

THE RESILIENCY EDUCATION PROGRAM AND ITS IMPACT ON CHANGING  
SCHOOL CLIMATE

By

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this mixed methods study was to test the effectiveness of a Resiliency Education Program (REP) in a small urban high school in promoting resiliency protective factors for youth at-risk for adverse educational outcomes. The school district invested significant resources to educate faculty on the importance of fostering resiliency within the student body and to develop and implement a district wide plan of action. The program promoted resiliency in students by measuring school climate assessments administered prior to REP implementation to school climate assessments measured thirty-six months post implementation. Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach the researcher first analyzed student and faculty climate assessment data and student and faculty interview data to answer two key research questions.

The survey questions were developed by Resiliency Incorporated to highlight areas/time periods in which significant stressors and/or negative behaviors could adversely affect the student population, particularly those already at risk for poor educational outcomes. The student climate survey consisted of 34 multiple-choice questions, and the faculty climate survey consisted of 26 multiple-choice questions. The researcher measured changes over a period of time, utilizing a longitudinal survey design. The initial baseline surveys were administered in September 2010 to the students and teachers at a high school located in Central Pennsylvania. The surveys were administered via an on-line survey tool developed for initial (pre-REP) 2010 school climate assessments. The results may provide other school districts with valuable information regarding resiliency programs and the impact on teaching and learning.

SIGNATURE PAGE

The Dissertation Committee for Drexel University certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

THE RESILIENCY EDUCATION PROGRAM AND ITS IMPACT ON CHANGING  
SCHOOL CLIMATE

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**DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my family- my wife Nikki, and children Christopher, Madelyn, and Benjamin. All of you spent countless hours, including a tremendous amount of nights, weekends and vacations without me so I could pursue my professional goals. I appreciate your encouragement, and patience throughout this entire process.

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- To the outstanding students and teachers that participated in this research study, I thank you. Your participation and willingness to be open and honest provided me the important data necessary to conduct this study and gain valuable insight into resiliency and school climate.

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## **CHAPTER 1 - Introduction**

### **Introduction**

Imagine walking through the gates of the Dachau Concentration Camp located approximately ten miles northwest of Munich, Germany. Picture yourself as one of the Jewish prisoners that was held captive there. How would you handle the stress? What would you do to survive? The magnitude of this horrific situation leaves many unanswered questions that will be contemplated for the next decade. What qualities allowed some individuals to persevere through this horrid experience and move on with life and while others are unable to heal? What did some survivors possess that others did not?

Now position yourself approximately 70 years post World War II to an urban high school located in Central Pennsylvania where the researcher was able to draw many parallels from the prisoners of war living in Dachau, to the at-risk population of students that are enrolled in public schools across the United States of America. What is it that allows some students to thrive and grow, given their myriad of personal and family issues, and other students, in similar circumstances, to experience poor outcomes in life? The researcher believes that the difference between making it and not making in life is correlated to one's ability to be resilient.

Resiliency is characterized as how children and adults bounce back from stress, trauma, and risk in their lives (Henderson et al.). For adolescents, resilience is having positive outcomes including success in school, self-esteem, absence or low levels of delinquency, and caring relationships despite the exposure to risk (Tiet, Huizinga, & Byrnes, 2010).

Describing children as “at risk” is a means of predicting vulnerability to a wide range of negative outcomes, such as school failure, dropping out of school, poverty, drug abuse, and delinquency (Silberg, Rutter, D’Onofrio and Eaves 2003 as cited in Brackenreed, 2010). The American Academy of Pediatrics (2001) identified psychological and sociological factors that could have a significant impact on the emotional, developmental, and learning potential of children and youth. The AAP further designated the following risk factors as the “new morbidity”: poverty, lack of parental care, disruptive or dysfunctional home life, child abuse, and neglect.

Although there are many environmental factors that contribute to producing risk factors for children, youth of all demographic backgrounds make choices on a daily basis that significantly impact their lives. Dryfoos (1998) (as cited in Brackenreed, 2010, p. 113) showed that as many as half of all 10 to 17 year olds can be classified as moderate to high risk because of their level of involvement in delinquent behavior, substance abuse, early sexual intercourse, or discord in school. “Children of rich and poor alike are growing up amid family breakdown, divorce, and easy access to drugs and sex, without any sense of direction. Physical poverty is killing our children’s bodies, but spiritual poverty is squashing their souls,” (Edeman, 1996, p. 15 as cited in Brackenreed, 2010, p.113).

Research had previously been conducted on the resilience of children, specifically fostering resilience in urban school environments. In spite of traumatic circumstances beyond their control, some urban children are resilient and continue to thrive, while others spiral into a potential lifetime of failure and disappointment. Many familial, social and economic factors play a part in this malfunction.

A major goal of public schools is to promote perpetual learning. Inspiring students to continually want to learn and strive to be lifelong learners. However, educators encounter students who have experienced trauma in their lives that prevent, or hinder, the notion to strive to become lifelong learners. The ability to bounce back from stress, trauma, and risk in their lives that is emerging from the fields of psychiatry, psychology, and sociology promotes the paradigm of resiliency (Henderson, & Milstein, 1996). A large number of students that attend a high school located in Central Pennsylvania, by design and insufficient nurturing, lack resilient qualities. These students face extreme adversity in their lives and possess a deficiency of skills to be resilient.

One urban high school, located in Central Pennsylvania faces major issues with truancy, low-test scores and a general dislike of school. Almost 80% of the school is economically disadvantaged, qualifying for free and reduced lunch. In this urban setting, it has been noted that a myriad of issues surround the students of this particular high school. The aforementioned problems such as truancy, economically disadvantaged, minority status, language barriers due to immigration and special education classifications pose challenging conditions to educators and students alike. Urban socioeconomically disadvantaged minority youth handle problems and adversity differently than a student from a middle class non-minority family. In fact, many suburban kids overcome drug abuse, casual sex and other problem behaviors and go on to live productive and successful lives (Green & Foster, 2004). Even getting to school can prove to be difficult for poor families due to transportation issues, start or end of their shift work job, childcare responsibilities, illness, etc. In response to these issues, as well

as a requirement by the Pennsylvania Department of Education as part of Adequate Yearly Progress status compliance and maintaining Safe Harbor (schools must prove they are taking steps to improve learning of their students by means other than traditional classroom initiatives), Horacio Sanchez, CEO of *Resiliency Incorporated*, was hired by a specific Central Pennsylvanian school district to implement a Resiliency Education Program (REP) to the entire district staff. For the purposes of this study, the implementation of the REP at the high school level was researched utilizing a sequential explanatory mixed methodology design.

The goal of the REP was to help teachers understand how to manage socioeconomically disadvantaged children, establish a safe classroom environment and promote consistent elements of resiliency throughout the district, specifically the high school setting. Psychologists agree that some people seem to be more resilient than others (Seibert, 2005). And it cannot be overlooked that some students who are products of the aforementioned conditions are, in fact, resilient. However, that population is diminutive. Because there is an immeasurable amount of obstacles in home lives for many students, some students are not as spirited and become easily defeated. Lacking the skills to deal with adversity, these non-resilient students learn how to be despondent and resign to failure. The at-risk population of students that attend this high school is not as resilient due to the following:

- Urban classification
- Economic factors
- Minority status
- Language barriers

- Chronic Stress

Resiliency is “that quality in children who, though exposed to significant stress and adversity in their lives, do not succumb to the school failure, substance abuse, mental health and juvenile delinquency problems they are at great risk of experiencing”

(Brackenreed, 2010, p. 114). Resilient children have “traits in common such as higher intelligence, lower thrill seeking, lower associations with delinquent peers, and an absence of anti-social behaviors, substance abuse and juvenile delinquency”

(Brackenreed, 2010, p. 114). Teachers often know what resilient students in the classroom look like, how they act and react, and what they feel. They eat meals with their parents, study for tests, participate in class, celebrate milestones in their lives, and have structure and order from their parents.

In addition to poverty traumatic events effect significant damage not so much because of the immediate harm they cause but also because of the lingering need to re-evaluate one’s view of oneself and the world (Condly, 2006). It is important to realize that the traumatic events may or may not affect children differently now and in the future. Because of this, we cannot classify if a child is resilient or not resilient. “Resilience should not be considered a single dichotomous variable; rather, as a label that defines the interaction of a child with trauma or a toxic environment in which success, as judged by social norms, is achieved by virtue of the child’s abilities, motivations and support systems” (Condly, 2006, p. 213).

One Central Pennsylvania high school contended with adversity, poverty, and an increasing population of non-English speakers, truancy, low-test scores, and a general dislike of school. In response to these issues, Horacio Sanchez, CEO of *Resiliency*

*Incorporated*, was hired by the school district to implement a Resiliency Education Program (REP) with the staff. The district-wide implementation of the REP was to promote self-esteem and self worth to the students by teaching teachers how to deal with urban youth of socioeconomically disadvantaged families. The overarching goal of the REP was to help the district teachers understand how to deal with youth at-risk, establish a resiliency-based safe classroom environment, and promote resilience via protective factors throughout the district. Can the very focused and precise efforts, as a staff, help the at-risk population of this particular high school become more resilient?

### **Problem Statement**

A significant portion of the students attending an urban high school, located in Central Pennsylvania, were experiencing truancy problems, poor grades, behavioral concerns and in general are considered to be at risk for experiencing poor outcomes in life when they leave the district. The high school has changed demographically over the past several decades, more drastically over the past thirty-six months. Unfortunately these shifts have not been positive relative to risk factors related to the youth population. In fact, the county, as a whole, has become poorer over the past 10 years as evidenced by increased poverty and low-income rates. Sadly, the county drop out rate has similarly increased by 6% over the same 10-year period. The aforementioned high school, in particular, saw more dramatic shifts in population, poverty and low-income rates (Free or Reduced Lunch %), and English proficiency rates.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to test the effectiveness of the Resiliency Education Program (REP) in promoting resiliency protective factors. Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach the researcher did so by comparing school climate assessments administered prior to REP implementation to school climate assessments administered thirty-six months post implementation. The researcher then interviewed six participants in order to elicit qualitative data to enhance the study. Participants of the study included staff and students that attend a high school located in Central Pennsylvania.

There are a variety of quantitative and qualitative studies on the resiliency of teenage students. The majority of research in this area focuses on factors that put people at greater risk for failure, and protective factors that insulate certain at-risk individuals from experiencing poor outcomes in life. School failure, criminal involvement, vocational instability, psychiatric illness, and poor social relationships later in life are the most prolific outcomes associated with students who lack resilient qualities (Sanchez, 2008). However, there are few studies that have examined the implementation of school wide interventions that foster resiliency factors (protective factors) in students and their impact on school climate.

More recent studies on resiliency show evidence that there is a certain number of children that have successful outcomes in life, despite having many identified risk factors. People that are able to survive this phenomenon have been labeled resilient. The resilient child is one “who loves well, works well, plays well, and expects well” (Werner and Smith, 1992). The work of Sanchez and Vance determined that individuals who are



not naturally resilient could become more resilient by the gaining of identified protective factors.

As researchers began to study resilient children and their families, they were able to identify important features that seem to protect against poor outcomes associated with risk factors. These so-called protective factors insulate children regardless of disability, diagnosis or IQ. The most recent research suggests that protective buffers appear to transcend ethnic, social class, and geographical boundaries. Protective factors also make a more profound impact on the life course of individuals who grow up and overcome adversity than do specific risk factors (Henderson, Benard, Sharp-Light, 1999).

Individuals who are not naturally resilient can become more resilient by the gaining of identified protective factors (Vance & Sanchez, 1994). Dr. James P. Corner states that students cannot learn well and are not likely to behave well in difficult school environments. The goal of fostering resiliency in schools is to create educational environments that help students gain protective factors. Examples of protective factors can be broken down into four distinct categories including: Early Development Protective Factors, Family Protective Factors, Child Social Skills Protective Factors, and Extra-Familial Social Support Protective Factors (Sanchez, 2008).

Schools norm behaviors based on the patterns of the majority of their students. This means that the actions and behaviors of normal healthy students are the standard for the entire population of a school. One problem with this process is that this does not account for the behavioral responses that are attributed to genetics, temperament, and exposure. All humans can inherit chemical imbalance that produces maladjusted behaviors. Research on human temperament tells us that approximately 10% of the

population is best able to cope with stimuli and change; that 80% of the population requires some consistency to maintain chemical equilibrium, and that 10% of the population suffers from severe chemical reactions caused from an increase in stimuli and stress (Sanchez, 2008). Applying this data to the school setting, we now can explain why times of additional stimuli such as, transitions and lunch, are a source of increased behavioral problems in schools. In an average school setting and depending on the exact population of the school, the majority of students can cope with situations of high stimuli. However, for a small percentage of students, unstructured times create varied levels of chemical imbalance that may lead to impulsive behaviors during these times (Sanchez, 2008). As stated previously, schools base appropriate behavior on the abilities of the majority. This creates a false representation of school transitions in most schools because school personnel believe that because most students can handle these situations, all students should be able to do the same.

### **Significance**

During the later part of the twentieth century researchers studying this topic focused their attention to survivors of the Holocaust. The work of Sadavoy, 1997, and Solomon, 1995, produced literature on the clinical impressions of emotional trauma inherent in war and the pathologies that inevitably arise. Further research on the Holocaust by Seudfeld, Krell, Weibe, and Steel (1997) generated a theory that supports the fact that Holocaust survivors had the ability to adapt adequately and had to use adverse experiences as a source of strength and power (p. 150). This theory is known as the salutogenic model- that describes the relationship between health, stress and coping.

This study is important because research is needed to clarify the relationship between risk factors, protective factors and school climate.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this research was to test the effectiveness of the Resiliency Education Program in promoting resiliency protective factors. Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach the researcher first analyzed student and faculty climate assessment data and student and faculty interview data to answer two key research questions.

The questions listed are related to the theme of understanding resiliency and the importance of establishing a safe and predictable environment for children. In this study the researcher made predictions about the relationship between the protective factors (environmental assets and internal assets) introduced in the REP and student/faculty perception of school climate. The researcher then employed statistical procedures in order to draw inferences about the study population. In order to formulate questions about this study, the researcher posed two competing statistical hypotheses: a null hypothesis and an alternative. The null hypothesis, denoted by  $H_0$ , is an assertion about one or more population parameters that are assumed to be true until there is sufficient statistical evidence to conclude otherwise. The alternative hypothesis, denoted by  $H_1$ , is the assertion of all situations not covered by the null hypothesis. Together the null and the alternative constitute a set of hypotheses that covers all possible values of the parameters in question (Washington, et al 2010).

Subsequent to the quantitative data collection and analysis, a semi-structured interview protocol was generated. The sequential explanatory mixed-methods design

consists of two distinct phases: quantitative followed by qualitative (Creswell et al., 2003). In this design, the researcher first collects and analyzes the quantitative data. The qualitative data are collected and analyzed second in the sequence and help explain, or elaborate on, the quantitative results obtained in the first phase. The second qualitative phase builds on the first quantitative phase, and the two phases are connected in the intermediate stage in the study. The qualitative data and their analysis refine and explain those statistical results by exploring participants' views in more depth (Creswell et al., 2003; Rossman & Wilson, 1985).

This study addressed the following research questions:

**Question 1:** How did the students' pre-Resiliency Education Program perceptions of school climate vary from those perceptions expressed regarding post- Resiliency Education Program?

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between the effect of the Resiliency Education Program and students' perception of school climate.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant relationship between the effect of the Resiliency Education Program and students' perception of school climate.

**Question 2:** How did the faculty's pre-Resiliency Education Program perceptions of school climate vary from those perceptions expressed regarding post-Resiliency Education Program?

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between the effect of the Resiliency Education Program and the high school faculty's perception of school climate.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant relationship between the effect of the Resiliency Education Program and the high school faculty's perception of school climate.

