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Educational Faculty Perceptions of the Learning Climate in a Juvenile Justice Residential Facility

Carolyn C. Cox
Joseph D. Visker
Ashley Hartman
Truman State University

The majority of educational faculty from a juvenile justice residential detention facility in rural Northeast Missouri who participated in a learning climate survey of their school seemed to agree that the environment for staff and students was generally physically safe and emotionally supportive; key factors for a positive learning climate. By describing perceptions of their school's learning climate; facility educational faculty can identify strengths and improve upon weaknesses. Enhancing a school's physical and psychosocial surroundings leads to a healthier school environment for all.

Keywords: Residential juvenile justice facility, learning climate, academics

Theoretical framework: School learning climate

A healthy school learning climate, including the attitudes, feelings, and values of students and school personnel (Marx, Frelick-Wooley, & Northrop, 1998), provides everyone with a sound physical and psychosocial environment in which to work and learn. The school's learning climate is multi-dimensional and includes the subjective school experiences of: relationships, sense of school community, commitment to school, and school safety. A positive learning climate has been linked to effective teaching and learning, therefore, leading to more healthful student behaviors, higher school achievement levels, better behavioral risk prevention, and improved student performance (Tubbs & Garner, 2008; National School Climate Center, 2010).

The policies and practices of a healthful and safe learning climate affect all individuals and areas within schools. For school students and school personnel, learning climate reflects the quality of the overall school experience (National School Climate Center, 2010). In order to positively impact the socio-emotional health of students as well as their academic achievement, the school learning climate must provide a setting in which students, educational faculty, and school staff can feel that they will succeed and reach their optimal potential (Tubbs & Garner, 2008; Marx et al., 1998).

Learning climate is one of the essential supports needed for school improvement (Sebring, Allensworth, Byrk, Easton, & Luppescu, 2006). As part of state and district-wide initiatives, schools are now assessing school learning climate to measure support for learning as well as to enhance those climate factors that contribute to overall school and life success (Cohen, Pickeral, & McClosky, 2009). It is now recommended that all schools conduct periodic learning climate assessments to supplement other forms of assessment, create learning climate standards, and direct resources to improving school learning climate (Cohen, Fege, & Pickeral, 2009). After conducting climate assessments, leadership in the analysis of the data, planning for change, and monitoring progress should be the next steps taken to develop more positive climates (Tubbs & Garner, 2008).

School learning climate and the juvenile justice setting

Juvenile justice facilities are also social environments that are important in the development of a youth's skills needed to navigate life outside of detention. The facility's learning climate is an important factor in affecting positive social growth that may diminish recidivism (Scott & Steinberg, 2008). Appropriate educational and mental health services are to be provided to youth under the jurisdiction of the juvenile justice system. Many barriers to providing quality education to confined students as reported by those teaching and working in the juvenile detention setting are related to school learning climate, including: perceived lack of administrative support, lack of security services, inappropriate student conduct, and lack of faculty and student input into decision-making (Houchins, Puckett-Patterson, Crosby, Shippen, & Jolivette, 2009).

Learning climate is especially important in the educational setting for confined youth, such as those in a residential juvenile justice facility. Usually administered by a regional juvenile or family court, youth who have been abused or neglected are assigned to these residential facilities and receive academic instruction as well as clinical and non-clinical interventions (Brooks & Histed, 2002). Education programs in this setting add much-needed structure to the lives of the confined students. A structured environment in addition to improved academic skills is related to the reduction of risky behaviors in these students after the confinement experience has ended (National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2006). The effects of interventions to improve anti-social behaviors, emotional problems, alcohol use, and poor academic achievement have been linked to successful changes in the school learning climate (McEvoy, 2000) as modification of school learning climate may enhance overall student health and well-being (Kasen, Johnson, & Cohen, 1990).

Recent system-wide juvenile justice reform initiatives are being targeted toward improvements in specific areas including using evidence-based approaches to decrease delinquent behaviors and reduce juvenile justice recidivism rates. For example, overcrowding creates not only safety issues but also issues surrounding access to educational and therapeutic services for youth in detention. For some youth, their substandard environmental and confinement conditions may border on abuse or neglect. Facilities are encouraged to use model intervention programs supported by a research base, such as alternative placement programs for low-risk youth, to assist with successful behavior change (Mendel, 2007; Models for Change, n.d.). Improving school learning climate, therefore, is an evidence-based initiative that can address these reform issues. Promoting a sustained, positive climate has been demonstrated to enhance educational outcomes and support a healthy, safe school environment (Cohen et al., 2009).

Importance of a positive learning climate for educational faculty

A supportive and safe learning climate for educational faculty has been demonstrated to improve their work performance (Freiberg, 1998). Learning climate can impact educational faculty behaviors that can then influence student achievement levels (Tubbs & Garner, 2008). Successful and effective schools possess positive leaning climates that include safe environments, active leadership, collegiality, and appropriate student conduct (McDill, Rigsby, & Meyers, 1969).

School safety/discipline. School safety and discipline are key factors in providing a safe work environment for educational faculty. As student perception of positive learning climate decreases, their levels of behavior problems increase (Wang, Selman, Dishion, & Stormshak, 2010) leading to more difficult classroom management for faculty. The specific learning climate factors of structure and support in school discipline were most associated with improved school safety in traditional schools (Gregory et al., 2009). School policies should prohibit discrimination, address the safety needs of educational faculty, and build faculty capacity and leadership skills to ensure such positive learning climates. Supportive polices such as these increase discipline and safety, leading to more constructive learning climates (Council for Exceptional Children, 2008).

