School Climate Study in Greater Atlanta Schools of the Georgia-Cumberland Conference

Beverly Amlaner

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SCHOOL CLIMATE STUDY IN GREATER ATLANTA SCHOOLS OF THE GEORGIA-CUMBERLAND CONFERENCE

By

Beverly Amlaner

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

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ABSTRACT

School Climate Study in Greater Atlanta Schools of the Georgia-Cumberland Conference

By
Beverly Amlaner

School climate is a relevant topic for both public and private parochial schools to understand the value placed upon the school by the stakeholders. School climate studies are a critical component of effective education delivery in all school settings. The researcher was most interested in the private parochial school setting and the unique challenges facing the private Christian schools. In this study the researcher chose to use a survey previously created by the researcher to ascertain the perceptions of the students in six environments of the school setting. The survey instrument had already been validated and its reliability well established. The survey sought to discover the perceptions of the students in four schools in the greater Atlanta schools of the Georgia-Cumberland school system of Seventh-day Adventists to determine the school climate of all four schools and each school.

The focus of this quantitative study was to realize the perceptions of the students in grades three through eight with the use of the survey with six demographic questions and 60 questions with four Likert scale choices of answers. The survey consisted of six different environments to help determine the perceptions of the students in the Total Environment and the six separate

The data analysis indicated a very high positive perception of all students about all six environments of the school climate. The demographic findings indicated no significant difference in student perception for gender, ethnicity, religion at home, or family status, but language spoken at home and grade levels showed some perception differences. The student perceptions of the Spiritual Environment were considerably higher than those of all other environments. Furthermore, no toxic environment was found for any environment or component of the survey. No significant relationship was found between academic achievement and the other environments, except for in Classroom Environment in the relationship with ELA of 0.04. When looking at the composite scores of the students in relationship with the environments no significant level was found except for the Spiritual Environment with a significance level of 0.04. The Total Environment with the composite scores had a significance level of 0.51 that was above the 0.05 significance level limit.

The conclusion of this study was that the students in the four schools were very happy with all six environments surveyed about the schools. All students perceived each of the six environments and the total environment of the school with strong perceptions even if they did not do as well in the academics of school or were not necessarily high achievers. A positive feeling held by each student translates into positive feelings held by the parents.
School climate is a continual ongoing value for a school. The need to continually reassess the school climate and the specifics of the school climate are needed to create a positive private Christian school. It behooves the leaders, principals, and teachers in the GCC school system to continually reassess the perceptions of the students to better understand the school climate.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements........................................................................................................iv

Abstract..........................................................................................................................v

List of Tables....................................................................................................................xiii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION......................................................................................1

Context of the Research.................................................................................................2

Purpose of the Study.........................................................................................................4

Research Questions.........................................................................................................5

Significance of the Study.................................................................................................5

Conceptual Framework.....................................................................................................7

Operational Definitions...................................................................................................9

School Climate.................................................................................................................9

School Environment.......................................................................................................9

Student Achievement....................................................................................................10

Toxic Climate................................................................................................................10

School Climate Assessment Limitations........................................................................10

School Climate Assessment Challenges........................................................................11

Conclusion....................................................................................................................11

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW..........................................................................13

Definitions for School Climate, School Culture, and School Environment..............15

School Social Environment..........................................................................................23

School Spiritual Environment........................................................................................28
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter/Discussion</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Academic Environment</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Classroom Environment</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Environment</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Operation Environment</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Toxic Environment</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of School Climate</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Significance of Personal Perceptions</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Perceptions</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Perceptions of School Climate</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Perceptions and Academic Achievement</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Perceptions and Student Demographics</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</strong></td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settings for the Study</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Participants and Institutional Review Board</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Instrument</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical Analyses</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Demographics for the Study

Gender

Ethnicity

Language Spoken at Home

Grade Level

Religion at Home

Family Status

Research Question One

Research Question Two

Gender

Ethnicity

Language Spoken at Home

Grade Level

Religion at Home

Family Status

Research Question Three

Research Question Four

Research Question Five

Additional Findings of Student Perceptions of School Climate by School

Additional Findings for the Relationship between Student Perception of School Climate and Their Academic Achievement by School

Summary
## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Research Questions

Summary of Demographic Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Spoken at Home</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion at Home</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Status</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of Major Findings

Research Question One

Student Perception of School Climate by School

Research Question Two

Research Question Three

Research Question Four

Research Question Five

Relationship of School Climate and Student Achievement by School

Discussion

Implications

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for Educational Practitioners

Conclusions
REFERENCES .................................................................................................................................153

APPENDIX A ......................................................................................................................................177
  Student Survey ....................................................................................................................................178
  Student Survey with Directions for Administering the Survey Instrument and The Subtitles for Six Environments ..................................................................................................................182
  Student Survey Coding for Analysis ..................................................................................................186

APPENDIX B .........................................................................................................................................187
  Institutional Review Board Approval for School Climate Study .....................................................188
  Parental Consent Form .....................................................................................................................189
  Student Assent Form ........................................................................................................................191
  Request to School Boards for Surveys in Four Schools .................................................................192

APPENDIX C .........................................................................................................................................193
  Tables in Findings ...........................................................................................................................194
# LIST OF TABLES

**Table 1.** Frequency Analyses: Student Demographics ........................................ 194

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate in Each Environment and the Total Environment ........................................ 195

**Table 3A.** Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate by Gender Using Group Statistics ....................................................... 196

**Table 3B.** Independent Samples T-test: Difference in Student Perceptions of School Climate between Male and Female Students ..................... 196

**Table 4A.** Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate by Categories of Student Ethnicity ......................................................... 197

**Table 4B.** ANOVA with Post Hoc Test: Differences in Student Perceptions of School Climate on the Total Environments among Categories of Student Ethnicity ......................................................... 197

**Table 5A.** Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate by Language Spoken at Student Home ...................................................... 198

**Table 5B.** ANOVA with Post Hoc Test: Differences in Student Perceptions of School Climate on the Total Environments among Categories of Language Spoken at Student Home ...................................................... 198

**Table 5C.** ANOVA Post Hoc Test: Differences in Student Perceptions of School Climate among Categories of Language Spoken at Student Home Using Multiple Comparisons of the Total Environments .............. 199
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6A</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate by Grade Level</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6B</td>
<td>ANOVA with Post Hoc Test: Differences in Student Perceptions of School Climate among Categories of Student Grade Level</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6C</td>
<td>ANOVA Post Hoc Test: Differences in Student Perceptions of School Climate among Categories of Student Grade Level by Using Multiple Comparisons of the Total Environments</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7A</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate by Religion</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7B</td>
<td>ANOVA with Post Hoc Test: Differences in Student Perceptions of School Climate by Categories of Student Religion Using the Total Environments</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8A</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate by Student Family Status Using Total Environment</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8B</td>
<td>Independent Samples T-test: Difference in Student Perceptions of School Climate between Single Parent Families and Two Parent Families</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9A</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of the Spiritual Environment Compared with Their Perceptions of the Other Five School Environments</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9B</td>
<td>ANOVA with Post Hoc Test: Differences in Student Perceptions of the School Climate among the Six School Environments</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9C. ANOVA Post Hoc Test: Differences in Student Perceptions of the School Climate between Spiritual Environment and Each of the Other Five School Environments ......................................................... 205

Table 10. Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate by Survey Item and by Each of the Six Environments ......................... 206

Table 11. Pearson Correlation: Relationship between the Student Perceptions of the School Climate and their Academic Achievement ................. 208

Table 12A. Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate in Each Environment and the Total Environment of School 1 ................... 210

Table 12B. Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate in Each Environment and the Total Environment of School 2 ................... 211

Table 12C. Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate in Each Environment and the Total Environment of School 3 ................... 212

Table 12D. Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate in Each Environment and the Total Environment of School 4 ................... 213

Table 13A. Descriptive Statistics: Relationship between the Student Perceptions of the School Climate and their Academic Achievement for School 1 ........................................................................................................ 214

Table 13B. Pearson Correlation: Relationship between the Student Perceptions of the School Climate and their Academic Achievement for School 1 ........................................................................................................ 214
Table 13C. Descriptive Statistics: Relationship between the Student Perceptions of the School Climate and their Academic Achievement for School 2.................................................................215

Table 13D. Pearson Correlation: Relationship between the Student Perceptions of the School Climate and their Academic Achievement for School 2................................................................................215

Table 13E. Descriptive Statistics: Relationship between the student Perceptions of the School Climate and their Academic Achievement for School 3................................................................................216

Table 13F. Pearson Correlation: Relationship between the Student Perceptions of the School Climate and their Academic Achievement for School 3................................................................................216

Table 13G. Descriptive Statistics: Relationship between the Student Perceptions of the School Climate and their Academic Achievement for School 4................................................................................217

Table 13H. Pearson Correlation: Relationship between the Student Perceptions of the School Climate and their Academic Achievement for School 4................................................................................217
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The climate of a school and school system is of utmost importance to continually be reevaluated and understood from the perspective of the students. Freiberg (1999) suggested school climate was “like the air we breathe - it tended to go unnoticed until something was seriously wrong,” and then something must be done to repair the damage (p. 1). School climate needs to ascertain that students are learning well and thereby directly affecting the satisfaction of the parents. Preble and Gordon (2011) described school climate as the “heart and soul of school success” (p. 12). The value of a healthy school climate is important to the success and future of the school and school system.

Private schools have the added dimension that parents have the choice to send their students to private schools, and as such, it is essential that parents feel their child is receiving the best possible education in the school of attendance. Barth (2002) suggested the school’s culture had more influence on the life of a student than a president, or even the principal, teachers, and parents. The accountability of the school climate through a variety of assessments is necessary in better understanding the students’ perspectives of the school climate. Mitchell, Bradshaw, and Leaf (2010) found academic achievement and less discipline concerns were achieved with favorable school climate. School climate studies are significant to understanding the value of a school as pertaining to student achievement and school quality (Ding, Liu, & Berkowitz, 2011).
Context of the Research

The research for this dissertation was conducted in four private parochial schools in the greater Atlanta area in the Georgia-Cumberland Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GCC). The GCC school system encompasses 39 schools from kindergarten through eighth grade, high schools, and a university. The GCC school system is under the umbrella of the Southern Union of Seventh-day Adventists (SU) education, then the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists education, and ultimately, the worldwide leadership of schools through the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GC). The availability of private parochial education as an alternative choice for education to students and parents is of utmost importance to the mission of the Seventh-day Adventists worldwide education systems.

In today’s financial environment, independent schools must assess the school climate so as to maintain current enrollment and expand by obtaining new students. The different environments of the school climate as realized by each student stakeholder are vital to be understood and acknowledged by the school. The contribution to the literature with this dissertation was to give the private parochial schools in the GCC school system and nationwide an awareness of school climate, and a survey instrument to discover what the students believe and feel about the school of attendance. The aim was for students in the four schools in grades three through eight to share how they feel in a nonthreatening manner about the school through the closed-ended non-identifiable survey instrument.

Leaders or teachers may not realize a toxic school climate has taken hold of a school and the results are the loss of students and revenue to operate the school.
Peterson (2002) stated, “School culture is the set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the ‘persona’ of the school” (p. 1). A private parochial school must keep the students and parents satisfied or they will look for another pleasing engaged school environment. The persona of the school is the feeling that the students or parents sense about the school. The value of using the closed-ended survey is knowledge gained about the students’ impressions of the school as a whole and the value placed upon the six different environments determined by the survey instrument. The knowledge gained from an individual school or the four school will help the administrators, school boards, and teachers better understand what is good and what needs to be changed at the school or schools.

Seventh-day Adventist private parochial education has been a big part of the life of the researcher for this dissertation. The private Christian education obtained by the researcher went through all the years of education through the Master’s degree in several nations around the world and the United States. The professional teaching and teacher or principal leadership career has been in the same private parochial system in the U.S. Through the years of teaching and leadership a shift has been noted from all children from Adventist homes attending Adventist schools to parents now choosing which private parochial or public school to send their children. Unfortunately, some Adventist schools have closed for a lack of students or downsized due to a lesser number of students attending the school. As a result, a great burden was felt by the researcher to help schools ascertain what is being done well and what should be addressed to improve.
The climate of a school is of utmost importance to continually be reevaluated and understood from the perspective of the students. As a result, during the Educational Specialist (Ed. S.) classes a survey was developed, validated, and found reliable by the researcher of this dissertation to use as the tool for the doctoral research. The instrument covered six environments to also include the spiritual component, which was part of the private parochial school curriculum. The contribution to the literature in completing this dissertation study was to give the private parochial schools in the Adventist school systems nationwide and other private parochial schools an awareness of school climate, and a survey instrument to discover what the students believe and feel about the school of attendance. The aim was for the students to share how they feel in a nonthreatening manner about the school through the closed-ended non-identifiable survey instrument. The school then may analyze and use the data to improve the areas indicated by the survey and continue in the areas found to have high value. The understanding of school climate is of great importance for the continuance and operation of the private parochial schools.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to scrutinize how the students perceived the climate of the greater Atlanta area private parochial schools in the GCC school system and to investigate if student demographic data had impact upon the students’ perceptions. The study assessed the students’ perceptions in six different environments with an emphasis of the comparison of the Spiritual Environment with the other five environments. The research evaluated the analyses to help
determine if the student perceptions indicated a positive or toxic environment as a whole or in one or more of the six environments. A related issue investigated the possible relationship between student achievement scores and school climate.

**Research Questions**

Based upon the purpose of this study to better understand the student perceptions to determine the school climate, the following research questions were formulated to guide this study. The research questions were:

1. What are the student perceptions of the school climate as described in the six environments?
2. Do student demographic backgrounds make any difference in their perceptions of the school climate?
3. How are the student perceptions of the Spiritual Environment compared with their perceptions of the other five school environments?
4. Is there a toxic school climate as perceived by the students in all environments or within one or more of the environments?
5. Is there any relationship between student perceptions of the school climate and the academic achievement?

**Significance of the Study**

The understanding of school climate in private parochial schools is lacking in the literature. School climate has been of interest to schools, school systems, and educators for over 100 years (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009a). School climate is extremely important to understand and embrace, as parents have choices as to where to send their children to school, whether public education or private
school systems. In addition, parents have many choices within the private school systems or private parochial schools. As such, the climate of the school and school system is extremely important to educators in planning for education of the students. Private schools have the added dimension of tuition or some type of remuneration that is required for attendance at the school. Thus maintaining a healthy school climate is of utmost importance to the school to sustain student enrollment, entice new students, and grow the student population of the school.

The findings of this study were to help the schools, the teachers, the principals, school boards, and the superintendents to better understand what was being done well and what needed improvement at their schools. The data was analyzed within six different environments of the life of a student in the GCC schools from the survey. From the findings a determination was made to better gauge the student perceptions of whether the school had a toxic school climate. If determination was made with low scores on the analyses, then the analyses helped determine whether the toxic school climate pervaded the entire six environments of the school, or whether the toxic environment was found within one or more specific environments. If a toxic climate was found, then the principal and leadership of the school can use the data analyses for indicated areas of changes within the environment or environments for a better-perceived school climate for the student. The perceptions of the students are of value in future planning for each school and will give a knowledge base for other private parochial schools.
**Conceptual Framework**

School climate study is of great value to schools to understand and embrace in gaining knowledge to improve the school. School climate studies have been conducted in a variety of ways, including different variables, methodologies, theories, and models (Anderson, 1982). The problem with defining school climate was difficult due to the variety of ways teachers, principals, and researchers used the terminology. Hoy and Miskel, (2005) suggested that school climate was “the set of internal characteristics that distinguished one school from another and influenced the behaviors of each school’s members” (p. 185). Cohen et al. (2009a) referred to school climate as “the quality and character of school life” (p. 182). Caglayan (2013) suggested that school climate was one of the characteristics to determine “how effective a school functions” (p. 1).

The conceptual framework of this study was based upon school climate as discussed by the researchers, Cohen et al. (2009a) and Caglayan (2013). Cohen et al. discussed school climate within different environments or aspects of school life, such as safety, teaching and learning, relationships with other teachers or students, and the environment of the school building. The researchers suggested that the quality and the experiences of school life helped determine the perceptions of the students. The schools are made up of many students that create a group experience, rather than just one student’s experience.

Cohen et al. (2009a) suggested that school climate affected student learning for the positive or negative. Studies from the 1970s and forward argued that if students felt safe and well cared for then learning was improved (Brookover &
Lezotte, 1979; Freiberg, 1999; Rutter, 1983; and Whitlock, 2006). Caglayan (2013) provided insight into existing school climate as perceived by both students and teachers in private and public schools. Within the students’ perceptions determination was found the students’ perceptions indicated enjoyment in learning, active participation in class activities, and a feeling of safety at the school. Caglayan found these positive school environment perceptions of the students to align with other studies in which school climate had significant relationship to academic learning, and social and emotional well being (Kuperminc, Leadbetter, Emmons, & Blatt, 1997; Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000).

Caglayan (2013) indicated a healthy learning environment created positive perceptions by the students for learning. Further, Caglayan found students’ perceptions of the school climate were more positive in smaller schools than larger schools within the public schools. The research was based upon both public and private schools. The private school students’ perceptions of the school climate were not as high as the public school. The researcher suggested this was due to the higher expectations within the private schools. Caglayan concluded that school climate was an essential part of today’s schools. Schools cannot rely upon tradition or the old way of doing things, but rather must “define its climate in order to discover the factors that could either hinder or improve school effectiveness. Understanding school climate is important to maximize the effectiveness of development initiatives” (p. 111).

The researcher for this dissertation took the inspiration and ideas from many researchers, but especially Cohen et al. (2009a) and Caglayan (2013) as a basis for
inspiration for the current study. The choice was made to evaluate the school climate in the greater Atlanta area schools in the GCC school system. The schools are all private parochial schools with the uniqueness of a spiritual component added to the curriculum. The researcher had developed a survey that included six environments, including the Spiritual Environment to better understand the perception of each environment. From the evaluation the desire was to determine how the school was perceived as a whole by the students in third through eighth grades, as individual students in one school, to compare one school to another school, or individual students in one school to another school. In addition, the perceptions of the students were examined to find how behavior and assessment were impacted by the school climate. In sum, the intention was to find the students' ratings of school climate as evidence to determine whether the school environment was a place the students wanted to go to school.

**Operational Definitions**

**School Climate.** A definition for school climate varied greatly depending on the different quantitative studies. For the sake of this study, school climate was defined as the feeling a stakeholder, such as a student or teacher, had toward a school or school district. School climate was the actual working together of all aspects of a school for a safe environment to teach and learn for both the teachers and students.

**School Environment.** School environment for this study related to the school setting and the influences upon six different facets of the school as pertaining
to the students. The six environments in this study were the Social, the Spiritual, the Academic, the Classroom, the Home, and the School Operations Environments.

**Student Achievement.** Student achievement was defined in this study as the standing of a student’s knowledge, understandings, and skills at any point of learning in a student’s education. The measure of knowledge, understandings, and skills was indicated by their attained results in standardized tests. The standardized test used in this study was the Iowa Assessment that included test areas of English language arts (ELA), math, science, social studies, and the composite scores.

**Toxic Climate.** A toxic school climate definition for this research was a school where negative feelings and perceptions pervaded the teachers’ attitudes and thoughts. The teachers had an attitude of stagnation and fear to speak anything positive or give new ideas for change for fear of the distrust among the other teachers or reprisals for suggestions to improve the school setting. Any type of celebration of student accomplishment was frowned upon with negativism and refusal to waste the time or effort.

**School Climate Assessment Limitations**

The survey was given to students in grades three through eight in four different schools in the GCC school system in the greater Atlanta area. The surveys were given to 171 students in these four schools. The school climate assessment limitation was that this number of 171 surveys was a sampling from some of the larger schools in the GCC school system of 39 different schools. In addition, the desire to learn from this sampling of data for the greater number of Seventh-day
Adventist schools and private parochial schools across North America may have limitations due to different demographic data found in the variety of school settings.

**School Climate Assessment Challenges**

The school climate assessment challenges were in the reliance the researcher had upon the other schools to help the researcher obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) signatures from all parents for students to take the survey. Another challenge was for the researcher to maintain a comparable method of giving the surveys to all students in different classrooms, schools, and with different teachers. The desire was for the researcher to maintain continuity throughout the survey by each student in grades three through eight at each location.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this study were to help educators better understand the perceptions of the students on the value of private parochial school education in these four schools. It will help shape the future growth of the GCC schools in better understanding the positive and negative factors involved in the schools and school system. Hinde (2004) suggested it was essential to understand school climate in order to create a reform initiative. The potential use of the survey instrument in the GCC school system will be a promising value to each individual school.

School climate is extremely important to understand and embrace in today’s society where parents have many choices as to where to send their children to school. The value of the survey instrument in the current research study was to understand and evaluate the thoughts and feelings of the students. The school climate was a key factor in comprehending how well students were learning and
thereby directly affecting the satisfaction of parents. A balance was maintained with the teachers feeling satisfied as well as the administrators with a direct result of an increased learning environment. When these aforementioned factors were in sync, a balanced community was achieved where students felt healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged (Cohen, 2006).

The National School Climate Council (2007) stated, “Positive school climate needs to be actively created and sustained by members of the student, parent, and school personnel groups in school, and supported by the community at large” (p. 5). This statement behooves the school leadership to continue assessing the actual school climate as perceived by the students and to improve or change in an ongoing process to meet the challenges for a sustained positive school climate. The positive school climate reinforced the value placed upon the school by the students enrolled in the school and their parents, the students and parents looking for a private parochial school option for education, and for the stakeholders of the greater school community.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

School climate has been of interest to schools, school systems, and educators for over 100 years (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009a). School climate studies have been conducted in a variety of ways and have included examination of different variables, methodologies, theories, and models (Anderson, 1982). The historical review of school climate up through the 1980s contained over 200 references to assist with analyzing the current school climate literature and to discover common findings. Ashby and Krug (1998) determined in the late 1990s that the biggest challenge with defining school climate was the variety of ways teachers, principals, and researchers used the terminology.

The study of school climate has changed significantly since the 1950s with the beginning of organizational climate (Argyris, 1958) research to the 1960s and 1970s with socioeconomic and race studies (Coleman et al., 1966; Hauser, 1970; McDill, Meyers, & Riugsby, 1967), and in the late 1970s with a focus on student outcomes as related to school climate (Zullig, Koopman, Patton, & Ubbes, 2010). One of the earlier approaches of school climate quality study in the 1980s was the appreciative inquiry (M. Tschannen-Moran & B. Tschannen-Moran, 2011) as a methodology for organizational research for motivating organizational change to transform systems to be used as a catalyst for a different course. The organizational culture began in the 1980s with emphasis on a leader of an organization to direct the culture of the organization (Ouchi, 1981; Peters & Waterman, 1982).
In the 1990s, the term “climate” was used frequently, yet there was only a modest amount of agreement on its meaning (Hoy & Tarter, 1992). In the same time period, school climate studies were conducted to gain a greater understanding of the safety of schools (Cushing, Horner, & Barrier, 2003). Quality in the lives of the students in education was also included. During this time, violence and school shootings started to become of great concern and the violent acts created a challenge for maintaining quality education and atmosphere for both the students and educators.

Hoy and Tarter (1992) discussed another shift in the research that included the development of a survey to measure the health of the school climate. Hoy and Tarter suggested that a healthy school climate linked with a purpose for achievement created an environment where students were committed to performing at their best-measured success. This represented a shift in focus on school climate as a measure of the whole school to focus primarily on the interaction between the students and teacher in the classroom (Zullig et al., 2010). Since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 attention focused on the school climate aspects of achievement and safety (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008). More recently school climate studies highlighted the environmental factors that created a positive school climate (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009).

School climates are complex issues that include multiple facets of the school. School climate may involve discussions in the teacher lounge, the noise level in the hallways, the physical structure of the building to the level of the heat, the colors of the paint on the walls, the comfort of the restrooms, the type of discipline used with
the students, the interactions between and among the students and teachers, as well as many other school climate related issues (Freiberg, 1998). No one single factor determines school climate. The different entities of the school interact together to “create a fabric of support,” (p. 22) that allows all persons in the school community to work together for optimal learning. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) suggested that school climate was like an unwritten mission statement of the school for the students and staff to know the purpose of the school. The aforementioned articles inaugurated the overview of the use of school climate studies to ascertain the perceived value of the school and its entities to the stakeholders, students, teachers, parents, school board members, and the greater community.