Figure 1

## Conceptual Framework

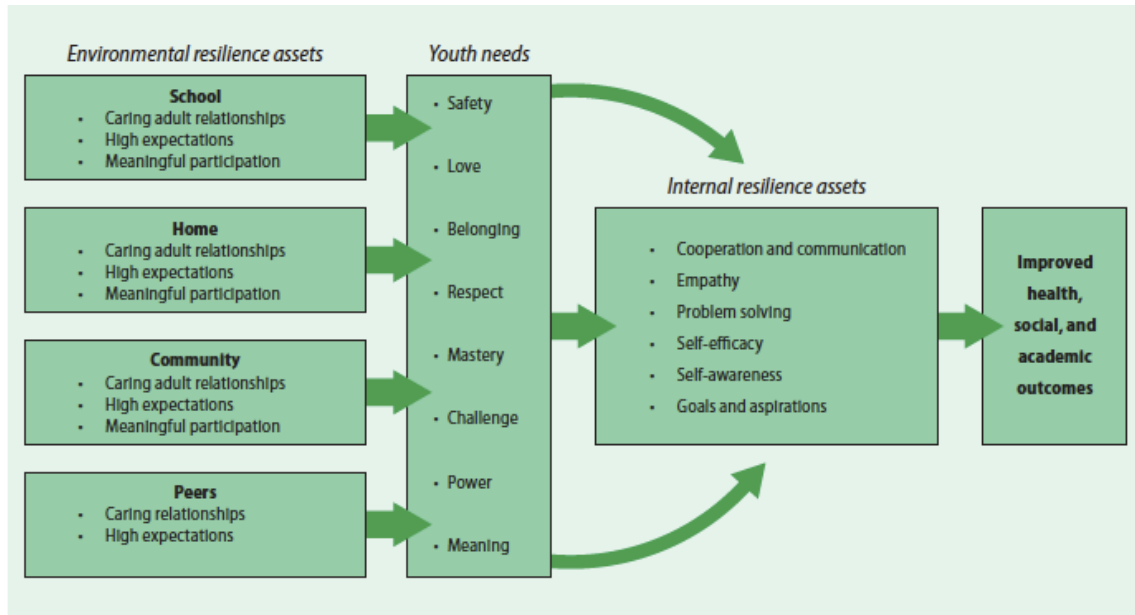
*Youth Development Conceptual Model*

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework on which this study is based. This model is grounded not only on studies of human development, but also research in school effectiveness, healthy families, competent communities, and successful youth serving programs (Hanson & Kim, 2007). The Youth Development Conceptual Model can aid in the understanding of why some children living in urban environments experience positive outcomes in school and others do not. The theoretical framework was developed based on the work of Bonnie Benard and her research on child development, family dynamics, school effectiveness, and community development. This model describes resilience factors and their interrelationships. There are four broad categories under the environmental resilience assets category: School, Home, Community and Peers. Within the four categories, there are a total of eleven environmental resilience assets that

promote positive outcomes, discouraging risky behavior and stimulating academic success (Benard, 1991). The second category documented in the Youth Development Conceptual Model lists eight basic human needs that address our common shared humanity: Safety, Love, Belonging, Respect, Mastery, Challenge, Power and, Meaning. The environmental reliance assets or protective factors provide the basic human needs necessary for healthy brain development. The internal resilience assets shown in the third block of the diagram, document the personal strengths of a resilient child including social competence, problem solving, autonomy, and sense of purpose. Internal resilience assets develop both naturally and in response to environmental resilience assets (Hanson & Kim, 2007). The general theory behind this framework is that when the environmental resilience assets are introduced and supported, basic human needs are fulfilled, and in turn provide individuals with the capacity to develop internal resilience assets. The outcome is improved health, social, and academic outcomes.

In spite of the daily challenges our most at risk children face today, researchers have begun to uncover sources of resilience for students who face a multitude of risks. However, resilience is best researched when appropriate theoretical approaches are used to provide structure to the factors and to acknowledge their relationship among each other (Cameron, Ungar, & Liebenberg, 2007). Gardynik and McDonald supported the study of conditions of resilience and the development and implementation of preventative interventions that foster resilience for at-risk students. A person's individual characteristics and experiences in the context of family, school, and community shape development and outcomes (Murray, 2003).

As an educator for 14 years, both as a teacher and administrator, observations and experiences with regard to at risk students have raised interest in the study for the researcher. More specifically, the researcher has observed how predictable environments have a positive affect on student behavior, ultimately impacting school climate.

Literature for this study is presented in three streams: urban education, school climate, and culture and resiliency. The overarching topic of urban education is presented first, moving from the reality of urban high school environments, to high school students' perceptions of their teachers' and finally to how students in urban high schools connect school with future opportunities. The topic of school climate/culture follows with a review of cultural contradictions within urban high schools. The researcher then reviews literature on creating a positive school culture, followed by culturally responsive classroom management. The literature review concludes with a presentation of resiliency research, reviewing predictors of resiliency among inner city youth.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study it is necessary to define terminology that was used extensively and in maintaining a common frame of reference as it relates to the overarching concepts and ideas that are interwoven throughout the study:

- **Resilience**. Masten, Best, and Garmezy (1990) define resilience as “ the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (p. 426). They delineated three different types of resilience: “(1) good outcomes despite high-risk status,

(2) sustained competence under threat, and (3) recovery from trauma” (p. 426).

- Protective Factors. Rutter (1985) describe protective factors as “influences that modify, ameliorate, or alter a person’s response to some environmental hazard that predisposes to a maladaptive outcome... (and) simply adding together risk factors and subtracting protective factors is “inadequate to account for the phenomenon” of resilience” (p.600).
- Risk Factors. Masten and Coatsworth define risk factors as “predictors of problems in adaptation, judged either in terms of symptoms or competence” (p.737). Specific risk factors have been identified as: growing up in a troubled family, stress from chronic discrimination, low socio-economic status, and the experience of negative life events.
- Safe Harbor. A school or district/LEA can meet Adequate Yearly Progress performance through a provision called Safe Harbor, which is a measure of improvement in test performance. Safe Harbor is achieved when a subgroup has greatly improved since the previous year—even though they did not meet the state goal.
- School Climate. Reflects the physical and psychological aspects of the school that are more susceptible to change and that provide the preconditions necessary for teaching and learning to take place.



**Assumptions**

Protective factors, as they apply to resiliency, do not directly correlate to academic achievement in students. However, protective factors help students navigate through the educational processes in order to remain in school and graduate. The instrument used to collect data was first used in a pilot study before it was implemented on the participants in the study. It was assumed that every participant answered every question to the best of his/her ability and responded with honesty. Participants were able to understand the questions that were asked.

**Limitations**

This research study was limited to an urban public school within Central Pennsylvania. The researcher did not create the survey instrument. It was a survey written to provide information to a public school district within Pennsylvania, not specifically for this dissertation. This study was a secondary analysis of archival data from a climate assessment for a specific public school district. Therefore, the researcher had no control over the original samples from which the data was collected.

One of the primary criticisms of resilience is the difficulty in defining successful outcomes (Kaufman, Cook, Arny, Jones, & Pittinski, 1994). Typically, students who are at risk for experiencing poor outcomes in life suffer from a deficiency in multiple protective factors. Therefore, the duration of the study posed a risk for not providing adequate time for students to demonstrate positive outcomes as a result of school wide interventions.

This study had a limited population size due to the inadequacy and validity of questionnaires that were returned to the researcher. The student population that was

surveyed ranged in age from 14- 21. This population consisted of approximately 225 students enrolled in the high school. The participating school district had a transiency rate of approximately 33%. The faculty population that was surveyed consisted of teachers that were employed by this school district since 2010. The faculty population consisted of approximately 74 members.

### **Delimitations**

There are a number of interesting research questions that could have been formed from the original climate assessment survey that will not be pursued, such as, “How did the trimester scheduling impact the overall climate of the school?” or “Is there a relationship between teacher/student experience and educational technology use?” These questions were not pursued in this study because the focus of the inquiry was on the relationship between REP variables and school climate.

The surveying participants were selected based on availability of enrollment during the time the data was collected. The students were given access to the survey during regular school hours via Survey Monkey.

### **Summary**

The study will help the reader to see that schools must create a positive climate in order to reduce stress, therefore improving behavioral outcomes and ultimately, learning. A stressful environment will not provide an effective place for teaching, learning, behavioral interventions, or any other programmatic services. The need for a positive environmental climate begins at the time one is born and continues to the end of life. Schools are the most likely place for students to experience the conditions that foster

resiliency. More than any other way, schools build resiliency in students through creating an environment of caring personal relationships (Henderson & Milstein, 1996).

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

### Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to share the literature and research available on resilience factors that influence school aged children and the impact of these factors on school climate. School climate characterizes the organization at the school building and classroom level. It refers to the “feel” of a school and can vary from school to school within the same district. While an individual school can develop a climate independently of the larger organization, changes in school culture at the district level can positively or adversely affect school climate at the building level (Gonder & Hymes, 1994).

Urban education environments and urban neighborhood high schools, in particular, are often characterized by chronic student absenteeism, high dropout rates, widespread course failure, and low academic achievement (Fine, 1994). The worst dropout rates in America cluster in urban neighborhood high schools (Balfanz & Legters, 2004), and those same neighborhood high schools enroll disproportionate numbers of low-income, minority and special needs youth in comparison to academically selective magnet, charter, and private schools within the same district. Urban neighborhood high schools are also more likely to be staffed by academically underprepared and inexperienced teachers and to experience higher teacher turnover (Chester, Offenber, & Xu, 2001).

Youth living in high poverty areas who attend these urban neighborhood high schools experience an increased risk for poor educational and life outcomes; however, in spite of the odds against their success, some youth are able to thrive in these environments. These young people are described as resilient. Resilience, in general, is the ability to cope with stress. For young people, resilience is having good outcomes

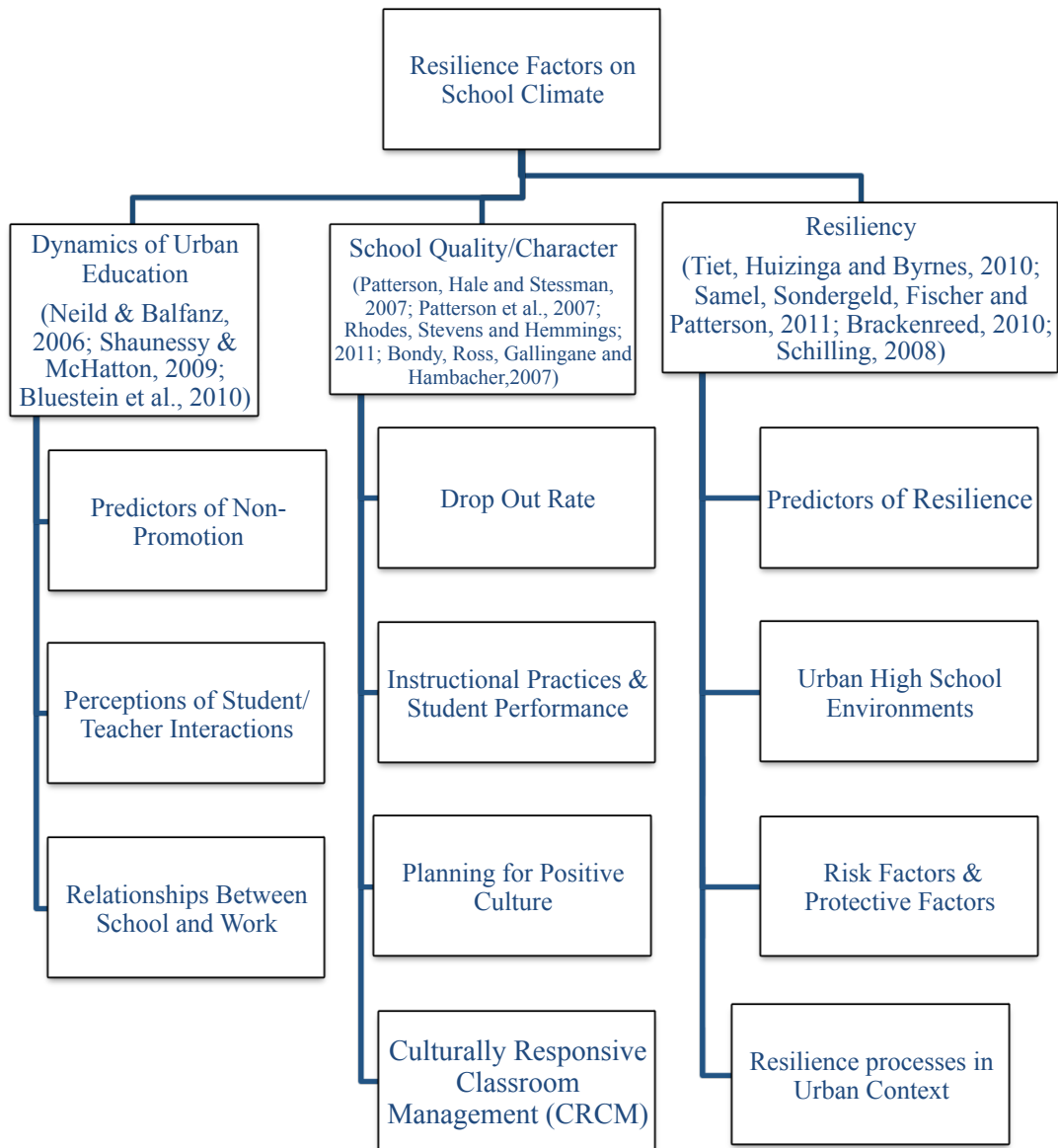
(success in school, self-esteem, absence or low levels of delinquency, caring relationships) despite the exposure to risk (urban environment, poverty, family disruption, residential mobility) (Tiet, Huizinga, & Byrnes, 2010, p. 361).

Early attempts by educational institutions to assist at-risk youth attacked the problem from a deficit model-change the students to fit the existing structures of the school rather than modifying the school environment to meet the needs of the students. Since those early (failed) efforts, decades of research on resiliency produces evidence that certain protective factors could shield at-risk youth from potential negative outcomes resulting from living in destructive environments. Schools are now attempting to mediate negative outcomes of students by utilizing resiliency models to institutionalize protective factors. One south-central Pennsylvania urban school district embarked upon a 5-year Resiliency Education Program (REP) in the spring of 2010. To date no follow up research has been completed to assess the effectiveness of the ongoing maintenance for this particular resiliency promotion effort.

The researcher reviewed literature related to resiliency by evaluating studies in the fields of urban education, resiliency and school climate/culture. The review of literature focuses primarily on high school aged subjects, however, the researcher discovered several longitudinal studies tracking at risk youth beginning in the middle school grades; therefore the initial research parameter was extended to include this demographic.

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework 2



### **Dynamics of Urban Education.**

Neild and Balfanz (2006) examined the challenges associated with high-poverty urban neighborhood high schools. The authors contended that policy makers, school reform programs and district personnel often overlooked the concentration of educational

needs at these schools. The researchers further analyzed quantitative individual-level student record data for 12,802 first-time freshman (1998-1999) and 23,423 first-time and repeat 9<sup>th</sup> grade students in the subsequent academic year. The first analysis, using the 1998-1999 data, identified predictors of non-promotion to 10<sup>th</sup> grade via logistic regression analysis. The follow-up analysis used descriptive data from the second freshman cohort to determine how students with one or more risk factors for non-promotion were distributed across neighborhood high schools.

The key predictors of non-promotion were identified as: students entering in high school over-age (15 years or older), poor 8<sup>th</sup> grade attendance, and 6<sup>th</sup> grade or lower math and reading comprehension levels. A high concentration of students with one or more predictors for non-promotion attending neighborhood high schools was noted. In the best-case scenario, one neighborhood high school (out of twenty-two within the city of Philadelphia) had an incoming freshman class with 60% of the students exhibiting predictors for non-promotion. In the worst case, a neighborhood high school had an incoming freshman class with 92% of the students possessing one or more risk factors for non-promotion.

The educational implications of this study impact policy makers, school reform programs and district administrators. Attempts to reform public urban high schools have to first incorporate a deep understanding of the kinds of academic challenges students bring with them to high school and how these challenges are concentrated within particular schools. In these researchers' stated experience, many stakeholders lack specific knowledge of the scale of need in urban neighborhood high schools (Neild & Balfanz, 2006, p. 139).

The researchers' objectives were to identify characteristics of students' educational backgrounds that predicted academic trouble (non-promotion) during the first year of high school, and to determine the concentration of students with non-promotion characteristics at urban neighborhood public high schools. Through the analysis of quantitative student record data, the authors achieved their stated goals by identifying specific predictors of non-promotion and levels of concentration within the public neighborhood high schools of Philadelphia.

The research of Neild and Balfanz (2006) focused on large urban public school systems and the characteristics of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students possessed that affected their ultimate promotion to 10<sup>th</sup> grade. This study did not address resiliency protective factors, which is, in part, the focus of this researcher's study; however, the identification of academic challenges of urban youth support further research into effective implementation of school-based resiliency programs in urban districts.

A subset of urban education research focuses on student perceptions of teachers and student/teacher interaction. The research by Shaunessy & McHatton (2009) explored how differently positioned students (honors, general, and special education) in a diverse urban community described their interaction with teachers. The research questions posed to respond to the study objective were: a) how do differently positioned students perceive interactions with teachers, and b) how do students' perceptions differ according to these positions (Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009, p.488)?

The authors surveyed 577 students in grades 9-12 attending an urban high school. The demographics of the students were: honors (n=201), general education (n=234), and special education (n=142). From the survey respondents, researchers sought focus group



participants. Seven focus groups were established based on previous program demographic: two honors groups (n=8), three general education groups (n=13), and two special education groups (n=8).

Shaunessy and McHatton (2009) conducted a mixed-method study. The survey data was quantitative and based on a four-point frequency scale. Data were divided into two subscales: perceived punitive feedback and perceived support. The researchers used descriptive statistics for survey data analysis, with the sample mean utilized as the primary test statistic. Qualitative focus group data analysis was based on grounded theory methodology. Data were coded, with seven themes emerging as relevant to teacher/student interaction. Themes were collapsed into two categories: a) disappointment in teachers and the educational system, and b) teachers' passion for teaching and engagement with students (Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009, p. 491).

The results revealed differences in teacher interactions based on program demographic and gender as noted in both the survey outcomes and focus group dialog (Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009, p. 498). Survey results in the perceived punitive feedback subscale indicated special education, honors, and male students reported more punitive feedback from teachers than did general education and female students. In the perceived support subscale, Hispanic students, regardless of program demographic, reported more frequent supportive feedback than did all other categories. White students reported the least perceived punitive and supportive feedback. Based on focus group results, the researchers found that students felt more responsive, motivated and engaged when teachers were passionate about their work. However, participant comments were centered on disinterested educators, lackluster content delivery, and apathy in the

classroom. The overarching message of the focus group data was that students perceived teachers did not care for them and lacked motivation in the classroom.

Youth in urban high schools are at greater risk of school failure and dropping out. As cited in Shaunessy & McHatton (2009, p. 488), Knesting & Waldron (2006) found that youth at risk for dropping out of school cited the lack of care by a teacher as a central catalyst; students believed they would learn more if teachers made greater investments in personal relationships with them.