School leadership/collegiality. Educational leadership and leader's style are also important factors in creating a positive learning climate for educational faculty (Kelley, 2005; Shaw, 2009). Administrators' leadership behaviors were found to be correlated with teacher perceptions of learning climate (Whitaker, 2009), and school leader behaviors and teacher opinions of learning climate also seem to be related to student achievement in traditional schools (Nichols, 2007; Kelley, 2005). It seems that shared leadership and professional community tend to improve some faculty instructional behaviors (Seashore & Wahlstrom, 2011), and the most effective schools appear to possess strong educational leadership leading to a positive learning climate (Kelley, 2005). Trust is built when administration is supportive and reasonable and when all faculty act with respect and cooperation. When educational faculty enjoy their colleagues and have supportive administration, they set appropriately high expectations for student achievement. (Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2003).

Student conduct/motivation. Faculty ratings of learning climate are also associated with student behavior and adjustment (Brand, Feiner, Seitsinger, Burns, & Bolton, 2008). High-quality traditional school learning climates are likely to mediate student relationships and behavioral problems (Loukas, Suzuki, & Horton, 2006). For example, learning climate is associated with and predictive of student conduct, especially violent behaviors (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). In schools with positive, supportive learning climates, students were more likely to

seek help in the prevention of bullying and school violence (Eliot, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2010). Many school improvement programs focus on learning climate factors as faculty perception of positive climate is associated with lower levels of student disruptive behaviors and discipline problems (Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010). In schools where students perceived a learning climate in decline, their behavioral and psychological health were affected (Way, Reddy, & Rhodes, 2007).

Teacher efficacy/professional development. In traditional schools, provision of professional development and learning communities for educational faculty can positively affect school learning climate (Tubbs & Garner, 2008). Also, effective professional development programs that focus on strategies to improve relationships and interactions between faculty and students was perceived as potentially leading to a more positive school learning climate (Price, 2008). Learning climate was also viewed as predictive of faculty self-efficacy in traditional schools (Tobin, Muller, & Turner, 2006).

A more positive learning climate and high sense of self-efficacy seemed to predict lower stress levels of those adults staffing juvenile corrections facilities, too (Wells, Minor, Angel, Matz, & Amato, 2008). In addition, most juvenile justice faculty in one study believed that they made a difference in their students, and that they possessed the educational background, teaching skills, and experience to impact student achievement. Those with more years of experience seemed to report these higher levels of self-efficacy. (Houchins, Shippen, & Cattret, 2004).

Purpose

A positive learning and work climate for educational faculty appears crucial for academic success and faculty performance (Search Institute, 2008) in traditional school settings. Positive learning and work climates would also be just as important in the success of educational and behavioral interventions of faculty teaching in juvenile justice residential facilities. Learning climate assessments are recommended as evidence-based initiatives that can address juvenile justice reform issues, and a positive learning climate may also improve educational faculty effectiveness. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to assess facility learning climate and support for learning in a residential juvenile justice facility from the perspective of the educational faculty.

Methods

Sample

After IRB approval of the study, all 22 Juvenile Center educational faculty from a residential detention facility in rural Northeast Missouri were asked by the researchers during one of the Center's faculty meetings in May 2009 to participate in the learning climate survey. All (100%) elected to participate and completed and returned a written informed consent document to the researchers at that time. The consent form described the purpose of the study, the possible benefits and harm that may results from participation, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The participants were educational faculty at a detention facility that serves a three-county area of Northeast Missouri. The participants, all state-certified teachers, taught core subject areas following the curriculum assigned to the youth in detention by their home school districts as well as counseled, facilitated group discussions, and mentored the youth during the school day.

The Center contains a secure detention and a secure residential treatment unit, and it also provides safe care and education services to adjudicated youth through both clinical and non-clinical interventions. Services meet the needs of youth and family in crisis and include: emergency shelter, inpatient therapeutic treatment and psychiatric services, individual and family counseling, and transition support and supervision. In addition, youth who have alleged to have committed law violations are involved in educational, recreational, and social programs using counseling and correctional skills for behavior management. A chaplaincy and a character education program are also utilized when necessary (Second Judicial Circuit Juvenile Division, 2009).

The survey was administered June 2009 during the regularly-scheduled all-Center faculty meeting. Toward the end of the meeting, researchers reviewed consent and survey instructions with participants, secretarial staff distributed surveys, collected surveys, and placed surveys into a sealed envelope for the researchers to transport.

Instrument

The survey tool "Creating a Great Place to Learn (CGPL): A Survey of Your School's Learning Climate – Staff Survey" was used to assess juvenile center educational faculty perceptions of learning climate in three focus areas: relationships, organizational attributes, and personal development (available from Search Institute). The survey was based on the Developmental Assets Framework created by the Search Institute (Search Institute, 2008). The survey used an asset-based foundation to assess faculty perceptions of their work climate. Emphasizing the role of the 40 Developmental Assets, those positive, healthy experiences and influences that protect youth from risky behaviors and allow them to be resilient and thrive, this survey assessed the facility's psycho-social environment experienced by the educational faculty. The instrument, developed over four years and tested with demographically diverse school faculty, includes both learning climate and developmental outcome measures. After analysis of the results, school improvements and reforms can then be implemented using "asset-based" strategies (Search Institute, 2006).

