to be real. This is clearly the case here. While few incidents occurred, all participants noted that there were student who they felt had the potential to be violent. Fourth, the responses in a moral panic are disproportionate to the actual incidence of the problem. Again, these teachers admitted that they had had few incidents, but managed to compile a list of responses taken nonetheless, as well as responses that should be taken. Finally, as described above, law-and-order approaches characterize the responses to the panic.

**Culture of Meanness**

The main characteristic of the culture of meanness in schools is the notion of incivility, or, as DiGiulio (2001) said, "a quickness to bristle, an anticipation of
offense" (3). This is visible at this school, according to the participants. As DiGiulio (2001) also noted, oftentimes the students who are most antisocial are also the most popular with their peers. "Jack" of group M alluded to this when he discussed the lack of leadership in some student cohorts at the school. "Howard" also expressed concern that students will verbally antagonize others, including teachers, much more easily than he feels they do at other schools or would have at other times in history.

Interestingly, the teachers involved in this study see this quickness to bristle in students, but do not see in it in themselves or the way that they approach curriculum and/or discipline. As an outside observer, it seemed to me that many of these teachers are not only slightly fearful of their students, but approach them with a certain degree of animosity. Using Eisler's (2000) two models, dominator and partnership, as a framework, I would argue that most of these teachers, as well as the leadership of the school, utilize dominator methods, have set up a dominator structure, and largely use the mainstream, dominator curriculum. Many authors cited in the literature review suggested that a competitive school environment fosters this type of incivility towards
others; teachers at this school generally agreed with the statement, "Competition, rather than cooperation, is stressed at this school" (2.75).

Critique of Safety-Related Responses

One critique of punitive responses to the perception or fear of school violence is that students will become more violent or more likely to act out. This did not seem to be the case here. For instance, "Eric" of group M mentioned that some of the safety-related changes made by the school increased resentment from students, but made a point of saying it was not physical but attitudinal. No one else in any way alluded to the fact that the safety changes had this type of impact. No one directly stated that they think these responses or the fear of potential school violence has made students depressed or alienated, but a number of participants described a concern about depression in general or students in need of counseling of sorts.

Another criticism identified in the literature is that students may feel more fearful as a result of safety-related measures, especially in schools where there has been no obvious events of physical violence, like this one. There was some suggestion that this might be the case. "Carol" and "Tammy" of group F discussed the
use of the terminology "lock down" when drug dogs are in the building, implying that this increased both their own and their students' fear.

The literature on the disproportionate impact of such policies as zero tolerance laws which shows that minority males bear the brunt could not be assessed very well here, as there is not a large minority population. There is, however, a small Hispanic population, many of them migrant workers. "David" of group L alluded to the fact that these students may not feel as safe as others, but did not provide any suggestion that they are targeted for disciplinary policies. It was suggested by "Carol" of group F that "who you are" makes a big difference in the way that you are treated and the application of disciplinary policies. First she addressed the interpretation of an incident. "We also have new state laws about intimidation and assault, and there have been occasions here where it would appear anyway that a student has actually been assaulted by another student. If that happens, according to the law, they're supposed to be expelled for 180 days, and yet that hasn't happened. And it becomes an interpretation of assault; their interpretation versus my interpretation." She went on: "When a kid is attacked from behind, to me there's no
question that they are assaulted, and yet the instance was treated as though it was just an altercation, just a fight between two kids. And nothing was done. I mean, a 2 or 3 day suspension. But by the new laws that’s assault and 180 days.” “Tammy” then agreed, stating, “I also think that within this community, because it is so small that we know everyone, there is a lot of social pressure. You know that if you discipline a kid whose parents are going to be on the phone complaining and trying to take your job away because you followed protocol, the same as you did with every other kid, and that contributes.”

Clearly few of these teachers have connected the climate of the school as being one of the root causes of violence or the potential for violence. While several mentioned that they felt “society” had changed and thus their students had as well, no real attempts to brainstorm ways the schools, as a societal institution, can counteract these trends. Participants seemed quick to blame home-life or families, yet offered nothing in the way of suggestions for improvement. This is consistent with the work of Beckett and Sasson (1996), who said, "Insofar as crime is viewed as a personal choice, pure and simple, crime control strategies oriented toward deterrence and punishment make the most sense. It is in this way that the values of self reliance and individualism in
American political culture provide fertile soil for punitive rhetoric and beliefs" (133).