The implication of the Shaunessy & McHatton (2009) study is that schools and educators must reinforce caring and relationships in order to deflect poor educational outcomes for at-risk youth attending urban high schools.

The author's study of resiliency promotion within an urban education environment is supported by the Shaunessy & McHatton (2009) study. Current research identifies several critical protective factors for fostering resiliency in urban youth at-risk for poor educational outcomes; chief among them is forming positive relationships with adults, particularly teachers and coaches. Therefore, research focused on the impact of existing resiliency promotion is warranted.

The Shaunessy & McHatton (2009) study contributed to existing research regarding the impact of teacher/student connectedness on the educational outcomes of urban high school students by adding the voices of those most impacted by the connection- the students.

The final piece of urban education literature this author reviewed related to students' perceptions of the connectedness between school, work, race, ethnicity and societal expectations. The purpose of the Bluestein et al. (2010) study was to gain an

understanding of diverse urban students' constructs of the relationship between school and work. The authors sought to explore the connections students made between school and work based on developmental and contextual factors and the students' perceptions regarding race, ethnicity, societal expectations and the likelihood of future success.

The researchers interviewed thirty-two students attending high school within the Boston Public Schools (BPS). The sample group was divided between 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students and between students who participated in a career development program and those who did not. Demographically, the sample was similar in composition to that of the BPS; 59% female, 41% male; 41% Caribbean American, 19% African American, 16% multiracial, 12% Hispanic, 9% White, and 3% Other; and, 72% free and reduced lunch. This qualitative study, specifically consensual qualitative research (CQR), consisted of semi-structured interviews focused on the connection between school and work and on the role of race and culture on career development. Data analysis resulted in themes that were captured in three central domains and eight categories.

The results of the Bluestein et al. (2010) study indicated that the majority of the students recognized a connection between school and their future work, acknowledging that doing well in school enhanced their adult work opportunities. Results also indicated that students believed that society had lower expectations of them based upon their racial and ethnic backgrounds. Finally, although most students perceived lower societal expectations, they could not predict whether or how their racial or ethnic background would impact their future success. Based on these results, the authors suggested that career education programs, specifically those designed for youth in urban school districts, should include material on enhancing resilience and resistance in the face of obstacles

and barriers (Bluestein et al., 2010, p. 254).

The researchers' level of understanding was elevated regarding the connection students within urban education environments make between school success and career options; thus, they achieved their primary objective. The researchers were also successful in deepening their understanding of the effects race and ethnicity have on the perceptions urban youth have regarding their career options and probable success rates.

Racially and ethnically diverse youth in urban education environments are faced with many challenges, inconsistent educational and social resources and societal perceptions being only a few. This research highlights barriers and points of resistance to successful educational outcomes for these youth, and therefore supports this author's study of school-based resiliency programs in urban districts.

The study results regarding students clear connections between doing well in school and improved future career and educational options was contrary to conventional wisdom, as expressed in the writings of Ogbu (1989), as cited in Bluestein et al. (2010, p. 245), that urban students struggle with internalizing the connection between school and work. Therefore, further research focused on the factors that shape how students understand the connection between high school academic achievements and their future career and educational options should be conducted (Bluestein et al., 2010, p. 254). Additional research might also focus on ways that students develop resilience in the face of racism and the internalized consequences of racism.

In summary, many policy makers, administrators, and educational reformers need a deeper understanding of the challenges at-risk youth bring with them to high school. Unfortunately, high school staff and classroom teachers often underestimate the impact

they have on the students in their care. Youth at-risk often cite the lack of care by a teacher as central catalyst for leaving school. Finally, career development programs designed for urban high school students should include material on enhancing resilience and resistance in the face of obstacles and barriers.

### **School Quality/Character.**

How does the culture and structure of an urban high school contribute to the high drop out rate among low-income and Latino students? This questions was researched by Patterson, Hale and Stessman (2007) in response to a request from Northside High School (a pseudonym), a neighborhood urban high school with an enrollment of 1600 + students. At the time of the request, Northside High graduated 53.6% of the cohort of students who began as a freshman. The racial composition of the student body was 40 % Hispanic; 36% Caucasian; 18% African American; 4% Asian; and 2% American Indian. In contrast, the faculty was 85% Caucasian; 6% Hispanic; 5% African American; 3% American Indian; and 1% Asian (Patterson et al., 2007 p. 3). The authors analyzed the culture of the high school, the students, and the community to determine what elements of the school's culture might be at odds with students' familial cultures.

The study was conducted with a purposeful sample of 68 stakeholders (administrators, teachers, students and parents). Qualitative case study methods were used to conduct the research, and the authors utilized multiple interactive methods to collect data-personal interviews, focus groups and document reviews. Each interview and focus group was recorded and transcribed verbatim, and each author reviewed all transcriptions, looked for patterns and identified categories. A coding scheme was developed to label all data, which were examined for relationships across the codes to

derive the findings.

Many notable structural and cultural contradictions were highlighted throughout the study. The overarching conclusion was that the bureaucratic school structure expected students and their families to conform to what the school was able to provide; however, the majority of low-income and Hispanic families did not possess the tools necessary to navigate the school system successfully. A number of cultural differences were noted in instructional delivery, and the incongruity was exacerbated by the contradictions in stated faculty values and theories and their actual practices.

As cited in Patterson et al. (2007), Mumford, Kendall & Kendall (2004) and Sweetland & Hoy (2000) demonstrated the existence of a relationship between a school's structure and culture, teachers' instructional practices and student performance. The current structure and culture of many U.S. urban high schools are not culturally responsive to the changing demographics of student bodies; therefore, necessary educational improvements will require administrators, teachers, parents and students to rethink how high schools should be organized.

The stated purpose for the Patterson et al. (2007) research was to examine how the culture and structure of Northside High School influenced teachers' instructional practices and how contradictions between stated theories and practices influence dropout rates. Based on the results of personal interviews and focus groups, the authors found several structural and cultural contradictions between school / teachers and student, and school and community. The researchers, however, did not establish a clear link between school culture and structure and dropout rates.

The research of Patterson et al. (2007) relates to this author's investigation of

resiliency promotion in urban high schools due to its focus on school culture and its impact on students' life outlook and educational outcomes. The researchers suggested that culturally responsive instructional practices and school environments are necessary to advance improvement in all schools, but particularly in urban school districts. This conclusion contributes to the current knowledge base on culturally responsive classroom management. Further research on culturally responsive instructional practices is recommended.

Consistent with the suggestions of Patterson et al. (2007) regarding culturally responsive school environments and classrooms, the following reviews address culture on a school-wide and classroom level basis.

The objective of the Rhodes, Stevens and Hemmings (2011) study was to present first-hand accounts of the process of establishing a new public, project-based, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) urban high school centered on positive school culture. The principal and teacher-leaders made a deliberate effort to create a positive school culture with a clear vision and core values based on relational trust and community bonds. The key educators involved in the start-up of the school were the principal, a planning team of teacher-leaders, and a university professor. The demographics of the inaugural 9th grade class (class of 2013) were 86% African American, 28% special needs, and 84% free and reduced lunch. The class of 275 students came from 48 feeder schools within the Cincinnati Public School system (Rhodes et al., 2011, p.82).

Dr. Virginia Rhodes, principal; Douglas Stevens, technology educator; and Dr. Annette Hemmings, Edgewood College, School of Education, wrote first person narratives. The writing was completed collaboratively with group feedback and reflection by the authors and planning

team teachers. The information in the paper flowed from project inception through the conclusion of the first academic year.

Based on literature reviewed within the paper and on the writings and reflections of the authors, the establishment of the vision statement and core values of the school was the foundation upon which the positive culture of the school was built. The authors noted that continued focused efforts by the faculty, staff and students were required throughout the first academic year to keep the school moving, growing and developing in the manner in which it was envisioned. Rhodes et al. (2011) also noted and cited examples of students rising to and exceeding academic and behavioral expectations. The once pejorative "geek" and "geekin" became positive labels and terms that acknowledged rather than ridiculed educational successes by the end of the school year (Rhodes et al., 2011, p.92).

The authors summarized the planning year that led to the opening of Hughes High School as a new choice-based STEM public high school. The authors categorized their planning into six distinct, yet intertwined processes. The implementation year was summarized and categorized into five interconnected themes. Student and staff culture figured predominately in the thematic presentation.

The Rhodes et al. (2011) school culture study did not address the issue of resilience in urban high schools; however, resilience literature refers to positive school culture as one of the protective factors for youth at-risk. As cited in Brackenreed (2010, p. 116), Edmonds (1986, p.45) concludes that: a school can create a coherent environment, a climate, more potent than any single influence- teachers, class, family, neighborhood - so potent that for at least six hours a day it can override almost everything else in the lives of children.



The authors, through their accounts, presented a roadmap for other schools involved in improving the culture within their buildings. They presented workable ideas and programs that generated student engagement and enthusiasm for learning. However, Hughes High School was unique in that the school was newly formed. A core group of teachers and community partners proactively established the norms, core values and culture of the school. Existing school cultures are much slower to change, with wholesale change almost out of the question.

Classroom level culture is addressed by the Bondy, Ross, Galligane and Hambacher (2007) study, which was part of a larger study of the practices of effective novice teachers in urban classrooms during the first weeks of the school year. The purpose of the study was to describe the strategies used by effective novice teachers to establish Culturally Responsive Classroom Management (CRCM) during the first day of school. The study was designed to be exploratory and descriptive and was based on the collection of qualitative data (Bondy et al., 2007, p. 331). Three female novice teachers, each with fewer than five years of teaching experience, were video taped and interviewed on the first day of a new school year. The researchers analyzed the resulting qualitative data using an inductive approach.

The researchers found that the subject teachers, by using CRCM techniques, accomplished more than establishing respectful and task-oriented classroom communities – they created a supportive environment that encouraged student resilience and achievement. The focus of the research was not only on what the novice teachers did - develop relationships and establish expectations – but also on how they did it - gentle, but firm insistence and a culturally responsive communication style (Bondy et al., 2007, p. 334).

Cited CRCM research suggested that effective classroom managers, i.e. effective teachers, must be culturally literate. In order to support and positively affect student achievement, teachers must analyze the role of culture in their perceptions of student behavior and use culture as a guide when establishing the context of their classroom. Resiliency literature cited within the article position CRCM strategies as a means to an end, building upon the protective factors that scaffold student resilience so that they will persevere in the face of challenging tasks and obstacles (Bondy et al., 2007, p. 331).

Although the scope of this particular CRCM study was limited to three novice teachers, the research findings supported the stated purpose of the study. Prior to Bondy et al. (2007), there was one direct study of CRCM (Brown, 2003, 2004) in which the researcher interviewed thirteen teachers across seven U.S. cities to identify the key CRCM strategies used by effective teachers. Brown (2003, 2004) did not include observations; therefore, the researchers in this CRCM study designed it to include video so that teachers, particularly novice teachers, could see how the establishment of CRCM is accomplished.

This study and the literature presented in the article are related to the present investigation of resiliency because the correlation between CRCM and student resilience seem significant. CRCM appears to do more than establish an orderly classroom environment and set the stage for academic success; it goes further by creating a culturally supportive environment where teachers develop caring relationships with students and set high and clear expectations for academic performance and classroom behavior, all of which are cited as protective factors in fostering resiliency.

This study contributed to the existing understanding of CRCM by highlighting and reinforcing the three researched characteristics of a culturally responsive classroom: 1) teachers

develop a respectful, caring, personal relationship with each student; 2) teachers establish and communicate clear, high expectations with an attitude of "no excuses"; and 3) teachers use verbal and nonverbal communication processes that are (culturally) familiar to students (Brown, 2003, 2004) as cited in Bondy et al. (2007, p. 328). The Bondy et al. (2007) study is part of a larger CRCM study, which, when completed, will further clarify the understanding of CRCM and its implications for today's classrooms.

As was noted in the studies reviewed above, school and classroom culture plays a significant role in the school and academic success of youth at-risk for poor educational outcomes. The reviews that follow discuss additional protective factors available to at-risk youth that can minimize or deflect adverse life and educational outcomes.

### **Resiliency.**

The objectives of the Tier, Huizinga and Byrnes (2010) study were to identify: 1) predictors of resilience; 2) longitudinal interrelations among predictors; and 3) bi-directional relationships between resilience and life context factors. The researchers hypothesized that children and adolescents who had strong conventional bonding with family and school would function well and be more resilient to the environmental risks of living in socially disorganized neighborhoods that were poor, unstable and crime-ridden. Resilience was hypothesized to be predicted by lower levels of adverse life events and infrequent involvement with delinquent peers in addition to the strong conventional bonds noted above (Tiet et al., 2010, p. 378).

For the purposes of this study, resilience was defined as a multidimensional construct. Two latent constructs of the measure of resilience were identified: *Adjustment*, indicated by academic achievement, self-esteem and psychosocial functioning, and *Low levels of anti-social behavior*, indicated by degree of gang involvement, delinquency, and

drug use. Tiet et al. (2010) evaluated an age-restricted sub-set (n= 877) of the respondents of the larger Denver Youth Survey (n =1,527) initiated in 1987. A secondary two-parent/guardian sub-set (n = 410) was simultaneously assessed. Quantitative data obtained via multiple longitudinal survey instruments were statistically analyzed via bivariate correlation analysis and evaluated through structural equation modeling techniques (Tiet et al., 2010, p. 365).

The results of the research indicated that resilience was longitudinally predicted by bonding to family and teachers, involvement in supervised extracurricular activities, lower levels of parent discord, fewer adverse life events, and tangential involvement with delinquent peers. The implications of this research are that early interventions are vital to strengthen traditional bonding to family, teachers and non-delinquent peers, and to moderate the effects of adverse life events to enhance functioning, educational and otherwise, of urban youth at-risk.

The stated research objectives were achieved. Tiet et al. (2010) identified predictors of resilience, mapped the longitudinal interrelationships between predictors, and established a bi-directional relationship between protective and risk factors. Additionally, the results of the bivariate correlation analyses and subsequent structural equation modeling techniques led the researchers to conclude that their original hypotheses, as stated, were confirmed, i.e. strong conventional bonding to family and school, lower levels of adverse life events, and reduced association with delinquent peers protect children and adolescents from environmental risk factors associated with poor, unstable and crime-ridden neighborhoods.

The results of the Tiet et al. (2010) study support this investigation of resiliency and its effective promotion within an urban school setting. Tiet et al. (2010) note that bonding to teachers was a significant predictor of lower levels of antisocial behavior for adolescents, and that positive relationships with teachers predict better academic outcomes for youth at-risk. They also found that involvement in supervised extracurricular activities predicted resilience and pro-social behavior in youth who lived in high-risk, urban neighborhoods.

The authors noted that their focus on longitudinal interrelations among predictors and between resilience and life context factors had been neglected in past studies; therefore, this study adds dimension and depth to the existing research on resiliency and youth at-risk, particularly those in an urban education environment. Several limitations of the study were noted as well. The researchers relied mostly on self-report measures, thus findings need to be replicated by future studies that do not rely primarily on self-report measures. Also, the sample was mostly Hispanic and African-American; therefore, future studies should examine the impact of other cultural factors on predictors of resilience.

A second longitudinal study follows. This study focuses on what differentiates "on-time" graduates from those that either graduate on an alternative timeline or do not graduate at all. The research objective of the Samel, Sondergeld, Fischer and Patterson (2011) study was to explore the multidimensional contexts of urban high school environments that both promote and inhibit student success. The authors posed two key questions. First, how were traditional ("on-time") and non-traditional graduates (students who fail to graduate "on-time") characterized by personal, academic, and non-academic factors? Second, what predictors of resilience and resistance helped explain the differences (Samel et al., 2011, p.96)?

The researchers followed a cohort of 346 7<sup>th</sup> grade students throughout their secondary school experiences in a Midwestern urban school district. The cohort demographics were: Male (50%), Female (50%); White (68%), Black (17%); Hispanic (16%), Other (1%); free and reduced lunch (68%); and special education (15%). The cohort was subsequently subdivided: On-time Graduation (OTG) (39%), Alternate Timeline (AT) (12%), and Early Exit (EE) (49%) (Samel et al., 2011, p. 102). Quantitative demographic, attendance, behavioral and GPA data were obtained from the schools, and annual college awareness and classroom environment surveys were conducted. All data were descriptively analyzed over time. The OTG subgroup was used as the baseline, with the AT and EE subgroups compared, respectively.

The comparisons indicated that demographic differences between the groups were negligible, but academic (GPA and grade promotion) and non-academic (attendance, discipline referrals, and extracurricular involvement) disparities were significant. The study indicated that EE students started on a path toward dropping out long before 12<sup>th</sup> grade, exhibiting characteristics as early as 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. The authors suggested that many of these students could be supported through interventions dealing with attendance, discipline referrals, teacher expectations and options for credit recovery. The researchers also suggested that teacher/student rapport and classroom climate can deflect points of resistance.

Samel et al. (2011) achieved their stated research objectives. The researchers identified the elements of resilience and resistance that explained the differences between students who moved through the secondary school pipeline in a successful and timely fashion with those

who did not. Pertinent academic and non-academic factors were highlighted throughout the article.

The results of this study support this investigation of resiliency and its effective promotion within an urban high school environment. The researchers concluded that strong non-academic interventions and improved teacher/student rapport and classroom climate improved academic outcomes and student retention for at-risk urban youth. Teacher/student rapport and positive classroom climate are frequently cited as protective factors fostering resilience in youth at-risk.