Definitions for School Climate, School Culture, and School Environment

The terminologies “school climate,” “school culture,” and “school environment” appeared to have multiple meanings, depending upon the working definition of each research study. At times the three terminologies were similar or overlapping in context, and other times the terminologies were used in very different ways. Definitions for these words were numerous and diverse, yet no definition from anthropology existed (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). The operational definition of various aspects of school climate, school culture, or school environment utilized in this literature review shifted depending on how the definition was used by the authors of each of the research papers. Definitions included the feelings felt about a school by the stakeholders as they entered, worked, or were educated within the school. Wooley (2007) said school climate was how a school made students, teachers, and families feel about a school. Snyder and Dillow (2013)
defined school climate as “the social system and culture of the school, including the
organizational structure of the school and values and expectations within it” (p. 772). Hoy and Miskel (2005) described organizational structure as a “system of
shared orientations that hold the unit together and give it a distinctive identity” (p. 165). Nwankwo (1979) perceived the climate as an overall “we-feeling” that
expressed the shared life in the school (p. 268). Peterson (2002) described school
culture as the way “people think, feel, and act” (p. 10), whereas Preble and Gordon
(2011) described school climate as the “heart and soul of school success” (p. 12).
Freiberg and Stein (1999) used a similar definition of school climate as “the heart
and soul of the school” (p. 11). Freiberg (1999) compared school climate to the “air
we breathe,” (p. 1) for if it was ignored until there was a problem, then something
had be done to repair the damage. Another description of school climate was
described as a “common sense that how we feel matters” (Cohen et al., 2009a; p. 2).
Deal and Peterson (1999) suggested school culture was an “underground flow of
feelings and folkways [that] wends its way within schools” (p. 3) and Adeogun and
Olisaemeka (2011) stated that climate referred to “the atmosphere in an
organization” (p. 552).

The National School Climate Council (2007) referred to school climate as “the
quality and character of school life... based on patterns of people’s experience of
school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching
and learning practices, and organizational structures” (p. 5). Many researchers
accepted this definition, while others created their own definitions based upon the
study. Barth (2002) had a similar definition of school climate, but enlarged upon the
descriptive list of characteristics to include beliefs, behaviors, ceremonies, traditions, and myths. Barth stated this meaning was “deeply ingrained to the very core of the organization” (p. 6) to exercise significant power to determine what people thought about the school and how they behaved at school. Peterson’s (2002) list was similar to the aforementioned lists with the “set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies, symbols and stories that made up the ‘persona’ of the school” (p. 10). Healthy school climate was described by Haynes (1996) as a goal to pursue or an ideal for a school to strive towards. A healthy school climate helped students have healthy development and provided the means for the students to have effective social and intellectual skills to give the support to the student to thrive and survive. School climate was not reached all at once and then left stagnant, but rather school climate was a dynamic process that included a continued effort of working toward the goal (Hansen & Childs, 1998). The state departments of education and school districts realized the significant value of school climate (Cohen, Fege, & Pickeral, 2009b). Yet many states did not define school climate, and if a state defined school climate, many times the definition was limited only to school safety. The concern for school climate has become a “buzzword” that leaders and teachers use effortlessly, yet the meanings are so strikingly different (Hoy & Tarter, 1992).

Zullig et al. (2010) were the first to use balanced historical measurements with modern structural equation modeling. The authors examined the existing school climate literature to endeavor to establish a historical definition of school climate and found five common school climate domains among many researchers
and authors. The five common domains identified included: 1) order, safety, and discipline; 2) academic outcomes; 3) social relationships; 4) school facilities; and 5) school connectedness. Cohen’s (2006) review of literature had created a list of four key dimensions that defined school climate. The four dimensions included: 1) safety; 2) teaching and learning; 3) relationships; and 4) environmental-structural, such as, adequate space, cleanliness, aesthetic quality, and curricular and extracurricular school offerings. In a later review of the literature Cohen et al. (2009a) described positive school climate as related to academic achievement, the success of schools, the prevention of violence, the healthy development of students, and the retention of teachers.

School climate is not just one individual’s experience, but rather the experiences of the group of people connected to the school. Haynes, Emmons, and Ben-Avie, (1997) outlined fifteen key elements of a strong healthy school climate. The elements were “achievement motivation, collaborative decision making, equity and fairness, general school climate, order and discipline appropriateness, parent involvement, school-community relations, staff dedication to student learning, staff expectations, leadership, school building, sharing of resources, caring and sensitivity, student interpersonal relations, and student-teacher relations” (pp. 326-327). School climate has many influences that make it multidimensional in nature (Koth et al., 2008). Multiple aspects of a school created the different influences or dimensions of school climate. As such, Marshall (2004) believed school climate was multi-dimensional and influenced many stakeholders.
Some authors or researchers only used the terminology “school culture,” but not “school climate.” Recepoglu (2013) discussed school culture in the context as the guidance of the whole school population in either a positive or negative means that led to either support or hindrance of the school. Peterson and Deal (1998) suggested school culture as powerful and difficult to define in schools, and yet was overlooked or simply taken for granted, despite being so meaningful to the school. Character Education Partnership (2010) viewed positive school culture as the very “cornerstone of good schools” (p. 1) and the foundation to bring about school improvement as needed. Finnan (2000) recognized that culture was all around us to help give meaning to our world, and that it was understood, yet not necessarily acknowledged or noticed and explained that culture was the “lubricant of our lives” (p. 6). Halpin and Croft (1963) used the analogy that “personality is to the individual what climate is to the organization” (p. 1). School reform attempts to change a school, or more specifically, change the culture of a school (Finnan, Schnepel, & Anderson, 2003). Muhammad (2010) suggested that healthy school cultures took ownership for their problems. Their language was “prescriptive as opposed to descriptive” (p. 2). Different definitions of school culture were presented, yet the inescapable reality was that school culture was intangible and difficult to describe (Hinde, 2004).

In some cases, the descriptions of school climate and school culture were very similar in meaning between researchers. Snyder and Dillow (2013) stated the definition for school climate as both the social system and the culture of a school and included the organizational structure and values of the school. Reichers and
Schneider (2011) portrayed organizational climate as the shared perceptions of the policies, practices, and procedures of the school. Forehand and Gilmer (1964) believed organizational climate included a set of characteristics to differentiate an organization from other organizations, lasted over time, and had influence on the behavior of the persons in the organization. Not dissimilarly, Hansen and Childs (1998) discussed a desirable culture where encouragement, warmth, support, and acceptance were found among both the students and teachers. When a stakeholder visited this type of school, the individual experiences a positive emotion when exiting the building, as the climate indicated students were treated with unconditional positive regard from teachers who were perceived as dedicated and sincere.

Positive school climate may be created at a school, but must be a continuous and ongoing process towards achieving the goals set for the school. Emmons (1992) reasoned that school climate was the frequency and quality of the interactions between the teachers and the students that influenced self-concept and behavior. Lightfoot (1983) purported that positive school climate presented itself as a good place to be with purpose and goals, as evidenced in the student and teacher relationships. Freiberg (1998) told how school climate could be a positive inspiration to the learning environment of the school, yet may also be a detrimental barrier to learning. A positive school climate was a school with nurturing that promoted achievement and productivity among the students and teachers (Villani, 1999). The school was a second home for students to feel welcomed, comfortable, well ordered, and feel the positive attitude and love held by all the persons in the
school building. Haynes et al. (1997) determined that school climate involved the interactions of everyone at school, the feeling of trust among all persons at school, and the respect that was held by the stakeholders in the community for the school. Bryk and Schneider (2003) determined that trust grew through daily interactions.

The terminologies of school climate and school culture have somewhat different or very different meanings to different researchers. Schein (2004) delineated school culture as a deeper meaning of expectations in the organizational school climate. Hoy, Tarter, and Kottkamp (1991) distinguished between climate and culture, with organizational climate viewed from the psychological perspective, as compared to school culture viewed from an anthropological perspective. Climate was described by Hoy (1990) as the behavior of its members that distinguished one school from another, whereas culture was viewed through the values and norms of the school to give a distinctive identity. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2012) discussed organizational climate in light of practical culture and change as noted through balancing theory with research. Organizational climate impacted the individual and the productivity of the person; conversely, organizational culture gave meaning and value to the events at the school (Furnham & Goodstein, 1997).

School environment was used to describe the school climate, however, at times the words were interchanged. The definition of school climate by Cohen et al. (2009b) defined schools as quality environments for students to experience the nurture and support from the school to prepare them for their future work, their ability to love, and their contribution and participation in the future changes of democracy. Cohen et al. further described school climate as a “practical and realistic
strategy that recognizes the essential social, emotional, and civic as intellectual dimensions of learning and school life” (p. 5).

The school climate or culture of private Christian schools was guided with another dimension of the spiritual that differed from public education. Bathersby (1992) told how the whole atmosphere of the private Christian school included a culture of shared faith. Buetow (1988) included spiritual atmosphere as part of the school climate of a private Christian school. The culture of private Christian schools embodied Christ in the relationships of the stakeholders with emphasis on Christian witness (Mills, 2003). The private Christian schools, such as the Catholic schools, viewed the school climate as the atmosphere to maintain the Catholic ethos (Dorman, 1999). Catholic schools desired to provide integrative, faith-based education of the whole child (Frabutt, Clark, & Speech, 2011). Skelly (2012) discussed school culture using the word ethos that included the ecclesial, social, and education contexts of Catholic schools.

As discussed, depending on the operational definition of each unique research study, school climate, school culture, or school environment may have similar meanings or somewhat different meanings. As such, in this literature review, the meanings of school climate were varied and yet carried somewhat of a similar theme as a way for schools to give the perception of value to all stakeholders. School climate surrounded and involved all levels of the stakeholders, including the student, teachers, leaders, and parents. Freiberg (1999) stated that school climate “creates the fabric of support that enable members of the school community to teach and learn at their optimum levels” (p. 10). The long-term change in a school was
made up of the little day-to-day tasks and interactions that took place in the school and classrooms. Jerald (2006) described school climate as the feeling of vibrancy upon entering an excellent school where a sense of purpose pervaded. The students felt confidence, the teachers indicated professionalism, and the teacher-student relationships were positive. Jerald likened school climate to the weather, as it seemed to “exist beyond direct human control” (p. 2). Freiberg (1998) spoke about moving forward and following the signposts along the journey to measure the school climate. Freiberg equated the analogy of the signposts as the inspirations for educational change. The signposts were dotted along the way and were used for direction and guidance to facilitate change and improve the overall school climate.

**School Social Environment**

The school Social Environment was made up of the relationships between and among the students, teachers, leader, parents, and all the stakeholders. The Social Environment was the overall interaction of relationships held by the various stakeholders within the school (Adeogun & Olisaemeka, 2011). Cohen (2006) discussed the desire of Americans to experience happiness, a positive human emotion and stated that the social-emotional abilities gave “an essential foundation for many, if not all, aspects of pleasure, engagement, and meaning” (pp. 203-204). Unselfish actions of the stakeholders created an atmosphere of pleased students. People who were happy were more socially involved, engaged, and had a sense of purpose in life (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). It was imperative to have a friendly school climate for the continued development of the school and positive engagement of each student (Character Education Partnership, 2010). Brennan
(2015) discussed the necessity of building a trust relationship between the students and teachers to increase learning among students. The teachers were trained to understand the positive benefits of social learning among the students to create active engagement in school. A positive school climate was a school where students felt valued and welcomed so they had a sense of ownership in their school, and their relationships and behavior worked together for excellence. The National School Climate Council (2007) included the social aspect in their school climate definition, “A sustainable, positive school climate... includes... expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe” (p. 5).

Brookover et al. (1978), and Anderson (1982) found concern that many of the studies of school climate only focused on a few aspects of the school climate of a school. In contrast, Brookover et al. studied the school as a meaningful social unit for the analysis of the social climate. The study used two school composition variables, a dependent variable, and random school samples to facilitate a greater knowledge of the school level climate. Duke and Perry (1978) felt that rapport between the teachers and students created positive behavior. Studies (Cohen et al., 2009b; Cohen & Geier, 2010) suggested that there was value in a combined assessment of the school climate that included the growth and sustainability of the learning, social, emotional, and ethical, and engagement of the students in the school. Ashby and Krug (1998) discussed how the emotions and attitudes within the school climate impacted the social development of the students.

A definition of the student social climate involved the way students related to one another within the social rules of a school (Cushing et al., 2003). Cunningham
(2007) and Kuperminc et al. (1997) found greater social adjustment and less behavioral issues in schools with positive school climates. Stakeholders, including teachers and students, who had high expectations for one another infused commitment, respect, and focus as strengths in their social interactions (Onoye, 2004). Marshall (2004) defined characteristics that influenced the educational experience of students; included in the list were feelings of respect and trust for students and teachers. A strengths-based focus was used in a research project that found trust was foundational to lifetime learning (M. Tschannen-Moran & B. Tschannen-Moran, 2011). As a result of the safety and respect students felt by the shared trust in each other and the teacher, the learners were willing to take the risks required for learning in the classroom and school.

According to Whitlock (2006), school connectedness included trust, caring, and respect for each other within the social school environment. Mutual respect and cooperation by the students for one another in the classroom were determined to be positive engagements by the students in the 15 powerful learning environment concepts defined by Finnan et al. (2003). The concept included concern and politeness for everyone, and celebrated learning successes. Freiberg (1998) noted teachers were viewing videotaped focus student groups in the in-service meetings. Teachers and students had proactively said “thank you” to each other which appeared to make a difference in the lives of the students, as evidenced by the tearful emotional responses of students in the focus groups stating the difference the positive words had made in their lives.
Positive school climates acknowledged the progress and celebrated the student accomplishments through ceremonies and rituals to communicate to the students their value and worth (Peterson, 2002). Wang and Holcombe (2010) found students had positive identification as a result of the teacher praise and emphasis on student effort. This type of social school environment lent itself to students feeling successful and valued (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Whitlock (2006) indicated students needed affirmation through subtly shared valued information about themselves from their teachers.

Schools were the social meeting place for students from the beginning of their education in schools with pre-kindergarten or kindergarten through the elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and for some on to college or graduate degrees. For many, students moved from childhood to early adulthood within the school structural setting (Freiberg, 1999). The social needs of the students needed to be met to keep from having the universal schooling problems of boredom, truancy, drug abuse, or a feeling of passing through the classrooms as a “tourist” (Freiberg, 1996; p. 36). This need had to be met to engage the students as active learners in the classrooms (Freiberg, 1996; Freiberg, 1999). Students in the adolescent years of their lives made rapid changes in their physical, emotional, and social development and needed the support of the schools in these transition years (Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, & Feinman, 1994). In a school that had a community climate and human interactions that embraced the love of humanity, students appreciated working together for the common good of a team to create interdependent relationships (Villani, 1999). These relationships nurtured the
emotional and social traits in the development of the students to adulthood.

Children needed to be nurtured and loved, felt like they belonged, have a sense of safety, and a fulfillment of power to be ready learners.

The negative interactions in a toxic school environment created a place of difficulty for students who desired to learn and excel; for example, Barth (2002), discussed the negative consequences of students who had to study over the weekend or learn with peer punishment for disturbing the cultural taboos. Deal and Peterson (1998) discussed the number one concern in a toxic situation when teachers blamed the students for the problems of the school and the social interactions were all negative and hostile. Students sensed a toxic school by the negative values and hopelessness that abounded throughout the classroom and school (Peterson & Deal, 1998). The lack of discipline led to negative factors affecting the school Social Environment, such as, bullying and peer-to-peer harassment (Preble & Gordon, 2011). This type of stress created a Social Environment where students felt unsafe physically and emotionally.

In the private Christian school sector the school Social Environment included a holistic manner of education and learning (Frabutt et al., 2011). In a study about Catholic schools, it was postulated that students may not reach their full academic level without the social, emotional, and psychological needs met. Mills (2003) discussed the culture of a Christian school that included the interpersonal relationships within a climate of love that originated with God. All members of the structural organization of the school were members of the body of Christ with a Christ-centered vision in “dynamic action” (p. 133). Each member of the school,
including the students, had a spiritual contribution to the community. Wighting and Liu (2009) suggested that the personal religious beliefs and commitment of the students was more important than the academic school education. School connectedness gave the students a sense of belonging with a shared faith, hope, and tolerance (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Skelly (2012) found the private Christian education in the Catholic settings had an inclusive learning environment as a guide for the positive social interactions of the students.

The school social relationships of the students formed the “lens through which each student viewed all other activities at school” (Preble & Gordon, 2011; p. 15). Freiberg (1996) suggested that school climate was all about relationships within the school with the leader, teachers, students, or students to their peers. It was very important that each person treat each other appropriately. As such, positive social and emotional development efforts for all students created success in the school Social Environment in schools (Zullig et al., 2010).

**School Spiritual Environment**

The school Spiritual Environment in private Christian schools entailed the spiritual growth of a student, the student’s comfort of prayer in the classrooms and school, the Christian faith shared in school by the students and teachers, the use and learning of the Bible stories in religious training classes, and the value placed upon private Christian education by the student and family (Vatanartiran, 2013). The identity of a private school as known by the school climate and held by the teachers, students, and parents indicated the commitment the stakeholders had for the private school. Wighting and Liu (2009) studied the relationship between the
paradigms of religious commitment and the individual student’s sense of the private Christian school community. A positive correlation was found between the feeling of community and Christian commitment in the private Christian school research. A community feeling of belonging with the shared spiritual faith maintained in a Christian school tied the commitment of students and members together (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). McMillan (1996) added to the spiritual community involvement to determine that community was the “spark of friendship that becomes the spirit of sense of community” (p. 315). The relationships developed in private Christian schools were the “deepening understanding of the core identity of each person” (Beagles & Balisasa, 2012, p. 16). Worthington (1988) defined religious commitment as how a person followed the religious beliefs, practices, values, and acts upon the values in day-to-day life.

Christian schools desired to have their schools infuse the school climate with the values found in the Gospels in the Bible and the specific traditions of their Christian denomination’s faith. For example, the Catholic schools taught the religious beliefs of their faith (Heft & Reck, 1991). The Seventh-day Adventist schools believed the Spiritual Environment of a school was a development of the whole person with regards to the physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual all combined together (Adventist Education, 2014). The Catholic education, as the emphasis was in most faith-based schools, was considered to be holistic, with an emphasis on the Spiritual Environment (Skelly, 2012). The Catholic schools nurtured the spirituality of the school for the students (Kennedy & Duncan, 2006) and included the spiritual component along with the intellectual, moral, and social
components (McDonald & Schultz, 2010). The term “spiritual atmosphere” was introduced by Buetow (1988) to show a school climate of respect and evangelical joy. Egbert (2012) suggested that the sharing of Jesus as a Friend was the best gift to give students in private Christian schools. Lekic (2005) determined from a study that the Spiritual Environment in the Seventh-day Adventist schools was the most positive aspect of the schools. Gregorutti (2007) determined the Spiritual Environment of a school as perceived by the parents was a key factor in enrolling children in a private Christian school. Wighting and Liu (2009) suggested the individual belief system and commitment of a student was more important than the spiritual belief system of the school itself.

The integration of the Spiritual Environment was part of the education goals of private Christian schools. The spiritual component was integrated into all subject areas, such as, the arts, English curriculum, PE and health, as different ways to share the value of the spiritual component of life. Dorman, Fraser, and McRobbie (1994) told from a Catholic viewpoint that the religious dimension infiltrated the entire school and gave a holistic education. In a study conducted by Kennedy and Duncan (2006), the teachers believed that the spiritual component was more likely expressed through spoken language, rather than written language. The Spiritual Environment was more than just a subject in school, but also helped the student become a complete person to help the hurting world (Van Dyk, 2005). Parents decided to send their child or children to private Christian schools because they wished for the child to have a Christian environment to equate to their home and church (Francis, 2005). Parents had a growing interest for their children to receive
private Christian education that mirrored their own family’s spirituality (Kennedy & Duncan, 2006).

Bradfield (2012) recognized a gap in assessment for the Spiritual Environments in school and recommended the need be fulfilled through assessment of Christian character, faith, and academic achievement. A framework of spiritual components was detailed to help analyze the different aspects of the spiritual life of a student (Burton, Bradfield, Desir, Beagles, & Thayer, 2012). The framework detailed the student’s spiritual life into three components of connecting to God, understanding the story of Jesus, and ministering to share Jesus’ love with others. Teachers helped students reflect their relationship with God through prayer and meditation (Kennedy & Duncan, 2006). Sequeira (2012) determined that academics and many subjects may be taught as factual information, but the Spiritual Environment of a school was not to just teach the concept and be done, but rather be a journey and process. Kennedy and Duncan also suggested the school Spiritual Environment was founded on shared beliefs and values that the school, community, and parents shared, and from this foundation, spirituality arose. Hyde (2008) determined that students drew on an “eclectic range of concepts and ideas emanating from society, religion, and the like” to develop each student’s personal framework for spiritual meaning (p. 238). The students wove together the aspects of meaning to create their own way to express their personal spirituality. The students used their own freedom to pull together meaning from different sources to create their own personal growth.
Christian schools tended to be smaller in school size, as compared to public education that averaged at least twice as large as most private schools (Forster & D’Andrea, 2009). The private schools generated their own funding and charged tuition for each student (Great Schools, 2014). The schools, therefore, may be selective and did not have to admit every student that applied. The private Christian schools could also choose their own curriculum, rather than state mandated curriculum. Caglayan (2013) found in smaller schools that the teachers and students tended to care about each other more than in larger schools. This resulted in more cooperation among the teachers and students for participation in academics and social life. Forster and D’Andrea found that private school teachers had more support, materials resources, and more recognition for their work, communication, and student discipline support from the principals in their schools, as compared to larger public schools.

The holistic approach to Christian education included the mind, body, and spirit. For example, the curriculum of the Seventh-day Adventist schools was the same across all of North America and gave a connectedness that was not available in many other private school systems (Kido, 2010). One study of private Christian education across North America was called Cognitive Genesis (2010) that determined the coordination of the cognitive with the Iowa Test of Basic Skills for grades 3 through 8 for four years as compared to national percentile rankings. The determination was discovered that nearly all students in Seventh-day Adventist schools did better than the comparison group, and students who were transferred to Seventh-day Adventist schools performed better. Students who attended smaller
class sizes generally did better than students in the larger class sizes. The population of the schools included diverse cultural and socioeconomic populations; as such, the data cannot be attributed to gifted students (Thayer, 2011). Thayer found overall that students were near the national average in ability, but achievement was higher than would be predicted on their ability scores. The longer students were in Seventh-day Adventist schools; they gained greater ability and higher achievement (Andreasen, 2010).

The Spiritual Environment was the core of Christian education in private schools (Gregorutti, 2007). Tan and Wong (2012) suggested some possible ways, although challenging, to include spiritual ideals into some public school courses for the value would be ascertained in the spiritual development of the students. Jeynes (2003) recommended further study of the religious commitment effects upon academic achievement. Hohl (2006) believed an understanding of the spiritual ideals and academic achievements in private Christian schools should be shared with public school to improve the teaching and learning for each student.

**School Academic Environment**

Student learning and staff flourish in the school Academic Environment in a positive school climate. The opposite was triggered with a negative culture and the student learning was hindered (Peterson, 2002). A continual positive school climate was associated with student academic learning and achievement (Cohen & Geier, 2010). Peterson suggested that positive learning environment fostered professional language, success stories, celebration ceremonies for academic achievement and improvement, and collaboration. These qualities created an environment for
student learning. The positive enriched school climate was correlated with academic success (Marshall, 2004). Positive school climates encouraged students to be motivated, to do well academically, and to be life-long learners (National School Climate Council, 2007). A positive school climate celebrated the positive behavior and traits of the student to create a trust relationship for greater learning (Brennan, 2015). As such, school climate did matter.

A case study determined strong academic focus was achieved in successful schools (Onoye, 2004). The influence of the school climate on the academic achievement of students was found to have a significant relationship (Adeogun & Olisaemeka, 2011; Emmons, 1992). The findings of the study by MacNeil, Prater, and Busch (2009) indicated that students in school climates with healthy learning environments achieved higher scores on assessment tests. Barth (2002) reported that the major reason for a school climate was to create a hospitable place of learning. Pallas (1988) believed the study of school climate was linked to educational outcomes with particular emphasis on achievement. Edmonds (1979) created a list of influential characteristics that included a safe and orderly school climate for higher student achievement. Brennan (2015) discussed early interventions by filling student-learning gaps before moving forward in the curriculum to leave the student struggling. Anderson (1982) reviewed over 200 articles on school climate studies prior to 1980 and determined over half of the studies realized academic achievement was affected by the school climate. Anderson categorized the articles into four main areas, in which academics was part of the culture variables. Lemasters (1997) reviewed literature on the influences of the
building facilities on the academic achievement of the students. Lemasters found studies that supported the concept of student achievement and behavior being related to the condition of the school buildings (Bowers & Burkett, 1989; Chan, 1980; Earthman, Cash, and Van Berkum, 1995; Hines, 1996). McGowen (2007) found the opposite that student achievement was not significant in relationship to the school buildings. Different factors influenced the perceptions of the students upon the varying aspects of the school.

Freiberg (1998) talked about school climate as an “ever changing factor in the lives of people who work and learn in schools” (p. 1). Various aspects of school climate influenced the school academic environment. Researchers (Cohen, Pickeral, & McCloskey, 2009c) shared that school climate was a persuasive predictor of the academic success of schools. A healthy school with high standards, goals, and a serious learning environment created academic success among the students with personal academic motivation and respect for other students with academic success (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). Academic achievement was influenced by the social, instructional, and organizational climates found in the schools (Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007). A school climate to promote student achievement was affected by the school climate created by a caring principal (Pellicer, 2003). Hansen and Childs (1998) suggested that a cohort program with students as partners created an atmosphere for a real learning community for academic growth. Cooperative learning with social support was found to be associated with increased academic achievement (Ghaith, 2003). Hoy, Hannum, and M. Tschannen-Moran (1998) found organizational climate influences upon student achievement were important in
reading, writing, and math with the impact of the school climate influences upon academic achievement as “enduring” (p. 356). Cohen (2006) argued that academic learning had be rethought into a larger package that included “not only academic learning, but also social, emotional, and ethical comprehension” (p. 201). Cohen had created a list of eleven influences to define the climate of a school to create a school climate with learning and academic achievement. The United Nations (1948) drafted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which included the right to a quality education for every child. Cohen discussed the importance of this type of education in a school environment that promoted learning to meet the academic need for each child of school age.

