

# ***THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SCHOOL CLIMATE: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CLIMATE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS***

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# *What is school climate?*

Most often includes: the social system of shared norms and expectations or the shared perceptions of the academic environment. Consistent findings:

- The more students feel that school rules and policies are handled fairly and consistently among all members of the school community, the lower the rate of behavioral problems in school.
- Feeling of safety is essential.
- Perceptions of positive relationships with others in the school, including student-student support and teacher- student support is consistently significant.
- Most problematic for middle school students has been a ***lack of fit*** between adolescents' needs and their environments

## *National attention to school climate*

Jonathan Cohen, President of the Center for Social and Emotional Education, has emphasized:

*“When a school climate is healthy, people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe; they are engaged and respected; students, families, and educators work together to develop and contribute to a shared school vision; educators model and nurture an attitude that emphasizes the benefits and satisfaction from learning; and everyone contributes to the operations of the school and the care of the physical environment” (Cohen, 2007, p.1).*

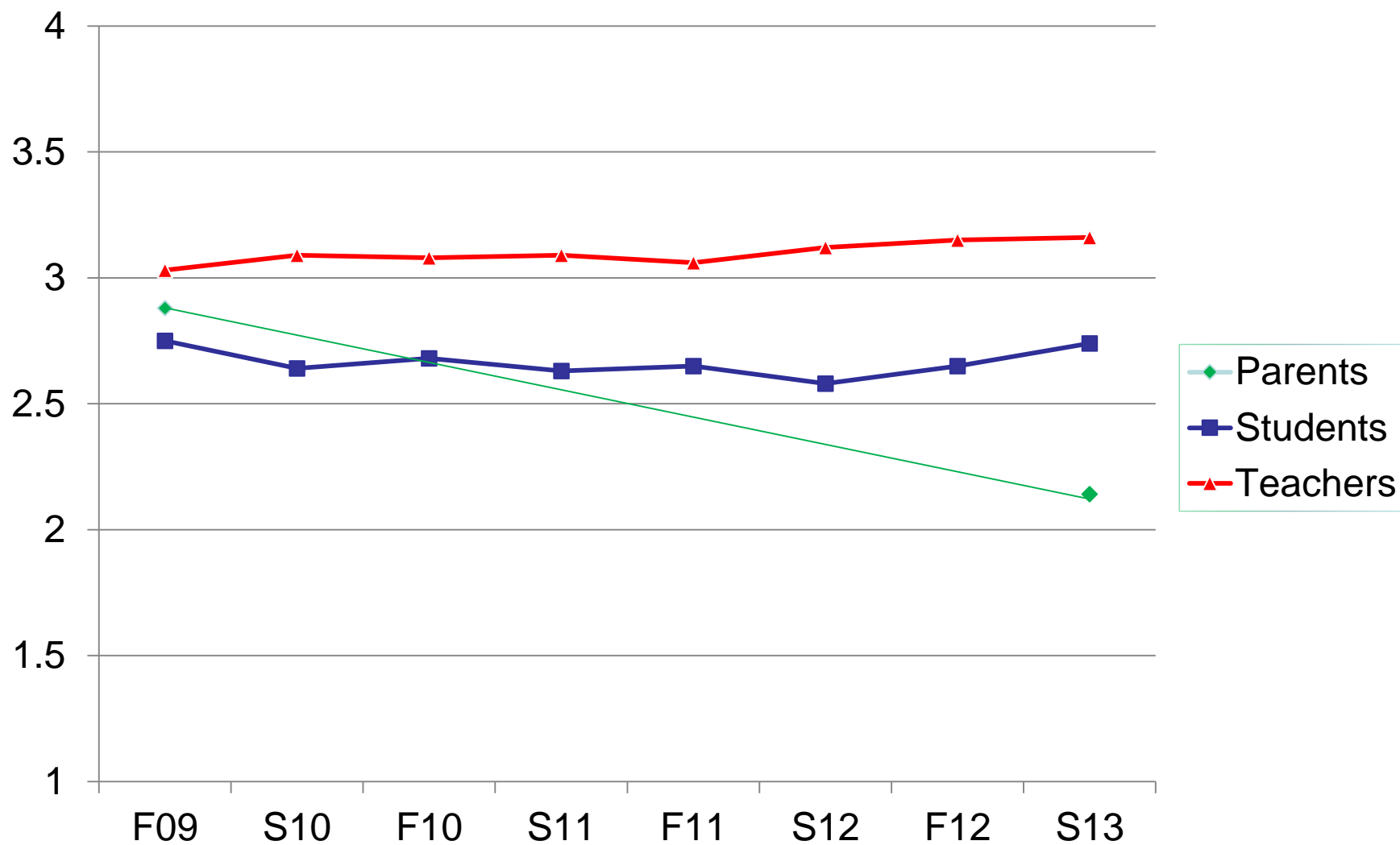
- Different people = different perceptions of climate