The variables examined in the survey were aligned with the 40 Developmental Assets categories (Search Institute, 2008) and were viewed as critical factors in a positive, supportive learning climate. Efficacy, the ability and confidence of the faculty to modify teaching techniques and be able to work together as an educational team, and collegiality, faculty learning from each other in a

collaborative way, leads to positive conditions that enhance learning. Leadership and shared decision-making can help address school problems in a productive manner. Such a collaborative culture increases the chances of success in school reform and school improvement programs. Since educational faculty need to constantly improve their skills and knowledge, an environment that supports professional development and continuing education encourages faculty professionalism. Safety, discipline, and appropriate student conduct are all important to support faculty authority and provide a safe work environment (Search Institute, 2006).

The staff survey consisted of 86 questions in three sections (Demographics, Facility's Learning Climate, and Support for Learning) that took about 25 minutes to complete. After completing the Demographics section, respondents were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with the list of statements describing the Facility's Learning Climate and Support for Learning on a five-point scale: 1=strongly disagreed, 2=disagreed, 3=neither agreed nor disagreed/neutral, 4=agreed, or 5=strongly agreed. The use of such a five-point scale has been supported in the literature as there seems to be little improvement in reliability with more than 5 scale points (Lissitz & Green, 1975). Most items were worded in a positive direction, however, four items in the Facility's Learning Climate section and two items in the Support for Learning section were worded in a negative direction. Reverse directions attempt to prevent response sets in order to decrease response bias. Sample items from this measure include: "This school provides a caring and supportive environment for me" (positive direction) and "instructional equipment is inadequate" (negative direction). The reading level of the instrument was approximately sixth grade. Internal consistency for the CGPL averaged .60 or higher and 7 of 11 had alphas that were .70 or higher. The test-retest reliability averaged .74 for the total asset categories and context areas (Search Institute, 2008), and sample-specific reliability was .892.

Procedure

All juvenile center educational faculty in this cross-sectional study voluntarily completed all three parts of the survey instrument at their faculty meeting during the first week of June 2009. In order to maintain confidentiality, surveys were collected at the end of the meeting by a secretarial staff member and placed into a large clasp envelope, sealed, and returned to the researchers.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics (percentages and mean scores) were computed for the frequency that each of the statements applied to the respondents. Based on pilot testing, final revision, and field testing over four years, a 5-point Likert scale was chosen by Search Institute to illustrate the proportion of respondents who indicated how much they agreed or disagreed with the list of statements describing the facility's learning climate and support for learning. The responses were scored: 1=strongly disagreed, 2=disagreed, 3=neither agreed nor disagreed/neutral, 4=agreed, or 5=strongly agreed (Search Institute, 2006). The scores for each question were added and then divided by the number of scores to obtain the mean or balance point in the distribution. The following Facility's Learning Climate questions were reverse-scored when computing mean scores for all of the statements: "students do not care about learning", "there is a lot of being mean among students", "I don't have as much enthusiasm as I used to", and "most students do as little as they have to". The following Support for Learning questions were reverse-scored when computing mean scores for all of the statements: "extracurricular programs are inadequate", and "instructional equipment is inadequate".

Categories were collapsed and recoded into either 'strongly agree/agree' or 'neither strongly agree nor agree' with 'neutrals' considered as 'neither strongly agree nor agree'. The Chi square statistic was then used to determine differences in the proportion of respondents who indicated how much they 'agreed' or 'disagreed' with the list of statements by demographic category; examining the relationship between the two variables.

To determine if those who reported low scores in one of the statements with the lowest means also reported low scores in the others, and if those who reported high scores in one of the statements with the highest means also reported high scores in the others; a Pearson Correlation Coefficient with a Bonferonni correction was also computed. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient evaluated the extent of the linear relationship between two or more variables since the quantitative variables were normally distributed and the scores for one case were independent from the scores for other cases.

Results

Demographics

All respondents reported their race as White (23/23, 100%), almost all respondents reported they were non-administrative educational faculty (22/23, 96%), one noted they were administrative educational faculty (1/23, 4.3%) and most described themselves as female (17/23, 74%), under 40 years of age (14/23, 61%), working in this career role for less than five years (13/23, 57%), and working at this facility for less than five years (14/23, 61%).