Tomlinson (2015) believed that the beginning of educational excellence in a school was to “understand and respond to the hungers in the human spirit” (p. 89). The students were lifted by the academic excellence and understanding among the teachers and leadership. Peterson (2002) suggested leaders follow a three-step process to read the culture, assess the culture, and dynamically shape the culture. The appreciative inquiry system helped lead change in school climate with an increase in student participation in their education (M. Tschannen-Moran & B. Tschannen-Moran, 2011). The schools that utilized the appreciative inquiry method saw the school academic learning environment become more orderly and serious with academic success. The achievement goal theory and its effect was studied to ascertain the impact on the school and on the academic achievement of students, whether success or failure (Linnebrink & Pintrich, 2002). The results of the study suggested the structural aspects in the classroom were the predictors of academic
performance goals. Eccles (2009) found academic self-concept led students to grasp their abilities for academic engagement and have mastery experiences by maximizing their opportunities. The positive school climate was of importance for students to believe in the value of the academic domain of the school (Wang & Eccles, 2013). Whitlock (2006) reported that school connectedness within the school climate was a predictor of adolescent academic achievement. Zullig, Huebner, and Patton (2011) found in their study that school satisfaction was connected to academic support, as well as the social support needed by the students to achieve. The quality of the interactions between the teachers and students, as well as among the students, appeared to have a long-term impact upon student achievement and academic success (Haynes et al., 1997). Johnson (2003) recommended students work together in teams of community learning to be challenged. Johnson suggested students should “think big, but start small” (p. 25). The conscious discipline method of classroom management used by teachers showed the value in helping to motivate students to learn and excel (Hoffman, Hutchinson, & Reiss, 2009). Hoy and Tarter (1992) suggested a link between academic success of the student and the striving for academic excellence. They found a prominence of academic emphasis was tied with a school climate where teachers believed in student success, students then appeared to be more committed to success and attain higher levels of achievement. In addition, Good and Weinstein (1986) focused research on the academic outcomes as pertaining to grades and achievement assessment scores and found variations in school processes affected the achievement of the students.
Politics has become an issue in demanding or creating laws for improvement in the academics to equate into increased yearly assessment scores. The political pressure upon leaders for increased learning through assessment measurement has created pressure on the teachers and students in the classroom and possible decreased academic performance (Preble & Gordon, 2011). Rutter (1983) reviewed the literature to determine the research findings and policy implications upon student academic achievements in school. Politics created a law to affect schools nationwide with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 with focus on raising academic achievement (Koth et al., 2008). Character Education Partnership (2010) called for all schools to promote excellence in all aspects of the school. Students recognized the differences between the school climates for achievement in different schools. An example was given by the Character Education Partnership about a girl who recognized the school climate as far more engaged with the teachers knowing everything about all the schoolwork. The result of the school climate was for the student to try harder for academic achievement.

Concerns with the school climate affecting the school Academic Environment are voiced by a variety of studies on this topic. Pretorius and Villiers (2009) suggested the lack of motivation be further investigated to determine the impact upon academic achievement. A greater understanding of how to construct a school climate conducive to learning for increased academics for students was of necessity (Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000). Differences between improving and declining school academics of the students in a study in Michigan revealed the improving schools had engaged teachers with higher levels of expectations and the principal as
an instructional leader, whereas in the declining schools the teachers had negative feelings about student abilities and did not follow instructional goals (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979). Students reported a concern with “watering down the curriculum” in the inner-city schools (Haynes et al., 1997, p. 325). Haynes discovered the same students desired thought-provoking and stimulating studies, rather than a more monotonous and inflexible teaching style. Jerald (2006) realized concerns with schools that had created a positive school climate, yet had not motivated the teachers and students for increased academic achievement. Jerald admonished schools to look for “concrete signs” (p. 7) to buttress the positive culture of the school in improving school achievement. Kuperminc, Leadbeater, and Blatt (2001) found the negative effects of self-criticism were moderated by the positive perceptions of the school climate. Villani (1999) voiced the need for a positive nurturing climate in the school to foster academic attainment and achievement. Another concern was that the academic value of student learning for academic achievement was affected by increased hassles and disruptions found in the school (Seidman et al., 1994). Bodovski and Youn (2010) determined that student achievement was negatively affected by low family emotional support, higher levels of parental depression, and greater amounts of physical discipline.

School size and socioeconomic privilege appeared to have bearing upon academic achievement. Howley (2001) discovered school size and classroom size affected student academic achievement. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds achieved higher academics in smaller schools and classrooms, whereas students from affluent backgrounds achieved higher academics in larger schools and
classrooms. A longitudinal study of about 10,000 students in 800 high schools determined that students achieved higher academics in schools with 600 to 900 students (Lee & Smith, 1997). Stevenson (2006) determined in South Carolina, smaller middle schools appeared to have better academic performance, and in the elementary schools the children served determined the size of the school for better performance. Stevenson concluded that the ideal school size was so complex and elusive that a determination needed further study.

The private school effect proposed the smaller class sizes correlated with higher achievement (S. Lubienski, C. Lubienski, & Crane, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Akkalkan, 2009). Lubienski et al. suggested parents chose private education due to the smaller class sizes for greater academic achievement. The private Christian sector of schools not only emphasized the curriculum within the academic achievement, but also in addition, focused on the spiritual and moral development as part of the academic achievement of each student (Skelly, 2012). Vatanartiran (2013) completed a case study of private schools and found the teachers who emphasized the academic targets in the elementary school resulted in higher academic achievements. Koubek (1984) found a correlation between religious commitment and academic achievement. Jeynes (2003) discovered students in private Christian schools who were committed to their religion performed higher in most academic subjects and were higher achievers in the academics than children less committed to their religious faith. Wighting and Liu (2009) indicated a positive correlation with learning and religious commitment in their study of Christian high school students. Hohl (2006) emphasized the need to understand the school climate
variables in order to create a positive school climate for improved learning for the students. In a Catholic middle schools study, Hohl found the value of listening to the student perceptions correlated with academic performance. The concern with mental health needs of students in Catholic schools and the correlation to academic achievement was studied (Frabutt et al., 2011). The insight from the research determined academic potential might not be reached unless the social, emotional, and psychological needs of students are met.

**School Classroom Environment**

The school Classroom Environment setting was where a large portion of the interactions took place between the teacher and the students. The school Classroom Environment involved the students and teachers, the students with students, as well as the academic learning performance and the teacher productivity (Adeogun & Olisaemeka, 2011). The learning environment of the classroom needed to be conducive to academic achievement, have good working conditions for the teachers, and profitable parent communication. The positive school climate should be felt throughout a school; otherwise noticeable inconsistencies between classrooms were found (Finnan, 2000). Freiberg (1998) suggested that not one single factor defined school climate throughout the school or in the classroom, but rather the exchanges between the classroom and school “create a fabric of support that enables all members of the school community to teach and learn at optimum levels” (p. 22). Hansen and Childs (1998) described the school and classroom as “a place where students and teachers like to be” (p. 5). It was also found that positive school
climate was correlated with fewer behavioral and emotional problems (Kuperminc et al., 1997).

School climate also affected teachers’ job satisfaction. The school climate bidirectionally influenced the teachers regarding how they felt about the school and how hard they felt they had to work in their teaching (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). School climate also appeared to affect teachers’ personal lives and ultimately the retention of persons employed in the teaching profession. It appeared that teachers who felt good about themselves and were satisfied in their jobs, was a protective factor in reducing teacher stress and burnout. School climate also affected the teachers’ beliefs that they could influence student learning (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). Teachers who took classes or seminars specifically about school climate to understand the value of a shared vision appeared to be more equipped to facilitate a positive classroom environment (Cohen et al., 2009a). In the Race to the Top program (2012, 2013, 2014), Georgia implemented an educator evaluation system to support new approaches for school improvement. In the program teachers were given training and classes to positively improve teacher practices and engagement of the students in the classrooms. The validated student surveys given annually starting in 2012 across grades 3 through 12 with three different surveys indicated some commonalities. Across all three tests a similar question, “my teacher cares about my learning,” (p. 40) had very strong consistent strength by all students (Barge, 2014). The classroom environment was important for the instructional practice by the teachers.
Singh and Billingsley (1998) found that leader and peer support could be particularly helpful. Peterson (2002) recognized the value for teachers to have regular times to discuss and share new ideas with their cohorts. Days for staff development were planned in the schedule for teacher training, camaraderie, friendship, eating together, and creating a collegiality and bond among the teachers. The planned time together reinforced the positive school climate and carried into the Classroom Environment. The result of the planned time together created a deep commitment among the teachers to the collaborative staff development “way we do things around here” (p. 13) mentality for positive engagement.

Kallestad (2010) discussed the value of teachers becoming more open to communication with their peers. The school climate created an atmosphere where teachers worked well together and were engaged and committed to their teaching (Hoy, 1990). The result of the committed teachers was teaching to high standards (Hoy et al., 1998). One of teachers’ main concerns was the learning process of the students to become educated students (Hoy & Tarter, 1992). Hansen and Childs (1998) reported how Oren High School recognized students daily with their picture and notice of rewards. The teachers were recognized with treats, teacher drawings, and teacher appreciation events. Pretorius & Villiers (2009) shared that teachers appreciated a school climate with the engagement, as openness in teacher behavior appeared to generate a professional atmosphere among the teachers with enthusiasm, acceptance, and mutually respectful relations. The result of these values for teachers was an enjoyable school to work at with a clear vision and positive
school climate (Peterson, 2014) and teachers motivated for student success, performance, and outcomes (MacNeil et al., 2009).

The classrooms created an atmosphere of learning. The support of the teacher in aiding the learning was integral for the student to achieve academically (Cohen & Geier, 2010). The teacher support a student received as early as kindergarten relates to later academic and behavioral effects in school (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Well-prepared teachers had more influence upon academic achievement in the students than other background influences, such as, minority, language, or poverty (Cohen et al., 2009). Wang and Holcombe (2010) discussed the need for teachers to not only focus on the social aspect of the classroom for the students will be less engaged in learning. A positive classroom environment had teachers who put their hearts into their teaching for they had a sense of purpose (Peterson & Deal, 1998). The teachers needed to create a classroom where students developed positive feelings about themselves, the positive feelings increased with time, and as a result, the students felt more proficient and confident in their educational performance (Emmons, 1992).

Students recognized the teacher’s care through listening, trusting, reflecting, and respecting (Freiberg, 1996). Preble and Gordon (2011) suggested from their research that respect included different aspects in the classroom. The students detailed respect to include engagement with fun activities in learning, personalized learning, building empowerment to learn, and recognizing the value in the students. The classrooms became a powerful learning place with rich and challenging learning for all students. The personalized learning included everyone and was interactive
among the students (Finnan & Swanson, 2000). The pedagogy and skills of the
teacher to teach the curriculum established one of the most essential elements for
the optimal learning by the students (Rutter, 1983).

Freiberg (1996) discussed person-centered classrooms with a list of
organizational characteristics. In a person-centered classroom the leadership was
shared among the students. The students helped oversee the management of the
classroom and were an integral part of the classroom management. For the most
part discipline came from within each student. Students shared the responsibilities
in the classroom. The school recruited businesses to come into the classrooms as
role models to enrich the curriculum. “Helping, sharing, participating, planning, and
working together – these are the heart of a cooperative classroom” (p. 34). These
characteristics portrayed students who had become active citizens of the
classrooms, who took ownership and pride in the learning environment, not just
idle “tourists” who were moving passively through the education system. Goodlad
(2006) recognized a need for teachers to be responsible for the education of the
students and to improve the classrooms and schools. Teachers needed to be part of
the reconstruction of education and help provide education for the health of
democracy. Jerald (2006) discussed high-performing schools where teachers
engaged with their students and put the students first.

 Teachers shared more than just the curriculum in the classroom for they also
taught social, emotional, civic, and ethical values to the students (Cohen & Geier,
2010). Character based education programs in the classrooms appeared to help
students have higher achievement scores in the elementary schools (Benninga,
Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2006), such as teachers who taught civic lessons by providing service-learning projects that applied to real-life situations (Morgan & Streb, 2001). The teachers need to integrate values, key principles, and extra components to their teaching for greater learning by the students (Finnan et al., 2003). Schools and the classrooms needed to be places students liked to be because they knew the teachers were genuine people (Hansen & Childs, 1998).

The structure of the Classroom Environment with the varying numbers of students created a variety of learning challenges. Akkalkan (2009) found in bigger class sizes in larger schools there tended to be more of a competitor atmosphere that boosted academic performance, as compared with smaller schools with lower class sizes there tended to be fewer concerns with attendance and discipline problems. Caglayan (2013) reported in general teachers and students preferred smaller schools with teachers who were perceived to be more caring about the students. Krueger and Whitmore (2000) found that students in smaller classes in the earlier elementary grades tended to score higher on achievement assessment measures. The smaller classes influenced the students for a greater likelihood of taking a college-entrance exam, and this was found more so among minority students.

In the private Christian schools the teachers were tasked with the expectation of quality teaching along with the spiritual component of the school. The Catholic schools had distinctive Classroom Environments that were permeated with the Catholic philosophy (Dorman et al., 1994). The purpose of the Catholic schools was to have graduates who were committed Christians with a Christian viewpoint of
the world (Dorman, 1999). The emphasis of the classroom spiritual atmosphere included respect, joy, cooperation, participation, and responsibility (Buetow, 1988). Skelly (2012) discussed how the holistic education for the students included the spiritual dimension. Hohl (2006) reported the understanding of the school climate in the Catholic schools was valuable to help improve the teaching and learning for all students, irrespective of whether it was private or public education. Forster and D’Andrea (2009) reported that retention of private school teachers tended to be high and many stayed as long as they were able to teach.

Continuing education for the teachers was invaluable. Educators needed to gain more knowledge and learning from workshops, in-service meetings, and learn to better relate to the social, emotional, and education of each student in the classroom (Cohen et al., 2009b). The preparation programs for teachers about school climate gave additional learning to the teachers to better engage the students in positive learning. The value of teacher certification was found to correlate positively with student achievement (Lubienski et al., 2008).

**Home Environment**

The Home Environment involved the engagement of the parents with the student in the school. The Home Environment included what the parents thought about the school, teacher, and learning and becoming engaged through the school governance process and decision-making. The involvement of the parents in the school activities, such as, parent teacher meetings, room parents, field trips, or fundraisers were all important aspects of the Home Environment. In addition, the
engagement of parents in the homework process was also a key element of the Home Environment.

The Home Environment with parental involvement was broad and involved parents in countless different ways (National Parent Teacher Association, 2009). The school climate included all teaching and learning that reached throughout the school and to the community and encompassed the Home Environment as it related to the student’s school involvement (Marshall, 2004). The fundamental ideology of the school climate was prevalent throughout the school (Jerald, 2006). Visitors coming to a school with positive school climate recognized the uplifting vision of the school through symbols, ceremonies, and talking to the students about their future goals for education. Hoy (1990) specified that a school’s climate be expressed in many ways by the principal and teachers. The parents and students made opinions about the school climate as they walked into a school. The judgments included the feeling about whether the student would be motivated academically; have a positive experience in this school; feel safe, be respected, and connected to students and teachers; find intellectual rigor, emotional support, ethical treatment, and cultural sensitivity; and a positive impact upon the student’s academic achievement (National School Climate Council, 2007). The answers by the principal or teachers to the questions of the students and parents reflected the school climate. Parents thought about the school climate and the feelings they found about the environment and academics in their visit to the school before enrolling their student (Adeogun & Olisaemeka, 2011).
The Home Environment was part of the community of the students’ lives. Gusfield (1975) defined community in two ways. The first definition of community was the quality of the relationship with other people in a specific community of the school or even a community without a specific location such as students working together from a distance. The other way to define community was the relational dimension of the school in a territory such as a town or neighborhood. McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined community as involving membership, influence, integration, and fulfillment of needs. The “sense of community” was a strong influence in society among groups of people (p. 6). The sense of community involved a feeling of belonging with a shared belief that the needs of the group would be met with working with one another. The school climate included the interactions of the principal, teacher, students, and the parents and community away from the school. The students were influenced by the interactions between the home and school. The interpersonal actions of the school and home helped students achieve academically and socially. A positive school climate required that the principal, teachers, students, and parents worked together like “seamless web of support” (p. 327) for the students (Haynes et al., 1997). Bodovski and Youn (2010) measured the relationship of family emotional sense using the dimensions of parental depression, parental warmth, and physical discipline. The study found the affects upon the student’s academic achievement and behavior in the school as related to parental depression and discipline of the child had a long-term negative effect upon the child’s school experience.
The school needed to adapt to the diversified families with flexible tactics to engage the community stakeholders. The Character Education Partnership (2010) included in their definition of a positive school climate to find ways to successfully include parents in the school’s attempt to increase the students’ character growth and academic learning. Many different ideas were needed for involving the parents and community in the schools. Freiberg (1996) described several ideas for parent involvement in the schools that included parents telling about their careers, students writing thank you notes to parents for their involvement in the school, parents buying books to give the student at school for special events such as birthdays, parents having lunch with their student at the school, parents helping with field trips, and seeing parents as role models for the students. Some schools included parents, grandparents, or family friends in planned events to promote positive social relationships and a caring community. For example, parents came to school to read aloud to students, volunteer to assist in the classroom, or rent the classrooms to host afterschool educational events. Some teachers or schools paired with corporate businesses for on-the-job career learning, other schools collaborated together with volunteers on service projects, or still other schools paired with high school students in sports (Benninga et al., 2006).

Parent engagement in the student rituals and celebrations of the successes and accomplishments of the students was an important aspect that fostered positive relationships between the Home Environment and the school (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Hamre and Pianta (2001) suggested that early relationships with adults other than parents played an important role in helping students learn to socialize
with other persons and students in their classrooms, which could be nurtured by teachers who developed a culture of trust at all levels throughout the school and community. The trust needed to be built where the “teachers believe the students are competent learners, believe what parents and students tell them, believe that the teachers can depend on the parents and students, and believe the parents are honest” (p. 180) and dependable (Hoy & Miskel, 2005; p. 180). The trust relationships wove from the principal, through the teachers, and the community for a culture of working together cooperatively. Bryk and Schneider (2003) shared that relational trust was built over time through everyday social interactions. This was accomplished in part by developing successful communication and working relationships between parents and teachers that ultimately benefitted the students and strengthened the connection between school and Home Environment (Rutter, 1983).

Gowrie and Ramdass (2014) stressed the need for improvements in the involvement of the stakeholders in the schools. The active engagement and collaboration of parents and community members aimed to identify changes needed in the school to improve the physical, social, and mental well being of the students. Another concern at schools was the unreasonable parents or community demands upon the principal or teachers. If the school had a healthy climate, then parents and community did not make unreasonable requests or commands upon the school. Hoy and Tarter (1992) talked about unhealthy schools that were bombarded by outside powers of unhappy parental demands and public outcries. In these schools the principal did not lead, the teachers were unhappy, and the students failed in
academic excellence. The opposite with healthy schools was a place of good characteristics with trust, cooperation, loyalty, teamwork, commitment, and the stakeholders liked each other. Some of the negative forces found in an unhealthy school were poor working relations between the school and the community that translated into no community support. One way to improve the negative forces was to have open communication between the school, teachers, and parents (Adeogun & Olisaemeka, 2011). Akkalkan (2009) found small schools had an advantage in having good communication with parents and the community. Stakeholders worked together to create and keep a positive school climate, yet at times the principal, teachers, students, or parents had to deal with a problem or even cope with a failure (Peterson, 2002). The attitudes of all stakeholders needed to be reviewed in order to make successful changes (Recepoglu, 2013). Changes made in educational reform to a healthy positive school climate required a community effort (Villani, 1999).

Mills (2003) discussed how the sense of community in the private Christian schools comprised shared values and beliefs. The private Christian school climate involved the principals, teachers, students, and the community. The community was the “quality of human relationships in the body of Christ that underlies the effectiveness of Christian witness” (p. 129). The members of Christian schools shared similar values and beliefs. The Christian school climate needed to be branded as communal interdependence with a Christ centered vision. The principal and head leadership of the schools determined the school climate within the context of the communities the schools served (Skelly, 2012). Wighting and Liu (2009) researched the relationships between religious commitment and the individual student feeling
of school community. The principal may be indirectly aiding the student learning in the Christian school with the promotion of the whole school community.

School climate was important to all stakeholders involved with a school. Barth (2002) recognized that the purpose of the school was to create a school climate that was “hospitable to learning” and that the students and teachers would be lifelong learners (p. 11). All stakeholders had responsibility for the welfare and learning of each student and each other (Edgerson & Kritsonis, 2006). All stakeholders were boundless sources of fresh ideas on how to improve the school climate and learning. The principal and teachers had the obligation to recognize these values and ideas to find ways to incorporate the new ways of learning into the school learning process and climate. Positive school climate with the involvement of the families created collaboration between the school and the community. The students increased their productivity and excelled in their schools. The students developed interdependent relationships with the teachers, students, and adults in the communities. “Values become part of the collaborative effort of the neighborhood” (Villani, 1999, p. 104).

Students attended school to learn and be educated to become responsible adults and citizens (Rose & Gallup, 2000). The community of stakeholders inside and outside of the school encouraged students to have a connectedness to their learning and democracy (Cohen et al, 2009b). Cotton and Wiklund (2001) discussed the parental involvement for adequate preparation of the students for their education and future lives. The more involved the parents were in the lives of their children, the more confident and engaged were their students in their learning
The parents and the caregivers had a very important function to be encouragers of the student’s learning in school, in the home, and in the community. Students were preparing throughout the school years to be learners all their lives and effective members of society (Cohen, 2006; Cohen & Geier, 2010). Children learned by their experiences at school, at home, in their community, and the world around them (Cohen et al., 2009c). Education was not just going to a building for classes, but rather an interaction between all the people who went to the building and all the people outside the building who interacted to provide students with the learning experience (Zullig et al., 2010).

**School Operation Environment**

School Operation Environment encompassed the leadership of the principal, the student and parent interactions with the principal, the feeling of safety, the school appearance, the comfort of the classroom, and the technology utilized by the students. Halpin and Croft (1963) defined leadership as the principal’s ability to create a climate where the leader could “consummate acts of leadership” (p. 1). The principal helped determine the identity and shape of the school (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Adeogun and Olisaemeka (2011) determined that the school leader was “a force that will attract and retain teachers” (p. 555). Sahin (2011) shared that the important role of the principal was to preserve and continue the positive school climate that influenced teaching and learning.

Hoy (1990) recognized that school climate included the leader of the school. An open school climate involved the principal and teachers working together. The principal lead by example and the result was the teachers were committed and
worked cohesively together. The principal and teachers had trust for each other in their work and camaraderie (Tarter & Hoy, 1988; Hoy et al., 1998; Pretorius & Villiers, 2009). Tubbs and Garner (2008) recommended the principal work to build a positive environment by giving the teachers support and opportunities for the teachers to fulfill their individual needs. Through the process of building the positive climate the principal worked on bonding the teachers into a cohesive unit for creating stronger academic achievements among the students. The positive school climate enhanced the value the teachers placed upon professional development as guided by the principal (Singh & Billingsley, 1998; Peterson, 2002). The principal built relationships with all stakeholders and even with people of diverse backgrounds or cultures (Edgerson & Kritsonis, 2006). The development of the positive school climate required fervent effort on the part of the principal and leaders in the school (Haynes et al., 1997). The underlying current of the school expressed the valued school climate held by the leadership and the school (Hinde, 2004). The result of positive school climate was a place where the stakeholders felt responsible and comfortable in their school as if the place were home, and created an environment where the stakeholders had a positive attitude for the job (Recepoglu, 2013).

The positive school had respect for the principal, the school property, and helped to resolve conflict (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). Finnan (2000) defined five assumptions that created success or failure for school climate. One assumption was about the type of school leadership and decision-making that defined the principal. Hemphill (1958) suggested the principal’s leadership in a positive school climate
problem solves. Peterson (2002) recommended the principal use positive clear language to foster learning by students and commitment by the teachers. The principal shared the core values and was recognized as a hero or heroine. The shared values of the principal were known through the logos, mottoes, and ceremonies that signified the school climate and helped to sustain the school climate (Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Beyer & Trice, 1987). The bulletin boards portrayed the school standards in language understood by the students to send signals to students about expectations (Jerald, 2006). These symbolic displays targeted the students, teachers, and parents that passed through the hallways. The principal shared the goals and vision in many different functions, such as, volunteerism, informal social events, teamwork, organizing ceremonies with students and teachers, or working side-by-side with the teachers in the classrooms (Sahin, 2008).