The Samel et al. (2011) longitudinal study corroborated prior research that identified advanced age (at least one year older than the standard age for grade), particularly in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, as a risk for dropout (Neild, 2006). Previous research correlated academic failure with dropping out, findings also substantiated in this study. Additionally, Tiet et al. (2010) linked school-sponsored extracurricular involvement to decreased dropout rates, a linkage that appeared to hold true for the OTG and AT subgroups in this research.

The authors also addressed conflicting results with previous research findings. Differences across subgroups in SES, race and parental attainment were small in their study, contradicting earlier research by Howard (2008) and Stage and Hossler (1989) concluding that these factors are disproportionately represented in students who drop out of urban high schools. Further research is needed to clarify these discrepancies.

Case studies are used to effectively humanize difficult concepts and to bring the theoretical into practice. The following two literature reviews study the successes of two young women described as at-risk for poor educational and life outcomes.

The purpose of the Brackenreed (2010) study was four-fold: 1) to identify risk factors and their influence on youth who were at-risk; 2) to identify protective (resiliency) factors and their effectiveness at mediating risk factors; 3) to identify the relationship and relevancy of these two concepts for students; and 4) to identify family, community and school practices that foster resiliency (Brackenreed, 2010, p. 111). After reviewing literature on risk and protective factors and their inter-relationship, the author focused on schools and their role in identifying and supporting youth who were at-risk. Finally, the author identified herself as a former youth at-risk and presented her case as a single study to illustrate the turmoil and successes of resilient youth.

The author's conclusions were drawn from in-depth literature reviews of risk and resiliency factors and on her personal account as an at-risk youth. Brackenreed stated that schools should focus on providing protective factors that mediate potential negative outcomes of risk factors and deliver programming based on a preventative / protective model. "I flourished with the support offered to me by a couple of my teachers and believe that this is the route we should take, focusing on the positive rather than dwelling on the negative. Those of us in "at risk" are well aware of our deficits and need to understand our strengths," (Brackenreed, 2010, p. 119).

The author achieved the stated purpose of the article by: 1) reviewing contemporary literature on factors that predict the vulnerability of youth for a wide range of negative outcomes, such as school failure, delinquency, drug abuse and unemployment; 2) reviewing resiliency literature as it relates to the school setting; and 3) establishing a link between protective factors in the schools and their mitigating effect on noted potential negative outcomes. Finally, the author's personal account illustrated the impact of one specific



protective factor - a caring, supportive relationship with at least one adult (in this case, a teacher) - in protecting her from potential negative outcomes of her dysfunctional home life.

The literature presented in the article and Brackenreed's personal accounts are related to an investigation of resiliency and its effective promotion within an urban school setting. The literature reviews linked the protective factors necessary for resiliency to the mediation of negative outcomes associated with youth who are at-risk. The literature reviews and accompanying case study highlighted the effectiveness of schools in providing some of the support structures necessary for vulnerable youth to overcome risk factors and thrive into young adulthood.

Although the literature reviews presented in this article were clear in their individual findings, and the author concluded that preventative, as opposed to deficit, models were more effective in protecting at-risk youth from potential negative outcomes, collective agreement as to the ideal delivery method of protective factors has yet to be determined. Further study is required to expand the understanding of this critical open point.

In the next review, the study author, Tammy A. Schilling, conducted research to examine resilience processes in context via a seven-year narrative case study of a young African-American woman, Tasha, who grew up in a poverty-ridden, high-risk urban area in the Southeast (Schilling, 2008, p. 297). The researcher collected qualitative data by conducting six personal interviews with Tasha, one with her mother, and two with leaders of an extracurricular program in which Tasha was involved. Anecdotal data regarding Tasha's school and extracurricular program involvement were also available based on informal communication among Tasha, the researcher, school counselor and program leaders. The multiple data sources

were analyzed and interpreted with respect to contextually defined constructs of adversity, adaptation, and protective processes.

Four primary themes emerged from the data analysis: Tasha's self-reliance and independence; external support systems; continued struggles in school; and a strained relationship with her mother.

Using traditional, non-contextual measures of resilience, Tasha did *not* demonstrate a resilience profile - she did not get along with her teachers, exhibited sporadic school attendance, gave birth twice before her 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, barely passed high school, and struggled with her "low class" status among her peer group. However, the detailed information collected over the period of the study did reflect a pattern of positive adaptation when viewed with a contextually appropriate perspective (Shilling, 2008, p.305). Tasha's external support system, her program leaders and school counselor, buoyed her throughout her teen years and allowed her some measure of success in school and in her home environment. Generalizability of the specific research results is limited; however, the study highlighted factors, circumstances and processes that may be applicable to other children, young adults and youth programs (Shilling, 2008, p. 316). The study results also support current views on broadening vulnerability, competence and resilience definitions.

The author's stated purposes for the research were to examine resilience processes in a poverty-ridden, high-risk urban context and to test the hypothesis that narrowly defined measures of competence and resilience do not typically meet the needs of youth at extreme levels of risk. The author contrasted Tasha's contextually positive adaptations with conventionally accepted measures of competence and highlighted Tasha's successes in what appeared to be an unremarkable, negative, and predictable life pattern.

The findings of Schilling's research relate to this current study of resilience in urban youth on several points. Traditional definitions of resilience, competence and processes were shown to be deficient when assessing youth at great levels of risk, an important consideration for this researcher in the evaluation phase of the project. The study also confirmed the significance of community- and school-based supportive adult relationships to youth at risk, a primary focus of this researcher's current study on resilience.

By conducting an in-depth, individual case study, Schilling's research supported current views of broadening how vulnerability, competence and resilience are defined. Additionally, the research extended the literature by considering these factors in cultural contexts different than mainstream society. The case interpretations would have been much different had mainstream resilience and competence definitions been used.

As previously noted, generalizability of the specific research results is limited; therefore, the author concludes that more intensive, long-term, context-specific research must be conducted to more completely understand the relationship between adversity, adaptation and protective factors for specific individuals (Schilling, 2008, p. 297).

The resiliency literature reviewed supports one critical protective factor above all others, the involvement of a caring, supportive adult in the life of a youth at risk for poor academic and life outcomes. The research points to teachers, or other adults in school-based environments, as the adults with the most impact on at-risk youth's outcomes.

### **CHAPTER 3 – Action-Oriented Research Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter provides the reader with an understanding of the design, rationale, and methodologies specific to this sequential explanatory mixed-methods study. The researcher analyzed the effectiveness of a Resiliency Education Program (REP) on a high school in Central Pennsylvania. The program promoted resiliency in students by measuring school climate assessments administered prior to REP implementation to school climate assessments measured thirty-six months post implementation. This chapter illustrates in detail how the researcher studied changes in attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of the high school faculty and students. In phase one of the study, the researcher measured changes over a period of time, utilizing a longitudinal survey design. While phase two of the study is qualitative in nature, a semi-structured interview protocol was generated to provide a more complete picture of the research findings (Creswell, 2012, p 367; Gay & Airasian, 2000).

A high school in Central Pennsylvania faces major issues with truancy, low-test scores and a general dislike of school. 82% of the school is economically disadvantaged, qualifying for free and reduced lunch. In this urban high school setting, it has been noted that a myriad of issues surround these students. The aforementioned risk factors such as truancy, economically disadvantaged, minority sub-groups, and language barriers due to immigration and special education classifications pose challenging conditions to educators and students alike. According to Sanchez (2008) risk factors do not invariably lead to problems in the lives of children, they do however increase the probability that such problems will arise.

Even getting to school can prove to be difficult for poor families. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) suggest that students miss school for many reasons, these can be divided into three broad categories:

- Students who cannot attend due to illness, family responsibilities, housing instability, the need to work or involvement with juvenile justice system.
- Students who will not attend school to avoid bullying, unsafe conditions, harassment and embarrassment.
- Students who do not attend school because they, or their parents, do not see the value in being there, they have something else they would rather do, or nothing stops them from skipping school (p. 4).

In response to these issues, as well as a requirement by the Pennsylvania Department of Education as part of AYP status compliance and mainlining Safe Harbor (schools must prove they are taking steps to improve learning of their students by means other than traditional classroom initiatives), the high school administrative team determined that a comprehensive school reform approach that integrates research, science and best practice in the field of education was needed.

In August, 2010 Horacio Sanchez, CEO of Resiliency Incorporated, was hired to implement a Resiliency Education Program (REP) to the entire district staff. Resiliency Incorporated's primary goal was to help teachers understand how to manage socioeconomically disadvantaged children, establish a safe classroom environment and promote consistent elements of resiliency throughout the district, specifically the high school setting. Resiliency Incorporated presented the school district with a paradigm for understanding all children and adolescents regardless of presenting biological,

psychological, and social issues. Resiliency Incorporated also provided the school district with a framework that trained the faculty and staff on how to educate and treat children already at risk for poor educational outcomes. This training took place one week prior to the opening of the 2010-2011 school year. Resiliency theory provides individuals with a paradigm that is not disability based and that merges assessment with treatment planning. This assessment approach is based on a number of longitudinal studies of large groups of children growing up in community settings (Garmezy, et al 1984). Within these groups of children, many characteristics of children and families were examined. These particular studies including hundreds of children produced varying results ranging from successful to abysmal. In looking at the characteristics of children with unsuccessful outcomes, researchers identified consistent risk factors that are often associated with the development of negative outcomes, such as school failure, psychiatric illness, criminal involvement, vocational instability, and poor social relationships later in life (Vance & Sanchez, 1994).

Resiliency Incorporated provided the district with a clear explanation as to why low academic achievement, destructive behaviors, and habitual negative patterns occur. Schools typically norm behaviors based on the patterns of the majority of their students. This means that the actions and behaviors of normal healthy students are the standard for the entire population of a school (Sanchez, 2008). One problem with this process is that this does not account for the behavioral responses that are attributed to genetics, temperament, and exposure. All humans can inherit chemical imbalance that produces maladjusted behaviors. Research on human temperament tells us that approximately 10% of the population is best able to cope with stimuli and change; that 80% of the population

requires some consistency to maintain chemical equilibrium, and that 10% of the population suffers from severe chemical reactions caused from an increase in stimuli and stress (Sanchez, 2008). Applying this data to the school setting, we now can explain why times of additional stimuli such as, transitions and lunch, are a source of increased behavioral problems in schools. In an average school setting and depending on the exact population of the school, the majority of students can cope with situations of high stimuli. However, for a small percentage of students, unstructured times create varied levels of chemical imbalance that may lead to impulsive behaviors during these times (Sanchez, 2008). As stated previously, schools base appropriate behavior on the abilities of the majority. This creates a false representation of school transitions in most schools because school personnel believe that because most students can handle these situations, all students should be able to do the same (Resiliency, Inc., 2010).

The focus of education more recently has been on student achievement and rising standardized test scores. Race and poverty appear to be the most obvious common denominators present among underperforming students. This observation has led to an uncertain belief that a wide range of risk factors commonly occur among certain populations. Resiliency studies identify specific risk factors that have placed individuals at greater risk for failure, as well as specific protective factors that seem to insulate certain at-risk individuals from experiencing poor outcomes in life (Werner, 1998). Proponents of resiliency interventions believe that there are specific protective factors that can be implemented that will help students experience more successful outcomes in life.

The district staff also received training that provided clear interventions for

academic and behavioral problems in a step-by-step format. Each individual school within the district developed an individualized REP to be implemented during the 2010-11 school year. Each individual REP consisted of specific interventions that are designed to promote social comfort, and consistency within the school.

## **Site and Population**

### **Population Description**

Dual populations for this study consisted of approximately 225 current members from the class of 2014 and 74 current full-time faculty members employed at a central Pennsylvania high school.

The faculty population included in this study consisted of members ranging in age from 28 years to 56 years of age. Gender specific demographics for the faculty research participants include: 60% male, 40 % female. Racial specific demographics for the faculty participants include: 97% White, 2% Hispanic, 1% Other; 63% had 1-10 years teaching experience at the high school, and 37% had 10 or more years of similar experience.

The entire selected faculty participants participated in the REP training administered by Resiliency Incorporated in 2010. The REP training lasted for five consecutive days and focused on 4 key elements that were specifically designed to reduce stimuli in the school setting, ultimately creating a safe environment. The resiliency training, provided through Horacio Sanchez, focused on the importance of utilizing new knowledge in neuroscience when considering classroom and school climate. The four key elements include:

- 1) Establish a safe environment



- 2) Establish a school wide behavior plan that promotes social comfort and focus students on being successful
- 3) Establish a minimal response to all minor infractions
- 4) Have one major infraction that always results in the same consequence.

In order to establish the four elements listed above, the high school needed to implement a behavioral modification program. The first step in implementing such a program required the staff to first assess the climate of the high school and then to create a positive school climate that promotes safety, security and building caring relationships. A positive climate can reduce stress, therefore improving learning and behavioral performance. On the contrary, a stressful environment will not allow any programmatic services, teaching strategies, or behavioral interventions to have the opportunity to be implemented effectively. Research on this age group may shed light on the school structures that can provide the most support during this time. Two themes that consistently appear in effective-schools literature are equally applicable to student resiliency building—caring and personalization (Fiske, 1991).

The student population was selected to include students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. All of the student subjects were enrolled in this urban school district from August 2010 through March 2014. The student participants were chosen because they were enrolled in the school district from the implementation date of the REP and have been exposed to specific protective factors designed to promote a positive climate that fosters success in school. Gender specific demographics for the student research participants include: 54% male, 46 % female. Racial specific demographics include: 47% White, 41% Hispanic, 7% African-American, 5% other.

For the purposes of this study, implementation was limited to the high school graduating class of 2014. The data was limited to how the students and faculty felt at the time of the survey and did not inform the researcher of the long-term outcomes associated with positive or negative outcomes in life.

### **Site Access and Description**

The context for this study was a small urban school district centrally located within Pennsylvania. The school district was comprised of five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. Approximately 82% of the students were economically disadvantaged, and over 64% of the students were minority. The population of this city was 25,475, and the school district enrolled 4,726 students in grades K4-12. Prior to implementation of the REP, state assessment scores for the school district (2009) were 56% Basic/Below Basic in Math, 55% Basic/Below Basic in Reading, and the district was in Corrective Action 2: year 1. The class of 2014's demographic data was similar to that of the entire school district having 84% of the class being economically disadvantaged, and 62% of the students was minority. State assessment scores for this population (2009) were 54% Basic/Below Basic in Math, 57% Basic/Below Basic in Reading.

The high school recently went through a large-scale renovation and was designed to look more like a college campus, and was set up to be completely ready for technology. There was space on campus for virtual students who needed additional support. The atrium was also used as a place for learning, and a gathering place for collaborative efforts. The auditorium and stage were of professional quality, inspiring the students in the performing arts to flourish. The renovation project was broken down into

5 phases. The 1st phase of the project began in November 2010. The entire project was completed in August 2013. As the project progressed through each phase, students and staff had to change classrooms multiple times and the traffic pattern inside and outside of the school was altered to accommodate for the construction. The project was extremely invasive, disrupting the educational setting throughout the process.

During the 2012-13 school year, the high school participated in the PA Hybrid Learning Initiative, which further personalized student learning. The high school piloted the largest hybrid approach in the state. Half of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students took hybrid classes in the core areas of Math, Science, Social Studies and English. The school district was committed to expanding hybrid learning across all grade levels. During the time of the study, all students in grades 9-12 were involved in the hybrid program, and each student had an iPad, which was intended to erase the digital divide. The implementation of this program has changed the climate of the high school building.

The population participating in this study played a significant roll in the development of the hybrid program. During the 2010-2011 school year the participants were in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The high school administration decided to pilot a one-to-one personal electronic device program that provided each student with an iPod to be used for educational purposes. This pilot provided the district with the experience and knowledge required to progress to the hybrid program in 2012.

This particular high school also moved to a trimester model for the 2013-14 school year. The high school administrative team felt that the school in general would significantly benefit in moving to a trimester schedule. Fewer classes per day would reduce the stimuli of the class transitions, and provide increased social comfort of

students in class. Additional classroom time would allow for improved instructional methods, as described in the REP.

Horacio Sanchez (2010) identified areas of concerns for schools with distinct behavior problems. He stated that crisis emerges when students are exposed to additional stimuli, such as hallway transitions. Schools that anchor the promotion of reducing stimuli in their transitions provide a reward pathway for students to succeed. Increase in the number of hallway transitions cause more stress in students. Those students are more susceptible to becoming chemically overwhelmed and impulsive in classroom situations, leading to additional behavior referrals.

Longer class periods in trimester schedules would allow students to engage in instructional practices encouraged by the REP. With additional time, teachers would be able to establish activities that get attention, provide repetition, use of the senses, and visual cues. Teachers could allow three to five minutes to students to begin homework, allowing any potential roadblocks to be addressed.

Reducing the number of classes per day allowed for an increase in social comfort of student relationships with other students and teachers. Spending additional time in class with the same students allows students and teachers to accurately read nonverbal cues of their environments. With increased social comfort, there is a reduction of social conflict (Sanchez, 2010). Less conflict in class would increase the amount of instructional time.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

This study was an appropriate application of a sequential explanatory design because of the critical nature of the connection between resiliency factors and school

climate. Subsequent to the quantitative data collection and analysis, a semi-structured interview protocol was generated and three students from the class of 2014 and three teachers were purposively sampled. The sequential explanatory mixed-methods design consists of two distinct phases: quantitative followed by qualitative (Creswell et al., 2003). In this design, the researcher first collected and analyzed the quantitative data. The qualitative data were then collected and analyzed second in the sequence and help explain, or elaborate on, the quantitative results obtained in the first phase.