## *School Climate*

School climate is based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. ( The National School Climate Council, 2007)

### School climate ( Marjoribanks, 2002) 29 items

- » **Imaginative Context-** Innovative context or degree to which children are encouraged to experiment
- » **Interpersonal** context- where children are made aware of affective states- own & others
- » **Regulative context-** nature of authority relationships in the school environment
- » **Instructional context-** teaching and learning relationships



## *School Quality*

- » I feel very safe and secure in this school.
- » The physical surroundings in this school are pleasant.
- » This school is neat and clean.
- » The school building is designed appropriately for learning.
- » The school is too crowded with too many people.
- » The school needs more up-to-date equipment.

## *Teacher Connectedness*

- » There is at least one teacher at this school whom I am able to talk to about my problems

Table 1 : Mean and Distribution of School Climate, School Climate Subscales , School Quality and Teacher Connectedness of **Middle School** Students (N=514)

	Mean ( 1-4)	% Agree/ Strongly Agree	Gender	Disadvantage	Race/ Ethnicity	Self- Esteem
School Climate	2.77	53.7	ns	ns	ns	*
Imagination	2.85	58.0	ns	ns	ns	*
Interaction	2.80	53.9	ns	ns	ns	*
Regulation	2.38	26.0	ns	*	ns	*
Instruction	2.93	69.8	ns	ns	ns	*
School Quality	2.64	35.7	ns	ns	ns	*
Teacher Connectedness	2.57	53.4	ns	ns	ns	*

The association between gender and Disadvantaged were tested with a T-Test. The association between Race was tested with ANOVA and OLS regression was used to test association between Self-Esteem and other school indicators.

The "\*" indicates a significant association ( $P < .05$ ) and n.s. denotes not significant.



Table 2 : Mean and Distribution of School Climate, School Climate Subscales , School Quality and Teacher Connectedness of **High School** Students (n=519)

	Mean	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Gender	Disadvantage	Race/Ethn icity	Self- Esteem
School Climate	2.74	52.2	*	ns	ns	*
Imagination	2.80	53.2	*	ns	ns	*
Interaction	2.77	53.4	*	ns	ns	*
Regulation	2.44	28.5	*	ns	ns	*
Instruction	2.88	65.9	*	ns	ns	*
School Quality	2.57	28.7	ns	ns	ns	*
Teacher Connectedness	2.70	60.1	*	*	*	* <input type="checkbox"/>