The principal oversaw the healthy school environment and promoted a clean and secure building facility and grounds (Benninga et al., 2006). A safe school had a safety school plan implemented and maintained by the principal to ensure the safekeeping of the students on the physical grounds, as well as in the buildings of the schools. The principal ensured the safety of students from all cultural and social backgrounds. Part of the safety plan included teacher training for knowledge and ability to diversity issues and communication. The need for principals to help students feel emotionally, intellectually, physically, and socially safe in their schools and classrooms was important to the students (Devine & Cohen, 2007). The feeling of security promoted student learning in a safe place to study and learn (Cohen et al., 2009a).
Principals of schools defined their style of leadership in different manners and styles. The democratic leadership style was where the principal, teachers, and students shared in cooperative values for a shared power together (Haynes et al., 1997). The democratic informed process of school improvement involved the principal and stakeholders to work together to create quality education and learning (Cohen et al., 2009c). The stakeholders had to dig deep to find ways for an action plan for higher learning. Teacher commitment was affected by the leadership styles. School leaders who promoted collaboration between the principal and teachers or between teachers and peer teachers engaged the students in learning communities (National School Climate Council, 2007). The positive school climate led teachers and students to greater focus on what the students needed to learn and teachers needed to teach. The supportive principal behavior style of leadership listened to teachers’ suggestions and gave praise to the teachers (Pretorius & Villiers, 2009). The principal cared about the teachers and students and connected with all staff members at the school (Peterson, 2014). A principal also led by servant leadership, transformational leadership, or shared leadership styles (Vatanartiran, 2013).

Several researchers discussed concerns about the leadership of the principal. A school climate could be damaged when a principal had a lack of leadership, vision, or goals (Adeogun & Olisaemeka, 2011). A principal could restore the school climate with the use of a good sense of direction for improvement. The toxic school climate with the negative influences needed to be addressed by the principal and turned around for change to the positive (Deal & Peterson, 1998). The reform necessitated
the need to help rebuild positive school climate. Students expressed concern with the disciplinary dealings with suspensions of the inner city students (Haynes et al., 1997). A concern followed with the teachers who dictated to the students what was or was not allowed. Pretorius and Villiers (2009) discussed the negativity of the engaged principal climate leadership style that tried to be rigid and rule-based with the teachers. This leadership style was not successful. Another concern for leadership was the disengaged climate where the teachers disliked the principal and tried to immobilize or sabotage the principal’s leadership. Darling-Hammond (1997) found concern with principals who espoused to use democratic leadership yet made nearly all the decisions. Teachers felt uneasy with a principal who required the teachers to do reports, follow specific procedures, and have little time for classroom preparation. The result was the school climate was slow to change due to the noninvolvement of the teachers and students in shared governance. A closed climate was of concern, as the principal insisted on the teachers following specific details of routine that created teachers with little satisfaction in their teaching.

Most principals did not teach, and thus were a step removed from teaching. As a consequence, the principal had to provide collegial leadership that resulted in a friendly and supportive environment for the teachers and students (Hoy et al., 1998). If a toxic school climate had developed, an instructional principal was needed to lead and guide the school into a healthy school climate with improving academic achievement. The instructional leader engaged the teachers in new teaching practices and promoted learning among the students (Barth, 2002). The
instructional leader emphasized the need for a nurturing and safe learning environment (Vatanartiran, 2013). The principal of the school helped determine the school atmosphere by finding a balance for school effectiveness by asking more demanding questions of the teachers to find the best educational practice (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). Harris (2002) recommended creating effective school improvement programs by engaging teachers in professional dialogue and development. Peterson and Deal (2009) discussed action plans for a principal to revitalize a toxic school climate into a positive school climate. Peterson (2002) advocated that a principal work tirelessly to turn around the negative and hostile environment into a positive school climate. The responsibilities of the principal as an instructional leader took on a more disciplinarian role and evaluated the achievement objectives of the students (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979).

Bell (2001) outlined obstacles to learning that were rampant in urban schools, including the principal and teachers who saw themselves only as employees of the district, rather than a group of educators at a school connecting with their students. The obstacles could become a vicious cycle of continuing frustration to all stakeholders. In these cases, a consultant needed to be called to the school to help identify the problems and strengths and help guide the principal and teachers in a direction of common purpose and togetherness. Finnan (2000) discussed the use of model designers to help implement school reform. The process required commitments from the principal and teachers to participate in the reform of changing the school climate.
Healthy schools were good places for all stakeholders involved. The stakeholders liked each other and worked well together (Hoy & Tarter, 1992). The characteristics of the healthy school included teamwork, trust, commitment, cooperation, and loyalty. The principal provided positive influence and resource support for the healthy school (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). The school climate was determined by the school principal to establish and maintain an environment for teaching and learning (Fink & Resnick, 2001). The principal paid continual attention to the school climate in determination of understanding the actions and processes carried out by the principal (MacNeil et al., 2009; Caglayan, 2013). The leader using the language of problem solving helped maintain the healthy school climate. The principal recognized problems would arise, but used problem solving to find ways to fix the concerns (Muhammad, 2010).

A principal was challenged to understand the school climate before implementing any changes (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). The principal strongly influenced the changes carried out at the school (Deal & Peterson, 1999, Freiberg, 1999). Fullan (2001) implored the principal to be “change agents to transform the teaching and learning culture of the school” (p. 74). Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003) suggested changes in the school climate by the principal indirectly affected student achievement in the classroom and on the assessment scores, whereas Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom (2004) suggested the changes directly affected student achievement. Another perspective by Freiberg (1999) purported that changes made by the principal did improve student achievement. If the principal desired changes in the school climate with improved
student achievement, then the principal had to first focus on the relationships with all the stakeholders (MacNeil et al., 2009).

The leadership of the principal in a private Christian school had the added dimensions of the school climate that influenced the leadership style. The added dimensions are the Biblical values and the Christian school community (Mills, 2003). The need in a private Christian school was for a principal to help direct the school climate within these dimensions. For example, the Catholic school principals were bestowed with the responsibility to ensure that the Catholic education infiltrated into every aspect of the education of the students (Skelly, 2012). The persona of the Catholic school was part of the principal’s life and belief system. The principal confirmed that the Catholic schools’ mission statements fulfilled the education for each student to the full potential for each student.

**School Toxic Environment**

A school toxic environment was a climate with interactions that were caustic. In a toxic school climate the teachers and leadership viewed the students as the problems (Deal & Peterson, 1998). The staff was hostile and did not want any change or there would be negative reactions. The teachers thought they were doing their best and never tried to do better. The teachers’ stories about the school from a historical perspective are negative, demoralizing, and discouraging. The teachers criticized any new ideas or complained when new ideas were implemented. If a teacher in a classroom had a problem the teachers were not willing to share fresh ideas or help problem solve. The school did not celebrate the positive aspects about the school, but rather the school provided no fun or positive interactions. The toxic
environment of the teachers in the hostile school lent itself to hopelessness for any improvement or bettering of the school environment. This type of toxic school culture created a concern for anyone to have new ideas or to even offer suggestions for improvement. The school was bombarded with unhealthy demanding forces from parents and community to create policies at the whim of the public (Hoy & Tarter, 1992), the school climate was not hospitable to learning, and the students suffered as a result (Watson, 2001).

The toxic school climate started with a belief system that grew and exploded into acceptance throughout the practices, procedures, and policies of the school (Muhammad, 2010). Gruenert & Whitaker (2015) discussed the expending of energy to prevent change in the toxic climate. The toxic teachers with similar mindsets may even see each other as heroes for blaming their own failures on the students or administrators. Barth (2002) described the toxic school where the language spoken by the teachers was full of emotion, frustration, and exasperation. Everyone else was blamed for the problems, rather than owning the problem and working together to find a solution. The toxic climate allowed everyone to explain away the problems in order to excuse the concerns. A school toxic environment begged for an instructional leader to step up to the concerns of the staff and students and create a new school environment. The changed school climate decrees to everyone at the school that this is “the way we do things around here” now (p. 6).

The school climate came from the school vision, either positive or negative (Jerald, 2006). Peterson (2002) believed principals might be able to change the toxic schools while addressing the hostile relationships. The principal cannot make
changes alone, but has to persuade others to buy into the new plan. The principal as a leader must have a clear vision, know where he or she is going with the school, and display a positive professional demeanor. The principal must bring a feeling of hope and possibility to the teachers in order to change the negative tone of thinking. In some cases, the principal might need to change the staff members in the office by hiring new staff with fresh and positive outlooks for the school. The principal needed to start meetings on time and share the vision with renewed energy each time.

The principal started the process of improving elements of the school by supporting the positive growth with time, energy, and resources (Deal & Peterson, 1998). The vision must be shared on a continual basis for it to become part of the school climate. The change factor included a problem of power. The power needed to be exercised in such a way that teachers began to gain a sense of ownership of the new vision of the school. The delicate balance of power shifted and change began in the school (Sarason, 1996). Fullan (2001) recommended five components to increase the effectiveness of the principal to change from toxic to positive school climate. The five components included “moral purpose, understand the change process, develop relationships, foster knowledge building, and striving for coherence” of working together (p. 11). The change from a toxic to a positive school climate did not just include the principal, but rather started with a small group and then spread to a larger group that was engaged to make the changes (Cohen et al., 2009a). Freiberg (1999) recognized many details influenced the group for changes to the school climate. The changes needed to be the right innovations for the school,
otherwise fragmentation occurred (Watson, 2001). Changes might be implemented, but not cultivated, eventually falling by the wayside. Other changes might be a poor fit for the school and did not become part of the school climate.

All schools have a school climate (Beyer & Trice, 1987). The school climate might be obvious to a teacher or student walking in the door, or the school climate might be so elusive it takes experts time to study and learn the school climate. The most important question was whether the school climate was positive or negative. The school can change from the toxic school environment to a more positive environment, but time was needed for change. Some of the changes included an instructional principal leader that facilitated helping the teachers become better teachers with greater learning (Fink & Resnick, 2001). The teachers were given opportunities and guided into teacher collaboration with working together with their teacher colleagues (Kallestad, 2010). The instructional principal had a positive impact on a school, the classroom, and as a result, a positive impact on student achievement (Sahin, 2011). The principal helped the teachers create lifelong leaders in their students (Barth, 2002). The teachers learned to focus on student learning, created shared goals, and had ongoing shared problem solving (Watson, 2001). The changes made in schools might be through character education to help students see the value in themselves and in the school (Benninga et al., 2006). The result was improved academics. The character education program promoted schools that were clean and inviting, modelled fairness, care, and respect, students contributed in meaningful ways, and the school engaged a caring community. Some of the ways to
express to the students and community the positive school climate was to organize ceremonies, rites, or rituals.

Some schools had a more difficult time leaving behind the toxic school climate and moving towards becoming healthy and more positive. Bell (2001) discussed 18 points that described urban schools. The challenges were significant to change and improve the current school climate. The urban school problems were like a “vicious cycle of recurrent frustration” (p. 71) that seemed to make rising above the problems an impossible task (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Many urban schools were underperforming, looked down upon with scrutiny, or were failing (Onoye, 2004). One way these recurring problems could be met with change was to call in a consultant to assist with recommendations for the improvement necessary to create a more positive school climate.

A core resource for school reform was creating a school climate with trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). The trust a principal exemplified to the teachers and staff improved the normal day-to-day routines (Kallestad, 2010). These daily interactions created a social trust in relationships among the teachers and students, teachers and principal, teachers with parents, and principal with parents and the community. The principal opened communication with the teachers, and teachers became more open to communication with their peers and the principal. The principals were often concerned with reducing teacher stress and burnout and had to work to find ways to minimize the concerns for the teachers (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). The building of a better school climate by a principal involved the interpersonal support from the principal for the teachers (Tubbs & Garner, 2008). Working together in positive
ways created a cohesive team of teachers collectively involved in the same positive goals.

Schools must be held accountable for the school climate and continuously assess the quality of the school climate (Character Education Partnership, 2010). Students attested to the value of school climate when changing schools. Finding a new school climate where teachers knew about the students’ academic work helped the students desire to do better. Character Education Partnership urged all stakeholders to help shape the nation’s schools to develop quality schools with positive school climates, not toxic or negative school climates. Schools needed to prioritize not only the academic learning of a school, but to include the social-emotional skills for an improved quality of life that supported the education of the whole child (Cohen, 2006; Cohen et al., 2009c). Cohen et al. (2009b) recommended the improvement of school climate through a promotion of listening to the voice of the teachers, parents, and students to help with the accountability of the school. The perceptions of the stakeholders were invaluable to understanding what others thought about the school (Cohen et al., 2009c). This understanding then created knowledge for meaningful improvements to the school. The students, parents, and teachers needed to feel safe physically, emotionally, and socially at the school.

The review of literature indicated that positive school climates involved strong academic achievement, success in the school, prevention of violence, healthy development of students, and the retention of the teachers (Cohen et al., 2009a). Fostering a positive school climate was in the hands of the people involved (Hansen & Childs, 1998). People could make a difference and the investment for effective
change was invaluable. Schools with positive school climates will still have problems, but will own their problems and find ways to fix the problems to continue the healthy school climate (Muhammad, 2010). The language at the healthy schools was “prescriptive as opposed to descriptive” (p. 2). Sometimes the healthy schools got tired of fixing problems, or maybe even felt frustrated at times, but the leadership and school would not change the resolve for the positive school climate. The principal and teachers asked questions together and found ways to overcome the concerns (Hoy & Tarter, 1992). The problems were dealt with in a problem-solving manner to find the best way to improve and move forward. The school board became involved in creating and maintaining a positive school climate by buffering the community and parental pressures upon the school. The principal worked with the school board to obtain the needed policies to successfully operate the school with a positive school climate.

Preble and Gordon (2011) considered school climate as the “heart and soul of school success” (p. 12). This type of engagement of the principal, teachers, and students together created an effective, safe, and supported positive school climate in a school. This type of orientation enabled continual school improvements for a positive school climate.

Assessment of School Climate

Assessments to determine different aspects of school climate have been created by a variety of researchers to learn more about school climate. Anderson (1982) reviewed over 200 school climate research studies and noted that the development of the instruments began in the 1960s. For a historical perspective,
some of the early assessments for school climate were noted. School climate was
defined in many ways and thus the instruments were varied to determine the
different aspects of each unique study and research variable. Assessment of school
climate began in the 1960s with research within the classrooms. The Classroom
Environment Scale (CES) instrument was used with both teachers and students to
determine classroom interactions between teachers and students or students and
students. The Learning Environment Inventory (LEI) for secondary schools and My
Class Inventory (MCI) for elementary schools were classroom school climate
questionnaires.

The pioneering school climate instruments in the early 1960s began with the
Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ) for elementary and
secondary schools (Anderson, 1982). Another pioneering questionnaire was the
High School Characteristics Index (HSCI) for students and teachers. My School
Inventory (MSI) was adapted from HSCI and used in elementary schools to study
school climate. In the 1970s the Elementary School Environment Survey (ESES) was
developed for student perceptions of teachers and peer attitudes and values. The
School Survey (SS) was developed to measure the teacher satisfaction with the
working environment. The School Description Inventory (SDI) instrument
measured the teacher perceptions of secondary schools. The Quality of School Life
Scale (QSI) measured elementary, secondary, or high school student attitudes
toward school. Anderson also gave a nine-page summary table (pp. 390-398) review
of major climate studies and the assessment instruments used.
A variety of assessments of school climate were available in more recent literature. Adeogun and Olisaemeka (2011) studied the influence of school climate on students’ achievement by the use of a multi-itemed School Climate Effects Questionnaire (SCEQ) and found a significant relationship between school climate, performance, and productivity. A new instrument, the Design-Based Learning Environment Questionnaire (DBLEQ) was used to identify student perceptions of classroom features affecting learning aspects of the learning environment. The learning environment included physical activities in the classroom, such as, computers or experiment kits, as well as the assessment and teaching methods to keep students engaged. The instrument used a five point Likert scale. The questionnaire included 196 items with 14 learning environment characteristics and 14 learning aspects. Each student was given a divided version of 49 items from 7 learning environment characteristics and 7 learning aspects. Educators used this instrument for examining different groups and learning environments (Doppelt & Schunn, 2008). Finnan et al. (2003) studied four classrooms using the Accelerated Schools Project (ASP) to determine important learning, values, and principles at the classroom level. Data was collected in 40 classrooms through structured observations to determine the Powerful Learning Environments (PLE). White, La Salle, Ashby and Meyers (2014) administered the Georgia Brief School Climate Inventory (GaBSCI) as a measure of student perceptions of school climate. The survey instrument was a short 9-item survey. The data collected was from 130,968 students in sixth and eighth grades in Georgia.
Patrick et al. (2007) found the perceptions of fifth grade students about the classroom social environment, the motivational beliefs, and the engagements in learning in the classroom were examined. The survey included a five point Likert scale that was given to each of the students. The survey about teacher emotional support, teacher academic support, interactions, mutual respect, emotional support, and student academic support to determine the student perceptions about their classroom social environment. Student and teacher perceptions of school climate were compared to note the level of congruence between the perceptions.

In a study by Mitchell, Bradshaw, and Leaf (2010), students were administered the elementary school version of the School Development Program School Climate Survey (SCS) with 53 items and answers in either “agree” or “disagree.” Whitlock (2006) gathered data from focus groups and surveys to determine the student connectedness as a predictor of student health and academic outcomes in school. The 110-item survey was developed for this study using similar scales and measures as the California Healthy Kids Survey and four other surveys. The items were in a closed-ended five-point scale response format. Ghaith (2003) studied the relationship between forms of instruction, achievement and perceptions of classroom climate. The determination was to understand the student perceptions about the fairness of grade, class cohesion, and social support. A modified version of the Classroom Life Instrument (CLI) was administered with 68 items and a five-point Likert scale. The study was administered in Lebanon to students with English as a second language.
The relationship between the perception of school climate and the size of the school and classes was determined by using a five point Likert scale called School Climate Survey (SCS) in Turkish schools with one version for students and another for teachers (Caglayan, 2013). Another survey assessed student interactions with their peers, their teachers, and the whole school (Ding, Liu & Berkowitz, 2011). The study abbreviated the School Climate Survey of 100 items down to 70 items by a validation process of a review panel. Data was taken from a character education project in an urban school district. The results of a confirmatory factor analyses exposed a seven-factor structure from their three years of research. The scales in the abbreviated survey found similar reliability as the original survey.

In a study of two differing student populations, spanning two different nations, the U.S. and China, student perceptions of school climate were studied to determine the similarities and differences between responses (Yang et al., 2013). The students in the U.S. were from a database that consisted of 12,262 students in grades 3 to 12 in Delaware who had already been administered the Delaware School Climate Survey-Student (DSCS-S). The students from China were a database of 4,525 students in grades 3 to 12. The student perceptions of school climate were assessed with the Modified-Delaware School Climate Survey-Student (M-DSCS-S) with a four-item Likert scale. The same survey was used in both countries with a translation from English to Chinese, and with a different translator from Chinese to English. The instruments addressed the comparisons between the student perceptions in two nations. Zullig et al. (2011) determined the relationships among school climate environments and school satisfaction. The Multidimensional Students’ Life
Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS), School Satisfaction Subscale (SSS), and School Climate Measure (SCM) were administered to the students in class. This study highlighted the importance of academic support and satisfaction to school climate.

Bodovski and Youn (2010) employed Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) data sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The family emotional climate was measured using the large database to determine whether love and discipline in the home had effects upon elementary school student achievement and learning-related behavior. In another research project a multilevel study examined the student perceptions of order, safety, and discipline, fairness of school rules, and teacher and student relationships at both individual and school levels. In another similar study, the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 was used to gather data (Fan, Williams & Corkin, 2011). The Markov Chain Monte Carol (MI) was used in a two-stage design, which selected students from each school with an overpopulation of specific demographics. Jeynes (2003) reported on the use of a database from the National Education Longitudinal Survey (NELS) study in 1992 with 18,726 students. From the database the new study determined if the student was classified at a religious level or not, and to what level. The purpose of this study was to compare the academic achievement of devoutly religious urban and other students who did not consider themselves religious. Regression analysis was used, and more specifically the General Linear Model (GLM). Wang and Eccles (2013) performed a longitudinal study of school engagement using multidimensional perspectives to understand student achievement motivations and academic engagement. The School Environment Measure (SEM) was used to create five
hidden constructs to assess the characteristics of the student perceptions of the school. The assessments helped determine the students’ motivational beliefs in school, their academic ability to learn, and the students’ intrinsic interest in academic achievement. The findings indicated the flexibility of school engagement and showed student perceptions of the school environment helped predict school engagement changes. Further, Wang and Holcombe (2010) studied the student perceptions of engagement and academic achievement and the school climate. The students were part of the Maryland Adolescent Development in Context Study (MADIC) longitudinal study of more than 1000 students, families, and teachers. Face-to-face interviews took about an hour with each student and self-administered questionnaires took 30 minutes. The students were offered $20 for the interview and survey. The study of the many dimensions of engagement between the student and the school environments helped teachers better understand the students’ varied experiences in school.

Tubbs and Garner (2008) identified school climate issues that appeared to impact a school’s performance as measured by the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). An instrument was designed and divided into six major sections with 29 Likert scale questions and administered at a faculty meeting. The results suggested the school climate was in an early toxic state, which appeared to have negative impact on student performance. Cushing et al. (2003) studied bullies, victims, and bully victims through the Social Development Model (SDM) instrument to determine the level of bonding to school and the perception of the school climate. The survey measured risk factors for bullying and protective factors in the school environment using a
four point Likert scale. The Student Interaction in Specific Settings (SISS) tool for observation of elementary and middle school students in kindergarten through eighth grade were administered. Study 1 determined the technical adequacy of the assessment tool, and Study 2 compared the SISS to other validated survey measures. The direct observation measure targeted behaviors that involved appropriate social behaviors and problem behaviors. The results indicated the SISS tool to be valid and reliable for elementary and secondary schools to measure the social student climate.

Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) (Barge, 2014) developed three survey instruments for three levels of students in grades 3 to 5, 6 to 8, and 9 to 12. The survey was administered annually statewide to gain a greater understanding of student perceptions in reference to teacher practices. The validated surveys were anonymously given to students to find honest feedback about the perceptions of the students. The four Likert survey results of the 2012-2013 school year indicated overall strongly positive perceptions of teacher practices.

A private Christian school instrument was developed and evaluated for the Catholic schools (Dorman, 1999). The Catholic School Classroom Environment Questionnaire (CSCEQ) had a 49-item instrument that assessed the perceptions of the students of his or her own role in the classroom. The format was the five-point Likert choices with underlying scales that included “student affiliation, interactions, cooperation, task orientation, order and organization, individualization, and teacher control” (p. 141) and took about 15 minutes to administer. The findings included demographic information from the survey. The CSCEQ instrument was found to be a useful research tool for the religious classes in the Catholic high schools to
investigate the psychological and social environments in the Catholic schools. In another similar study, Vatanartiran (2013) used the Sirin School Climate Survey (SSCS) for teachers, students, and parents to determine the perceived value of the learning environments at three private schools under one chain in Turkey. The survey consisted of five instruments within the one large survey. The five instruments were the Academic Satisfaction Instrument, Service Satisfaction Survey, Quality of Communication, School Climate Instrument, and School Identity instrument. The surveys for the teachers had 71 items, the students had 63 items, and the parents had 53 items. The findings indicated the three schools within the same group of schools had similar results with the perceptions of teachers, students, and parents in the school environment factors.

In a study conducted by Wighting and Liu (2009) researchers chose to examine the relationships between the sense of school community and the sense of religious commitment among Christian high school students. The Classroom and School Community Inventory (CSCI) was used to measure the student perceptions for sense of community. The Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10) was used to measure the religious commitment. The two surveys were analyzed together to determine the relationship between the learning community and intrapersonal religious commitment. The study determined a positive correlation between religious commitment and the sense of community. The correlation was stronger for girls than for boys, but no significant differences in gender were found in either religious commitment or sense of community. In another similar study, Francis (2005) reported on the 19 private Christian schools that participated in the teenage
religion and values survey with a database of nearly 34,000 boys aged between 13 and 15 years old. The detailed questionnaire was a revision of the Centymca Attitude Inventory (CAI) with a five-point Likert scale. The findings demonstrated the 13 to 15 year old boys that were educated in private Christian schools showed a distinctive values profile as compared to the public school students. The students felt better about life and about themselves and this was important to parents who sent their boys to private Christian schools. In a study of private Christian schools in Australia, Hyde (2008) examined children’s spirituality and the implications for religious training. The researcher visited three Catholic schools five weeks running to orient him to the research site. At the end of the five weeks the researcher randomly chose two groups of six children from each of the three schools to engage in focus groups following the spiritual sensitivity with the “weaving the threads of meaning” (p. 244) discussion among the students in the focus groups. In order to create the sense of mystery a nature sound CD was played to give the ambiance and eucalyptus oil was burned while a set of pictures were shown and discussed to generate reflective conversation. The focus group and ambiance created time for awareness about their spirituality. The research demonstrated that the wonderings of the students helped them find ways for their spirituality to be expressed. The religious training in private Christian schools may draw upon this wonderment to nurture the spirituality of the students.