For example, "Jack" of group M said, "We have a lot of people who are living in very, very disturbing home lives." Earlier, when discussing students as leaders, he also used this "blame the victim" mentality: "We have some kids who want it to be different, who are asking for opportunities to change this, but who are afraid to lead in that way. That wasn't a problem, you know, twenty years ago, but I see it as a problem outside the school too. The kids that behave well keep their noses out of others' business."

"Howard" of group D made these comments: "I think it's a societal change. I think society has become more accepting of...a shorter attention span. Violence is a very easy way to solve a conflict because it doesn't take any time. It explodes and then it's done. I don't think we do a very good job as a society of teaching our children that it's not acceptable to use your fists. I try to tell my kids in the classroom that if we lived in a world that was, like Thomas Hobbes said, 'Life is brutish, short and ugly,' if it was a real world of natural selection, none of you would be here. They say, 'What are you talking about?' and I say, 'You don't think Mr.____ isn't bigger,
better and stronger than you? Mr. _____? Myself? Mr. _____? Mr. _____? Any of these guys? We're all bigger, better and stronger. We're better trained. That isn't how you do it, though. That isn't how people live together. I think it's a societal thing and that scares me. That bothers me. Because we can deal with the safety issues all we want, but if we go home and the parents say, 'If that teachers says anything to you you get up in his face and you let him have it. Don't worry about it, I'll stand behind you no matter what.' When I was growing up in my house if I'd have challenged a teacher no matter what, the consequences would have been dire and immediate. And I don't think that's true anymore, and that's what scares me." This attitude, then, allows them to look to punitive responses, because those are familiar, relatively easy, and quick to implement. They also provide teachers with a sense of control. Like Devine (1996) maintained, teachers have been increasingly separated from their once-holistic role, now seeing themselves more as implementers of lessons.

In sum, seven main conclusions can be drawn from the data about this school. First, teachers are fearful at work, but not always directly and not always physically. Second, school climate does seem to be important to
teachers, especially the feeling that they are supported by administrators. This animosity between teachers and administrators results in a negative work environment, and cannot help but contribute to some of the concerns with school pride that are also closely tied to school violence prevention. Third, females at this school feel as though they have less of a voice than do the male teachers. Fourth, older teachers feel as though the school is going "downhill." Fifth, this is an environment where competition is stressed, whether overtly or implicitly. While it is impossible to determine the multitude of effects this competitive environment may have on teachers and students, it is safe to say that it does impact the school environment in a negative way. Sixth, teachers' at this school expressed a need for more training in regards to safety procedures and conflict resolution. Finally, the physical structure and layout of a school are important in fostering feelings of safety amongst teachers.

Recommendations

This type of study highlights the importance of allowing teachers to speak about issues that affect them in their work environments. While it is not the goal of this study to make generalizations about other schools,
one thing that clearly comes out of this is the need to conduct similar research in other settings; larger rural schools, suburban schools, and urban schools. These results indicate some significant differences by gender and seniority; it is recommended that other school violence research look at these differences as well.

Further, comparing the perceptions of middle and elementary teachers with high school teachers in the same district would provide a chance to better understand a district's safety issues. Additional areas of inquiry that would help elucidate the various perceptions of school climate would be to conduct focus groups and/or administer the School Climate survey to students and administrators at the same school.

It is also hoped that these teachers will take some of the concerns and insights they shared during the focus group sessions and through the completion of the School Climate survey and share them with administrators. Perhaps a dialogue can open up that will address some of their concerns about voice in the school, as well as re-evaluate some of their safety-related policies. A step in the right direction has already occurred; in the first staff meeting held after data collection an item on the
agenda was to address the school’s safety-response handbook.

In my role as a former teacher as well as researcher, I see a variety of ways that this research can contribute to the fields of Sociology and Education. Above all, these data highlight the importance of allowing teachers a voice about issues that impact their work environment. Extending this beyond the schools, it becomes clear that employees in all work environments need to feel as though they can, at least in some ways, impact the policies put in place. The climate in this school is negative, in large part due to the lack of agency teachers employed here feel. This rings true to my own experience as well; teachers at my school were seldom viewed as experts in what we do or even as if we had any input of value. In a climate such as this and the one I taught in, as noted by Freire (1970), it becomes easy for the oppressed to become the oppressor. Teachers can and often do simply slip into the same dominator models in their classrooms, as that is what they know and that is what is rewarded. Teachers like Howard, who at times offered glimpses of understanding yet still vacillated back to a punitive, deterrence theory approach, might benefit immensely from having more opportunities to talk...
through what they see happening at their workplace. This kind of conversation might allow him and others the opportunity to develop those partnership-oriented ways.