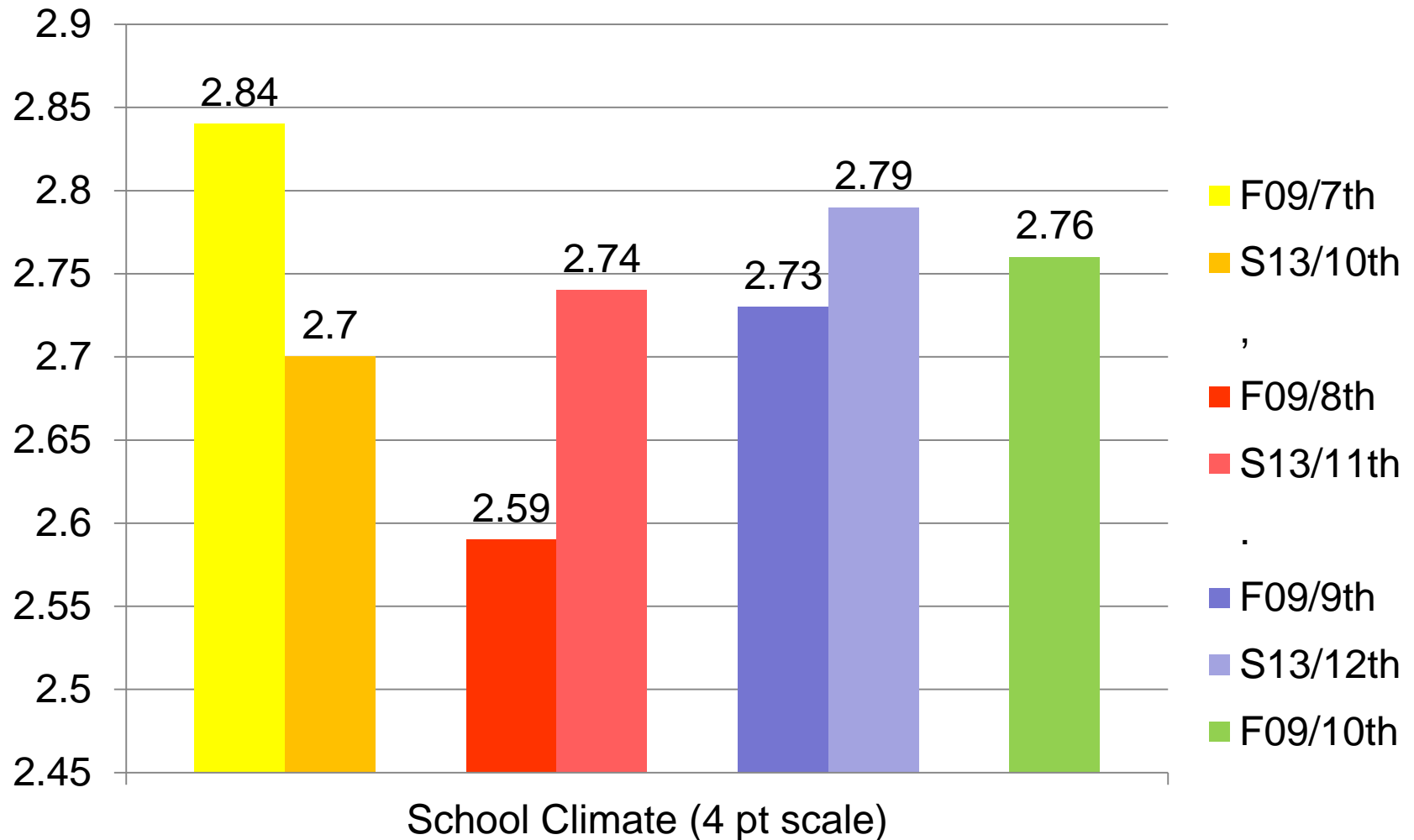
The association between gender and Disadvantaged were tested with a T-Test. The association between Race was tested with ANOVA and OLS regression was used to test association between Self-Esteem and other school indicators.

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# Climate item means – see handout