**The Significance of Personal Perceptions**

The understanding of perception as described by several dictionaries was the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses. Another
description was the state of being or process of becoming aware of something through the senses. Perception was a mental impression and had intuitive understanding and insight. Another interpretation was a unified awareness that comes from sensory processes while a stimulus was present (Google Dictionary, 2014). The Merriam-Webster (2014) defined perception as the way you think or understand someone or something. Perception was also the ability to notice or understand something easily, or notice someone or something through the use of the senses. Some of the synonyms to mean perception were discernment, insight, wisdom, awareness, consciousness, appreciation, knowledge, comprehension, understanding, impression, idea, notion, thought, belief, judgment, intuition, sensitivity, or intuition.

The significance of personal perceptions of students were seen in how a school was perceived, how a teacher treated the students in the classroom, or how students interacted with each other (Villani, 1999). Students at school needed to perceive they were part of a community where there was love, belonging, safety, positive school climate, and nurturing values for the learner. Personal perceptions needed to be understood and studied because of the influence that the school environments have upon the behavior of students (Mitchell et al. 2010). Bandura (2001) suggested that students’ perceptions of experiences were seen subjectively, rather than objectively. Understanding student perceptions within the school climate was about the students themselves, the classroom, and the school (Koth et al., 2008). Watson (2001) believed if the school climate was not hospitable then the student perceptions would be negative toward learning. The desire for students to
perceive a school in a good light was suggested by Hansen and Childs (1998) when someone came away from a school and said, “That was a good school. You could tell that the students liked to be there. You knew that the teachers were good, genuine people” (p. 14). As such, this statement exemplified the significance of personal perceptions and the importance of impression management for a school even for a very brief visit.

**Student Perceptions**

Student perceptions of their experience in school had interesting effects on their Social Environment. Marshall (2004) suggested that the perceptions of the students interacting with each other was equally as important as the perceptions of academic achievement found in a school. The positive school climate enriched the interactions of the students with each other and their academic achievements. Ghaith (2003) suggested the perceptions of students about the fairness of grading were positively correlated to cooperative learning. The cohesion of the class, support of the peers, and competitive or individual instruction were not related to cooperative learning. The perceptions of students in effective schools had a sense of community, commitment, respect, and focus (Onoye, 2004). Patrick et al. (2007) found the students’ own perceptions of different aspects of the classroom were related to their motivation and engagement. The same study found students’ perceptions of teachers who provided emotional support were individually unique yet mixed with the students’ senses of worth in relationship to the teacher. The students in a middle school perceived the value of specific organizational, instructional, and interpersonal dimensions to give value in their development in
education and non-education areas (Roeser et al., 2000). The students’ perceptions of the school environment in seventh grade helped determine later their eighth grade engagement in three different areas (Wang & Holcombe, 2010) The three areas to determine school engagement included school participation, sense of identification with school, and the use of self regulation strategies. Students looked to the school to help give them opportunities to become engaged in their school activities. The amount of influence by the school as perceived by the students was determined by how well the psychological needs of the student were met (Krapp, 2005). Gowrie and Ramdass (2014) established that the psychosocial environment of the school needed improvement after examining the perceived student-related and school violence in the schools of the study.

**Student Perceptions of School Climate**

The perceptions of school climate as perceived by the students were varied in the literature. The National School Climate Council (2007) specified that school climate does matter. The positive school climates of schools promoted the perceptions of academic achievement, student learning, risk prevention, healthy development, and school success. The perceptions of the school climate were vital for the perceived value of the school and may be seen as positive or negative, with either positive or negative consequences (Pretorius & Villiers, 2009). Student perceptions of school climate were analyzed in comparison to various individual and school level variables using a nationally representative sample (Fan et al., 2011). The individual level risk factors, such as behavior problems at school, coming from a single-parent home, the level of parental education, student gender and
ethnicity, and whether a student had been held back a grade all affected the student perceptions of school climate. Caglayan (2013) reported in a study of 600 sixth, seventh, and eighth graders, and 426 teachers that both the students and teachers had mostly positive perceptions about the school climate. The interesting aspect of this study was that students in public school held more positive school climate perceptions than the students in private school. Schools perceived as excellent schools were known to have healthy school climates (MacNeil et al., 2009).

The school climate impacts how a student feels about the school environments (White et al., 2014). The perceptions may be about safety, social life, classroom teaching and learning, or student relationships. Healthy school climates believed in children and the belief was put into practice and implemented into policies that continued to foster a healthy school climate for the students (Muhammad, 2010). In a longitudinal study Haynes, Emmons, and Woodruff (1998) suggested student perceptions about the school improved over a period of time with the implementation of the school development program. The impact of the small changes created a perception of positive school climate.

School climate was studied at three different private schools under the same umbrella of a school system (Vatanartiran, 2013). The findings indicated the perceptions of the students were different in all three schools, or different in one school and similar at two schools. The academic satisfaction was different among the students and teachers. In one school the students noted acceptable communication, whereas the students’ perceptions at the other two schools
indicated the need to work in this area. The perceptions of the students, parents, and teachers for personal commitments to the schools were similar.

Wang and Eccles (2013) found in their study of academic engagement that the students needed attention to both the Academic and Social Environments of the school to create positive perceptions of the school climate. Zullig et al. (2011) studied the relationships among school climate environments and school satisfaction for middle and high school students. The study used the variables of gender, grade, age, or grade point average. The study indicated school climate perception was multidimensional, and the school climate environments used for the study were related to school satisfaction. Mitchell et al. (2010) completed a study on school climate and compared both teacher and student perception ratings to the classroom level or the school level. The researchers assumed students would be more perceptive to classroom ratings, but the opposite was true. The teachers were more sensitive to the classroom ratings, but the students were more sensitive to the school level ratings, such as student mobility, student-faculty ratio, and how often a principal changed. The students’ perceptions were concerned with school level disruptive behaviors, not just the classroom level. Another study on student perceptions of the school climate found that student level and classroom level factors had more influence on the student perceptions about school climate than the school level factors (Koth et al., 2008). The student perceptions of the improvement of the connectedness between the teachers and students also had a greater level of influence upon the students’ perception of school climate than school level factors.
A study of student perceptions of the school climate was conducted in the United States and China to find comparisons between the two nations in the three levels of schooling of elementary, secondary, and high school (Yang et al., 2013). The Chinese students scored higher in all three levels of schools in their perceptions of student and teacher relations, student-to-student relations, the liking of school, and the fairness of the school rules. The differences in the perceptions of school climate were significant between the American students and the Chinese students. The researchers suggested the perception differences might be due to the cultural differences of the two nations in respect to authority, classroom management, self-regulation, and peer-to-peer regulation. The perceptions of the students in China were more favorable to the school climate than the students in United States. The perceptions of the students found in a positive school climate study had supportive teachers and principals, quality academic learning, and a sense of school belonging (Ozdemir, Sezgin, Sirin, Karip, & Erkan, 2010). The value of a positive school climate was noted in the students’ perceptions of the early stages of a toxic school climate. The perceptions of the toxic school climate impacted the students’ performances in school (Tubbs & Garner, 2008). The toxic school climate was perceived through an unhealthy belief system that grew and enlarged to a point that the procedures, practices, and policies of the school continued the toxic school climate (Muhammad, 2010). The perceptions of the students were negative and unhealthy. The student perceptions of the school climate were filled with frustration, excuses, and exasperations.
Kaczor (2006) measured student achievement within school climate as compared to school size in four schools with students from poverty levels. The findings indicated the perceptions of students about school size were negatively related to school climate in these four schools, although some minor exceptions were noted in the smaller schools. There was basically no relationship found in the perceptions of the students about academic achievement and school size. Adeogun and Olisaemeka (2011) described significant relationship between the perceptions of students about school climate and performance or productivity at school. They discovered the need for a school facility with good learning environments that was peaceful, neat, void of extra noise, and friendly and positively correlated with student perceptions for performance and productivity at school. The school needed classes that were favorable to learning and effective communication between the school and home environments. The students needed to feel safe, secure, and have appropriate levels of discipline measures to ensure a learning environment for all students, as well as teachers who experienced evidence of support and care for the students.

In the private Christian schools the school climate included shared values and beliefs of the Christian community (Mills, 2003). The perceptions of the students and community of the private Christian school climate included the conscious effort to share Biblical values and a Christian community.

**Student Perceptions and Academic Achievement**

Student perceptions connected to academic achievement were varied among the different studies. Student perceptions about school climate have been found to
positively affect academic achievement (Brookover et al., 1978). The perceptions of
the students in successful schools indicated strong academic achievement where
teachers worked together in teamwork, the principals were leaders, and the
stakeholders held high expectations (Onoye, 2004). Solving conflicts between the
students’ motivation and engagement in the classroom affected the students’
cognitive engagement and academic achievements (Patrick et al., 2007). The
students perceived the negative value placed upon the academics by the teachers in
a similar manner as the teachers’ projection to the students, and the students
fulfilled the negative perception by not doing their homework, being uncooperative
in class, or not committed to their work (Pretorius & Villiers, 2009).

Wang and Holcombe (2010) discovered that academic achievement of
students was influenced by their perceptions of the school environment both
directly and indirectly. The student perceptions about school climate helped predict
the student academic achievement and risky behaviors (White et al., 2014). In
another study academic achievement perceptions by the students rated their
emphasis on their own individual actions, as opposed to the teachers rated their
perceptions of the academic achievements of students as a whole school with global
assessment knowledge (Mitchell et al., 2010). It was postulated by the researchers
that the students might have rated themselves more favorably due to the social
desires to personally do well. Doppelt and Schunn (2008) discovered from student
perceptions that the two most important learning environment characteristics were
homework and worksheets.
A study analyzed the influence of the principal and teacher relationships on student academic achievement and perception to maintain positive and healthy relationships (Edgerson & Kritsonis, 2006). The study determined teachers needed to motivate their students to make a difference in their lives and principals needed to lead by example. In another study about the perceptions of students in science classes Kardash and Wallace (2001) found how information was taught in the science classes was as important as to what information was taught.

**Student Perceptions and Student Demographics**

The findings of students in high poverty schools in South Carolina appeared to stay in school longer when in smaller schools (Stevenson, 2006). As such, it appeared that the smaller school served as a protective factor for students to stay enrolled in school longer. The perception of the students was their personal needs were fulfilled to a greater extent and they achieved higher academically. The findings from qualitative focus groups and a quantitative survey indicated that the students perceived they were developmentally supported regardless of the demographic variables (Whitlock, 2006). The students perceived they received caring or support from the school.

Kindergarten students and teacher relationships were studied and found perception of both academic and social spheres of school performance were strong and persistent (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). The study noted that boys with minimal reliance and struggles with their kindergarten teachers had better long-term outcomes. The girls with good relationships with their kindergarten teachers had less behavioral difficulties in future life.
Wighting and Liu (2009) studied the sense of school community and religious commitment of Christian high school students. Their findings indicated the perception of a positive correlation between the two, and a gender difference with a stronger correlation for the girls than the boys. A study about adolescent perceptions of school climate varied with reference to race, ethnicity, gender, and grade (White et al., 2014). The findings showed a connection between the perceptions of the school climate and the actual behaviors of the students. The findings also indicated the demographic data of male students and African-American students needed additional intervention to create positive social relationships. Another study found the need to improve school climate perceptions among male and minority students with interventions for negative attitudes (Koth et al., 2008). A study looking at the variables that predicted student perceptions in elementary school found that girls perceived a more positive school climate than boys (Ozdemir et al., 2010).

Madill, Gest, and Rodkin (2014) studied students’ perceptions of teacher closeness and sense of peer community within the classroom level in grades one, three, and five. The findings indicated grade and gender differences in perceived relatedness. Students in the lower grades had closer relationships with their teachers while the fifth graders had more realistic perceptions about their teachers. The findings on peer community within the classroom indicated the first graders had the strongest sense of peer community. The girls felt closer to the teachers in their relationships with the teachers than the boys. The boys were more likely to disrupt the class with more overt negative interactions between teachers and boys.
The findings indicated the teacher and classroom to which the student was assigned was more important in the student’s quality of relationships than the whole school. The result of the findings supported the researchers’ hypothesis that children in classrooms with emotional support from the teacher have higher levels of relatedness. The perceptions of the students with between-classroom differences were significant in the students’ perceptions of the teacher closeness. The teachers who recognized the needs of the students had closer relationships with the students. When students perceived closer relationships with their teachers, this appeared to help with their social and academic problems. The researchers’ hypothesis that emotional support between teachers and students gave the students a sense of peer community was confirmed partially. If the teachers were sensitive to the students’ needs and gave the students autonomy, then the students perceived a greater sense of community. Another part of the research reported children with behavior issues of aggression or disruptive behavior perceived minimal relationships with their teachers, due to continual reprimands. These findings indicated that the relationships between teachers and students might contribute to the perception of peer relationships.

Middle school student perceptions within the social environment were found to link to student adjustment for ethnicity and a socioeconomically diverse student body (Kuperminc, Leadbeater, Emmons, & Blatt, 1997). In the study, the perceptions of the ethnic minorities varied. Girls who were African-American received more discipline referrals, boys who were African-American were perceived as more disruptive, and girls who were African-American or were Hispanic or Latina were
perceived as internalizers. This study indicated that the perceptions of school climate in reference to student adjustment appeared to have impact upon the student minority population.

Francis (2005) determined in private Christian schools that the perception of the 13 to 15 year old boys in Christian schools was different than the same age in public education. These boys were more likely to perceive themselves as committed to believe in God and the Bible, have a positive view of their church and religious education, protected from liberal views of alcohol, drugs, sex, and bullying, have respect for their teachers, and tended to feel better about life. Hohl (2006) found in the study of student perceptions and school climate in Catholic schools that girls rated school climate higher than the boys.

**Summary**

In conclusion, this chapter presented a review of the literature related to this study. The review of the related literature included an introduction section about school climate to set the stage for the topic. The next section introduced various definitions of school climate as it pertained to different research findings. The different words used to define school climate, such as, school culture, or school environment were discussed and associated with the researchers along with their own definitions. Over 50 definitions of school climate from varied authors from the 1990s up to today were given and discussed in the context of several combined topics. The topics included feelings, beliefs, behaviors, the experiences of a whole group; positive, negative, toxic school climates; organizational climates within the schools; and the spiritual realm of the culture of private Christian school systems.
The definitions were varied and wide-ranging and included various aspects of the topic the researcher dealt with in context of the school climate of a particular research project.

The main endeavor of the research for this dissertation was a survey for students that covered six different environments of the school. The attempt was to gain an understanding of the school climate in four schools in the Georgia-Cumberland Conference school system in the greater Atlanta area. The first environment was the Social Environment that was made up of the relationships between and among the students, teachers, leader, parents, and all the stakeholders. The second environment was the Spiritual Environment in private Christian schools that entailed the spiritual growth of a student, the student’s comfort of prayer in the classrooms and school, the Christian faith shared in school by the students and teachers, the use and learning of the Bible stories in religious training classes, and the value placed upon private Christian education by the student and family. The third environment was the Academic Environment that included the learning of the students and the factors that helped or hindered the academic growth of the students in the particular school climate of a specific school. The next environment was the Classroom Environment where a large portion of the interactions takes place between the teacher and the students. The school Classroom Environment encompassed the interactions between the students and teachers, the students with peers, and the academic learning that took place in the classroom. The fifth environment was the Home Environment that involved the engagement of the parents with the student in the school, such as, what the parents thought about the
school, teacher, and learning. The Home Environment also involved the engagement of parents in the school activities and the homework process outside of school. The last environment was the School Operations Environment that encompassed the leadership of the principal, the student and parent interactions with the principal, the feeling of safety, the school appearance, the comfort of the classrooms, and the technology utilized by the students. The review of literature for the six environments sets the stage for the knowledge base of what previous researchers had learned about these environments of the school climate.

A school climate concern for schools was whether or not a toxic environment pervaded a school. The toxic environment involved caustic interactions where teachers and principals named the students as the problems. The leadership and teachers fell into a negative role and sank deeper into the corrosive school climate. The review of literature discussed the toxic school climates and the possible changes needed to shift from a negative to a more positive school climate.

The assessment of available school climate instruments was detailed from the review of literature. Assessments to determine different aspects of school climate have been created by a variety of researchers to learn more about school climate.

The literature review on student perceptions was detailed in five different aspects of perceptions. The importance of considerable thought about student perceptions to this research project was the perceptions of the students and their understanding and feelings in answering the surveys. The first section was the significance of personal perceptions. The significance of personal perceptions of
students was how the students perceived the school, the classroom, the teachers, the principal, the classmates, or the building. The second section focused on the value of student perceptions and how their perceptions of their experience in school had affected their Social Environment and their life in school. The third section was the student perceptions of the school climate of a school and highlighted the various perceptions of school climate as perceived by the students in the literature. The fourth section detailed the student perceptions and academic achievement. Student perceptions connected to academic achievement were varied among the different studies in the literature review and had been found to positively or negatively affect academic achievement or directly or indirectly affect the academic achievement. The fifth section included student demographics and student perceptions. The literature indicated a variety of student perceptions affected by the background of the student demographics.

The sectionalized literature review helped for ease of reading and understanding of the topic of discussion for this dissertation. This exhaustive review explained the rationale for this study based on past research findings and recommendations for future research. Thus the foundation for the research for this dissertation has been detailed in the literature review of this chapter of the dissertation.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The rationale for choosing the quantitative research approach was to better understand the school climate of private parochial schools in the greater Atlanta area of the Georgia-Cumberland Conference school system (GCC) through the use of a survey instrument. The survey was designed by the writer of the dissertation to ascertain the school climate in both the academic environments and the Christian spiritual values of the students in the private parochial schools of the GCC (Amlaner & Chan, 2013). The choice to use a survey for a quantitative study was to “yield a lot of information at a reasonable cost in time and effort” (Vogt, 2007; p. 90). Vogt suggested the efficient way to obtain subjective data from the students was by asking the students what they believed, thought, felt, or perceived about the different school environments. The objective data were attained through the demographic survey items included in the survey.

Quantitative research was defined by Babbie (2010) as a focus on collecting numerical data, which is generalized across groups of people. Quantitative research aims to classify details, count the details, and then construct models to try and explain what the data is telling. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) suggested the main purpose of quantitative research using surveys was to define the characteristics or opinions of a particular population. The studied population cannot be surveyed as a whole, rather a sampling of persons is surveyed, and a description of the targeted population is determined from the sampling of individuals answering the survey questions. Williams (2007) defined quantitative research as a
way to create “meaning through objectivity uncovered in the collected data” (p. 66).

The data gathered through surveys from a sampling of a population permits the researcher to make inferences or generalizations about the population of study (Borrego, Douglas, & Amelink, 2009). The data gathered and analyzed by the writer for this dissertation was to help determine the school climate of the four schools in the GCC school system in the greater Atlanta area as perceived by the students in the specified schools. The research was focused by the research questions proposed for the study.

**Research Questions**

Based upon the purpose of this study to better understand the student perceptions to determine the school climate, the following research questions were formulated to guide this study. The research questions were:

1. What are the student perceptions of the school climate as described in the six environments?
2. Do student demographic backgrounds make any difference in their perceptions of the school climate?
3. How are the student perceptions of the Spiritual Environment compared with their perceptions of the other five school environments?
4. Is there a toxic school climate as perceived by the students in all environments or within one or more of the environments?
5. Is there any relationship between student perceptions of the school climate and the academic achievement?
Settings for the Study

This study was conducted at four different schools in the GCC school system in the greater Atlanta area. The GCC school system is a private parochial system with 37 different schools in Georgia, the eastern portion of Tennessee, and a western portion of North Carolina. The GCC school system is part of the Seventh-day Adventist nationwide and worldwide education programs from childcare through universities. The GCC schools provide alternative choices for parents and students for education in private parochial schools. The four schools chosen for this study consisted of a variation of classes from kindergarten through eighth grades. The four schools participating in the study were Atlanta North School (ANS), Carman Adventist School (CAS), Duluth Adventist Christian School (DACS), and Shoal Creek Adventist School (SCAS). The student population of the schools varied by the school with a total of 346 students in the four schools, and 229 students in grades three through eight who were the targeted group for the survey study.

ANS is located north of Interstate 285 and the perimeter of Atlanta, Georgia, in the city of Dunwoody, Georgia. ANS had five teachers for the combined grades of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, first and second grades, third and fourth grades, fifth and sixth grades, and seventh and eighth grades. The seventh and eighth grade teacher was also the principal of the school. The ethnicity of the four teachers and teacher principal was four White and one Multiracial, and the gender was one male and four females. ANS had a total number of 70 students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grades. The gender of the students was 41 males and 29 females in the whole school. The ethnicity of the students was 20 students were African
American, 5 students were Asian, 20 students were White, 22 students were Latinos, and 3 students were Multiracial. The pre-kindergarten and kindergarten had 12 students, the first and second grades had 15 students, the third and fourth grades had 18 students, the fifth and sixth grades had 16 students, and the seventh and eighth grades had 9 students.

CAS is located northwest of Atlanta off the Interstate 75 in Marietta, Georgia. CAS had six teachers for single grades and combined grades of kindergarten, first and second, second and third, fourth and fifth, sixth and seventh, and eighth. The principal taught part time in math and music classes. The ethnicity of the six teachers and principal were one African American, five White, and one Latino, and the gender was one male and six females. CAS had a total of 94 students in kindergarten through eighth grades. The gender of the students was 42 males and 52 females in the whole school. The ethnicity of the students was 39 students were African American, 4 students were Asian, 28 students were White, 20 students were Latinos, and 3 students were Multiracial. The kindergarten had 10 students, the first and second grades had 17 students, the second and third grades had 16 students, the fourth and fifth grades had 19 students, the sixth and seventh grades had 18 students, and the eighth grade had 14 students.

DACS is located northeast of Atlanta, Georgia, north of Interstate 85 in Duluth, Georgia. DACS had eight teachers for single grades and combined grades of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, first, second, third and fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth. The principal was a full time principal with no teaching responsibilities. The ethnicity of the eight teachers and principal was four African
American and five White, and the gender was two males and seven females. DACS had a total of 146 students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grades. The gender of the students was 73 males and 73 females in the whole school. The ethnicity of the students was 34 students were African American, 54 students were Asian, 10 students were White, 30 students were Latinos, and 18 were Multiracial. The pre-kindergarten and kindergarten class had 17 students, the first grade had 14 students, the second grade had 16 students, the third and fourth grades had 26 students, the fifth grade had 16 students, the sixth grade had 23 students, the seventh grade had 19 students, and the eighth grade had 15 students.

SCAS is located southwest of Atlanta, Georgia, in the town of Sharpsburg, Georgia. SCAS had four teachers in combined grades of kindergarten through second, third and fourth, fifth and sixth, and seventh and eighth. The seventh and eighth grade teacher was also the principal of the school. The ethnicity of the three teachers and teacher principal were four White, and the gender was one male and three females. SCAS had 36 students in kindergarten through eighth grades. The gender of the students was 19 males and 17 females in the whole school. The ethnicity of the students was 17 students were African American, 1 student was Asian, 12 students were White, 1 student was Latino, and 5 students were Multiracial. The kindergarten through second grades had 10 students, the third and fourth grades had 10 students, the fifth and sixth grades had 11 students, and the seventh and eighth grades had 5 students.

These four schools were representative of the schools from the GCC school system. The students in the schools were from families attending the churches
connected with each school, students from other Seventh-day Adventist churches in the greater Atlanta area, and students from neighboring communities. All four schools were connected to an area Seventh-day Adventist church that helped to financially support the schools and choose the school board members through a nomination process. Students attended these schools because parents desired the students to be in smaller schools, have more one on one learning with the teachers in smaller classes, be part of a whole large family of students, receive religious training, and easy access for parents to interact with teachers.

**Study Participants and Institutional Review Board**

The participants in this study were students in grades three through eight from the four named schools. In the initial stages of the creation of the survey instrument the researcher for this dissertation believed the third through eighth grades had the ability to read the words and understand the meaning of the words and sentences in the survey. The researcher felt the first and second graders did not yet have the ability to read the words or understand the usage of the four choices Likert scale. At the time of the establishment of the validity of the survey, one of the tasks requested of the validation team was to determine if all words and phrases were recognized and understood by third through the eighth grades. The desire was to have one survey comprehensible by all students in grades three through eight for the purpose of this study, and eventually for the use by schools throughout the GCC school system. The four schools chosen in the GCC school system were from around the greater metropolis of Atlanta, Georgia. The schools varied in student population from 36 through 146, but had somewhat similar demographics with students
representing different ethnicities and heritages. The classroom student population in the four schools chosen varied with one or two grades per teacher in each classroom. The greater Atlanta area schools in the GCC school system was chosen due to the interest of the researcher for the schools surrounding the large Atlanta city metropolis.

For purposes of the study and protection of the student participants, each student was assigned a number to coordinate to his or her name for the determination of correlating the Iowa Assessment achievement data to the student numbers. After the data was collected and coded from the survey instruments and the achievement data were coded to each student, then all names were deleted from the study for the protection of each student. No student name was used in this dissertation study or any subsequent publications.

The researcher for this dissertation had already received permission from the superintendent for education at the GCC Office of Education to request permission from each school board to survey students in the four schools. The superintendent had also given permission for access to the Iowa achievement assessment data for the schools to coordinate the achievement data with the demographic and survey instrument data. The next step was to contact and speak with each principal of the schools to request permission from each school board for the students in grades three through eight to be involved with the school climate survey. A letter from the researcher went to each principal and school board requesting allowance along with a note from the superintendent of education for the GCC school system (see Appendix B). After receiving permission from the school
boards of the four schools the researcher processed through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Kennesaw State University (KSU).