Yet if these data show anything, they show that simply allowing teachers to have a voice as a one time deal is not enough. As noted above, this school met to discuss their safety handbook during the staff meeting after the focus group sessions. Unfortunately, few offered anything in the way of discussion. Teachers were given a voice and opted not to use it. Thus an important sociological insight is that people need to not only be given opportunities to exercise a voice, but also need to have practice and guidance in developing it. A structure that allows for and rewards this exploration and development is critical.

As a final recommendation, I suggest that schools reconsider the model of school improvement that is currently used by most. In this model, teachers are required to attend in-service training several times a year, usually for a half-day, by some “expert.” This is the model that is typically used in preparing teachers to be ready for any type of crisis, including possible school violence. By the very act of bringing in an outsider as an expert, teachers are being told that they
do not have the knowledge and skills necessary to ready themselves for acts that might occur in the place where they work and in the profession for which they are trained. This approach allows for no teacher voice about one of the most personal issues a teacher could face; their own safety. Rather, research such as this suggests that teachers do hold a great deal of knowledge and insight about their work environment and can and should be used as resources in this regard.
APPENDIX A

School Climate Survey
School Climate Survey

Please respond to the following statements by circling the most appropriate response. Use the scale provided below.

1=Strongly Disagree  2=Disagree  3=Neutral  4=Agree  5=Strongly Agree

1. The principal at my school seeks and values teachers' ideas.
   5 4 3 2 1

2. Teachers at my school are not involved in the decision-making process.
   5 4 3 2 1

3. Teachers at my school are kept informed about current school-related issues.
   5 4 3 2 1

4. The principal at my school is friendly and supportive most of the time.
   5 4 3 2 1

5. The principal at my school seeks and values students' ideas.
   5 4 3 2 1

6. Teachers who do a good job at my school are rarely praised for their work.
   5 4 3 2 1

7. Teachers at my school are encouraged to be innovative in the classroom.
   5 4 3 2 1

8. The mission of my school provides a clear sense of direction for teachers.
   5 4 3 2 1

9. Teachers at my school generally support the school mission.
   5 4 3 2 1

10. Students at my school help one another to accomplish things at the school.
    5 4 3 2 1

11. Teachers at my school are rarely supportive of one another.
    5 4 3 2 1

12. Teachers at my school are willing to help out when something needs to be done.
    5 4 3 2 1

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13. Teachers at my school do not generally trust one another.
   5 4 3 2 1
14. Teachers and parents at my school have common expectations for student performance.
   5 4 3 2 1
15. Parents at my school trust teachers' judgment.
   5 4 3 2 1
16. My school has adequate equipment and supplies.
   5 4 3 2 1
17. I seek and value students' ideas in the classroom.
   5 4 3 2 1
18. My behavior is viewed by students at the school as friendly and supportive most of the time.
   5 4 3 2 1
19. Students at the school generally feel pride in their school.
   5 4 3 2 1
20. Students at the school generally dislike coming to school.
   5 4 3 2 1
21. I generally enjoy my job at the school.
   5 4 3 2 1
22. I feel loyalty to my school district.
   5 4 3 2 1
23. Teachers at my school are role models for students.
   5 4 3 2 1
24. Teachers at my school emphasize empathy, tolerance and compassion in the classroom.
   5 4 3 2 1
25. Teachers at my school value school improvement.
   5 4 3 2 1
26. In general, my school has high expectations for students.
   5 4 3 2 1
27. Teachers at my school have few opportunities for collaboration and dialogue.
   5 4 3 2 1
28. Different departments at my school collaborate on school and classroom projects.
   5 4 3 2 1
29. Students at my school are frequently asked to work together in the classroom.
   5 4 3 2 1
30. Competition, rather than cooperation, is stressed at my school.
   5 4 3 2 1
APPENDIX B

Focus Group Questions
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Background Information:

Gender of each participant.

Teaching experience at the school (Described in categories of under ten years and ten years plus).

1. What do you see as your role in addressing school problems?

2. Is cooperation stressed in the school? In what ways? How about in the individual classrooms?

3. What safety-related changes do you recall the school making in recent years?

4. What was the staff response to those changes? The student response?

5. Do you generally feel safe at work?

6. Did you feel safe prior to the safety changes you indicated earlier?

7. How do you perceive that students feel at school regarding safety? Have you noticed a difference in how students feel about school safety in recent years? Please provide examples.