School Climate Scale	Wave 1				Wave 8		
	Gr 7	Gr 8	Gr 9	Gr 10	Gr 10	Gr 11	Gr 12
<b>Negative meaning</b>							
Most of my teachers make this school a very exciting place in which to learn.	2.91	2.63	2.65	2.87	2.75	2.83	2.83
Most of the teachers in this school are very interested in the personal problems of students.	2.71	2.41	2.49	2.62	2.53	2.57	2.72
Usually, those in charge in this school are not very patient with the students.	2.34	2.52	2.41	2.58	2.48	2.38	2.38
The teachers often seem like they are not very interested in what they are teaching.	2.27	2.23	2.27	2.07	2.26	2.13	2.08
Most of my teachers encourage us to use a lot of imagination in our schoolwork.	2.86	2.57	2.55	2.69	2.75	2.57	2.83
This is a very caring school – the teachers care about us.	3.02	2.67	2.74	2.82	2.74	2.71	2.82
Quite often teachers embarrass and upset students in my classes for not knowing the correct answers to questions.	2.18	2.22	2.07	2.22	2.19	2.09	2.05
Most of my teachers put a lot of energy and enthusiasm into their teaching.	3.04	2.82	2.74	3.00	2.77	2.74	2.88
In this school our teachers encourage us to think about exciting careers.	3.05	2.80	2.74	2.99	2.86	2.83	2.95
The teachers don't want to get to know the students in this school.	1.81	1.90	2.03	1.98	2.15	2.04	2.06
I enjoy being in this school because there are not too many strict rules.	2.22	1.94	2.40	2.03	2.01	2.03	2.00
I think that I learn a lot in most of my lessons.	3.10	2.96	2.88	2.96	3.00	2.88	2.97
This school is full of boring students and teachers, so it is not an exciting place to be.	1.95	2.09	2.12	2.11	2.28	2.42	2.25
Outside of class most of the teachers are very friendly and find time to talk to students.	2.93	2.75	2.83	2.94	2.72	2.89	2.96
In this school, most teachers think that students are always fooling around and they punish students for everything.	2.42	2.50	2.41	2.49	2.50	2.25	2.42
The teachers plan lessons very well.	3.02	2.87	2.91	3.00	2.84	2.87	2.93
Most of my teachers encourage us to be very creative.	3.18	2.92	2.83	3.02	2.85	2.75	2.90
In this school many teachers spend a lot of time helping students with their schoolwork.	3.06	2.89	2.94	3.00	2.83	2.80	2.95
There are a lot of rules and regulations in this school.	3.24	3.39	2.95	3.25	3.21	3.21	3.41
Most of my teachers seem to be very interested in what they are teaching.	2.90	2.80	2.79	2.95	2.82	2.87	2.96
Teachers often try out new and exciting ways of doing things.	3.04	2.82	2.77	2.92	2.75	2.69	2.80
Teachers are really concerned with students' feelings.	2.78	2.51	2.58	2.59	2.56	2.58	2.73
In this school, teachers, often make students take the blame for problems whether they did them or not.	2.37	2.33	2.42	2.44	2.32	2.12	2.30
Most of my teachers don't seem to prepare lessons very well.	1.91	1.99	2.03	2.00	2.11	2.01	2.08
Most of my teachers give homework that helps me to understand my schoolwork.	3.01	2.77	2.80	2.81	3.09	3.07	3.01
Teachers in this school push students too hard.	2.18	2.29	2.24	2.31	2.22	2.05	2.07
The teachers in this school are not very interested in whether we learn or not.	1.86	1.79	2.00	2.00	2.14	2.17	2.21
Most of my teachers let us do things by ourselves.	2.51	2.65	2.79	2.73	2.81	2.86	3.02
Students in this school are friendly to new students.	2.66	2.57	2.55	2.74	2.62	2.69	2.86

*Means for School Climate – All Students  
Longitudinal Change Fall 09 and Spring 13*



## *Will individual/group differences influence student interpretation of school climate?*

### **Self-Efficacy & Ethnic Identity examined....**

- » Appraisals of others influence our **self-efficacy** or “the beliefs that people hold about their capabilities and about the outcomes of their efforts” (Usher & Pajares)
- » Research has found that success in an academic setting is influenced greatly by **self-efficacy** (Pajares)
- » Self-efficacy research has found that **gender** and **race/ethnicity** are influencing variables for **self-efficacy** (Pajares)

## *Relationships occur between race/ethnicity and self-efficacy*

- » Adolescents interpret their own **ethnic status** differently depending on their position within their community (Phinney)
- » **Ethnic identity** has been found to be less relevant for adolescents who are members of the majority culture (i.e, whites).
- » **Ethnic minority** students have been shown to develop strong **self-efficacy** in schools when they are numerically the majority and fit into the school culture. (Rodgers; Schunk,).
- » As a result, school **climate** is essential to study (Schunk & Gunn)
- » *Do students with different levels of self-efficacy and ethnic ID interpret the same school climate differently?*

- 9<sup>th</sup> **Self-efficacy** and **Ethnic Identity** predicted school climate score. *(Specifically, Whites with high self-efficacy have an increased positive perception of school climate.)*
- 10<sup>th</sup> **Self-efficacy** alone predicted school climate *(As perception of self-efficacy increases in 10<sup>th</sup> grade students, perception of school climate also increases.)*
- 11<sup>th</sup> **Self-efficacy, Ethnic identity, race, gender** all predict school climate *(For White female students, their perception of school climate improves to a greater degree when they have a strong ethnic identity than it does for males or students of color.)*
- 12<sup>th</sup> **Self-efficacy** alone predicted school climate *(As perception of self-efficacy increases in 10<sup>th</sup> grade students, perception of school climate also increases.)*

## *Qualitative results – Abilities/self-efficacy*

- » **White Females** consistently have the highest percentage of positive comments about their academic abilities.
- » **Hispanic Females** consistently have the lowest percentage of positive comments about their abilities and the highest percentage of negative comments about their abilities.
- » **African American males** have a fairly high rate of comments about their abilities, but many of those comments are not academic-oriented (e.g., sports).
- » **SEE HANDOUT**

*Thank you!*

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