The researcher utilized a longitudinal design for the quantitative data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2012). Responses were numbered and reported anonymously. The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the high school's Resiliency Education Program (REP) in promoting resiliency factors by comparing school climate assessments administered prior to REP implementation to school climate assessments administered thirty-six months post implementation.

The initial baseline surveys were administered in September 2010 to the students and teachers at a high school located in Central Pennsylvania. The surveys were administered via an on-line survey tool developed for initial (pre-REP) 2010 school climate assessments. Resiliency Incorporated developed the survey questions to highlight areas/time periods in which significant stressors and/or negative behaviors could adversely affect the student population, particularly those already at risk for poor educational /life outcomes. The student climate survey consisted of 34 multiple-choice questions, and the faculty climate survey consisted of 26 multiple-choice questions. Dual populations for this study consisted of approximately 225 current members of the Class

of 2014 and 74 current full time faculty members employed at the participating high school.

The 34 –question student and 26-question teacher surveys were aligned in 4 broad categories: general climate, admission process, lunchtime environment, and dismissal process. Respondents were asked to rank their responses to the questions within each category on a 1- to 5-point Likert scale. The student survey consisted of fifteen questions that offered two responses, twelve questions that offered three responses, and seven questions that offered five responses. The teacher survey consisted of sixteen questions that offered two responses, three questions that offered three responses, and seven questions that offered five responses. In the general climate category, responses to the questions relating to educational resource quantity, teacher emphasis, administrative fairness, bullying, and strength of school programs were collected.

The researcher utilized two surveys, one for each group of participants. The researcher believes that the survey instruments used collected the necessary data to answer the research questions. The faculty survey instrument consisted of 26 survey questions. The admissions process category presented questions relating to adult supervision, environment, infractions, and student attitude. The lunchtime environment category presented questions related to food quality, social experience, and rules and routines. The dismissal process category reported questions relating to adult supervision, infractions, and environment.

The emphasis of this particular study was to acquire a better understanding of student and faculty perceptions on the impact of the REP on school climate. In the second phase of this study, the collection of qualitative research data from six semi-

structured interviews helped this researcher garner and generate a rich, in depth, and descriptive body of information regarding this topic. In order to identify student and faculty perceptions of school climate three students from the class of 2014 and three teachers (teachers had to have taught in the district in 2010) were purposively sampled. The intention of the interview process was to discover what perspectives each of the participants held in their beliefs, attitudes and value systems as it relates to this issue. The qualitative instruments were developed by the researcher with a focus of understanding the phenomenon of the impact of the REP on school climate.

The semi-structured interview questions were aligned in four broad categories: general climate, admission process, lunchtime environment, and dismissal process. There are two open-ended questions under each category. Each question is directly correlated to one of the four categories. The questions were designed to elicit various specific responses from the participants, which enabled the researcher to extrapolate student and faculty perceptions, beliefs, judgments, and evaluations.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this research was to test the effectiveness of the Resiliency Education Program in promoting resiliency protective factors. Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach, the researcher first analyzed student and faculty climate assessment data and student and faculty interview data to answer two key research questions.

The questions listed are related to the theme of understanding resiliency and the importance of establishing a safe and predictable environment for children. In this study the researcher made predictions about the relationship between the protective factors

(environmental assets and internal assets) introduced in the REP and student/faculty perception of school climate. The researcher then employed statistical procedures in order to draw inferences about the study population. In order to formulate questions about this study, the researcher posed two competing statistical hypotheses: a null hypothesis and an alternative. The null hypothesis, denoted by  $H_0$ , is an assertion about one or more population parameters that are assumed to be true until there is sufficient statistical evidence to conclude otherwise. The alternative hypothesis, denoted by  $H_1$ , is the assertion of all situations not covered by the null hypothesis. Together the null and the alternative constitute a set of hypotheses that covers all possible values of the parameters in question (Ramsey, 2001).

This study addressed the following research questions:

**Question 1:** How did the students' pre-Resiliency Education Program perceptions of school climate vary from those expressed post- Resiliency Education Program?

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between the effect of the Resiliency Education Program and students' perception of school climate.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant relationship between the effect of the Resiliency Education Program and students' perception of school climate.

**Question 2:** How did the faculty's pre-Resiliency Education Program perceptions of school climate vary from those expressed post- Resiliency Education Program?

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between the effect of the Resiliency Education Program and the high school faculty's perception of school climate.



**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant relationship between the effect of the Resiliency Education Program and the high school faculty's perception of school climate.

## **Research Methods**

### **Mixed Methods**

While strengths and weaknesses of this mixed methods design are widely discussed in the literature, combining and integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to research methods can sharpen the understanding of the research findings. Furthermore, the rationale for mixing both kinds of data within one study is grounded in the fact neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient, solely, to capture the trends and details of a situation (Gay & Airasian, 2000; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Tashakkori and Teddlie add that through using mixed-methods, researchers can build a study based on the strengths of both research methods, which may provide a more complete picture of a research phenomenon or problem.

### **Sequential Explanatory Design**

The mixed-methods sequential explanatory design is characterized by the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data (Creswell et al. 2003). The rationale for this design was that the quantitative portion of the study provides a general understanding of the research problem. The qualitative data were collected and analyzed to refine and explain the statistical results from the first phase. The strengths and weaknesses of this mixed-methods design have been widely discussed in the literature (Creswell et al., 2003; Goodchild, & Turner, 1996; Green & Caracelli 1997). A sequential explanatory mixed methods research design was chosen because multiple methods work to provide the most

complete understanding of the research problem. This type of design can be especially useful when unexpected results arise from the quantitative portion of the study (Creswell, 2007).

### **Quantitative Approach**

In the quantitative portion of this study the researcher tested his hypotheses by reaching valid conclusions about the cause and effect relationship between the independent variable and dependent variables. This study consisted of collecting data using a survey for each group of participants. The instruments used for this sequential explanatory mixed-methods study mirrored the climate assessment survey instruments developed by Resiliency Incorporated. The surveys were designed specifically for an urban school district in August 2010. The survey questions were developed to identify key areas and time periods in which significant stressors or negative behaviors could adversely affect the student population, particularly those already at risk for poor educational outcomes. The results from the initial climate assessment survey administered in the fall of 2010 were integral to the development of the Resiliency Education Program (REP) implemented by each school within this urban school district. The student climate assessment consisted of a 34-question survey utilizing a 1- to 5- point Likert scale. The faculty climate assessment instrument consisted of a 26-question survey also using a 1- to 5- point Likert scale.

### **Qualitative Approach**

The methodology for the qualitative portion of this sequential explanatory mixed-methods research study was phenomenology, as this researcher sought to understand how students and faculty perceived the “shared experience” that is represented by school

climate in light of the implementation of the Resiliency Education Program. The focus of this study, thus was to understand the phenomenon of the impact of the REP on school climate. The phenomena included student and faculty perceptions, beliefs, judgments, and evaluations. In order to examine faculty and student perceptions of school climate, this study employed the phenomenological interview as the primary method of qualitative data collection.

As this research is explanatory-sequential in design, subsequent to the quantitative data collection and analysis, a semi-structured interview protocol was generated. Student perceptions of school climate were identified through an interview process. The students interviewed were 2014 Class Officers who participated in both surveys. The three faculty members that were interviewed participated in both the 2010 and 2014 surveys.

### **Stages of Data Collection**

Many of the stages began in the winter of 2013. The first stage in the researcher's data collection was to participate in the Institutional Review board (IRB) exercise. Also, during the winter of 2013, the researcher identified participants and obtained necessary permissions. During this time, the researcher spoke with the personnel involved in the study about the study and their role in it. The administration and collection of the surveys took place during the Spring 2014. Data analysis occurred in the spring of 2014. The dissertation writing began in the spring of 2014 and was concluded prior to the summer of 2014. The timeline in Figure 3 details the progress of the work to complete the study.

Figure 3

*Timeline*

	Fall 2010	Fall 2013	Winter 2013	Spring 2014
Conducted Pre-Climate Assessment	✓			
Started Resiliency Treatment	✓			
IRB Certification Process Participant Identification/Permission		✓	✓	
Study Explained to Participants				✓
Survey Administration/Collection				✓
Conduct Interviews				✓
Analyze/Code Data				✓
Discuss & Review Findings				✓
Dissertation Writing of Findings				✓

**Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretation Methods**

*Instrument Development* – The quantitative data was collected utilizing a survey design. This was accomplished through the use of a Likert type survey provided by *Resiliency Incorporated*, which was used by the participating school district to collect quantitative data from students and faculty members in 2009. The researcher obtained permission from Horacio Sanchez, owner of Resiliency Incorporated, to use the survey in this experimental research. Permission was obtained in the form of a letter and was received in the month of May 2011. This methodology allowed for a statistical analysis of the data. The Climate Assessment Survey (CAS) proved to be an efficient means of gathering data without introducing threats to reliability that can occur with other collection means (Suskie, 1996).

The reliability, validity, and internal consistency of the newly designed survey in this study requires further testing with a larger population and random sample, possibly under experimental or quasi-experimental conditions to further demonstrate sound psychometric properties and factor analysis for all factors measured by the survey and the scale. The scale would have potential usefulness in practical educational, clinical, and research settings.

Subsequent to the quantitative data collection and analysis, a semi-structured interview protocol was generated. In order to identify student and faculty perceptions of school climate three students from the class of 2014 and three teachers (teachers had to have taught in the district in 2010) were purposively sampled. In order to examine student and faculty perceptions of school climate, this study employed the phenomenological interview as the primary method of qualitative data collection. Specifically, the researcher utilized a “romantic” interview where complete objectivity was paramount. In this study it was critical to analyze and reveal the subjectivities of the researcher and strive to generate dialogue that was intimate and self-revealing (Meriam, 2009).

*Instrument Description-* The quantitative instruments used for this mixed methods study were developed by Resiliency Incorporated to be used in a climate assessment for a specific school district located in Central Pennsylvania in 2010. The survey questions were developed to highlight areas and time periods in which significant stressors and/or negative behaviors could adversely affect the student population, particularly those already at risk for poor outcomes in school. The results of the initial climate survey provided data that was integral to the development of the Resiliency Education Program

(REP) implemented throughout the school district. The researcher obtained permission to use the instruments in this comparative study from the Superintendent of Schools. The faculty instrument consisted of a 26-question survey utilizing a 1- to 5-point Likert Scale. The student instrument was similar in format consisting of 34 questions.

The researcher administered the test via an on line survey tool, SurveyMonkey.com. This survey collection tool was selected because it was the most effective means of data collection for this particular study. All participants were able to access the survey via their own personal device (iPad or laptop).

The qualitative instruments were developed by the researcher with a focus of understanding the phenomenon of the impact of the Resiliency Education Program on school climate. The phenomena included student and faculty perceptions, beliefs, judgments, and evaluations (Schwandt, 2007). The interview questions were categorized into four broad categories: general climate, admissions process, lunchtime environment, and dismissal process. Each category consisted of two separate interview questions geared towards understanding how the subjects perceived the shared experience that is represented by school climate in light of the implementation of the Resiliency Education Program.

*Participant Selection and Invitation* - The selected population for phase one of the study included students and faculty from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. The dual populations for this study consisted of approximately 225 current members of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade class and 74 current full-time faculty members employed the participating high school.

In order to identify student and faculty perceptions of school climate, three class officers from the class of 2014 and three faculty members that participated in the 2010 climate assessment, were purposefully sampled in phase two of the study.

*Data Collection* – Data for this sequential explanatory mixed-methods study was collected in two distinct phases. During the first phase quantitative data were collected. SurveyMonkey.com was used as the delivery method for both the student and faculty surveys. The online survey site provided an effective way for the respondents to participate in the study with confidentiality and anonymity. It also provided an efficient and accurate platform for the researcher to collect data and supported the research design. The researcher applied to Drexel University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval to conduct research. Permission from the school district and the high school to conduct research was obtained. The researcher explained the purpose of the research and described the procedures for student survey participation.

The faculty survey instrument was administered during the last 30 minutes of a regularly scheduled faculty meeting in March 2014. The faculty meeting was held in the large group instruction room so that all participants had access to the wireless network. The faculty was instructed to bring their laptops or iPads to the faculty meeting. The researcher explained the purpose of the research and provided a description of the procedures for the survey. The researcher distributed a cover letter, Anonymous Consent Form, and directions for taking the online survey to the faculty. Upon completion of the survey, the researcher was able to identify, in aggregate style, the number of high school faculty participants that completed the survey in years 2010 and 2014.

The researcher administered the student survey instrument to twelfth grade students enrolled in English class. English class was a common course among all twelfth grade students attending the high school. The rationale for selecting this particular course is because every twelfth grade student had to take English class. This ensured the greatest number of participants who took the survey. The researcher then explained the procedure for taking the survey in each English classroom during one class period within the testing window. The testing window lasted approximately one week. This allowed the researcher to visit each English classroom at the rate of two per day. There were currently nine sections of English class taught to seniors at this particular high school. The researcher explained that participation in the surveys was anonymous and optional. The researcher along with the classroom teacher assisted the students logging onto the Web-Based electronic data collection site (SurveyMonkey.com).

Surveys for this study were administered through a Web-Based electronic data collection site. Participants were required to log onto the Internet and access the designated Web site and complete the self-guided survey. Data obtained from the surveys were collected and tallied through the electronic data collection site. Selected participants for this study had access to personal computers or iPads. Upon completion of the survey, the researcher was able to identify, in aggregate style, the number of student participants that completed the survey in years 2010 and 2014.

The second phase of data collection was comprised of a semi-structured interview protocol. The interviews were conducted in the high school office conference room. The qualitative data was recorded utilizing an open-ended interview design. This format provided the interviewees with a stress free atmosphere and provided the researcher an



opportunity to have open and candid dialogue with the participants (Willis, 2009). The open-ended style of questioning is designed to provide the researcher flexibility and rich conversation. Each question was interdependent and designed to elicit specific information from the participant.

The researcher secured permission from the study participants to tape record the interview sessions via a “Consent to Participate in Research” letter. The “Consent to Participate in Research” letter was signed prior to each interview. The researcher utilized a digital-recording device to ensure participant responses to the interview questions were accurately reflected in the data transcript and data analysis. The research participants were afforded the opportunity to read all interview transcripts and provide the researcher with any further clarification prior too publication.

*Data Analysis* – The researcher performed a statistical analysis on the collected survey data by using Microsoft Excel Data Analysis Toolpak. Frequency distributions and descriptive statistics, were calculated and analyzed. The researcher also analyzed the change in mean scores between pre- and post- REP climate surveys.

To determine the significance of the variance in sample means, a Paired Sample t-Test was utilized. The paired Sample t-Test determined if there was a statistically significant difference in the mean values of dependent variables (Schloesser, 2001). The researcher used this test to establish if a statistically significant difference exists in school climate at the high school level as a result of the Resiliency Education Program implementation.

In phase two of the data analysis, the researcher synthesized and extrapolated meaning from the various emerging topics to ensure and accurate understanding of each

proposed idea shared during the interview protocol. In addition, the researcher used a coding system to identify recurring themes in the data to ensure cohesion and uniformity in the analysis of each interview. The collected data from the interviews was compared to climate assessment data and the four broad categories of the Resiliency Education Program.

*Reliability and Validity* – The reliability, validity, and internal consistency of the newly designed survey in this study requires further testing with a larger population and random sample, possibly under experimental or quasi-experimental conditions to further demonstrate sound psychometric properties and factor analysis for all factors measured by the survey.

To warrant the validity of the data from the interviews this study will avoid biases. The first way to avoid bias is for this researcher to bracket or put aside personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions. This process is also known as epoche (Willis, 2009, p. 25). Another strategy is phenomenological reduction in which the researcher continually returns to the essence of the experience to derive the inner structure of meaning in and of itself. The third strategy is horizontalization. In this strategy the researcher lays out all the data for examination and treats the data as having equal weight. The fourth strategy is imaginative variation where the researchers view the data from various perspectives and from different angles (Willis, 2007, p. 26). These strategies were also used to analyze the data.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study involved school district personnel and students that could potentially be affected by the results of the study. The researcher and participants were made aware of the potential risks of the study. This research study involved human subjects, therefore required several ethical considerations. The subjects in this study volunteered for participation in this research trial and did so with full consent. Parents of minors that participated in this study provided consent and children separately provided assent to the conditions of the study. The subjects in this study had full knowledge of the activities and associated risks involved in the study. The researcher was aware and followed appropriate guidelines to ensure all participants were not exposed to any situation that was mentally or physically harmful. Participants were freely able to withdraw from the study at any time.

The information gathered in this study about the subjects will remain anonymous and the information collected cannot be traced back to the individual it was collected from. Anonymity was ensured through the use of an electronic data collection device where a number identified all participants, not a name. No data was physically collected in person.

In this study all subjects have been exposed to the same treatment, therefore eliminating the concern for ethical considerations related to the lack of exposure of potentially helpful treatment to a selected group within the subject field. The researcher remained objective throughout the research process in order to eliminate all personal bias. Data analysis was structured in a way to produce an outcome that was free of the researcher's own opinion.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Findings and Results**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to test the effectiveness of the Resiliency Education Program (REP) in promoting resiliency protective factors. Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach the researcher did so by comparing school climate assessments administered prior to REP implementation to school climate assessments administered thirty-six months post implementation. The researcher then interviewed six participants in order to elicit qualitative data to enhance the study. Participants of the study included staff and students that attend a high school located in Central Pennsylvania.