8. Do you feel that staff is more positive or negative towards the school and/or administration as a result of these safety-related changes? Please provide examples.
9. Are students more positive or negative towards the administration and/or teachers as a result of the safety measures? Please provide examples.

10. Have the changes had any impact on what is taught or how it is taught? On the educational goals of the school? Please provide examples.

11. Do you sense a change in student or staff pride in the school? Explain any difference you have noticed by providing examples.

12. How would a violent incident be handled at your school?

13. What do you feel is the best way to respond to school violence? To prevent it?
APPENDIX C

Institutional Review Board Approval

IRB Approved Consent Form
Date: February 19, 2002

To: Susan Caulfield, Principal Investigator  
Laura Finley, Student Investigator

From: Mary Lagerwey, Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 02-02-03

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled “Teachers’ Perceptions of School Safety, Safety-Based Changes, and Their Resultant Impact on School Climate: A Case Study” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: February 19, 2003
Western Michigan University  
Department of Sociology  
Principal Investigator: Dr. Susan Caulfield  
Student Investigator: Laura L. Finley

I have been invited to participate in Laura Finley's dissertation project entitled "Teachers' Perceptions of School Safety, Safety-Based Changes, and Their Resultant Impact on School Climate: A Case Study." My building principal has provided his consent for school participation in this study though this in no way makes me obligated to participate. I can refuse to participate or withdraw my consent at any time without prejudice, penalty, or other risk.

I am being asked to participate in a one-and-a-half hour long discussion session with several colleagues. The session will be held during my planning period on a date to be announced. This will be scheduled during Winter, 2002 with permission from the principal. The session will take place on school grounds, and drinks and snacks will be provided. The first hour of this session will include group discussion, facilitated by Ms. Finley, of several questions regarding school safety-issues, any safety-related changes I have noticed in the last several years, as well as my perception of the impact of these changes. This portion of the session will be tape recorded so that results may be coded and analyzed later. Once the analysis is complete, my name will be erased. In the final half hour I will be asked to complete a school climate assessment. This one session will conclude my participation in the study. The tape of the session as well as the written school climate assessment will only be used by the researcher for data analysis. Once the information is collected and analyzed, all potential identifying information, including my name on the tape-recording, will be eliminated. All subsequent papers or presentations regarding these results will use pseudonyms for myself and other participants, as well as a code name for the school where I am employed. The tapes and written material will remain confidential, as they will be locked.
up for at least three years in the office of Dr. Susan Caulfield on Western Michigan University's campus.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks for participants. If an accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken; however, no compensation or additional treatment will be made available to me except as otherwise stated in this consent form. There are no known physical or social risks associated with this study. One potential concern participants may have is that information shared may be perceived negatively by administrators. This is very unlikely, however, as my building principal gave his consent for teachers to participate in this study. While he does know the general research topic, he is not aware of the specific questions to be discussed during the session. Further, he will not be given a copy of any results obtained from this study, or information about specific individuals who participate. Another potential concern is that information discussed will be shared with other staff members outside of the focus group, or that members will somehow be ostracized for the views they express within their focus group. All information obtained during the course of this study will remain confidential. Participants will be asked to maintain the confidentiality of discussion material, as well as agree not to ostracize or in any way harm those who express their views, by consenting to do so on this form. The only potentially identifying information sought will be seniority and gender. As there are a number of staff members of each gender and of varying years of experience, this should not provide for easy identification of individuals.

One possible benefit from this study is that it can provide an opportunity for teachers to engage in dialogue with their colleagues about important safety and educational issues. Further, this data will be adding to the literature about school responses to violence or the fear of violence, as little work has sought the input and perceptions of classroom teachers.
I may refuse to participate or quit at any time in the study without prejudice or penalty. If I have any questions about this study, I may contact either Laura Finley at 349-2974, or Dr. Caulfield at 387-5291. I may also contact the chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 387-8293 or the Vice President for research at 387-8298 with any concerns I might have.

My signature below indicated that I have read and/or had explained to me the purpose and requirements of the study and that I agree to participate.

__________________________
Signature

__________________________
Date

My signature below indicates that I will maintain the confidentiality of any material discussed in the focus group that I participate in. This means that I will not tell anyone outside of my focus group what another member said, nor will I use their perceptions about school violence in any way to ostracize or harm them.

__________________________
Signature

__________________________
Date