The IRB process at KSU consisted of the application form, parental consent letter and signature form, the research study student assent form, and a copy of the survey instrument to be completed by each student (see Appendix B). A permission letter from each school for the survey was included with the application process with the IRB. The IRB process was completed, signed, and had the application approval code number of Study #13-222 before the survey process proceeded. The IRB process continued with a combined parent cover letter and consent form sent to the parents through hard copies and email at each school. The parents were requested to fill out the consent form so the student would be allowed to take part in the survey process at each classroom. The student assent form was given to each student who had a signed parental consent form prior to taking the survey. At the time of the administration of the survey in the classroom each student was read the instructions on the assent form and given the opportunity to sign the assent form, opt out of the survey process, or at anytime during the survey if uncomfortable with the questions to opt out of answering the survey answers. After the assent forms were completed, then the administrator of the survey read the instructions to the students given at the beginning of the survey instrument. The students were assured that the survey was anonymous so they could answer as they truly believed or perceived the value of school on each question. The administrator of the survey read each question to the students and asked the students to answer the questions at the pace read by the administrator. The instructions included the concern with
students asking questions about a specific item on the survey, and the administrator was asked to answer the student with the request for the student to answer to the best of his or her ability or perception. The students within each classroom of the school in grades three through eight who had parent consent were administered the survey.

**Survey Instrument**

The researcher for this dissertation designed the survey instrument (see Appendix A). Initially in the pilot study a school climate survey was researched to find one with academic values and Christian spiritual values included. Validated and reliable surveys for school climate were found for public school education. The inclusion of the Christian spiritual aspects were lacking in the surveys. The survey instruments relating specifically to Christian spiritual values were practically nonexistent. The search for a survey instrument to determine the Christian spiritual values along with the academic values of the school climate of schools in the GCC school system were not found. Thus the researcher of this dissertation determined the need to design an instrument to match the values of the GCC school system. The instrument was not created in a vacuum from the research of the literature. Different validated survey instruments were studied for ideas, styles, and Likert scales used. Marzano (2003) had a field-tested questionnaire using student level factors. This survey tested the school’s practices relative to how students perceived the situations on the survey. Valuable information was gleamed from this survey, yet no Christian spiritual based questions were incorporated. Individual sample education questionnaires were available on Survey Monkey (2012), yet again no
specific Christian spiritual based questions were found. The WestEd (2007) survey for teachers called The California Healthy Kids Survey presented other valuable ideas, but again no specific Christian spiritual based questions were discovered.

The researcher located Christian spiritual based survey instruments on individual Christian school websites, such as, The Liberty Christian School Climate Survey (2009). Ideas for survey questions were gleamed from this resource, yet the survey did not indicate the survey was validated or tested for reliability. As a result, the researcher for this dissertation when in the Educational Specialist in Educational Leadership degree (Ed. S.) research classes elected to design an instrument to match the academic and Christian spiritual values important to the schools in the GCC school system. The items for the survey were formulated using ideas from other surveys along with creating questions to match the values of the GCC school system.

The validity of the survey instrument designed by the researcher was established through several steps. A panel of judges was chosen and invited to review the survey instrument. The persons requested to serve on the panel all had an invested interest in a school in the GCC school system. The panel of experts was requested to examine if the content of the survey instrument was substantial. The panel was asked to determine whether the language of the questions was a level appropriate for grades three through eight. The original survey instrument was presented in topical sections and the panel of judges was queried to scrutinize the organization as to whether the sections should remain grouped together with their title or not. The responses were consolidated together in one document to be
examined by the researcher. Then both the pros and cons of each comment were discussed with the major professor to create the best possible judgment of each question in comparing the many ideas. With the varied comments by the panel, the researcher of the survey determined to keep the questions in as similar an order as originally presented, but to remove the actual titles of each section.

From the varied comments, the Likert scale for responses was changed from five choices with a neutral choice to four responses requiring the students to make an opinioned choice of “strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, and strongly disagree.” The result of this process was a cleaner and more refined survey instrument for grades three through eight. Through these steps the validity of the survey instrument was established.

A pilot survey was administered to 36 students in three classrooms at Atlanta North School in grades three through eight. Thirty-five students completed the survey instrument from which the reliability process was based. The results were confidential, stored on a password-protected computer that had no student access and was not brought to the school. All information was kept confidential and was de-identified for any subsequent published works. The data were analyzed using the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The SPSS software enabled the researchers (Amlaner & Chan, 2013) to create in-depth analyses and addressed the data reliability coefficient of the survey. Cronbach’s Alpha (Cronk, 2010) was used to analyze the data to measure the internal consistency. The overall reliability coefficient for the total environment of the six untitled sections of the survey was 0.925. Next the analysis of each individual environment of the survey
was ascertained to determine the reliability coefficient for each section. The first section of Social Environment’s reliability coefficient was 0.617, the Spiritual Environment’s reliability coefficient was 0.714, the Academic Environment’s reliability coefficient was 0.726, the Classroom Environment’s reliability coefficient was 0.818, the Home Environment’s reliability coefficient was 0.616, and the School Operation Environment’s reliability coefficient was 0.814. The Social Environment and Home Environment sections were further analyzed by removing one question at a time. By removing one question from the Social Environment the reliability coefficient was improved from 0.617 to 0.631. By removing two questions from the Home Environment the reliability coefficient improved from 0.616 to 0.695. In the final analysis of all six sections of environments, the reliability coefficient improved from 0.925 to 0.926 with the use of the Cronbach’s Alpha reliability analysis. The survey with established validity was determined to be a very good survey with high reliability.

The final edited and revised survey instrument from the pilot study for the three through eight grade students consisted of six demographic questions and 60 survey items (see Appendix A). The administrators used the survey instrument with instructions for the administrator to read to the students. In addition, the six environments were noted as sections for the administrators. The demographic section and then six environments and questions were as follows:

Demographics were questions 1-6

Social Environment was questions 7-13

Spiritual Environment was questions 14-22
Academic Environment was questions 23-30

Classroom Environment was questions 31-41

Home Environment was questions 42-50

School Operations Environment was questions 51-66

This survey was designed to fit the specific characteristics and missions of the schools in the GCC school system. This survey cannot be compared to other surveys due to its own uniqueness. The development of a school climate assessment survey instrument for the pilot study and the GCC school system was an interesting journey of experiences. Initially the need for the survey instrument was identified and the researcher began the literature review. After many hours of library and Internet search no survey suitable to the Christian spiritual values and the academic requirements were found for school climate of the schools in the GCC school system. Thus the researcher of this dissertation chose to design a survey specifically tailored to the combined Christian Spiritual and Academic Environments. This was the survey given to the students for this dissertation research.

Data Collection

After the permission from each school board had been attained for the survey administering and the IRB process had been completed, then the survey process was put into progress. First, a letter of explanation and the consent form was sent to each parent along with the request of the principal of each school for permission for student participation (see Appendix B). The parents were encouraged several times to allow their children to participate by both hard copies and electronic means. The combined letter and consent forms were sent both in
hard copies and electronic versions. The consent forms returned by the parents were collated to determine which students in grades three through eight were allowed to take the survey. The administrator of the survey gave the assent form to each student with an explanation about the survey instrument. The survey was administered during the first two weeks of February in 2015 in the four different schools in the greater Atlanta area. The survey was administered to CAS on February 2, ANS on February 4, SCAS on February 10, and DCAS on February 11. The researcher for this dissertation visited the four different schools and oversaw the administering of the survey in the different classrooms in an attempt to establish consistency in the administering and marking of the survey by the students in grades three through eight.

The paper and pencil surveys were handed to the each student with a number on each survey (see Appendix A). The instructions were read to the students and the administrator requested that no student go ahead of the group, but rather answer question by question at the same pace. Each question was read out loud to the students without any extra explanation. The administrator requested the students only mark the question as read out loud. The collection of data began with the first six questions about student demographics to establish knowledge about the students attending the four different schools. The six different environments about school climate that were not identified by titles followed the demographic section of questions on the survey for the students to mark. The student had the opportunity to choose from the four Likert question choices for each answer in the 60 questions from the six environments on the survey instrument.
After all the surveys were completed by the students in the classrooms, the researcher for this dissertation went through a process to code the data into numbers in an SPSS spreadsheet (see Appendix A). The coded data equated to a specific individual student who was known by a given number rather than by his or her name. Each demographic question was coded into a number to equate to the different aspects of the demographic information. The 60 questions within the six environments were coded into numbers to equate back to the original question. The highest level of agreement of the four Likert was coded with a 4 and progressively to least agreement with a 1. The coded data were kept confidential and stored on a password-protected computer. The next step in the coding process was to code the Iowa Assessment data for each student in the SPSS spreadsheet. Access to this data was realized through permission with the GCC school system Office of Education. The data was obtained from the confidential Iowa Assessment files at each of the four schools. The coded academic achievement data was to help ascertain whether there was any relationship between student perceptions of the school climate and the academic achievement. After the Iowa Assessment data was coded in the SPSS spreadsheet along with the coded demographic and survey items, then the student name that equated to a student number was removed from the database for confidentiality. All information was kept confidential and de-identified for the dissertation or any subsequent published works.

**Statistical Analyses**

The statistical methods used for data analysis were determined by each of the five research questions. The predictive analytics software used was the IBM
SPSS, version 18, to assist in creating in-depth analyses. To provide the answer to Research Question One, the data were analyzed by using the descriptive statistics (specifically means, standard deviation, and percentages). The descriptive statistics was a method of using single numbers to represent the main ideas of a group of observations (Ramachandran, 1982). Thompson (2009) suggested that descriptive statistics were numbers that were analyzed to describe what was happening in the sample. The analyzed data helped determine the means, standard deviation, and percentages of the school climate and its six environments.

To provide the answer to Research Question Two the data were analyzed by using a T-test and ANOVA (Analysis of Variance). Question Two dealt with demographic data and perceptions of the school climate. The T-test studied the differences between the male and female perceptions of the school climate and the family status of single parent or a two parent family (Vogt, 2007). The Analysis of Variance or known as ANOVA, was used to determine the analysis of demographics with more than two groups, such as the six choices for ethnicity, the six different languages spoken at home, the six grade levels taking the survey, or the seven choices of religion in the home.

To provide the answer to Research Question Three the data were analyzed by using ANOVA. The Spiritual Environment was compared to the other five environments addressed in the survey. ANOVA was used to analyze the differences or variations among and between the groups (Vogt, 2007).

To provide the answer to Research Question Four, the data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics (specifically means, standard deviation, and
percentages). The analysis was to determine whether there was a toxic school climate as perceived by the students in one environment, several environments, or all the environments. The data were numbers that were analyzed to find what was happening in the data (Thompson, 2009).

To provide the answer to Research Question Five, the data were analyzed by correlational analysis. The analysis determined the strength of the relationship between the student perceptions of the school climate and the academic achievement of students. The determination was to find whether the two variables of student perceptions and academic achievement had a strong relationship with each other or a weak relationship (McLeod, 2008).

**Limitations**

Limitations have been reviewed progressively throughout the study. The researcher for this dissertation study had found limitations. One of the limitations was the survey was given to 171 students in four different schools in the greater Atlanta area. This was only a sampling of students from the 39 schools in the GCC school system. The demographic data in the variety of school settings and student population may be significantly different with some schools only having one or two teachers in multi-grade classrooms with four to eight grades taught by a teacher. Some schools may have one grade or two grades per teacher with five to seven teachers in a school, or several teachers of the same grade in a couple of larger schools in the school system. The schools may be multiethnic, while others may only contain one ethnicity. Some schools may have students who only speak English, whereas other schools may have many languages represented by the students. Some
schools may be rural, whereas others are in the city. The desire to learn from the sampling of this study for the greater number of Seventh-day Adventist schools and other private parochial schools across North America may have limitations due to different demographic data found in the variety of school settings.

Summary

This methodology chapter described the ways the researcher for this dissertation chose to learn and understand the perceptions of the students in a sampling of schools in the GCC school system. The creation of the survey with validity and reliability was described. The procedure for the IRB review was detailed. The step-by-step process for the data collection through the use of the surveys was explained. The data analyses using the statistical methods were specified. The value of the analyses for better understanding the school climate of the chosen schools in the GCC school system was portrayed. The perceptions of the students as determined by the surveys were invaluable to a greater knowledge and understanding for creating a better school climate where all stakeholders were pleased and content. The impact of the research will help each school understand what the students perceived was being done well and what needed to be improved. The effect of the data and analyses will help the leadership in the schools better understand the values placed upon each school and the GCC school system.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The presentation of the research findings for the study of school climate in four different schools in the greater Atlanta area of the Georgia-Cumberland Conference school system are discussed in this chapter. The focus of the study was to realize the perceptions of the students in grades three through eight. Each student circled the appropriate demographic answer for the six questions and checked the appropriate box for the four Likert scale survey of 60 questions. The survey consisted of six different environments to help determine the perceptions of the students in the Total Environment and each separate environment. The six environments consisted of the Social Environment, Spiritual Environment, Academic Environment, Classroom Environment, Home Environment, and the School Operations Environment.

Data from the quantitative study were synthesized to provide evidence to address each of the research questions. The analyses are given in the order of the five research questions. The reported data are presented in tables in numbered order in Appendix C. The analyses are based upon the 171 surveys completed by the students in grades three through eight that had signed parent consent and student assent forms. The findings for the demographics of participants are described in the text and in Table 1 in Appendix C. The results of the statistical analyses serving as answers for the five research questions are portrayed in both the text and the tables in Appendix C.
Demographics for the Study

The total number of participants in the study was 171 students in grades three through eight. Each student circled the appropriate demographic answer for six questions. The questions consisted of gender, ethnicity, language spoken at home, grade level, religion in your home, and the family status. The demographics were analyzed using descriptive statistics with frequency analyses (see Table 1).

**Gender**

The support for the frequency analyses of the demographics data is found in Table 1. The gender of the students in the study was 81 male or 47.4% and 90 female or 52.6%.

**Ethnicity**

The ethnicity of the students consisted of six sub-categories: African American, Asian, White, Latino, Native American, and Multiracial. In the dataset, the Native American sub-category had no data. The African American subcategories had 61 students with a 35.7% of the total number of 171 surveys. The Asian population was 13 students with 7.6%. The White population was 42 students with 24.6%. The Latino population was 32 students with 18.7%, and the Multiracial population was 23 students with 13.5%.

**Language Spoken at Home**

The language spoken in the home by the student had a choice of six different sub-categories on the survey. The choices were English, Spanish, African language, Chinese language, Korean, and Other. The reported data indicated no value found for Chinese language. The other five languages spoken in the home by the student
are detailed in the following data. The greatest number of students spoke English with 128 students or 74.9%. Twenty-two students reported speaking Spanish or 12.9%. Five students or 2.9% reported speaking an African language, and three students or 1.8% reported speaking Korean. Thirteen students or 7.6% reported other languages spoken at home.

**Grade Level**

The distributions of the 171 students in the different grade levels ranged from grade three through grade eight. Thirty-three students or 19.3% represented grade 3. Grade 4 had 24 students or 14.0% of the total population, and grade 5 had 25 students or 14.6%. Forty-one students or 24.0% represented grade 6. Grade 7 had 24 students or 14.0% that participated in the surveys, and grade 8 had the same number of 24 students or 14.0% that participated in the surveys.

**Religion at Home**

The demographic data of the religion in the home of the student was realized with seven choices for the students to choose one. The choices consisted of Seventh-day Adventist, Christian, Catholic, Buddhist, Muslim, None, and Other Religions. Neither Buddhist nor Muslim was chosen for the religion in the demographic data. The Seventh-day Adventist choice had 131 or 76.6% of the student population. The other Christians choice had 36 students or 21.1%. Two students or 1.2% chose Catholic, and two students or 1.2% chose other religions.
Family Status

The final category for the demographic data was noted in the family status of a single parent family or a two-parent family. The student population had 32 or 18.6% in single parent category and 139 or 81.3% in the two parent family category.

Research Question One

What are the student perceptions of the school climate as described in the six environments?

The data for Research Question One were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically means and standard deviations (see Table 2). The overall analysis of the survey indicated a very high positive perception for all students about all six environments of the school. Each survey item or question had the same four possible answers that gave a possible mean average from one through four. All averages in the Total Environment and each of the six individual environments were above the average responses of 2.5. The mean for the Total Environment was 3.40.

Student perceptions of all the six environments were found to be positively above the average of 2.5 with some stronger environments and some less strong environments. Even though the Home Environment mean average was the least strong with 3.23, it still showed strong above the 2.5 average for the one through four scale. The School Operations Environment was the second least strong with a 3.29 average, followed by the Academic with a 3.30 average. The Social Environment increased to a 3.41 average, followed by the Classroom Environment with a 3.48 average. The strongest environment was the Spiritual Environment with a 3.68 average.
Research Question Two

Do student demographic backgrounds make any difference in their perceptions of the school climate?

The student perceptions of school climate were analyzed by categories of student demographic backgrounds to find if there were any differences between each of the demographic sub-categories or among them.

**Gender**

The group statistics of the T-test were employed to examine gender as a student demographic category to find out if there was any difference between the male and the female perceptions of the school climate (see Table 3A). Results of the analysis indicated that both the 81 males and 90 females had strong positive perceptions of the school climate averaging above the 2.5 mean. The males were somewhat stronger with an average of 3.45 and the females were slightly less strong with a 3.35 average. The results of the independent samples T-test found no significant difference between male and female in their perceptions of the school climate (t=1.65; p>0.05) (see Table 3B).

**Ethnicity**

The six different choices of ethnicities were analyzed using the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The six ethnicities were all very close in the averages that indicated strong student perceptions of the school climate (see Table 4A). The Total Environment was 3.40 average. The Asian ethnicity had a comparatively low score of 3.32 average whereas the White ethnicity had the highest score of 3.46 average. The difference between the lowest and highest was only 0.14. The Latino ethnicity
had 3.35 average, and the next was Multiracial ethnicity of 3.37 average. The African American ethnicity was next to the strongest with 3.41 average, and the strongest was the White with 3.46 average. The Native American ethnicity had no reported data. There was no significant difference in the student perceptions of school climate among the five ethnic groups (F=0.60; p>0.05) (see Table 4B). The post hoc test was not performed since there was no significant difference found from the beginning.

**Language Spoken at Home**

The six different choices of languages were analyzed using the ANOVA. The Chinese language spoken at home had no data. Four of the remaining five choices of languages spoken at home by the student were all very close in the averages and were strong perceptions of the school climate (see Table 5A). The Total Environment was 3.40 average. The Korean language spoken at home had the lowest score of 2.72 and somewhat above the 2.50 average mean score. The other four languages spoken at home were very strong with very close averages of 3.35 for the Spanish language, 3.41 for the English language, 3.46 for the Other languages, and the highest score for the African language of 3.50. The student perception difference among the five languages spoken sub-categories was significant (F=3.02; p<0.05) (see Table 5B).

The post hoc test showed the detailed differences among the different languages spoken at home by the students and their perceptions of the school climate (see Table 5C). The languages compared were Korean to English with 0.001 significance level, Korean to Spanish with 0.004 a significance level, Korean to
African language with a 0.003 significance level, and Korean to Other language with a 0.002 significance level. The Korean-speaking students’ perceptions of the school Total Environment were lower than the other four language groups.

**Grade Level**

Student perceptions of school climate by grade level were analyzed using the ANOVA with the post hoc test (see Table 6A). Grade 3 with 33 students had the strongest perception of all the grade levels with a 3.64 average. Both Grade 7 and Grade 8 had the lowest perception score with 3.16 and 3.18 averages respectively and each class had 24 students. Grade 4 with 24 students, Grade 5 with 25 students, and Grade 6 with 41 students were very close with 3.43 average for both Grade 4 and Grade 6 and 3.44 average for Grade 5. The Total Environment average was 3.40.

Analysis of Variance was performed to examine the student perception difference among the grade level sub-categories. Significant difference was found (F=8.05; p<0.05) (see Table 6B). The post hoc test was performed to find the detailed differences among the six grade levels (see Table 6C). Within the detailed differences of the post hoc test Grade 3 scores were compared to Grade 4 scores with a mean difference of 0.21 (p=0.023), Grade 5 with a mean score difference of 0.20 (p=0.026), Grade 6 with a mean score difference of 0.20 (p=0.01), Grade 7 with a mean score difference of 0.48 (p=0.000), and Grade 8 with a mean score difference of 0.45 (p=0.000). Grade 4 perception scores were compared to those of Grade 7 with a mean score difference of 0.27 (p=0.005), and to those of Grade 8 with a mean score difference of 0.25 (p=0.01). Grade 5 student perceptions were compared to those of Grade 7 with a mean score difference of 0.28 (p=0.004) and to those of
Grade 8 with a mean score difference of 0.26 (p=0.008). Also Grade 6 student perceptions were compared to Grade 7 student perceptions with a mean score difference of 0.27 (p=0.002) and to Grade 8 student perceptions with a mean score difference of 0.25 (p=0.004).

**Religion at Home**

The demographics of the seven different choices of religion were analyzed using the ANOVA. Three of the category choices had no data. The three categories with no data were Buddhist, Muslim, and None. The Seventh-day Adventist religion had 131 respondents with 3.41 average that was well above average of 2.5 for a one to four scale (see Table 5A). The Christian category had 36 respondents with a strong 3.34 average. Both the Catholic and Other categories had 2 respondents each with 3.40 and 3.52 averages respectively. The Total Environment was 3.40 average.

Analysis of Variance analysis was performed with no significant difference found in student perceptions of school climate among the religion sub-categories (F=0.44; p>0.05) (see Table 7B).

**Family Status**

The group statistics of the Independent Samples T-test was employed to examine family status to see if there was any significant difference in the student perceptions between single parent families and two parent families (see Table 8A). Student perceptions of school climate involved 32 single parent families with an average score of 3.31 and 139 two parent families with an average score of 3.42. The student perceptions in the two parent families were somewhat stronger than those of the single parent families. Results of the T-test analysis showed that there was no
significant difference in student perceptions of school climate between students of single parent families and students with two parent families (t=1.51; p=0.13) (see Table 8B).

**Research Question Three**

How are the student perceptions of the Spiritual Environment compared with their perceptions of the other five school environments?

The student perceptions of the Spiritual Environment compared with their perceptions of the other five school environments was initially analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically means and standard deviations (see Table 9A). The mean for the Spiritual Environment was 3.68, which was much higher than all the other five environments or the Total Environment. The means of the other environments ranged from 3.23 to 3.47 and the mean of the Total Environment was 3.40. Student perception of the Spiritual Environment was the strongest environment above the other environments with a 0.21 to 0.45 averages stronger than the other environments.

The six different environments were analyzed using the ANOVA to determine if there was any difference in student perceptions of the school climate among the six school environments. The student perception difference among the six school environments was significant (F=22.01; p<0.05) (see Table 9B). The post hoc test showed the detailed student perception differences among the different environments as compared to the Spiritual Environment (see Table 9C). Within the detailed differences of the post hoc test the Spiritual Environment was compared to the Social Environment with a mean difference of 0.26 (p<0.01), Academic
Environment with a mean difference of 0.38 (p<0.01), Classroom Environment with a mean difference of 0.21 (p<0.01), Home Environment with a mean difference of 0.000 (p=0.45), and School Operation Environment with a mean difference of 0.45 (p<0.01). All five comparisons were significant at the significance level of 0.01. The students rated the Spiritual Environment much higher than all the other environments.

**Research Question Four**

Is there a toxic school climate as perceived by the students in all environments or within one or more of the environments?

The student perceptions of school climate were analyzed by using descriptive statistics, specifically means and standard deviations, to examine if toxic school climate existed (see Table 10). The analysis was to determine if any environment or any component within an environment indicated a toxic school climate. The determination of a toxic climate was specified by whether any environment or specific component of an environment had a mean below 2.5.

Result of data analysis showed that the mean of the Total Environment was 3.40 (see Table 9A). It was also found that each of the six environments and each of the 60 environment components had a mean above 2.5 (see Table 10). The school was not toxic in any environment or in any one of the survey components. All survey components analyzed had means between 3.10 and 3.92 except for six components between means of 2.68 and 2.92. Result of data analysis clearly showed that none of the components in any environment were negative or below 2.5 means. The
students did not perceive the school climate to be toxic in any environment of the school nor in any specific component of the survey about the school.

**Research Question Five**

Is there any relationship between student perceptions of the school climate and the academic achievement?

The relationship between academic achievement and the school climate as perceived by the students was studied in Question Five. The Pearson correlation coefficient determined the strength of the linear relationship between each of the environments and the five components of achievement that were ELA (English Language Arts), math, social studies, science, and composite. The five components of achievement were realized from the Iowa Assessment achievement scores for each of the five components of the assessments for each student. The data analyzed for Question Five was based upon 166 students with the Iowa Assessment scores from October 2014 (see Table 11). Six of the 171 students that took the survey did not have Iowa Assessment scores.