The high school in this research study was in the fourth year of a REP implementation. In March 2014, a purposeful sampling of students and teachers participated in anonymous on-line surveys developed for the initial (pre-REP) 2010 school climate assessments. The survey questions were developed by Resiliency Incorporated to highlight areas / time periods in which significant stressors and / or negative behaviors could adversely affect the student population, particularly those already at risk for poor educational outcomes. The results from the initial climate assessment survey administered in the fall of 2010 were integral to the development of the Resiliency Education Program (REP) implemented by each school within this urban school district.

In the second phase of this study, the collection of qualitative research data from six semi-structured interviews helped this researcher garner and generate a rich, in depth,

and descriptive body of information regarding this topic. The first interviews were conducted with three class officers from the class of 2014. The next three interviews consisted of participants from the high school faculty. All faculty participants were employed by this particular school district from 2010 through the 2014 school year. The semi-structured interviews were designed to elicit student and faculty perceptions of school climate. Specifically, the intention of the interview process was to discover what perspectives each of the participants hold in their beliefs, attitudes and value systems as it relates to this issue. The qualitative instruments were developed by the researcher with a focus of understanding the phenomenon of the impact of the REP on school climate. The semi-structured interview questions were aligned in four broad categories: general climate, admission process, lunchtime environment, and dismissal process. There are two open-ended questions under each category. Each question was directly correlated to one of the four categories. The questions were designed to elicit various specific responses from the participants, which will enable the researcher to extrapolate student and faculty perceptions, beliefs, judgments, and evaluations.

### **Research Questions**

Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach the researcher first analyzed student and faculty climate assessment data and student and faculty interview data to answer these two key research questions:

**Question 1:** How did the students' pre-Resiliency Education Program perceptions of school climate vary from those perceptions expressed regarding post- Resiliency Education Program?

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between the effect of the Resiliency Education Program and students' perception of school climate.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant relationship between the effect of the Resiliency Education Program and students' perception of school climate.

**Question 2:** How did the faculty's pre-Resiliency Education Program perceptions of school climate vary from those perceptions expressed regarding post-Resiliency Education Program?

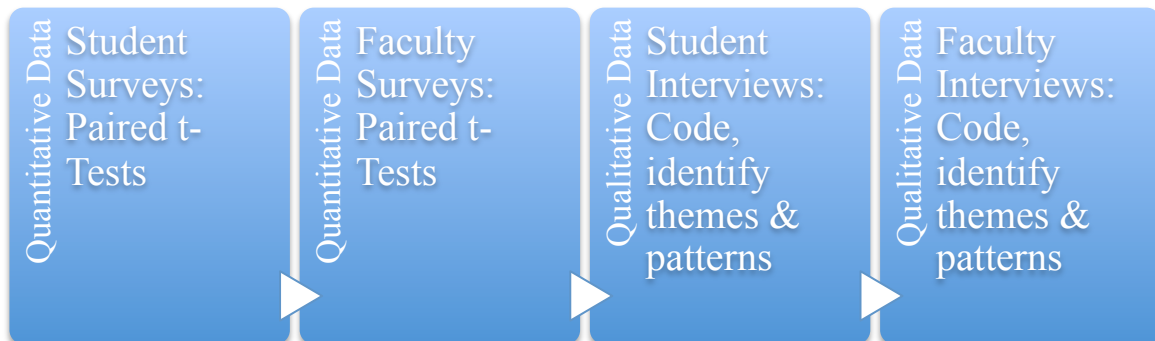
**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between the effect of the Resiliency Education Program and the high school faculty's perception of school climate.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant relationship between the effect of the Resiliency Education Program and the high school faculty's perception of school climate.

This research was conducted using a sequential explanatory mixed-method design (Creswell, 2007) in the following sequence:

Figure 4

#### Sequential Explanatory Mixed Methods Research Protocol



### **Research Streams**

Horacio Sanchez, CEO of *Resiliency Incorporated*, was hired by a specific Central Pennsylvanian school district to implement a Resiliency Education Program (REP) to the entire district staff. For the purposes of this study, the implementation of the REP at the high school level was researched utilizing a sequential explanatory mixed methodology design. The goal of the REP was to help teachers understand how to manage socioeconomically disadvantaged children, establish a safe classroom environment and promote consistent elements of resiliency throughout the district, specifically the high school setting. Resiliency is “that quality in children who, though exposed to significant stress and adversity in their lives, do not succumb to the school failure, substance abuse, mental health and juvenile delinquency problems they are at great risk of experiencing” (Brackenreed, 2010, p. 114).

Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach the researcher compared school climate assessments administered prior to REP implementation to school climate assessments administered thirty-six months post implementation. The researcher then interviewed six participants in order to refine the results from the quantitative data (Creswell, 2008, p. 560). Participants of the study included students and faculty that attend a high school located in Central Pennsylvania.

### **Population**

The selected population for phase one of the study included students and faculty from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. The dual populations for this study consisted of approximately 235 current members of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade class and 74 current full-time faculty members employed the participating high school.

In order to identify student and faculty perceptions of school climate, three class officers from the class of 2014 and three faculty members that participated in the 2010 climate assessment, were purposefully sampled in phase two of the study. The class officers were elected by the class of 2014 and were a representative sample of the student body. All faculty participants were employed by this particular school district from 2010 through the 2014 school year.

### **Methods**

This study consisted of collecting data using a survey for each group of participants. The instruments used for this sequential explanatory mixed-methods study mirrored the climate assessment survey instruments developed by Resiliency Incorporated. The survey questions were developed to identify key areas and time periods in which significant stressors or negative behaviors could adversely affect the student population, particularly those already at risk for poor educational outcomes. The student climate assessment consisted of a 34-question survey. The faculty climate assessment instrument consisted of a 26-question survey.

The methodology for the qualitative portion of this sequential explanatory mixed-methods research study is phenomenology, as this researcher sought to understand how students and faculty perceived the “shared experience” that is represented by school climate in light of the implementation of the Resiliency Education Program (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). In order to examine faculty and student perceptions of school climate, this study employed the phenomenological interview as the primary method of qualitative data collection. The students to be interviewed will be the 2014 Class Officers who



participated in both surveys. The three faculty members to be interviewed will have participated in both the 2010 and 2014 surveys.

## **Findings**

### **Quantitative Data**

The urban high school in this study was in the fourth year of a REP implementation. The survey questions were developed by Resiliency Incorporated to highlight areas and time periods in which significant stressors and/or negative behaviors could adversely affect the student population, particularly those already at-risk for poor educational outcomes. The student climate survey consisted of 36 multiple-choice questions, and the faculty survey consisted of 28 multiple-choice questions. The 2014 data were collected and downloaded from SurveyMonkey.com to MS Excel.

Dual populations were selected for this study. The first group of participants consisted of approximately 225 current members of the Class of 2014. The second group of participants was comprised of 74 current full time faculty members. Of the 225-member student population, 160 responded to the survey for a return rate of 71% and 104 students identified that they participated in the survey in 2010. Of the 74-member faculty population, 72 responded to the survey for a return rate of 97%. 55 of the 74 faculty participants indicated that they participated in the survey in 2010.

The 34-question student and 26-question teacher surveys were aligned in four broad categories: general climate, admissions process, lunchtime environment, and dismissal process. Participants chose their responses on a five point Likert scale reflecting their level of agreement with the statement: 1 being best, 5 being worst. The 2010 and 2014 survey data were analyzed via Paired Samples t-Tests, which determined

statistically significant differences in the mean values of the paired dependent variables. The researcher used the Paired Samples t-Test results as the initial filter to determine further analysis of the data as it related to the research questions of the study.

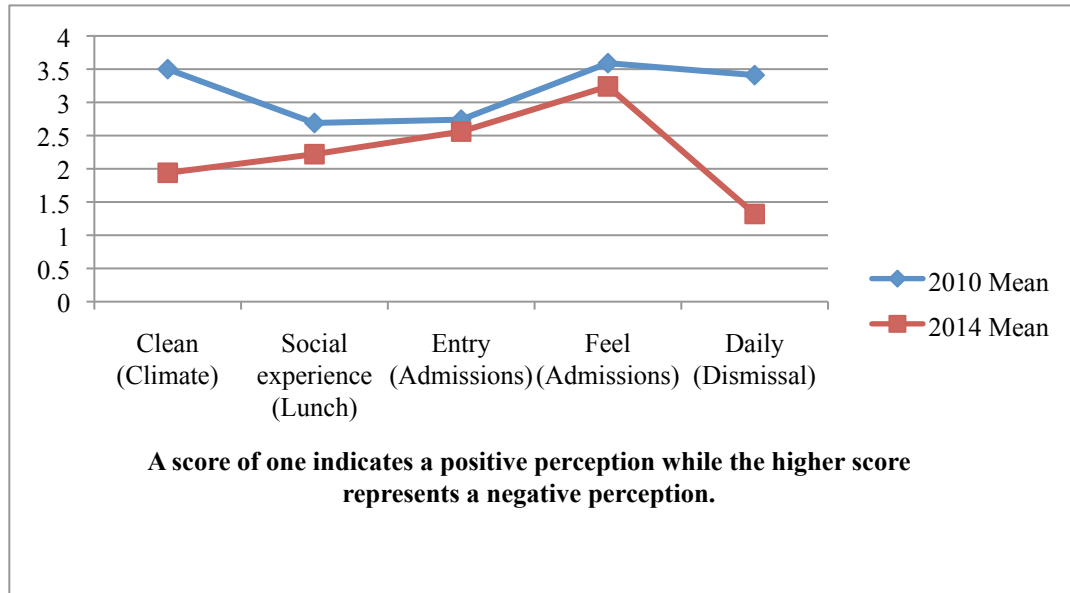
### **Student Surveys**

The student climate assessment consisted of a 34-question survey. Five key questions were used to represent the four categories as shown in Table 1. Based upon the statements in the survey, participants chose their responses on a five point Likert scale reflecting their level of agreement with the statement. The questions used to represent the student survey results related to the general cleanliness of the school, social experience during lunchtime, daily entry into the building, the overall feel of admissions and daily dismissal from the building. In analyzing both pre and post survey data, many similarities in responses and rankings were discovered. The questions related to social experiences during lunchtime, entering the building during the admissions process, and the overall feel of the admissions process all earned similar mean scores in both the pre and post data collection period. However, the most notable difference between both questionnaires was in the areas of general climate and daily dismissal.

The paired samples t-test was utilized to compare mean scores from the pre-test student survey and post-test student survey. The results indicate that the probability,  $P$ , .035, is  $< .05$ . Therefore we reject the Null Hypothesis and accept the Alternative Hypothesis. Statistically we conclude that the REP had a significant impact on student responses related to school climate. See Table 1.

Table 1

Student Survey



According to the students, the greatest strength of the school program is the quality of student/teacher relationships, presented in Table 2. However, the most significant shift in student perception from pre-REP to post-REP was documented in responses one, two, and three collectively. In 2014, 76% of student responses fell in the areas of quality of relationships, quality of instruction and administrative leadership. This was an increase of 16% from the 2010 survey data. Table 2 highlights the shifts in the underlying data.

Table 2

The Greatest Strength of The School Program

	2010	2014
1 - Quality of student/teacher relationships	43%	42%
2 - Quality of instruction	8%	18%
3 - Administrative leadership	9%	16%
4 - Quality of student population	20%	8%
5 - Quality of special programs / activities	20%	16%

As per student responses, there was an increase in “student behavior” as being the biggest challenge facing the school program. The survey results indicate that there was little difference in two very important factors, “student behavior” and “student achievement” when comparing pre-REP and post-REP surveys. However, these two factors account for 89% of the student perception in 2010 and 87% in 2014. Table 3 illustrates the paired responses.

Table 3

The Biggest Challenge Facing The School Program

	2010	2014
1 - Student behavior	53%	58%
2 - Staff turnover	0%	3%
3 – Student achievement	36%	29%
4 – Poor programming	9%	5%
5 – Lack of qualified teachers	2%	6%

### Faculty Surveys

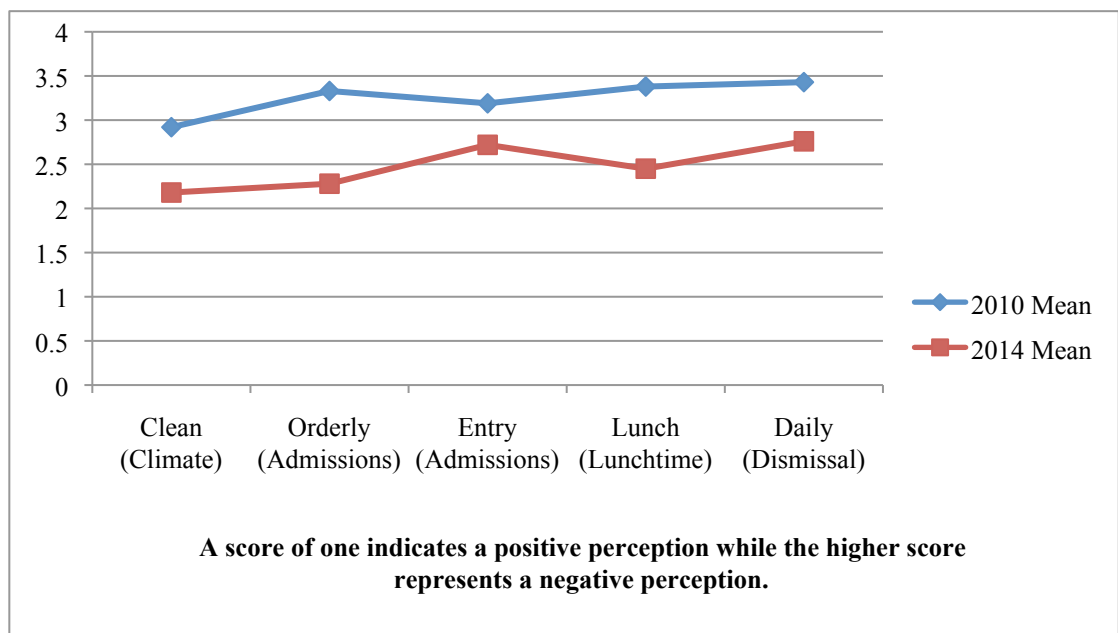
The faculty climate assessment consisted of a 26-question survey. Five key questions were used to represent the four categories as shown in Table 4. Based upon the statements in the survey, participants chose their responses on a five point Likert scale reflecting their level of agreement with the statement. The questions used to represent the faculty survey results related to the general cleanliness of the school, social experience during lunchtime, daily entry into the building, the overall feel of admissions and daily dismissal from the building. In analyzing both pre and post survey data, notable differences in responses and rankings were discovered. The questions related to cleanliness, entry into the building, and daily dismissal process all earned varied mean scores in both the pre and post data collection period. However, the most notable

difference between both questionnaires was in the areas of admissions and lunchtime environment.

The paired samples t-test was utilized to compare mean scores from the pre-test faculty survey and post-test faculty survey. The results indicate that the probability,  $P$ , .0008, is  $< .05$ . Therefore we reject the Null Hypothesis and accept the Alternative Hypothesis. Statistically we conclude that the REP had a significant impact on faculty responses related to school climate. See Table 4.

Table 4.

#### Faculty Survey



According to faculty member responses, “Quality of student/teacher relationships” drastically increased from the 2010 pre-REP to the 2014 post-REP survey data. Table 5 illustrates the 29% shift in perception for response one. In 2010, “quality of student/teacher relationships” and “quality of instruction” earned 78% of all responses for this survey question. In 2014, the same two responses earned 90% of all responses.

This dramatic shift in faculty perception embraces the essence of what the REP was trying to establish, which was to help teachers understand how to manage socioeconomically disadvantaged children, establish a safe classroom environment and promote consistent elements of resiliency throughout the district.

Table 5

## The Greatest Strength Of The School Program

	2010	2014
1 - Quality of student/teacher relationships	46%	75%
2 - Quality of instruction	32%	15%
3 - Administrative leadership	19%	5%
4 - Quality of student population	0%	1%
5 - Quality of special programs / activities	3%	4%

Teacher perception of the biggest challenge facing the school in 2010 was “student behavior” (50%). In 2014, a significant shift was noted with teachers selecting “student achievement” (72%) as the biggest challenge facing the school program. In both pre- and post-REP surveys, no teachers perceived “staff turnover” or “lack of qualified teachers” as the biggest challenge. “Poor programming” accounted for less than 5% of teacher selections for both pre- and post-REP surveys. Summary data is presented in Table 6.

Table 6

**The Biggest Challenge Facing The School Program**

	2010	2014
1 - Student behavior	50%	26%
2 - Staff turnover	0%	0%
3 – Student achievement	46%	72%
4 – Poor programming	4%	2%
5 – Lack of qualified teachers	0%	0%

### **Qualitative Data**

The two sets of interviews were conducted utilizing semi-structured, open-ended interview questions. The interview questions were aligned in four broad categories: general climate, admission process, lunchtime environment, and dismissal process. There are two open-ended questions under each category. Each question was directly correlated to one of the four categories. The questions were designed to elicit various specific responses from the participants, which will enable the researcher to extrapolate student and faculty perceptions, beliefs, judgments, and evaluations. This data analysis approach involves collecting large amounts of data and later reducing it into categories or themes to support answering the research questions (Maxwell, 1996).