Perceptions of Facility's Learning Climate: Positive Perceptions

School safety/discipline. Respondent perceptions of Facility Learning Climate including relationships, organizational attributes, and personal development are illustrated in Table 1. The majority of respondents reported 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that "they felt safe in the school building (21/23, 91%) and on school grounds" (22/23. 96%), "students were rarely bullied at this school" (18/23, 78%), "staff would stop bullying if they did see it" (19/23, 83%), and that "the school provided a caring and supportive

Table 1

Perceptions of Learning Climate (n= 23)

Safety/discipline

Question	SD	D	N	A	SA	NR
	n% n%	n%	n%	n%	n%	
Feel Safe in School Building	0/0.0	1/4.3	1/4.3	10/43.5	11/47.8	0/0.0
Feel Safe on School Grounds	0/0.0	0/0.0	1/4.3	13/56.5	9/39.1	0/0.0
Staff Stop it if They See Student Being Bullied	0/0.0	1/4.3	1/4.3	11/47.8	8/34.8	2/8.7
Rarely Students Get Picked On or Bullied	0/0.0	1/4.3	3/13.0	11/47.8	7/30.4	1/4.3
School Provides Caring and Supportive Environment	0/0.0	1/4.3	3/13.0	12/52.2	7/30.4	0/0.0
Rules Enforced Fairly at School	0/0.0	0/0.0	2/8.7	17/73.9	3/13.0	1/4.3
Admin. Enforces Discipline Fairly	0/0.0	2/8.7	2/8.7	14/60.9	4/17.4	1/4.3
If Students Break a Rule, They are Disciplined	0/0.0	0/0.0	1/4.3	16/69.6	6/26.1	0/0.0

Leadership/collegiality

Question	SD	D	N	A	SA	NR
	n% n%	n%	n%	n%	n%	
Atmosphere of Collegiality	0/0.0	1/4.3	7/30.4	8/34.8	7/30.4	0/0.0
Staff Care about Students	0/0.0	0/0.0	2/8.7	12/52.2	9/39.1	0/0.0
Staff Work Together to Improve Instruction	0/0.0	0/0.0	3/13.0	14/60.9	6/26.1	0/0.0
Adm. Treats Collaborative Work as Priority	0/0.0	2/8.7	5/21.7	11/47.8	4/17.4	1/4.3
School Staff Take Academics Seriously	0/0.0	2/8.7	1/4.3	16/69.6	4/17.4	0/0.0
Co-workers Pleasure to Work With	0/0.0	0/0.0	0/0.0	16/69.6	7/30.4	0/0.0
Principal Trusts Judgment of Staff	0/0.0	0/0.0	5/21.7	12/52.2	6/26.1	0/0.0
Admin. and Staff Work to Make School Function	0/0.0	2/8.7	2/8.7	10/43.5	8/34.8	1/4.3
I Feel Accepted and Respected as a Colleague	0/0.0	0/0.0	2/8.7	17/73.9	3/13.0	1/4.3

My Work has Positive Effect on my Life	0/0.0	0/0.0	3/13.0	11/47.8	8/34.8	1/4.3
My Work gives me a Feeling of Accomplishment	0/0.0	1/4.3	1/4.3	14/60.9	6/26.1	1/4.3
This School Inspires my Best Job Performance	0/0.0	1/4.3	5/21.7	16/69.6	1/4.3	0/0.0

Student conduct/motivation

Question	SD	D	N	A	SA	NR
	n% n%	n%	n%	n%	n%	
Students Treat Each Other with Respect	0/0.0	4/17.4	5/21.7	13/56.5	0/0.0	1/4.3
Students can Work Without Being Distracted	0/0.0	6/26.1	7/30.4	9/39.1	0/0.0	1/4.3
Students are Helpful and Cooperative	0/0.0	3/13.0	5/23.7	13/56.5	1/4.3	1/4.3
Most Students Try Hard to Get Best Grades	0/0.0	8/34.8	8/34.8	6/26.1	0/0.0	1/4.3
Teachers are Rarely Interrupted by Students	0/0.0	5/21.7	8/34.8	10/43.5	0/0.0	0/0.0
Most Students are Eager to Learn as Much as They Can	0/0.0	7/30.4	11/47.8	5/21.7	0/0.0	0/0.0
Most Students Put Forth Good Effort in School Work	0/0.0	4/17.4	9/39.1	10/43.5	0/0.0	0/0.0

Teacher efficacy/professional development

Question	SD	D	N	A	SA	NR
	n% n%	n%	n%	n%	n%	
Staff Help Make Decisions Affecting School	0/0.0	2/8.7	9/39.1	9/39.1	3/13.0	0/0.0
Students Help Set School Policies	6/26.1	4/17.4	11/47.8	2/8.7	0/0.0	0/0.0
Students asked their Opinions before Decisions Made	1/4.3	7/30.4	13/56.5	1/4.3	0/0.0	1/4.3
Students are Free to Make Suggestions to Admin.	0/0.0	1/4.3	9/39.1	10/43.5	3/13.0	0/0.0
Most Parents Take an Active Part in Child's Learning	3/13.0	9/39.1	9/39.1	2/8.7	0/0.0	0/0.0
Most Parents are a Genuine Partner in Child's Learning	2/8.7	9/39.1	9/39.1	3/13.0	0/0.0	0/0.0

environment" (19/23, 83%). With regard to rules and discipline, the majority of respondents reported 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that "rules were enforced fairly" (20/23, 87%), "disciplinary procedures were fair" (20/23, 87%), and "if students broke a rule, they were disciplined" (22/23, 96%).

School leadership/collegiality. The majority of respondents also reported 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that staff worked well together to improve instruction" (20/23, 87%), "staff took academics seriously" (20/23, 87%), and "co-workers were a pleasure to work with" (23/23, 100%). Most (15/23, 65%) reported 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that "the administration treated collaborative work as a priority", that "the principal trusted staff judgment" (18/23, 78%), and that "the administration and staff worked together to make the school function" (18/23, 78%).