The correlation between the student perception of school climate in Total Environment and the academic achievement of ELA indicated a close relationship with a significant level of 0.05 (r=0.153; p=0.05). The correlation between the student perception of school climate in Total Environment and the academic achievement of math was weak with a significant level of 0.38 (r=0.069; p>0.05). The correlation between the student perception of school climate in Total Environment and the academic achievement of social studies was weak with a significant level of 0.18 (r=0.105; p>0.05). The correlation between the student
perception of school climate in Total Environment and the academic achievement of science was weak with a significant level of 0.62 \( r=0.037; p>0.05 \). The correlation between the student perception of school climate in Total Environment and the academic achievement of the composite scores was weak with a significant level of 0.51 \( r=0.051; p>0.05 \).

No significant relationship was found between any field of academic achievement and Social Environment, Academic Environment, Home Environment and School Operations Environment \( p>0.05 \). The Classroom Environment had a 0.04 significance level \( r=0.161; p<0.05 \) of relationship with ELA achievement. However, no other significant level of relationship was found between the Classroom environment and math, social studies, science, and composite scores.

The Spiritual Environment had the strongest levels of significance in all the six environments in the relationships between the student perceptions of the school climate and their academic achievement. The relationship of Spiritual Environment and ELA achievement showed a significance level of 0.01 \( r=0.212; p<0.05 \). The relationship between the Spiritual Environment and social studies achievement showed a significance level of 0.03 \( r=0.165; p<0.05 \). The relationship of the Spiritual Environment and the composite achievement scores showed a significance level of 0.04 \( r=0.163; p<0.05 \).

**Additional Findings of Student Perceptions of School Climate by School**

The student perceptions of the school climate for each of the six environments and the Total Environment were analyzed by each of the four schools participating in the study. Descriptive statistics using means and standard
deviations were employed in the process of statistical analysis. All the environments in all the four schools were found to be positively above the mean of 2.5 with some stronger environments and some less strong environments (see Tables 12A, 12B, 12C, and 12D). The Total Environments for the four schools ranged from 3.27 to 3.56 averages.

School 1 showed a mean of 3.27 in Total Environment indicating a strong positive perception above the mean of 2.5 for the four Likert scale (see Table 12A). Within the six environments the least strong was the School Operation with a mean of 3.12, followed by the Home Environment with a mean of 3.15, then the Academic with a mean of 3.23, the Classroom with a mean of 3.28, the Social with a mean of 3.32, and the strongest was the Spiritual with a mean of 3.53.

School 2 showed a mean of 3.47 in Total Environment indicating a strong positive perception above the mean of 2.5 (see Table 12B). Within the six environments the least strong was the Home with a mean of 3.25, followed by Academic with a mean of 3.38, then School Operation with a mean of 3.40, the Social with a mean of 3.50, the Classroom with a mean of 3.56, and the strongest was the Spiritual with a mean of 3.75.

School 3 showed a mean of Total Environment of 3.56 indicating a strong positive perception above the mean of 2.5 (see Table 12C). Within the six environments the least strong was the Academic with a mean of 3.33, followed by Home with a mean of 3.42, then Social with a mean of 3.48, School Operation with a mean of 3.66, Classroom with a mean of 3.67, and the strongest was the Spiritual with a mean of 3.80.
School 4 showed a mean of 3.42 in Total Environment indicating a strong positive perception above the mean of 2.5 (see Table 12D). Within the six environments the least strong was the Home with a mean of 3.23, followed by School Operation with a mean of 3.26, then the Academic with a mean of 3.29, Social with a mean of 3.43, Classroom with a mean of 3.53, and the strongest was the Spiritual with a mean of 3.75.

The strongest of the six environments in all four schools was the Spiritual Environment with means of 3.53, 3.75, 3.75, and 3.80. The mean of Spiritual Environment was 0.26 higher than Total Environment for School 1. The same comparison for School 2 was made with a mean of 0.28 higher for the Spiritual, for School 3, a mean of 0.24 was higher for the Spiritual, and for School 4, a mean of 0.33 was higher for the Spiritual Environment. All four of the Spiritual Environment means were positively the strongest mean for each school.

**Additional Findings for the Relationship between Student Perception of School Climate and Their Academic Achievement by School**

The relationship between academic achievement and the school climate as perceived by the students was studied in Question Five. In the additional findings each of the four schools were individually studied to find relationship between the student perceptions of the school climate and their academic achievement with the composite score. The Pearson Correlation was used to find if there was any significant relationship. In School 1 there was no significant relationship found (r=0.06; p=0.65) (see Tables 13A and 13B). In School 2 there was no significant relationship found (r=0.18; p=0.25) (see Tables 13C and 13D). In School 3 there was
no significant relationship found ($r=0.21; p=0.39$) (see Tables 13E and 13F). In School 4 there was no significant relationship found ($r=0.06; p=0.65$) (see Tables 13G and 13H). Results of the Pearson Correlation analysis showed that there was no significant relationship between the student perception of the school Total Environment and the academic achievement Composite scores in any of the four schools.

**Summary**

The statistical analyses conducted on data collected from the survey administered in four schools provided demographic information and answers to the five research questions proposed. In response to Question One, result of the data analysis indicated a very high positive perception of all students about all six environments of the school climate. In response to Question Two, the demographic backgrounds of the students were analyzed to find if there were differences in their perceptions of the school climate by category of their demographic information. No significant difference was found for gender, ethnicity, religion at home, or family status. The language spoken at home had perception difference among one language sub-category out of five categories of languages. Student perception difference was found among the grade level sub-categories.

In response to Question Three student perceptions of the Spiritual Environment was compared to those of the other five environments. The result of the comparison showed that the student perception difference was significant at the level of 0.01. The student perception rating of the Spiritual Environment was considerably higher than those of all other environments. In response to Question
Four, student perceptions of school climate were examined by environment and by component of each environment. No sign of toxic school climate in any environment or any component of each environment was found. In response to Question Five, the academic achievement and the student perception of the school climate was studied. No significant relationship was found between academic achievement and Social, Academic, Home, or School Operations environments. In Classroom Environment, significant relationship was found between student perceptions and ELA achievement. A significant relationship was also found between academic achievement and the Spiritual Environment.

The analyses and findings were very enlightening to better understand the student perceptions in the four schools of the Georgia-Cumberland school system in the greater Atlanta area. These analyses were the underpinning for the discussion in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The desire for a better understanding of the school climate of the schools in the greater Atlanta area of the Georgia-Cumberland Conference school system was the motivation for this study. The beginning of this research for the dissertation began during the Educational Leadership Specialist (Ed. S.) Program when no validated and reliable survey instrument was found to ascertain the school climate of Christian schools. Survey instruments that are validated and reliable were available and well used in schools, but the Spiritual Environment was not found nor included. The progression of research began in the Ed. S. with creating a survey for schools with six environments to include the measure of the perceptions of the students for the spiritual values of Christian schools.

In the pilot study the survey instrument was created, validated, and found reliable (Amlaner & Chan, 2013). The instrument created was the tool used for the research for this dissertation. The instrument was given to 171 students in grades three through eight in four different schools in the greater Atlanta area of the Georgia-Cumberland Conference school system. The students who had signed parent consent forms were noted and given the survey instrument. These students signed the student assent forms, and 171 students completed the survey. The analyses and findings from the surveys have been detailed in Chapter 4. First the demographic analyses were noted and then the five research questions followed. All numbered tables referred to in this chapter may be visualized in Appendix C. This chapter discusses the major findings of the study with reference to previous studies.
in the field. The implications of the findings and recommendations for future research and educational practitioners were also included in this chapter.

**Research Questions**

Based upon the purpose of this study to better understand the student perceptions to determine the school climate, the following research questions were formulated to guide this study. The research questions were:

1. What are the student perceptions of the school climate as described in the six environments?
2. Do student demographic backgrounds make any difference in their perceptions of the school climate?
3. How are the student perceptions of the Spiritual Environment compared with their perceptions of the other five school environments?
4. Is there a toxic school climate as perceived by the students in all environments or within one or more of the environments?
5. Is there any relationship between student perceptions of the school climate and the academic achievement?

**Summary of Demographic Findings**

The demographics findings for the research study of the 171 students in grades three through eight may be found in Table 1. The four schools had a total of 229 students in grades three through eight that could have taken the survey instrument. The percentage of students that received parent consent was 74.7% of the total students available. In both School 1 and School 2 the schools obtained 100% of the parent consents for the students in grades three through eight. The four
schools had a total of 346 students in all schools in grades pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. The demographics of this study for the total numbers of the students in the schools and each school were compared to give added dimension for understanding (see Chapter 3).

**Gender**

In the four schools the gender of the students taking the survey instrument was 5.2% higher for females with 52.6% and males with 47.4%. The comparison to the total 346 students in all grades for all four schools was 171 females with 49.4% and 175 males with 50.6%. The percentages for all students in the four schools were closer to having the same number of females and males. The gender for the total number of students in each individual school was compared. School 1 had 44.7% male and 55.3% female. School 2 had 58.5% male and 41.5% female. School 3 had 52.8% male and 47.2% female. School 4 had 50% male and 50% female. The greatest difference in gender for the total number of students in each individual school was found in School 1. The gender of the students in total number or for each school varied slightly from the survey percentages.

**Ethnicity**

The ethnicity of the schools was varied among the different ethnicity choices in the survey instrument. The ethnicities noted in the survey found the African Americans had the highest percentage of students with 35.7% followed by Whites with 24.6%, Latinos with 18.7%, Multiracial 13.5%, and Asians with 7.6%. The total number of ethnicities for all grades in the schools found the African Americans category had the highest percentage of students with 31.8% that was 4% lower than
the survey results. The White category had 20.2% that was 4.4% lower than the survey results. The Latino category had 21.1% that was 2.4% higher than the survey results. The Multiracial category had 8.4% that was 5.1% lower than the survey results. The Asian category had a total of 18.5% that was 10.9% higher than the results of the survey.

The individual school demographics of the ethnicities indicated variances from the survey percentages and the total numbers for the individual school percentages. School 1 had 41.5% African Americans, 4.3% Asian, 29.8% White, 21.2% Latino, and 3.2% Multiracial. The African American and Latino categories were higher than the survey averages, and the African American and White were higher than the total number for the schools. School 2 had 28.6% African Americans, 7.1% Asian, 28.6% White, 31.4% Latino, and 4.3% Multiracial. The Latino ethnicity was higher than the survey, and the White and Latino were higher than the total number for the schools. School 3 had 47.2% African Americans, 2.8% Asians, 33.3% White, 2.8% Latino, and 13.9% Multiracial. The African American and White ethnicities were higher than the survey, and the African American and White ethnicities were higher than the total number for the schools. The Latino category was considerably lower than either the survey at 15.9% or total number of students for the schools at 18.3%. School 4 had 23.3% African American, 37.0% Asian, 6.9% White, 20.5% Latino, and 12.3% Multiracial ethnicities. The Asian category was 29.4% higher for the survey and 18.5% higher than the total number of students for the schools. The comparisons indicated School 4 had a significant difference in the
number of Asian students in the school. School 4 had a large population of Asians as ESL learners visiting from other countries and few of these students took the survey.

**Language Spoken at Home**

The language spoken at home by the student was predominately English with 74.9%. The students verbally indicated to the researcher that different languages were spoken in the home by the parents, but that the students mostly answered and talked in English in the home, or even some students verbally reported speaking two languages interchangeably in the home. This question was difficult for some of the students to answer due to the dual languages used in homes. No data was learned for the language spoken at home for the total number of students in the schools.

**Grade Level**

The percentage of students taking the survey in grade levels four, five, seven, and eight were similar in percentages to the total numbers for the schools around 14.0%, except for 3rd grade with 19.3% and 6th grade with 24.0%. Since both School 1 and School 2 had the total number of possible students in grades three through eight taking the surveys, then the percentages are not different for the total number of students in each grade of these two individual schools. School 3 had 73.0% of the possible students in grades three through eight take the surveys. School 4 had 48.5% of the possible students in grades three through eight take the surveys. The high number of ESL Asian students lowered the number of students able to understand the survey and the parents who understood the parent consent form to give permission for the student to be part of the survey process.
Religion at Home

Since the schools were part of the GCC Seventh-day Adventist education system, the greatest percentage for religion at home was the Seventh-day Adventist with 76.6%. The schools drew students from the local Adventist church, the greater Atlanta Adventist churches, and the general community with other forms of faith. The Other Christians component had 21.1% with 1.2% each for Catholic and Other Religions. No students reported Buddhist, Muslim, or None on the survey. This data was not known for the whole school and could not be compared.

Family Status

The family status was predominately two parent families with 81.3% and 18.7% for single parent families. These percentages indicated students from two parent families were able to choose private education over public education or other schools possibly because two parent families could afford tuition with two incomes in the household to support the student in private school.

Summary of Major Findings

Research Question One

What are the student perceptions of the school climate as described in the six environments?

The student perceptions in grades three through eight for all six environments and the total environment showed positively strong averages above the average of 2.5 on the four possible answers to each survey component (see Table 2). The averages indicated students in all four schools perceived the schools very positively.
The Home Environment average of 3.23 was the lowest among the six environments, yet indicated strong above the average of 2.5. Three questions in the Home Environment scored under the 3.00 average (see Table 10). The perceptions of the students on Question 42 had the average of 2.98 about parents setting limits for the use of electronic games, social networking, Internet, and television. The perception average was still above 2.5, yet one of the three lowest averages. Question 46 asked the perceptions of the students as to whether their parents often checked their homework. The average of 2.88 indicated over half of the students had parents checking their homework, yet not quite half of the parents did not check the homework of the students. The parents of students with high grades did not feel the need to check their students’ grades, and other parents were too busy to find the time to look on the Renweb sight to check the grades. The lowest score average of 2.68 on Question 50 asked if the parents volunteered their time to help the school. The students answered the least positive for this answer. Possible causes for the lack of volunteering time was due to minimal time on the part of the parents, lack of time due to so much travel time in greater Atlanta with parents and students traveling distances to come to the four different schools, and parents lacked time due to their on-the-job timeframes.

The School Operation Total Environment was the next lowest average of the perceptions of the students with 3.29, yet again was still positive above the average of 2.5 (see Table 2). Two questions in the School Operations environment received averages below 3.00 (see Table 10). Question 56 had the average of 2.91 and asked the perception of the students whether the principal asked their parents to
participate in the school activities. The perception of the students indicated a lower average than 3.00 and they believed their parents were not asked to participate in school activities. The students may not know what the parents were asked to do, or maybe the parents truly were not asked for whatever reason. It is possible that the principal knowing the busyness of the parent simply chose not to ask the parent for help. Question 64 had the average of 2.73 and asked the students whether they could study with no noise disturbance. The perceptions of the students indicated the average of 2.73 that reflected even with noise disturbance they were still able to study. Three other questions had lower averages of 3.10, 3.11, and 3.13. Question 53 asked whether the students perceived the principal listened to what the student said. The answer was still positive, but showed less strong perceptions of the principal’s ability to listen and hear what the student was saying. Question 55 asked if the students were happy with the lunch program. This question was difficult for students in School 1 and School 3 to answer because there was no daily lunch program in those schools, but rather one or two days only per week. Question 62 asked the students if they were comfortable in their classroom, not too hot or cold. The perceptions of the students indicated a less positive feeling about the warmth or coldness of the classroom, although the scores were still above the average of 2.5.

The Academic Environment indicated the average of 3.30 with the student perceptions (see Table 2). Question 25 had the least positive of 2.73 with the students checking their grades online. The second lowest score was Question 29 with the average of 3.16. Students perceived the curriculum was not challenging. This area indicated a challenge for each school to address the individual needs of
each student and to differentiate teaching to accommodate the learning abilities and styles of each student. The highest average of 3.55 was indicated in Question 28 where the students perceived their school helped them succeed.

The Social Environment had the average of 3.41 with the least positive average of 2.82 (see Tables 2 and 10). Question 10 asked the students if they told their friends about their school. Students rated their perceptions with the average of 2.82. Students did tell their friends about their school. One possibility may be their friends at home, church, sports, music may go to public school, and the student does not know how to explain the Christian aspect of the school. Question 10 may also be less strong due to the students having their friends at their Christian school and since the students live distances from one another they do not see one another often enough to talk about their daily school happenings. The strongest positive score of 3.92 was Question 13 with the perception of the students about having friends at their school. This score indicated a very strong feeling of friendship among the students.

The Classroom Environment scored a strong average of 3.48 (see Table 2). Question 37 had the least strong average of 3.11 with the perceptions of the students (see Table 10). The average of 3.11 indicated that students did not believe the teacher praised them for work well done. The average was still strong above 2.5, yet consideration is needed to improve this area in the classroom. On the other hand, the strongest average of 3.70 on Question 32 was given to the perceptions of the students about the teachers encouraging the students to do their best. This perception indicated the students felt embraced by their teacher to strive to do well.
The overall strongest average for the perceptions of the students was the Spiritual Environment with 3.68 (see Table 2). The averages by each question were 3.56 up to 3.88 (see Table 10). The strongest average of the perceptions of the students of 3.88 was the belief that praying in school was important. The students indicated by the averages given that their perceptions of the Spiritual Environment of the school were extremely important. The perceptions of the students indicated the school was known as a private Christian school, and the belief in God was part of the curriculum and the daily Bible study. The strong Spiritual Environment also indicated that the students came to these schools to have the additional spiritual learning to enrich their lives. Parents purposely sent their students to a private Christian school and were willing to pay the tuition due to the value gained from the Spiritual Environment.

The Total environment average for the perceptions by all 171 students was 3.40 for all 60 questions on the survey instrument (see Table 2). This average was strong and well above the 2.5 means average. The perceptions of the students in all six environments and the Total Environment indicated strong perceived value of each school by the students. The schools were doing very well in all environments of the schools.

**Student perception of school climate by school.** The student perceptions of the school climate for each of the six environments and the total environment were analyzed by each of the four schools partaking in the research study. The perceptions of the students for School 1 averaged from 3.12 to 3.53 (see Table 12A). The least strong environment was the School Operation and the strongest
environment was the Spiritual. The student perceptions indicated a high regard for the Spiritual Environment of the school. The student perceptions of the Total Environment were 3.27. The private Christian school has gained a positive reputation in the community for the school grew 20% in student population from the previous school year to the current school year. The new students from the community numbered 30 to replace the number of students that graduated eighth grade and still grew with a 20% increase. Possibly the addition of a high percentage of new students previously in public schools or home schools attributed for the lower average ratings when compared to the other three schools in the study.

The perceptions of the students for School 2 averaged from 3.38 to 3.75 (see Table 12B). The least strong environment was the Home Environment and the strongest was the Spiritual Environment. The Christian values of the school and the added spiritual components of the curriculum were perceived strong by the students. The student perceptions of the Total environment were 3.47. The student population of the school was slightly less this year than the previous year and was heavier on the pre-kindergarten through sixth grades. The student population of the students in grades three through eight did not change significantly from the previous year so the students had a year or more years of going to the same school. Possibly the students had stronger perceptions about the school due to going to the same school for two or more years.

The perceptions of the students for School 3 averaged from 3.33 to 3.80 (see Table 12C). The least strong environment was the Academic and the strongest environment was the Spiritual. The perceptions of the students for the Spiritual
Environment indicated the students felt strongly about the value of their Christian school. School 3 had the strongest Spiritual Environment of all four schools. The teacher to student ratio was the lowest for this school with one teacher to 12 students. Possibly the Spiritual Environment was higher due to the more one-on-one relationship of the teacher and students. The student perceptions of the Total Environment were 3.56.

The perceptions of the students for School 4 averaged from 3.23 to 3.75 (see Table 12D). The least strong environment was the Home Environment and the strongest was the Spiritual Environment. The least strong perceptions of the Home Environment may possibly be caused by the high number of ESL students who are living with a host parent away from their own home in another country. The strongest was the Spiritual Environment that indicated the students perceived with high regard the value of the Christian school curriculum and Christian aspects, such as prayer, of the school. The student perceptions of the Total Environment for School 4 were 3.42.

The four schools had variances in the averages of the six environments and total environment within each school, but the one consistent aspect of the study was the very strong Spiritual Environment of each school. This indicated parents chose and sent their students to the private Christian schools specifically to endorse the spiritual training given each student in the school. The averages of all environments and the Total Environment were strong above the average of 2.5.
**Research Question Two**

Do student demographic backgrounds make any difference in their perceptions of the school climate?

The student demographic backgrounds of gender had no significant difference between male and female in their perceptions of the school climate (see Tables 3A and 3B). The no significant difference in the perceptions of the students with relation to the gender may be because so many students have been friends for many years at the school that resulted in students valuing each other as friends and like one big family at school. The gender differences of the male and female students did not have any significant differences about their perceptions of the school climate.

The student demographic backgrounds of the six ethnicities were very close in the averages from 3.32 to 3.46 that indicated strong student perceptions of the school climate (see Table 4A). No data was given for Native American, and the Total Environment had an average of 3.40. There was no significant difference in the student perceptions of school climate among the five ethnic groups (see Table 4B). The multi-ethnicity of the four schools lent a flavor of real life to the students to get along with each other and have a happy family atmosphere in the schools. The smaller ratios of teacher to students may possibly have created the value students place upon each other as friends. The result of these friendships among the different ethnicities created no significant difference found. The ethnicities did not think differently about the school climate.
The language spoken at home had six different choices of languages (see Table 5A). The Chinese language had no data. Four of the five remaining choices had close averages of 3.35 to 3.50 and were strong perceptions of the school climate. The Korean language had the lowest score of 2.72 that is somewhat above the 2.5 average mean score. The significance level was 0.01 for the sub-categories of the five languages spoken (see Table 5B). The post hoc test showed the differences were between the Korean language spoken and the English, Spanish, African language, and Other languages (see Table 5C). The perceptions of the Korean-speaking students of the school Total Environment were lower than the other four language groups. The Korean students were ESL students who came to learn English and live with a host family and did not necessarily build the friend relationships with the students in the school to have strong school climate perceptions.

The perceptions of the students of the school climate by grade levels had averages from 3.64 to 3.18 (see Table 6A). Grade 3 had the highest average perception of the school climate, Grades 4, 5, and 6 had averages of 3.43 and 3.44, then the averages of 3.16 and 3.18 lowered for Grade 7 and 8. There was a significant difference among student perceptions of the different grades at the 0.01 level. The strongest student perceptions were found in Grade 3 (see Table 6B). The post hoc test indicated the comparisons between Grade 3 and all other grades, Grades 4, 5, and 6 (see Table 6C). The Grade 3 students were closer to the younger years of school with much nurturing by the teacher to each student. The Grade 3 students possibly had a higher level of respect for the six environments of the school and had not yet formed opinions of indifference to the school climate.
The student perceptions of the school climate by religion resulted in seven different choices with no data given for three of the categories (see Table 7A). The two main religions were Seventh-day Adventist category with 131 students with an average of 3.41 and the Christian category with 36 students with an average of 3.34. The Seventh-day Adventist religion had 76.6% and the Christian had 21.0%. The large number of Adventist students indicated the relationship of the school to the GCC school system of Seventh-day Adventists. There was no significant difference found in the student perceptions of the school climate among different student religions (see Table 7B).

The family status with 32 single parent families represented 19.8% and 139 Two Parent families represented 81.2% (see Table 8A). The greater number of two parent families may follow due to the tuition cost and the need for two incomes to cover the tuition. No significant difference in student perceptions was found for One Parent or Two Parent families (see Table 8B). The mean of both categories were so close between the two groups that no significant differences were found.

**Research Question Three**

How are the student perceptions of the Spiritual Environment compared with their perceptions of the other five school environments?

The student perceptions of the Spiritual Environment were compared with their perceptions of the other five school environments (see Table 9A). The averages of the other five environments ranged from 3.23 to 3.47 and the Total Environment was 3.40, whereas the Spiritual Environment was much stronger with an average of 3.68. The parents send their children to the private Christian schools to obtain
spiritual Christian learning through the Bible classes, Bible study, prayer, discussion, singing, chapel, pastoral visits, and varied other ways throughout the school day. The students knew they were going to a private Christian school where they could learn and openly speak about God. There was a significant difference for the Spiritual Environment and the other school environments (see Table 9B). All the comparisons were significant at the significance level of 0.01 (see Table 9C). The student perceptions rated the Spiritual Environment much higher than all the other environments. The Spiritual Environment was very important to the students in these four schools.

**Research Question Four**

Is there a toxic school climate as perceived by the students in all environments or within one or more of the environments?

The four schools were studied for a toxic school climate as perceived by the students in all environments. The six environments and the total environment were much stronger than the mean average of 2.5 (see Table 9A). The averages ranged from a strong average of 3.23 to the strongest average of 3.68. The total environment was an average of 3.40. These averages did not indicate any toxic environment determined to be below the mean of 2.5. Further analysis was completed to detail every component of the survey instrument (see Table 10). Only six components were less strong and below 3.00. The six components ranged between averages of 2.68 to 2.98, which were still stronger than any circumstances of toxic environment average of below 2.5. Four components were in the lower 3.00 average around 3.10. The rest of the components ranged on up to 3.88. The schools
were not toxic. No environment was toxic. Further, no individual component was negative or toxic in the survey. The students did not perceive any single component, any environment, or the Total Environment of the four schools as toxic.