The researcher started the process by reading each interview transcript. The documents must be read thoroughly to focus on common words and phrases to be coded. The coded words and phrases have the potential to become categories. The coding is highlighting and noting of key words, phrases, or concepts that appear repeatedly by the different participants (Rhine, 2005). Once the initial coding was completed, the researcher was committed to performing the code-recode strategy. In this strategy, the initial coding must be discredited and the coding process must be performed again in its

entirety. The process of coding-recoding allows the researcher to discover if the same words and phrases need coding (Hahn, 2008). The researcher coded the data and then created and named categories based off of the information in the interview transcripts for each of the four research questions. By reading and rereading the interview transcripts, the researcher was able to identify consistencies and differences in the data on the perceptions of school climate and coded the data. This provides the initial insight into the thoughts, perceptions, beliefs, and ideas of the participants. The categories came from themes, words, and ideas mentioned frequently by the participants (Dick, 2005).

### **General Climate**

Questions one and two of the interview looked to solicit participant opinions on the overall climate of the high school. This pair of questions is instrumental in discovering how students and faculty feel about the cleanliness of the school and how well equipped the school is in providing the appropriate resources needed to provide a high quality education. The participants' responses to the questions within the General Climate category provided information, not only about the cleanliness of the school and resources needed to provide a high quality education, but information concerning the "feel" of the building as well as how the building cleanliness and resources have improved over the course of 36 months.

*Student Question 1: From your vantage point as a student, describe the overall cleanliness of the school.*

S1: "I would say the overall cleanliness of the school is friendly and welcoming, and as my years gone throughout high school, I see a huge change of the environment of the school. I would say it's very clean and bright, and... I don't know. There's nothing



much to complain about because we're given so much and we have so many opportunities that Lebanon offers." (*sic*)

S2: "The cleanliness is pretty good. I always see the janitors like walking around after and they like check the school to make that's covered first and then, I'll see them like going to the bathroom and completely clean them out and it makes it easier actually because the janitors actually clean the bathrooms now. I think they clean the building like a descent level of cleanliness."

S3: "My last year as a senior, when the school is like completely done, everything is top notch and clean and pretty much in perfect condition as of now." (*sic*)

The students that participated in the interview process felt that the school was clean. All participants provided positive feedback in regards to general school cleanliness.

*Faculty Question 1: From your vantage point as a faculty member, describe the overall cleanliness of the school.*

F1: "It seems like a very cleanly school in terms of the appearance and looks. The atrium looks immaculate. On Wednesday morning, you always see somebody cleaning the plants and adding water to plants and making sure they look acceptable. When you walk into the classroom, it looks like the floors are clean."

F2: "It's probably the best I've seen since I've been working here. The hallways are clean. The walls are clean. Classrooms are swept. Trash is emptied. It's been really good."

F3: “Our school is very clean for the most part. We spent a better part of three years going through our renovation where we saw a lot of clutter around the building in the classroom, but you know I feel, from a day-to-day basis, it’s clean.”

All three of the faculty respondents believe that the cleanliness of the school is above average. The participants cited specific examples to justify their perceptions.

*Student Question 2: Considering all of the changes that occurred in your tenure as a student at the high school, does the school building have the facilities and resources needed for a high quality education? Provide the interviewer with specific examples.*

S1: “I agree completely on that. I feel like they do offer a lot of opportunities for students such as the hands-on and the more personal relations that you get from the guidance counselors. And also, the technology they put towards the school since the renovation has helped you get into different types of learning and expose yourself to the electronics and the technology you're going to get in the future which I feel like that’s going be beneficial towards students in this type of generation.” (*sic*)

S2: “I think they do. We have like more bathrooms now, classrooms are bigger, they took out the space, it’s increased now behind a square feet. We have an atrium now, which is good for meetings and stuff like that, like we just have memorial service the other day. We have the reconstruction ceremony the other day. And also, the lunchroom, they got bigger, so that makes for more like lunch productivity and stuff like that.” (*sic*)

S3: “I think yes, because now, we have a tech department that can help us with all our tech problems and music department section or are people with music. They have a

studio recording where kids can do their vocals and whatnot, and not be heard by or interrupt other classes surrounding it.”

The students agreed that the school has the facilities and resources needed for a high quality education. Common themes among their responses were: Improved technology, renovated classrooms, additional educational space, and music department renovations.

*Faculty Question 2: Considering all of the changes that occurred in your tenure as a faculty member at the high school, does the school building have the facilities and resources needed for a high quality education? Provide the interviewer with specific examples.*

F1: “The facilities and resources that were given at as I walked into this building were more than what I expected as a teacher. We received smart boards in the classroom and computers. We have ten laptop computers to my room as well as all the students being able to use an iPad and keep that with them and for their use for the entire school day.”

F2: “Yes, I think with the renovations, we’ve added more classrooms. The size of mostly classrooms has increased. We have only desk in just the size of the classrooms been able to not have enough room to spread out to some collaborative groups with our students having that room.”

F3: “I think our facilities we have here from education standpoint are quite impressive. From the individualized classrooms that are set up with the hybrid learning style to the large group instruction, the small group instruction, and beautiful auditorium,

planetarium, you know for different types of learning experience. So, I think we have a wonderful facility.”

The faculty responses in regards to this question were similar to those of the student participants. All teachers agreed that the high school facility does have the resources needed to provide a high quality education. In fact, the same themes emerged in this category: Improved technology, renovated classrooms, additional educational space, and music department renovations.

### **Admissions**

Questions three and four were constructed to obtain the general thoughts of the participants about the admissions process when students enter the building each morning. Based on the current phenomenological study’s finding, understanding student and faculty perceptions during key transitions could improve practices geared toward promoting social comfort, therefore leading to an overall improvement of school climate.

*Student Question 3: Think about the daily admissions process at the high school. Are there established rules and routines for morning admissions that help to keep the transition orderly? Provide the interviewer with specific examples.*

S1: “I feel like whenever you walk into the door at the high school you're immediately greeted by any types of teachers or security guard you see even if it's just a smile or good morning or how are you doing. I feel like they try to like push onto you being there on time a lot even if you're probably five seconds late after the building make you get it like pass. I feel like that's very good because people don't roam around the school.” (*sic*)

S2: “I come into the back and there’s always a security guard there to make sure that you came in on time. And if you don’t come in on time, you’ll regularly pass but I know like to the front, they try to keep the doors condensed so they’ll keep both opened and you’ll see security guards there too, and then they check for dress code too while you’re there.” (*sic*)

S3: “We have ten minutes to pack our stuff away in our lockers and get to our classrooms, and there are teachers on the hallways to keep order, and everything usually goes pretty clean, and no one gets in your way.” (*sic*)

The students perceived that there were staff members visible in every morning transition in order to help with the admissions process. Two of the three respondents cited specific examples of rules that are in place to keep the transition orderly.

*Faculty Question 3: Think about the daily admissions process at the high school. Are there established rules and routines for morning admissions that help to keep the transition orderly? Provide the interviewer with specific examples.*

F1: “I think that’s controlled by our administrators along with security guards very nicely. They know to come in and get the breakfast, sit down, and eat it, throw away their trash.”

F2: “Yes, there’re definitely established rules. As they come in, they understand the procedure, for example, taking their hats off, taking off maybe hoodies, and they understand, as they come in.” (*sic*)

F3: “Yeah, there are rules and routines. Only certain doors students can use to be able to come to building, which I think is important in our facility we have here because there are a lot of doors but we require each student to come only into specific doors, and

we have faculty assigned as well as security assigned to those doors. So, I think it is pretty smooth and orderly transition.”

The faculty statements offered for question three alluded to the fact that there are rules and routines established for morning admission that help keep the transition orderly. All three of the participants cited specific rules for the morning admissions. The rules that were mentioned were in favor of picking up trash, getting to class on time, and enforcement of the dress code.

*Student Question 4: Describe your average admission into the school building. Do the majority of adults in the school help supervise the transition?*

S1: “I feel like probably over majority because I never had trouble with the teachers tell me the overall like details of what to do and where to go. They’re always very helpful on what you need any types of questions that needs to be answered. The teachers check the people in the hall to make sure people are going where they need to be, and also, people who go out in atrium and make sure people are not sitting in there and not going to class. I feel like they make sure everyone is where they needed to be at certain time.”

S2: “Usually, when I come in the morning, like there are teachers around the triangle, so I’ll pass like three or four of them and I’ll like good morning to them and stuff. And then, I’ll go up the stairs and through the one hallway, I’ll see another teacher and then they’ll say good morning, and going into the classroom, your teacher is always standing outside their doors in the morning to make sure no one is late. I guess it’s pretty good when you come in to the school and teachers say hi to you.”

S3: “Absolutely, yes.”

Overwhelmingly, student responses indicated that the majority of adults assist with the morning admissions process. Two students cited specific examples of where they see adults on a regular basis during this time period.

*Faculty Question 4: Describe your average admission into the school building. Do the majority of adults in the school help supervise the transition?*

F1: “You always see adults standing down in the atrium along with all of the administrators, which I think is really important for the students to see at the beginning of the day. And then when you walk out into the atrium, there are sets of teachers in places every single morning you see. The kids see the same teachers there and they're always in the same area. So, I think that makes them feel comfortable as well as in the hallways.”  
(*sic*)

F2: “Yeah, we have the security guards and administrators and teachers who have first planning period are part of that process of being there welcoming the students, greeting them and making that the flow is going the way it should be going.” (*sic*)

F3: “I think when you consider supervision as a whole in the building, the answer is yes, the vast majority, because there're always teachers in the hallways but that's throughout the day, and anytime, there's a transition period. I think we have a specific number of teachers assigned to those doors that are assigned for the entrance to the building but, as students then come in the building, matriculate to the lockers or classrooms, the teachers just stand in the hallways greeting the students, so I think our school does a very good job of welcoming students during admission process.” (*sic*)

Faculty member responses indicate that the majority of adults in the building supervise the morning admissions process. Participants mentioned that administrators,

teachers, and security guards are among the most frequent adults that participate in the supervision process at the morning admission process.

### **Lunchtime Environment**

Questions five and six were constructed to gain insight on the lunchtime environment at the high school. The lunchtime periods of the school day are the most volatile time in the school. Helping to understand student and faculty perceptions of this time will aid in creating a plan to control the lunchtime environment.

*Student Question five: Think about your experiences in the high school lunchroom. Are there established rules and routines for the lunchroom? Provide the interviewer with specific examples.*

S1: "I feel like that's just general rule now because, unless you have a pass and you still have to get a permission to go to the bathroom, to leave, or any type of place to go when it's during your lunch period." (*sic*)

S2: "They have like people standing outside the lunchroom and like you can't leave unless you have a pass or some type of excuse to leave. And when you're going into the lunchroom, there're teachers lined up across from both the lunch line and from the tables, that way, they see you're sitting down and making sure that you're in the lunchroom and stuff. And also, within the actual like line area, there's a security guard that would make sure that like no fights or any trouble starts up in there." (*sic*)

S3: "Yes, no one is able to leave the lunchroom without a pass of any sort, only to go to the bathroom. Everyone is to remain seated until the teacher that's supervising the lunchroom blows the whistle or gives us a cue."



The students felt that there are rules and routines in place for the lunchroom. The main theme that emerged from the interviews was that students were not allowed to leave the lunchroom without a pass from a faculty member.

*Faculty Question five: Think about your experiences in the high school lunchroom. Are there established rules and routines for the lunchroom? Provide the interviewer with specific examples.*

F1: “Yes, They go into the lines. There’s a couple of different lines that they can proceed to which were established at the beginning of the year by announcements as well as the lunchroom supervisors and then they know to go to the cash registers to pay and then they sit down and they go to their table of their choice. They know at a certain point that they should begin to, and not just based off of their timing and teachers walking around kind of noting that they should throw their trash away, and then, they wait until teachers have kind of like the roll call to tell them that they can go and proceed to their class after the supervision or after the lunch is completed, the lunch time is completed.”  
(sic)

F2: “Yes. The extensive lunchroom is a lot better. Secondly, the way the lines are now organized with our cafeteria services, you know the lines are well marked, the Deli line for example, the two hot lines, the pizza line, the salad line. So, students are regulated into those lines because of the established systems.” (sic)

F3: “You know in my experience in the café, and I go there pretty much everyday for lunch, I never see any issues. The students kind of know where to go, to get of their food, to pay for food. I think our café is set up very well to deal with the number of things that we have in each lunch period. They get through the line in orderly fashion.

The café is usually clean. I think our staff does a great job whether it's a faculty that is monitoring on café duty or lunch." (*sic*)

The faculty members felt that there are rules and routines established in the lunchroom. The common theme that emerged from the faculty interviews was focused on established procedures that keep the lunchroom orderly. Another common theme was the efficiency in which students progressed through the serving lines as a result of the new cafeteria design.

*Student Question six: Describe your average experience in the lunchroom. Do the lunchroom supervisors provide good supervision?*

S1: "There's always teachers supervising, making sure nothing's going on, or anything that's like not in the rules. Rules are generally just you can't draw food, you can't like run around, just sit at your table, just go to the line, get your food, sit down, eat, throw it away, just a simple rule. There's nothing really too strict. It's pretty laid back."

S2: "I think it's okay. I think when you walk in, it's just like your typical lunch but I think the difference now is that, since we have more lines, it makes it more productive, so you don't have time to like stop and talk to people. So, you get your lunch, and you sit down right away." (*sic*)

S3: "Well, it's as orderly as it could get with a bunch of teenagers in one room. Laid back!"

Student responses for this survey question varied, however all students believe that the majority of adults supervise the lunchroom. Two students described the lunchroom experience as being "laid back".

*Faculty Question six: Describe your average experience in the lunchroom. Do the lunchroom supervisors provide good supervision?*

F1: "I think, for the most part, they do. I think some of the teachers including myself stay at the same spot everyday but I also think that provides comfort to the students because they've had specific conversations with students who says that the teachers that are kind of picking them out and walking around and they're picky with them makes them feel uncomfortable." (*sic*)

F2: "I do not have lunch duty butt I believe that it is orderly."

F3: "I think that the administration has done a very good job, pre-meditated job, of assigning people at café duty and you know that's the key, is you have to have the visibility of staff members but also staff members that aren't just gonna hangout, you know, on that exterior and just kind of stand there. They got to be able to interact with the kids and kind of keep with them. But I definitely think it's a pre-mediated act just that café can be a time of the day and a place during the day that could become unruly if you aren't there to supervise it continuously." (*sic*)

Question six revealed that two out of three teachers stated that the adults provide good supervision in the cafeteria. The general consensus among faculty participants was that the lunchroom was orderly.

### **Dismissal Process**

The construction of questions seven and eight enabled participants to express their opinion on the dismissal process at the high school. Participant's perceptions regarding key transitions, such as dismissal, could improve practices geared towards promoting social comfort, therefore leading to an overall improvement of school climate.

*Student Question Seven: Think about the daily dismissal process at the high school. Are there established rules and routines for dismissal that help to keep the transition orderly? Provide the interviewer with specific examples.*

S1: “The general rule is just simple. The day bell is pretty much just going with the flow with the general direction that we’re going which is pretty much out the doors. Also, I feel like they try, not necessarily push people, to not let people just sit around and hang out and especially outside when you're in the front, they don’t let people standing in front of the school or they have to like use the crosswalks and keep a safe environment for the students here.” (*sic*)

S2: “And again, with the morning, it’s like the same transition. Teachers are everywhere, at the atrium, below, at the doors. You usually see Mr. Giovino outside with other teachers making sure that the kids are on the sidewalk crossing in the crosswalk. And you’ll even see sometimes the superintended out there too. I think everyone’s get involved in the dismissal process just to make sure everyone gets home safely.” (*sic*)

S3: “I mean there aren’t really rules. People just... When the bell rings, everyone just go down and since we only have two stairways and three circles, everyone crowds around those two stairways, so it does get a little chaotic but nothing else. I mean it’s as orderly as it could be, I guess I could say.” (*sic*)

The construction of question seven guided participants to think about the daily dismissal process at the high school, specifically about established rules and routines for this transition. Only one of the six student participants cited a specific rule or routine for the dismissal process at the high school. However, the overall student consensus for this question is that the dismissal transition was orderly.

*Faculty Question Seven: Think about the daily dismissal process at the high school. Are there established rules and routines for dismissal that help to keep the transition orderly? Provide the interviewer with specific examples.*

F1: "I think that the dismissal process is very easy and controlled very rarely or there are any disruptions and they walk home and get on the bus and they're on their way. So, I think it's comfortable for them." (*sic*)

F2: "The procedure, it runs smoothly, and then once again, why does it run smoothly? I believe there are administrators out there; there are teachers out there as part of their afterschool duties so the flow keeps moving as the students are exiting. We also have teachers on the school ground, outside of the school ground, out of the parking lot, making sure we're controlling the flow of the cars leaving the parking lot and students outside and in front of the school making sure that the students are not causing any problems on the street as they're crossing, etcetera." (*sic*)

F3: "Absolutely, and I think the dismissal process is even more of a difficult situation because once school... Schooling ends at 2:55, not everyone leaves. That's different than the morning where everyone is going to the same time going to a classroom. In the evening, you know you have students going to catch a bus, students going to walk to home, students going to practice, club meetings, extra-curricular activities in the building, so I think it's a little more difficult to have a strict set of rules as everyone is going out one door, because they can't, there are two doors." (*sic*)

The faculty statements offered for this question alluded to the fact that there are rules and routines established for the afternoon dismissal that help keep the transition

orderly. All three of the participants cited specific rules for the morning admissions. Faculty participants described the transition as safe, orderly, and comfortable.