The majority of respondents reported 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that "staff really cared about the students" (21/23, 91%), "they felt accepted and respected as a colleague" (20/23, 87%), "their work had a positive effect on their lives" (19/23, 83%), "their work gave them a feeling of accomplishment" (20/23, 87%), and "they looked forward to work on most days" (23/23, 100%). Most reported 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that "there was an atmosphere of collegiality at the school" (15/23, 65%), and most (16/23, 70%) reported 'agree' to the statement that "this school inspired their best job performance".

Perceptions of Facility Learning Climate: Negative Perceptions

Student conduct/motivation. Only a little over half (13/23, 57%), however, reported 'agree' to the statement that "students treated each other with respect", only about 40% (9/23) reported 'agree' to the statement that "students could work without being distracted", and a little over 40% (10/23) reported 'agree' to the statement that "teachers were rarely interrupted by students". Female respondents were significantly more likely than male respondents to report 'neither strongly agree nor agree'' to the statements that "most students were helpful and cooperative with the staff" (X^2=6.688, df=2, p<.05) and that "teachers were rarely interrupted by the students" (X^2=5.247, df=2, p<.05).

Only 22% (5/23) reported 'agree' that "most students were eager to learn as much as they could", only 26% (6/23) reported 'agree' that "most students tried hard to get the best grades", and only 44% (10/23) reported 'agree' that "most students put forth good effort in school work". Female respondents were significantly (X^2=6.330, df=2, p<.05) more likely than male respondents to report 'strongly agree/agree' that "most students were helpful and cooperative with the staff".

Shared decision-making. About 40% (9/23) reported 'agree', and about 40% reported 'neither agree nor disagree', however, to the statement that "staff helped make decisions affecting the facility". Only 9% (2/23) reported 'agree' to the statement that "students helped set school priorities", only 4% (1/23) reported 'agree' that "students were asked their opinions before key school decisions were made", and a little less than half (10/23, 44%) reported 'agree' that "students were free to make suggestions to the administrators". In addition, only 9% (2/23) and 13% (3/23), respectively, reported 'agree' that "most parents took an active part in their child's learning" and that "most parents were genuine partners in their child's learning".

Facility Learning Climate: Correlations among Statements with the Highest Means

Correlation coefficients were computed among the statements with the highest mean scores in the Learning Climate section: "on most days, I looked forward to work" *(M*=4.43*, SD*=.507), followed by "there were adults at this school whom students can trust (*M*=4.43, *SD*=.590), "most of my co-workers were a pleasure to work with" (*M*=4.30, *SD*=.470), "staff really cared about students" (*M*=4.30, *SD*=.635), "I felt safe on the school grounds (*M*=4.35, *SD*=.573), and "I felt safe inside the school building" (M=4.35, *SD*=.775). Using the Bonferonni approach to control for Type I error across the correlations, a p value of less than .05 was specified for significance. The results presented in Table 2 indicate that five of the correlations were statistically significant.

In general, those respondents reporting high scores for the statement that "staff really cared about students at this school" would also tend to report high scores for "felt safe in the school building", "co-workers were a pleasure to work with", and that "there were adults at the school that students could trust". Those who reported high scores for "felt safe in the school building" also tended to report high scores for "felt safe on school grounds", and those who reported high scores for "co-workers were a pleasure to work with" also tended to report high scores for " I look forward to my work on most days".

Perceptions of Support for Learning: Positive Perceptions

Teacher efficacy. Only those who identified themselves as full-time educational faculty were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with the next set of statements concerning Support for Learning. Respondent perceptions are illustrated in Table 3. The majority of respondents reported 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that they "believed they could make a difference in student achievement" (18/21, 86%), that "they made a positive difference in students' lives" (16/21, 76%), and that "they could change their teaching approach" (16/21, 76%) or "change their teaching methods (16/21, 76%) for those not doing well in their class". In addition, the majority reported 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that "staff played a key role in in-services" (16/21, 76%) and that "in-services meet staff needs" (15/21, 71%); as well as reported "adequate resources" (16/21, 76%) such as "adequate copying services" (17/21, 81%), "adequate computers" (17/21, 81%), and "adequate classroom supplies" (16/21, 76%).

Table 2

Correlations among the Statements with the Highest Mean Scores: Learning Climate (n=23)

	Staff care Students	Feel safe building	Co-workers pleasure	Feel safe grounds	Adults kids trust	Like work most days
Staff care students		.42*	.48*	.32	.48*	.28
Feel safe building			.07	.74*	.05	.06
Co-workers pleasure				.09	-.007	.76**
Feel safe grounds					-.06	.08
Adults kids trust						.09
Like work most days		.				