**Research Question Five**

Is there any relationship between student perceptions of the school climate and the academic achievement?

The relationship between the student perceptions of the school climate and academic achievement was minimal (see Table 11). The Pearson Correlation determined the strength of the relationship between each of the six environments and the five components of the Iowa Assessment. When looking at the composite scores of the students in relationship with the environments no significant level was found except for the Spiritual Environment with a significance level of 0.04. The analysis determined the significance level for each of the four components of the Iowa Assessment in addition to the composite scores in relationship to the environments. One significant level was found within the Classroom Environment in the relationship with ELA of 0.04. The Total Environment with the composite scores had a significance level of 0.51 that was above the 0.05 significance level limit.

In the Spiritual Environment significance was found in three achievement areas. The significance level for ELA was 0.01, Social Studies was 0.03, and Composite was 0.04. No significant relationship was found between Spiritual Environment and the other two areas of Math and Science. The analyses indicated that significant relationships between student perceptions of the school climate and their academic achievement only appeared in a very small portion of the analyses.
Relationship of school climate and student achievement by school.

Individual schools were analyzed to find if there was any relationship between the student perceptions of the school climate and their composite score in their academic achievement assessments (see Tables 13A, 13B, 13C, and 13D). No relationship was found for any one of the four individual schools. The significance level was well above the level of 0.05. The academic achievement of the students did not have a relationship with the high perceptions of the students within grades three through eight in the four schools. The students perceived the high values of the schools no matter what their achievement levels indicated. The high achieving students did not perceive the school in a greater manner than the lower achieving students.

Discussion

The demographics indicated that no matter what gender, ethnicity, language spoken at home, grade, religion, or family status, all students at the four schools perceived the schools very positively. These demographic findings indicated that the students from all different socio-economic backgrounds, whether male or female, whatever ethnicity or language spoken at home, or from a single or two parent home perceived the schools in very positive manners. The positive schools as evidenced by the perceptions of the students in all six environments gained positive engagement from each student. This reflected the same idea as manifested by Character Education Partnership (2010) that positive school climate welcomed the students and made each student, no matter the demographic differences or sameness, feel valued.
The students in the four schools perceived their schools very positively as indicated by the high averages of the perceptions of the students in all environments, particularly the Spiritual Environment. The findings of this study supported those of Vatanartiran (2013) and Wighting and Liu (2009). Vatanartiran suggested the students and parents placed value upon the religious training received by the students in a private Christian school. Wighting and Liu (2009) found the student’s perception of the schools involved a positive correlation between their religious commitment and the student’s sense of the private Christian school community. The highest perception score was the Spiritual Environment for all four schools and the Total Environment. The mission for the schools in the GCC school system strongly included the Spiritual Environment in addition to the academics. The key factor in parents specifically choosing the private Christian schools was because of the Spiritual Environment of the schools (Gregorutti, 2007). Kennedy and Duncan (2006) noted parents desired education for their children in private Christian schools that mirrored their own family’s spirituality. The value of the Spiritual Environment in the school attracted and maintained students in the schools, and the students mirrored the parents’ values with their strong perceptions about the Spiritual Environment.

The positive school climate as evidenced by the perceptions of the students in the survey clearly indicated that there was not a toxic environment. The students did not perceive that the teachers viewed the students as problems, criticized the students, or felt the school had a hopeless feeling as evidenced by a toxic environment (Deal & Peterson, 1998; Hoy & Tarter, 1992). All components of the
survey were well above the average of 2.5 that notated a positive and strong liking of the school.

In this study, the high achieving students did not perceive the school in a greater manner than the lower achieving students. Wang and Holcombe (2010) found high achieving students had high perceptions of the schools, and low achieving students had low perceptions of the schools. But this was not the case in these four schools. Adeogun and Olisaemeka (2011) found a significant relationship between the influence of the school climate and academic achievement of the students. Pallas (1988) believed the study of school climate was linked to educational outcomes with particular emphasis on achievement. More specifically, MacNeil, Prater, and Busch (2009) found that students in healthy learning environments achieved higher scores on assessments. However, the analysis from this study in the Total Environments indicated that all students irrespective of achievement saw the school in a positive manner that was indicative of their optimism in their continued growth and development.

The four private Christian schools in this study continually worked diligently to maintain a positive school climate to attract parents and maintain students. The survey analyses have indicated the value placed upon the four schools by the positive responses of the perceptions of the students.

**Implications**

The strongest implication for this study was that Spiritual Environment remains the strongest of all six environments in all four schools (see Tables 2, 12A, 12B, 12C, and 12D). The data of the students' perceptions supported the schools’
stand for Christian values, beliefs, lifestyles, morals, ethics, and Christian love for each student and family member. The data also indicated the schools were succeeding in sharing these values with the students. The students and parents were choosing these four schools because of their reputation and adherence to the Christian standards of the GCC school system. The perception of the students was that the schools were succeeding in the message shared about the Christian values.

Another implication of this study was that all the perceptions of the students were strong in all six environments (see Table 2). Students rated the six school environments much stronger than the average of 2.5. The analyses denoted students liked the four schools in all environments and perceived the values of the schools at a high level. No environment was even close to the average. Even when each component was analyzed no separate component was 2.5 or lower and only seven components were below the average of 3.00 (see Table 10). The perceptions of the students were way above the average. These averages indicated the students were very positive about the school and liked the environments of these schools. These findings spoke very highly of the school climates at these four schools. However while student perceptions in all the environments were strong, some environments were less strong than others. Teachers and administrators need to focus attention on creating strategies to work on environments that were not as strong.

A third implication was none of the schools were toxic or even near toxic. Not even one component of the 60 components of the survey when analyzed individually was at the average of 2.5 or below the average. The schools were not
toxic, but well liked, respected, and appreciated. The outcome was achieved by the concerted efforts by teachers, administrators, parents, and the community.

A fourth implication was the findings of this study indicated minimal to no relationship between the academic achievement of the students and the student perceptions of the six environments for all four schools or for each individual school (see Table 11). No matter whether the students achieved high or low on their academic achievement assessments, still the perceptions of the students were strong for the six different environments or the total environment. The only environment that had a small relationship was the Spiritual Environment with a 0.04 significance level. The strong implication was that students and parents specifically chose the private Christian school for their students and the students held the schools in high regard.

A fifth implication was the impact of this study upon the leader or principal of a school. As a leader the principal needs to take the results of this school climate study and personally study, reflect, and devise a plan for improvements in the details noted by the student perceptions. The results of the study may inspire the principal to change some facet or facets of the leadership style in relationship to the students. The leader needs also to share the climate study results with the teachers and staff that could be involved in a process of detailed drilling with reference to the specific targeted areas with the lower means scores. The principal, teachers, and staff could collectively find ways for improvements to the school climate for the benefit of the students. As a result, the active engagement and commitment by the
principal, teachers, and staff will make the school a better place as guided by the students’ perceptions in the school climate study.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The recommendations for future research include enlarging this study to contain a greater number of the schools in the GCC school system. The value gained for each individual school and for the GCC school system as a whole would be meaningful to each individual school and the whole GCC school system. The GCC school system would also benefit from an understanding of the demographics in the different schools, regions of the school system, and the whole school system.

A second recommendation is for a similar study using the survey instrument, and possibly leaving out the Spiritual environment, to be administered in small rural public schools with similar demographics to the four schools of the current study. This would allow a comparison of student achievement between public schools and the private parochial school sector. In this study the students in the four schools lived distances away from their schools, whereas the students in a rural public school would live in the general neighborhood of the public school. The relationship of student perception of school climate and their academic achievement may be different from the outcomes of this study.

A third recommendation is to study how students tell their friends about their private Christian school. A more in-depth study is needed to help the school better understand how and where the students talk to their friends about their school. The study should also include an understanding of whether the friends attend the same private Christian school, go to another private Christian school, or
go to public school. This aspect may best be studied using focus groups or individually interviewing students with a qualitative study approach.

A fourth recommendation is to create a survey for the parents to be used in the same schools as the students and include the same six environments, but with components engaging the parents. The study would then have the ability to compare the perceptions of the students with the perceptions of the parents for the school climate. The Home Environment was the least strong with the average of 3.23. Another benefit of creating a survey for parents would be to have greater understanding of the perceptions of the parents and their needs as pertaining to the private Christian schools. From this data and analysis the school could create classes to engage the parents to help them be a greater support for their student in the school.

A more comprehensive study of the school climate in the GCC school system is to create protocols for a qualitative research study using focus groups and semi-preplanned questions for the facilitator to direct the conversations. A more detailed rich understanding of the individual perceptions of the students would be achieved. The engagement of both the qualitative approach with the focus groups and use of the survey for a quantitative approach would create a very meaningful mixed methods study of the school climate in the schools in GCC school system.

Another noted improvement to the survey is the demographic section of the survey needs some enhancements to enlarge the understanding of the student and the student’s family. The component, language spoken in the home, needs to include two languages equally spoken in a home to give a clear understanding of this aspect
of the demographics. More demographic data may be realized, such as the age of the child, the number of siblings, and the child’s placement number within the children of the family.

**Recommendations for Educational Practitioners**

Ongoing data collection about the perceptions of students of the school climate is critical to an understanding of the school and school system. The data and analyses may be compared from one year to another, or from one year to two years later or whatever cycle is chosen. The importance is for a continual understanding of the values the students place upon the school. The teachers and leaders of the school may think everything is going well, but miss the subtle cues coming from the perceptions of the students. The administering of the survey every chosen number of years indicates the leaders’ value placed upon the students and their perceptions of the school climate.

After the survey data have been analyzed and interpreted the leaders and teachers need to look carefully at the individual components within the survey to determine the areas needing improvement. The leader and teachers need to study, discuss, and involve the parents and students to find ways to help improve these specific areas. The process is ongoing and never ending, but the result is greater success for the school, and stronger perceptions by the students about the school. When the students are happy with the school, then usually the parents are happy.

In private parochial schools the Spiritual Environment is very important. Students in private parochial schools recognize the value placed upon the Spiritual Environment of the school as indicated by the study. The leaders and teachers need
to continually reassess their engagement in sharing the Christian values with the students. The private parochial school systems fit a niche of students and parents who value the Spiritual Environment.

**Conclusion**

The conclusion of this study was that the students in the four schools were very satisfied with all six environments surveyed about the schools. All students perceived each of the six environments and the Total Environment of the school with strong perceptions even if they did not do as well in the academics of school or were not necessarily high achievers. A positive feeling held by each student could translate into positive feelings held by the parents. The data analyses from the school climate study indicated seven specific components of the survey with lower scores below 3.00 within the six environments that needed attention to increase the averages of the perceptions of the students.

School climate is a continual ongoing value for a school. The need to continually reassess the school climate and the specifics of the school climate are needed to create a positive private Christian school. Private schools have to market their product to have students in the school, and one of the best marketing tools is the word of mouth by the students and parents. With the fast movement of parents’ and students’ beliefs, feelings, and perceptions about a school via the Internet and various electronic means, the school must continually be alert to any subtle changes in the school climate. School climate is “the heart and soul of school success” (Preble & Gordon, 2011, p. 12). It behooves the leaders, principals, and teachers in the GCC school system to continually reassess the perceptions of the students to better
understand the school climate found when walking into the school, the classroom, or any of the six environments of the school. Positive feelings from the school climate are indications of student and parent satisfaction. Congratulations to the four schools included in this study for excellent school climates.
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APPENDIX A

Student Survey

Student Survey with Directions for Administering the Survey Instrument and the
   Subtitles for Six Environments

Student Survey Coding for Analysis
Student Survey

Directions: Please circle only one answer for each question. Please circle the best answer to the question.

1. Gender
   - Male
   - Female

2. Ethnicity
   - African American
   - Asian
   - White
   - Latino
   - Native American
   - Multiracial

3. Language spoken at home
   - English
   - Spanish
   - African language
   - Chinese language
   - Korean
   - Other

4. Grade level
   - 3
   - 4
   - 5
   - 6
   - 7
   - 8

5. Religion in your home
   - Seventh-day Adventist
   - Christian
   - Catholic
   - Buddhist
   - Muslim
   - None
   - Other

6. Family status
   - Single parent
   - Two parent family

Directions: Please check only one answer for each question. Please check the best answer to the question.

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**Student Survey with Directions for Administering the Survey Instrument and the Subtitles for Six Environments**

Note: Administrator of the survey please read the following words to the students.

*Students, you are now going to be taking a survey to help the school know what is going well and what needs to be improved. This is called a School Climate Study. The first six questions help tell about the students in the school. The next sixty questions have no right or wrong answer. Please answer honestly to the best of your ability. Each question has a choice of four answers. Please only check one answer for each question. Your name is never attached to any of the questions or research. No one will know what you have said or felt about a question.*

*Please read silently while I read aloud each question. Then please check the appropriate answer in the box. Please do not go ahead or ask any questions for interpretation. Now we will start the survey.*

Note: Administrator, please allow enough time for each student to check one answer per question. If a student asks a question for interpretation please ask the student to answer to the best of his or her ability.

Directions: *Please circle only one answer for each question. Please circle the best answer to the question.*

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**School Operation Environment**

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# Student Survey Coding for Analysis

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<td>Asian = 2</td>
<td>Caucasian/White = 3</td>
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<td>3. Language spoken at home</td>
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APPENDIX B

Institutional Review Board Approval for School Climate Study

Parental Consent Form

Student Assent Form

Request to School Boards for Surveys in Four Schools
Institutional Review Board’s Approval for School Climate Study

1/13/2015

Beverly Amlaner, Student
KSU Department of Educational Leadership

RE: Your application dated 12/11/2012, Study number 13-222: Climate Assessment Instrument Development for the Georgia-Cumberland Conference of Seventh-day Adventists School System

Dear Mrs. Amlaner:

I have reviewed your request for continuing review of the study listed above. This study qualifies for expedited review under FDA and DHHS (OHRP) regulations.

This is to confirm that I have approved your request for continuation. The protocol is approved through completion of a questionnaire. Revision 1/12/2015: Sampling of students in grades 3-8 from four schools. The data set associated with this study is considered limited. In reviewing your consent procedure for this study, your inclusion of the following special classes of subjects was taken into account: students, minors.

You are granted permission to continue your study as described effective immediately. The study is next subject to continuing review on or before 1/13/2016. Two weeks prior to that time go to http://www.kennesaw.edu/irb/forms.html and submit a progress report to continue or close your study.

As with the initial approval, changes to the study must be promptly reported and approved. Contact the IRB at irb@kennesaw.edu or at (470) 578-2268 if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,

Christine Ziegler, Ph.D.
KSU Institutional Review Board Chair and Director

cc: gtaasoob@kennesaw.edu
Parental Consent Form

Title of Research Study
School Climate Study in the Greater Atlanta Schools of the Georgia-Cumberland Conference School System

Researcher
Beverly Amlaner, (678) 401 8860, bamlaner@gccsda.com
Beverly Amlaner is the principal at Carman Adventist School, previously taught at Atlanta North School, and was a principal and teacher in Indiana, and teacher in Arkansas.

Request of Your Student’s Participation
Your child is being invited to take part in a research study conducted by Beverly Amlaner for her doctoral dissertation at Kennesaw State University. Please read this form and ask questions if you do not understand. This research will also be presented to each school as a learning tool to better understand the feelings of the students at each of the four individual schools.

Description of Project
The purpose of this study is to discover the students’ perceptions or feelings about the school climate at Atlanta North School, Carman Adventist School, Duluth Adventist Christian School, and Shoal Creek Adventist School in grades three through eight. The questions address six environments of the school: social, spiritual, academic, classroom, home, and school.

Explanation of Procedures
The student will take a paper and pencil survey consisting of 66 questions. Each question will be answered by a circle or check mark in the correct box. The first six questions are demographic questions about gender, ethnicity, language spoken at home, grade level, and religious faith. The following 60 questions ask the student to “strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree.” The student’s name is not written on the survey, but rather a number is attached to each survey.

Time Required
The survey will take approximately 30 minutes.

Risks or Discomforts
No risks are involved. The students will be in their classrooms taking the survey.

Benefits
The benefit achieved by this school climate study is to obtain information about the perceptions and feelings of the students at the four schools. This study will help each school better understand what the students believe is being done well or needs to be improved. The benefit for Beverly Amlaner is to obtain information for her doctoral research and dissertation.
Compensation
There is no compensation or monetary value provided to the students in grades three through eight taking part in the interviews.

Confidentiality
The data and analyses will be stored on a password-protected computer kept off premises of any of the four schools. All information will be coded into a number system and be de-identified for the doctoral dissertation and future publications. All checked answers are kept confidential. The dissertation will have no individual identifiable information.

Inclusion Criteria for Participation
The students taking part in this interview process are students in grades three through eight. The age of the students is between seven and fifteen years of age.

Consent to Participate
I give my consent for my child, ____________________________________________, to participate in the research project described above. I understand that this participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty. I also understand that my child may withdraw his/her assent at any time without penalty.

________________________________________
Signature of Parent or Authorized Representative, Date

________________________________________
Signature of Investigator, Date

Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board. Address questions or problems regarding these activities to the Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, 1000 Chastain Road, #0112, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (470) 578-2268.
Student Assent Form

Title of Research Study
School Climate Study in the Greater Atlanta Schools of the Georgia-Cumberland Conference School System

Researcher
Mrs. Beverly Amlaner, (678) 401 8860, bamlaner@gccsda.com

Hello, my name is Mrs. Amlaner. I am the principal of Carman Adventist School and a student at Kennesaw State University.

Your parent or guardian knows I am asking you to be in this research study, but you get to make the final choice. If you decide to be in this study, then you will take a paper and pencil survey about how you feel about this school. For each question you give one answer from a choice of four answers. You are asked to be honest and give your best answer. The survey will take about 30 minutes to complete in your classroom. This survey is to help me complete my research for the degree I am working on.

If anything in the study worries you or makes you uncomfortable, let me know and you may stop. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer or do anything you do not want to do.

Everything you say and do will be private. I will not tell your parents or teachers what you say on your survey for this study. Your name is not written on the survey. When I tell other people about what I learned in this study, I will not give your name or anyone else’s name in this research study.

You do not have to be in this study. It is up to you. You can say no now, or you can change your mind later. No one will be upset if you change your mind. You can ask me questions at any time and you can talk to your parent any time you want about the questions. Do you have any questions now that I can answer for you? If you are willing to be part of the study, please sign or print your name on the line below.

______________________________________________________________  ________________________________
  Student name                                           Date

______________________________________________________________
  Name of parent who gave consent for child to participate

______________________________________________________________  ________________________________
  Signature of person obtaining assent                                           Date
Request to School Boards for Surveys in Four Schools

Hello ______________ (Principal),

As per our several conversations, I am requesting of the ______________ School and school board the opportunity to come to ______________ School and administer a survey about school climate to grades 3 through 8. The survey is answered anonymously. The survey will only be identified to the student name via a number on the survey for the student so the survey may be equated with the Iowa Assessment data. After the survey is completed the researcher will code all student answers onto a spreadsheet and de-identify any attachment to a student name. All human subjects research will utilize approved protocols through the Institutional Review Board process at Kennesaw State University that follows the Federal guidelines for human subjects research.

The survey covers general demographics and six environments of social, spiritual, academic, classroom, home, and school operation in 66 questions. The desire of the researcher is to ascertain the school climate of each of the four schools (Atlanta North School, Carman Adventist School, Duluth Adventist Christian School, Shoal Creek Adventist School) within the greater Atlanta area of the GCC school system, and most specifically, the value of the spiritual environment to the school. The researcher is requesting coming to your school to give the survey to all students in grades three through eight. A consent form for the parents will be sent in advance for their signature, and at the time of the survey an assent form will be signed by each student. The researcher will read the survey to the students and the students will have a four Likert scale (four choices) to check. The survey will take 30 minutes or less per classroom for administering.

After the coding of the data and the analysis through SPSS statistics the dissertation results will be completed. Each school will be given a paper specifically written for your school to give an analysis of the school climate as perceived by your students. If anyone is interested, the dissertation may be shared with the school also.

Thank you for your school and school board consideration of this request. I request coming to your schools in early February. If you have any more questions, please email me at bamlaner@gccsda.com or call on 812 236 4254.

Thanks so much,

Beverly Amlaner
Carman Adventist School Principal
APPENDIX C

Tables in Findings
Table 1

*Frequency Analyses: Student Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Labels</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Spoken at Home</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>74.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African language</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Five</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Six</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eight</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion at Home</td>
<td>Seventh-day Adventists</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>76.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Christians</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Religions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Status</td>
<td>Single Parent Family</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two Parent Family</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>81.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate in Each Environment and the Total Environment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Operation</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3A

*Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate by Gender Using Group Statistics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Standard Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3B

*Independent Samples T-test: Difference in Student Perceptions of School Climate between Male and Female Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Environment</th>
<th>T-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Variances Assumed</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Variances Not Assumed</td>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4A

*Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate by Categories of Student Ethnicity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4B

*ANOVA with Post Hoc Test: Differences in Student Perceptions of School Climate on the Total Environments among Categories of Student Ethnicity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>0.326</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>22.56</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22.89</td>
<td>170</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5A

*Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate by Language Spoken at Student Home*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Language</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>171</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5B

*ANOVA with Post Hoc Test: Differences in Student Perceptions of School Climate on the Total Environments among Categories of Language Spoken at Student Home*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Between Groups</strong></td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Within Groups</strong></td>
<td>21.34</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>22.89</td>
<td>170</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5C

ANOVA Post Hoc Test: Differences in Student Perceptions of School Climate among Categories of Language Spoken at Student Home Using Multiple Comparisons of the Total Environments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Languages Compared</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Korean English</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean Spanish</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean African Language</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean Other</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Only significant differences at 0.05 level or lower are reported
### Table 6A

*Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate by Grade Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Levels</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6B

*ANOVA with Post Hoc Test: Differences in Student Perceptions of School Climate among Categories of Student Grade Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>8.05</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>18.40</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22.89</td>
<td>170</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Table 6C

ANOVA Post Hoc Test: Differences in Student Perceptions of School Climate among Categories of Student Grade Level by Using Multiple Comparisons of the Total Environments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Levels Compared</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three Four</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Five</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Six</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Seven</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Eight</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Seven</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Eight</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Seven</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Eight</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Seven</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Eight</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Only significant differences at 0.05 level or lower are reported.
### Table 7A

*Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate by Religion*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seventh-day Adventist</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 7B

*ANOVA with Post Hoc Test: Differences in Student Perceptions of School Climate by Categories of Student Religion Using the Total Environments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
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<th>Mean Square</th>
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Table 8A

*Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate by Student Family Status Using Total Environment*

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Table 8B


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Table 9A

*Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of the Spiritual Environment Compared with Their Perceptions of the Other Five School Environments*

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Table 9B

*ANOVA with Post Hoc Test: Differences in Student Perceptions of the School Climate among the Six School Environments*

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Table 9C

ANOVA Post Hoc Test: Differences in Student Perceptions of the School Climate between Spiritual Environment and Each of the Other Five School Environments

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**Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate by Survey Item and by Each of the Six Environments**

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Table 11

*Pearson Correlation: Relationship between the Student Perceptions of the School Climate and their Academic Achievement*

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<td></td>
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<td>166</td>
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<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
<td>Significance (2-tailed)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>-------------------------</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>Math</td>
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</table>
Table 12A

*Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate in Each Environment and the Total Environment of School 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
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<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>0.40</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
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Table 12B

*Description Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate in Each Environment and the Total Environment of School 2*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.38</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.25</td>
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<td>3.95</td>
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</table>
Table 12C

*Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate in Each Environment and the Total Environment of School 3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.44</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
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<td>0.44</td>
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<tr>
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Table 12D

*Descriptive Statistics: Student Perceptions of School Climate in Each Environment and the Total Environment of School 4*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>N</th>
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<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Social</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
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<td>0.49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
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<td>2.56</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>0.53</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>0.52</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.23</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
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</table>
Table 13A

*Descriptive Statistics: Relationship between the Student Perceptions of the School Climate and their Academic Achievement for School 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement/Environment</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Composite Score</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Environment</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13B

*Pearson Correlation: Relationship between the Student Perceptions of the School Climate and their Academic Achievement for School 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>Significance (2-tailed)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Composite Score</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Environment</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.65</td>
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</table>
### Table 13C

**Descriptive Statistics: Relationship between the Student Perceptions of the School Climate and their Academic Achievement for School 2**

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Total Environment</td>
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### Table 13D

**Pearson Correlation: Relationship between the Student Perceptions of the School Climate and their Academic Achievement for School 2**

<table>
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<td>Composite Score</td>
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<tr>
<td>Composite Score</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Environment</td>
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Table 13E

*Descriptive Statistics: Relationship between the Student Perceptions of the School Climate and their Academic Achievement for School 3*

<table>
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<th>Standard Deviation</th>
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</thead>
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</table>

Table 13F

*Pearson Correlation: Relationship between the Student Perceptions of the School Climate and their Academic Achievement for School 3*

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
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Table 13G

*Descriptive Statistics: Relationship between the Student Perceptions of the School Climate and their Academic Achievement for School 4*

<table>
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Table 13H

*Pearson Correlation: Relationship between the Student Perceptions of the School Climate and their Academic Achievement for School 4*

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Total Environment</td>
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