*p<.05

**p<.01

Table 3

Perceptions of Support for Learning (n= 21)

Question	SD	D	N	A	SA	NR
	n% n%	n%	n%	n%	n%	
Inadequate Extracurricular Programs at School	4/19.0	11/52.4	2/9.5	1/4.8	2/9.5	1/4.8
School or Dept. Library includes Adequate Selection of Books and Periodicals	0/0.0	5/23.8	7/33.3	7/33.3	1/4.8	1/4.8
I Believe I Can Make a Difference	0/0.0	0/0.0	2/9.5	12/57.1	6/28.6	1/4.8
Staff Play a Key Role in Determining Content Of In-service Programs	0/0.0	1/4.8	3/14.3	13/61.9	3/14.3	1/4.8
Adequate Copying Equipment and Services are Available to staff	0/0.0	0/0.0	3/14.3	11/52.4	6/28.6	1/4.8
Most of the In-service Programs Deal with Issues Specific to the Needs of School's Students/Staff	0/0.0	0/0.0	5/23.8	10/47.6	5/23.8	1/4.8
Instructional Equipment is Not Adequate for My Purposes	3/14.3	10/47.6	5/23.8	1/4.8	1/4.8	1/4.8
Staff Encouraged to be Innovative	0/0.0	2/9.5	5/23.8	10/47.6	3/14.3	1/4.8
Counseling Program is a Strength	0/0.0	1/4.8	4/19.0	8/38.1	7/33.3	1/4.8
Making a Positive Difference in the Lives of Students	0/0.0	0/0.0	4/19.0	12/57.1	4/19.0	1/4.8
Adequate Opportunities to Work with Faculty Members of other Depts./Grade Levels	1/4.8	0/0.0	6/28.6	9/42.9	4/19.0	1/4.8
Resources are Adequate for My Purposes	0/0.0	1/4.8	3/14.3	13/61.9	3/14.3	1/4.8
Staff Development Programs Permit Me to Acquire Important Knowledge and Skills	0/0.0	1/4.8	7/33.3	7/33.3	5/23.8	1/4.8
Availability of Computers is Adequate	0/0.0	2/9.5	1/4.8	11/52.4	6/28.6	1/4.8
When a Student has Trouble Learning, I try a New Strategy	0/0.0	0/0.0	4/19.0	13/61.9	3/14.3	1/4.8
Classroom Supplies are Adequate	0/0.0	0/0.0	4/19.0	14/66.7	2/9.5	1/4.8
In school, Encouraged to Experiment with Teaching Methods	0/0.0	0/0.0	6/28.6	13/61.9	1/4.8	1/4.8
If Some Students in Class are Not Doing Well, I believe I should Change Teaching Approach	0/0.0	0/0.0	4/19.0	12/57.1	4/19.0	1/4.8
By Trying a Different Teaching Method, Can Significantly Affect a Student's Achievement	0/0.0	0/0.0	4/19.0	12/57.1	4/19.0	1/4.8

Perceptions of Support for Learning: Negative Perceptions

Professional development. Less than half, though, reported 'agree' to the statements that "staff were encouraged to be innovative" (10/21, 48%) and that "there were adequate opportunities for working with faculty from other departments/grades in the school" (9/21, 43%). One-third (7/21) of respondents reported 'agree' and one-third (7/21) reported 'neither agree nor disagree', however, that "in-services permitted them to acquire important skills".

Support for Learning: Correlations among Statements with the Highest Means

Correlation coefficients were computed among the statements with the highest means: "I believe I can make a difference in student achievement" (*M*=4.20, *SD*=.616), followed by "adequate copying services" (*M*=4.15, *SD*=.671), "the counseling program is strong" (*M*=4.05, *SD*=.887), "adequate availability of computers" (*M*=4.05, *SD*=.887), "if some students in my class are not doing well, I believe I should change my teaching approach" (*M*=4.00, *SD*=.649), and "by trying a different teaching method, I can significantly affect student achievement" (*M*=4.00, *SD*=.649). Using the Bonferonni approach to control for Type I error across the correlations, a *p* value of less than .05 was specified for significance. The results presented in Table 4 indicate that eight of the correlations were statistically significant.

In general, those respondents reporting high scores for "believe I make a difference in student achievement" also tend to report high scores in "the counseling program is strong", and "by changing my teaching methods, I can affect student achievement". Those who reported high scores in "adequate copying services" also tended to report high scores for "adequate in-services". In addition, those who reported high scores for "the counseling program is strong" and "adequate computers" also tended to report high scores for "if some students in my class are not doing well, I believe I should change my teaching approach" and "by trying a different teaching method, I can significantly affect student achievement". Lastly, those who reported high scores in "If some students in my class are not doing well, I believe I should change my teaching approach" also tended to report high scores for "by trying a different teaching method, I can significantly affect student achievement".

Correlation coefficients were also computed among the statements with the lowest means (Table 5): "the instructional equipment was not adequate" (*M*=2.35, *SD*= .988), "extracurricular programs were inadequate to met student needs" (*M*=2.30, *SD*=1.174), "library selection is adequate" (*M*=3.20, *SD*=.894), "staff were encouraged to be innovative" (*M*=3.70, *SD*=.865), "adequate opportunities to work with other faculty" (*M*=3.75, *SD*=.967), and 'I'm encouraged to experiment with my teaching methods" (*M*=3.75, *SD*=.550). Those who reported low scores on "staff were encouraged to be innovative" also tended to report low scores on "adequate opportunities to work with faculty from other departments/grades", and those who reported low scores on "adequate opportunities to work with faculty from other departments/grades" also tended to report low scores on "encouraged to experiment with my teaching methods".

Table 4

Correlations among the Statements with the Highest Mean Scores: Support for Learning (n=21)

	Make diff	Adq Copy	Adq in-serv	CNS strong	Adq comp	Change approach	Change methods
Make diff		-.08	.26	.66**	-.17	.40	.53*
Adq copy			.65*	.25	.25	.36	.12
Adq in-service				.33	.25	.34	.22
CNS strong					.07	.55*	.55*
Adq computers						.46*	.55*
Change teaching approach							.75*
Change teaching methods							

*p<.05

Table 5

Correlations among the Statements with the Lowest Mean Scores: Support for Learning (n=21)

	Inadq Ex-Cur	Adq Library	Inadq Equip	Encourage Innovate	Work w/other Diff depts.	Experiment Teach methods
Inadq extra-curr		-.01	.22	-.06	-.02	.04
Adq library			.39	.15	.06	.32
Inadq instruct equip				-.18	-.07	.17
Encouraged innovative					.54*	.28
Work w/others						.47*
Experiment methods						

*p<.05

Discussion

Learning climate reflects the quality of the school experience (National School Climate Center, 2010). In this case, the climate reflected the overall work environment for the educational faculty in a juvenile justice setting. Those working in the juvenile justice setting have viewed many school learning climate variables as barriers to quality education, especially poor administrative leadership, lack of safety and discipline, poor student conduct, and lack of shared decision-making (Houchins et al., 2009). Most respondents in this study, however, reported generally positive perceptions of safety and discipline (generally feel safe, perceive rules are fair, and view environment as supportive), leadership and collegiality (feel they work as teams, administration and faculty collaborate), and efficacy (feel confident in their teaching ability). On the other hand, most respondents reported negative perceptions of their professional development (in-service) opportunities, student conduct and motivation (disrespectful students, low effort from students), as well as shared decision-making (involvement in school-wide decisions).

Educational faculty perceptions related to a positive Facility Learning Climate

School safety/discipline. School safety and discipline were perceived to be associated with a positive school learning climate by the respondents. The majority of respondents from a detention facility in rural Northeast Missouri who participated in a learning climate survey seemed to agree that the learning climate for staff and students was generally physically safe and emotionally supportive, and that rules were adequately enforced. Policies that are consistently enforced improve discipline and safety at a school (Council for Exceptional Children, 2008). A caring, supportive school environment, therefore, was illustrated by the high mean scores reported school safety and discipline.

School leadership/collegiality. School leadership and staff collegiality were also perceived to be associated with a positive school learning climate by the respondents. Most respondents seemed to agree that relationships between faculty and administration were generally collegial. School leadership, teacher attitudes, and collegiality have all been associated in the literature with improved faculty work performance (Search 2006) and student academic success (Kelly, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005). Those respondents who reported high scores on school safety also reported high scores on staff collegiality as they may have felt safe enough to move beyond their content area to collaborate across disciplines with other faculty. Those who perceived low levels of school leadership, however, also seemed to perceive low levels of collegiality. Possibly, lack of strong safety and discipline policies or discipline policies not supported by school leadership would dissuade faculty from working as teaching teams. Leadership and administrative-faculty collaboration are key factors in a sound physical and psycho-social environment that leads to a positive learning climate at a school (Marx et al., 1998).

Educational faculty perceptions related to barriers to a positive Facility Learning Climate

Student conduct/motivation. Poor student conduct and motivation were perceived as barriers to a positive school learning climate by the respondents, similar to attitudes of others working in the detention setting (Houchins et al., 2009). There was less agreement that students were respectful of each other; and it seemed that disruptions and interruptions were perceived to affect the learning climate, especially by female respondents. Many respondents also did not agree that students put much effort into their class work or really cared about learning. Although academics are important, because students in this type of school setting are placed there because of family problems and other problems; academics may not really be their first priority.

Shared decision-making. Most respondents did not perceive a level of involvement and partnership by students or their parents. This agrees with previous studies citing lack of shared decision-making as a barrier to quality education in this setting (Houchins et al., 2009). The lowest mean scores were reported as student involvement in setting rules, student behavior when unsupervised, and parents as active partners. Additionally, most did not agree that students were involved in school decisions that affected them nor were parents involved as partners in their child's learning. A positive learning climate requires involvement and cooperation of all parties (Marx et al., 1998), even students and their parents.

Although involvement in all aspects of the school by faculty, students, parents, and community members is optimal, both students and parents in this type of school setting may have other problems that need their primary attention. If it becomes possible, though; it is recommended that faculty afford the students some say in class rules to encourage more 'ownership' and bonding with the school. If some rules are perceived as 'theirs', students may use positive peer pressure on each other for improved behavior and adherence to rules when not supervised by adults. Parents need to be brought into the established school partnership to become more involved in their child's learning. Faculty's use of any and all means of communication, such as telephone, parent-teacher meetings, and electronic communication could lay the foundation for such a partnership.

Implications for educational faculty in the juvenile justice setting

Since supportive policies from the administration improve discipline and safety (Council for Exceptional Children, 2008), strong school administrative leadership truly shapes the learning climate in the facility (Kelly et al., 2005). Administrators in the juvenile justice setting should create and consistently enforce administrative policies that minimize unsafe circumstances, interruptions, and distractions in order for faculty to work at their optimum level. A structured and disciplined environment leads to reductions in students' risky behaviors (National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2006) that may lead to improved classroom management by the faculty member.

Administrators in the juvenile justice setting should also support their faculty and encourage activities that promote collegiality between faculty members if they wish to increase faculty expectations for their students (Hoy et al., 2003). Those who perceive strong collegiality between faculty members seemed to exhibit higher confidence levels and higher job satisfaction levels (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993), both linked to higher student achievement (Taylor & Tashakkori, 1995). On the other hand, since poor student behaviors and lack of parental involvement are job stressors for juvenile justice staff (Houchins et al., 2004) as well as barriers to providing quality instruction to the students (Houchins et al., 2009), faculty and administration need to continue to enforce policies fairly and find ways to involve parents as partners. A parents' group or parent support group could possibly be formed to work more directly with each juvenile justice facility.

Educational faculty perceptions related to positive Support for Learning

Teacher efficacy. Teacher efficacy was perceived to be associated with positive support for learning. The majority of respondents seemed to agree that their work was relevant, that they made a positive difference, and that they looked forward to coming to work on most days. The majority of respondents also seemed to agree that they knew that they could use and even modify their teaching strategies and methods to make a positive difference in student achievement and in their students' lives.

The highest mean scores were reported in staff perception of their teaching skills and adequate instructional resources. Those who reported this high self-efficacy also tended to agree that they possessed enough instructional resources to meet student needs. Those with high self-efficacy, however, may also have viewed any level of instructional resources as adequate as they believe they could successfully teach no matter the amount or type of resources available. The physical learning conditions, such as adequate educational supplies and services, enhance the learning climate (Marx et al., 1998).

Educational faculty perceptions related to barriers to Support for Learning

Professional development. Lack of professional development opportunities was perceived as a barrier to support for learning. Some respondents did not seem to perceive adequate support for innovative teaching or to work across disciplines or departments. The lowest mean score was reported for opportunities to work with faculty from other grades/departments. Since the teachers seemed confident in their teaching skills, reported good relationships with their colleagues, and seemed quite satisfied with the physical resources available; more administrative support could be given to cross-discipline work such as thematic units, team-teaching, or newer

techniques that allow teachers to learn from each other. In-services can be focused on learning the skills to implement the latest strategies in this area.

Implications for educational faculty in the juvenile justice setting

In this study and in previous research in the juvenile justice setting (Houchins et al., 2004), teaching faculty reported high self-efficacy and high job satisfaction. A healthy school learning climate positively impacts teaching efficacy (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993) and is also an important predictor of teacher job satisfaction (Taylor & Tashakkori, 1995). If a teacher perceives high job satisfaction and high self-efficacy, they feel more confident that they can impact student achievement (Houchins et al., 2004). Faculty, though, need access to professional development activities, instructional in-services, and skill-building conferences to increase confidence in using the most appropriate teaching strategies. Learning and applying the latest innovations in such techniques as cross-disciplinary teaching will possibly improve teachers' self-efficacy. Professional development activities that focus on improving interactions and relationships between teachers and academic disciplines have been demonstrated to improve school learning climate (Price, 2008).

In addition, learning climate assessments have been recommended for traditional schools as a supplement to other types of assessments in order to improve the quality of education (Cohen et al., 2009). Since juvenile justice reform initiatives also call for evidence-based programs to address concerns (Mendel, 2007; Models for Change, n.d.), a learning climate assessment based on the 40 Developmental Assets would allow for program interventions based on "asset-building" strategies that have demonstrated effectiveness (Search Institute 2006; Search Institute, 2008). Once the assessments have been concluded, schools would plan and implement change strategies and then evaluate those interventions (Tubbs & Garner, 2008).

Innovative interventions based on the results a learning climate assessment should thrive in an environment where faculty members feel they can succeed and make a difference. Although the current study did include all members of the educational faculty population of this school facility, the small number of respondents in a specific facility makes it difficult to generalize results to other juvenile justice residential facilities. This study suggests, though, that by describing perceptions of their school's learning climate; school staff and administration can identify strengths and work to improve upon weaknesses. Since it is recommended that staff and students work cooperatively to improve learning climate, an avenue for further research is to survey the students' perceptions of the learning climate at the school; noting if their identified strengths and weaknesses were similar to the staff's descriptions. All in all, enhancing the school's physical and psychosocial surroundings leads to a healthier school environment for staff and students.

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Author Notes
Carolyn C. Cox, PhD, MCHES
Truman State University
2108 Pershing Building, Kirksville, MO 63501
ccox@truman.edu

Carolyn C. Cox is a Professor of Health Science at Truman State University in Kirksville, MO. She teaches courses in community and school health education. Her research interests focus on community-based participatory research in the areas of school and worksite health promotion.

Joseph D. Visker, PhD, CHES
Truman State University
2108 Pershing Building, Kirksville, MO 63501
jvisker@truman.edu

Joseph D. Visker is an Assistant Professor of Health Science at Truman State University in Kirksville, MO. He teaches courses in research methods and environmental health. His research interests are in human sexuality and youth sexual health.

Ashley Hartman
Truman State University
2108 Pershing Building, Kirksville, MO 63501
Abh1764@truman.edu

Ashley Hartman is an undergraduate student in Health Science at Truman State University, and her research interests include school health, youth health, and health of special populations.

Current Issues in Education
Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College • Arizona State University
PO Box 37100, Phoenix, AZ 85069, USA

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