*Student Question eight: Describe your average dismissal upon conclusion of the school day. Do the majority of adults in the school help supervise the transition?*

S1: “The teachers, I usually see them outside or outside duty. They usually like tell us have a good week or have a good night. They're very friendly which is very common you see from teachers here. They're very approachable. Other than that, they always supervise us making sure nothing goes on or any like people breaking any rules but that's just... I make one destination to the other which just make there as fast as possible for my dismissal because it just makes a lot of traffic and I always try to avoid that.” (*sic*)

S2: “I usually stay in the school for like an hour because I'm always here. And then like when I live, there're still security guards here at the time and there're still teachers here that watch me go. So, I think when the teachers see you leave, they try to make sure that they know where you're going. Usually some teachers will actually ask you if you're going home or if you're going here.” (*sic*)

S3: “Yes. Our principal is almost always in the front of the building where the majority of our... Like school has walkers, so were the majority of them would go out, he's always there with several other teachers that have outside duty even in the cold and in the rain. So, we always have teachers outside.” (*sic*)

Student responses indicate that the majority of adults assist with the dismissal process. Two students cited specific examples of where they see adults on a regular basis during this time period.

*Faculty Question eight: Describe your average dismissal upon conclusion of the school day. Do the majority of adults in the school help supervise the transition?*

F1: “Yes, for the most part, I think that most of the adults go out to where they're supposed to be at the end of the day. And again, I think that provides comfort for the students as they're leaving and exiting the building”. (*sic*)

F2: “Yes. That’s probably our biggest area where we have a lot of the adults there during that time. That’s part of the majority of our teachers because it’s considered an afterschool duty, so they're there. The majority of staff is either inside the building, right there during the atrium, to help with the procedure or outside, to also help with the process.” (*sic*)

F3: “I think, again, all of the adults are involved in that whether it’d be in the hallway or in specific location, pre-determine by administration throughout the building. And I think we do a really good job. I mean I don’t see too many issues going on during that time of the day. I think a lot of our kids are trying to get out here.” (*sic*)

Question eight revealed that all faculty participants believe that the majority of adults in the building supervise the dismissal process. Participants mentioned that administrators, teachers, and security guards are among the most frequent adults that participate in the supervision process at the dismissal process.

## **Results**

### **Analysis of Data**

Because of the nature of the data collected in the surveys, the researcher employed quantitative methods to analyze the data. Frequency distributions and descriptive statistics were calculated and analyzed. The percentage change in the mean

scores between pre- and post- REP climate surveys was calculated. The intent was to gain perspective on any changes of perceptions of the participants over time.

To determine the significance of the variance in sample means, the Paired Sample t-Test was utilized. The Paired Sample t-Test determined if there was a statistically significant difference in the mean values of the dependent variables (Schloesser, 2001). The researcher used this test to establish if a significant difference existed in the school climate at the high school as a result of the Resiliency Education Program implementation. The testing of variables was completed for each category of responses in the study surveys category including climate, admissions, lunchtime, and dismissal. Based on the grouping of questions and the presence of differences in the mean responses between 2010 and 2014, evaluations were made regarding the study's research questions.

Subsequent to the quantitative data collection and analysis, a semi-structured interview protocol was generated. In order to identify student and faculty perceptions of school climate three students from the class of 2014 and three teachers, employed by the district since 2010, were purposively sampled. In order to examine student and faculty perceptions of school climate, this study employed the phenomenological interview as the primary method of qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2007).

### **Research Question #1**

The first research question of the study was: How did the students' pre-Resiliency Education Program perceptions of school climate vary from those perceptions expressed regarding post- Resiliency Education Program? This question is essential to efforts of promoting a safe and orderly school climate; therefore promoting resiliency in the school.



As indicated in Appendix A, questions numbered 1, 4, 19, 22, and 30 on the Student Climate Assessment, related to how student perceptions have changed as a result of the Resiliency Education Program. Table 1 (p.74) illustrates how student perception has changed and represented a significant statistical impact with one-tailed t-tests comparing pre and post survey data showing  $p = .034$ .

Qualitative data collected from student interviews supported these findings by providing detailed instances that the school climate has improved as a result of the REP. The semi-structured interview questions (Appendix B) that were designed to elicit various specific responses from the participants enabled the researcher to extrapolate favorable student perceptions of the high school climate. Student responses to the interviews are documented on p. 79 – 94.

### **Research Question #2**

The second research question of the study was: How did the faculty's pre-Resiliency Education Program perceptions of school climate vary from those perceptions expressed regarding post- Resiliency Education Program? This question is essential to efforts of promoting a safe and orderly school climate; therefore promoting resiliency in the school. As indicated in Appendix B, questions numbered 1, 9, 12, 18, and 24 on the Faculty Climate Assessment, related to how faculty perceptions have changed as a result of the Resiliency Education Program. Table 4 (p.76) illustrates how faculty perception has changed and represented a significant statistical impact with one-tailed t-tests comparing pre and post survey data showing  $p = .0008$ .

Qualitative data collected from faculty interviews supported these findings by providing detailed instances that the school climate has improved as a result of the REP.

The semi-structured interview questions (Appendix B) that were designed to elicit various specific responses from the participants enabled the researcher to extrapolate favorable faculty perceptions of the high school climate. Faculty responses to the interview questions are documented on p. 79 – 94.

### **Summary**

The findings and results of Chapter Four provide data to support the Alternative Hypotheses for both research questions. The quantitative and qualitative data indicate a positive relationship between the effect of the Resiliency Education Program and student/faculty perceptions of school climate. The data collected and analyzed will enable the researcher to formulate interpretations, conclusions and recommendations. These reflections will be provided in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER 5

### Interpretation, Conclusions, and Recommendations

#### Introduction

Chapter Five is divided into three sections: Interpretations, Conclusions, and Recommendations. This chapter presents findings from this sequential explanatory mixed-methods study. This mixed-methods design consists of two distinct phases: quantitative followed by qualitative (Creswell et al., 2003). These findings were based upon data gathered from an electronic survey and semi-structured interviews.

The purpose of this study was to test the effectiveness of the Resiliency Education Program (REP) in promoting resiliency protective factors. In this study, the researcher compared school climate assessments administered prior to REP implementation to school climate assessments administered thirty-six months post implementation. The researcher then interviewed six participants in order to refine the results from the quantitative data (Creswell, 2008, p. 560). Participants of the study included staff and students that attend a high school located in Central Pennsylvania.

These study results conform to previous research on the predictors of resilience among inner city youth, which found evidence that bonding with teachers, and involvement in extracurricular activities may predict resilience in some at-risk youth (Tiet et al., 2010).

#### Overview of the Study

In 2010, the school district made a large financial and multi-year commitment to resiliency education for all district teachers and staff. The purpose of this study was to test the effectiveness of the Resiliency Education Program in promoting resiliency

protective factors by comparing school climate assessments administered prior to REP implementation to school climate assessments administered thirty-six months post implementation.

Youth living in high poverty areas and attending urban neighborhood high schools experience an increased risk for poor educational outcomes; however, in spite of the odds against their success, some at-risk youth are able to thrive in these environments. These young people are described as resilient (Fine, 1994; Sanchez, 2010).

The review of literature revealed low socioeconomic status (and the stresses associated with it), family disruption, residential mobility, socially disorganized neighborhoods, and limited English proficiency as some of the risk factors that can predict negative educational outcomes for adolescents. Census data from 2000 and 2010 indicate this particular school district realized an increase of 19.2% in poverty and low-income rates within the community it serves. Additionally, data retrieved from the Pennsylvania Department of Education shows an increase of 29.5% in limited English proficiency of school age children within this particular school district from 2005 to 2011. The research conducted by Patterson, Hale and Stessman (2007) suggests that the combination of the increases in poverty levels and limited English proficiency points to a potentially fragile and at-risk student population.

The body of research on resiliency has consistently provided evidence that a variety of protective factors may shield youth from potential negative outcomes resulting from living in destructive environments (Shaughnessy & McHatton, 2009). This research centered on the protective factors under an educational institution's scope of influence, namely schools with high academic and behavior standards, caring/supportive

relationships between teachers and students, and an opportunity for student involvement in extracurricular activities (Neild & Balfanz, 2006; Shaughnessy & McHatton, 2009; Bluestein et al., 2010).

The school district in this study implemented a Resiliency Education Program within each of the district's seven schools to address concerns regarding student resilience. At the study site, the REP focused on minimizing time periods of student and faculty stress and improving student and faculty relationships. This study compares the results of the climate assessment administered in 2010 by Resiliency Incorporated to an identical school climate assessment administered by this researcher in 2014.

Decades of research on resiliency have consistently provided evidence that a variety of protective factors may shield youth from potential negative outcomes resulting from living in destructive environments. Past research has pointed to two school-based factors, bonding to teachers and involvement in extracurricular activities, as significant predictors of better academic and behavioral outcomes in at-risk youth (Tiet et al., 2010, p. 373). In the review of literature Tiet et al. (2010) note that bonding to teachers was a significant predictor of lower levels of antisocial behavior for adolescents, and that positive relationships with teachers predict better academic outcomes for youth at-risk. This supports what the researcher found in the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data; both faculty members and students agree that one of the greatest strengths of the school program is quality of student/teacher relationships. The quantitative and qualitative data indicate a positive relationship between the effect of the Resiliency Education Program and student/faculty perceptions of school climate.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The researcher utilized a pre and post survey and semi-structured interviews as data collection methods to gain insight into the research questions. In reviewing all of the data collected for this study, the researcher noted that there was positive and significant impact on the perceptions of student and faculty at this urban high school.

The 34 –question student and 26-question teacher surveys were aligned in 4 broad categories: general climate, admission process, lunchtime environment, and dismissal process. Respondents were asked to rank their responses to the questions within each category on a 1- to 5-point Likert scale. In reviewing all of the data for this study, the researcher noted that out of the 34-item student survey, the participants ranked thirty statements in favor of improvement on the post-REP survey than the pre-REP survey. The researcher also noted that out of the 26-item faculty survey, the participants ranked twenty-two statements in favor of improvement on the post-REP survey than the pre-REP survey.

Five key questions were used to represent the four categories in this study. The questions used to represent the student survey results related to the general cleanliness of the school, social experience during lunchtime, daily entry into the building, the overall feel of admissions and daily dismissal from the building. In analyzing both pre and post survey data, from both student and faculty surveys, many similarities in responses and rankings were discovered. The questions on the student survey related to social experiences during lunchtime, entering the building during the admissions process, and the overall feel of the admissions process all earned similar mean scores in both the pre

and post data collection period. However, the most notable difference between both questionnaires was in the areas of general climate and daily dismissal.

The faculty climate assessment consisted of a 26-question survey. Five key questions were used to represent the four categories. The questions used to represent the faculty survey results related to the general cleanliness of the school, social experience during lunchtime, daily entry into the building, the overall feel of admissions and daily dismissal from the building. In analyzing both pre and post survey data, notable differences in responses and rankings were discovered. The questions related to cleanliness, entry into the building, and daily dismissal process all earned varied mean scores in both the pre and post data collection period. However, the most notable difference between both questionnaires was in the areas of admissions and lunchtime environment.

Based on the analysis, the data presented indicates that the reduction of stimuli during key transitional times played an integral role in changing student perception of school climate. Additionally, brain-based science literature reinforces the notion that some rules must be uniformly enforced by all adults within an educational setting, and scholarly research has borne-out that adults and students need anchors in their environment (Sanchez, 2008). When it comes to rules, safety and resilience, students tend to view a climate as fair and safe if certain things are predictable (Resiliency, Inc., 2010, p. 21). Consequently, the REP at this high school aimed to promote resiliency by establishing and reinforcing consistent, clear and concise student behavioral expectations and consequences.

According to faculty member and student responses, “Quality of student/teacher relationships” significantly increased from the 2010 pre-REP to the 2014 post-REP survey data. Resiliency and urban education literature documents that youth in urban high schools are at greater risk of school failure and dropping out of school altogether (Patterson, Hale and Stessman, 2007). Researchers cite that youth at risk for these poor outcomes named the lack of care by a teacher as a central catalyst. These students believed they would have learned more and been more successful if teachers had made greater investments in personal relationships with them (Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009). Because accepted research is conclusive regarding the importance of the student/teacher relationship in fostering resilience, the REP places great emphasis on relationship building. In conjunction with the relational component of the REP, several new resiliency-based programs were introduced, in the 2010-2011 school year, to enhance and support the student/teacher relationship. Based on the results from this study, the data indicates that the high school faculty and administration value the trust and relationships developed over the years with their students and continue to work toward solidifying them.

### **Conclusion**

The data from this study provides nine significant factors regarding positive changes in school climate as they relate to the resiliency protective factors. According to the students, the most significant shift in student perception from pre-REP to post-REP was documented in responses related to general climate, daily dismissal, quality of student/teacher relationships, quality of instruction, and administrative leadership. According to faculty member responses, the most significant shift in faculty member



perception from pre-REP to post-REP was documented in responses of admissions and lunchtime environment, quality of student/teacher relationships, and quality of instruction.

Based on the researcher's collection and analysis of data in this study, the current REP design has been effective in promoting resiliency protective factors at this particular high school. Ongoing review and modifications of the REP, staff collaboration, continued professional development, and community support will enhance the school culture at this particular high school.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

This research is critical for educational leaders who are interested in promoting resiliency in schools by instilling protective factors that will ultimately lead to successful outcomes in school. Public educators working in the twenty-first century will have to develop the knowledge base and skills needed to promote elements of resiliency. This study provides insight on this topic. The following are recommendations based upon the data and conclusions of this study:

1. Educational leaders should continue to promote resiliency in schools by reinforcing protective factors that will lead to positive school outcomes.
2. Educational leaders of this district should develop an action plan to share the data with parents in the community, coaches, outside agencies, and additional people who have involvement with youth in the community.
3. School leaders, in collaboration with the teaching staff, should use these results to design specific professional development programs to reinforce the benefits of implementing an effective Resiliency Education Program.

4. School leaders and teachers of this high school should constantly evaluate and modify the REP to increase the likelihood of school climate enhancement of resiliency protective factors.
5. School leaders and teachers of this high school should establish a strong mentoring program for the students of this high school.
6. It is strongly recommended to conduct the same type of study on the other schools in this district including students from pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The data collected from building specific studies will assist the district in developing a series of teaching and learning activities, ultimately helping the district to instill protective factors on the students of this community.

#### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Results from this study indicated additional options for further research. Based on the results from this study the researcher recommends that another resiliency study be formed at this school after current research results are reviewed, appropriate REP modifications are made, and sufficient time has elapsed for the effects to be realized. Future resiliency research should focus on protective factors specifically addressed in the modified Resiliency Education Program. The overarching goal should focus on helping the district teachers to understand how to deal with at-risk youth, establish a resiliency-based safe classroom environment, and promote resilience via protective factors throughout the district. It would be beneficial for educators to be informed of the current data and reflect on and evaluate how they can better understand the importance of establishing and fostering positive relationships with students. The results can add to the

professional practice in that it can lead educators to a greater understanding of the importance of adults fostering positive relationships with students.

### **Summary**

A high school in Central Pennsylvania faces major issues with truancy, low-test scores and a general dislike of school. In response to these issues the school district determined that a comprehensive school reform plan was needed. The primary goal was to help teachers understand how to manage socioeconomically disadvantaged children, establish a safe classroom environment and promote consistent elements of resiliency throughout the district. The data collected, analyzed and evaluated in this study provides actionable information for administrators and teachers to assess the impact of the REP at this specific high school. The data collected, analyzed, and evaluated in this study provide a success story for the REP program at this high school. The district should work as a team to plan for “next steps” in its approach to best serve its students.

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## Appendix A:

**Student Climate Survey**

**I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS SURVEY:**  YES  NO

**I PARTICIPATED IN THIS SURVEY IN 2010:**  YES  NO

1. Is the school building clean?
  1. Always clean and organized
  2. Often clean and organized
  3. Sometimes clean and organized
  4. Seldom clean and organized
  5. Never clean and organized
  - 6.
2. Does the school have the facilities and resources needed for a high quality education?
  1. Very little
  2. Some
  3. Most
3. The food at lunch is...?
  1. Bad
  2. Adequate
  3. Good
4. The social experience at lunch is...?
  1. Well-organized with healthy student social interaction
  2. Sometimes organized with good student social interaction
  3. A fairly organized gathering of students requiring good adult supervision
  4. An unstructured and loud gathering of students
  5. A stressful period for many students where something negative can occur at any minute
5. Do you feel safe at school?
  1. Seldom
  2. Sometimes
  3. Always
6. How many of your teachers are fair, friendly, and look out for your best interest?
  1. Few
  2. Some
  3. Most
7. Do your teachers care more about...?
  1. Grades
  2. Effort
  3. Behavior

8. How many of the students are accepting of different students and get along with almost everyone?
1. Few
  2. Some
  3. Most
9. Do the administrators deal with most students fairly and look out for their best interest?
1. Seldom
  2. Sometimes
  3. Always
10. How involved are you in school activities and functions?
1. Seldom
  2. Sometimes
  3. Always
11. Do you say hello to your teacher each morning?
1. Seldom
  2. Sometimes
  3. Always
12. Does your teacher say hello first?
1. Seldom
  2. Sometimes
  3. Always
13. Your school rules are here to...?
1. Control and punish
  2. Keep order
  3. Teach you to be more successful
14. Are there bullies at your school?
1. Few
  2. Some
  3. Many
15. Are there things that go on at the school that the adults don't know about?
- YES    NO
16. Have you ever been bullied at this school?
- YES    NO

17. Are there established rules and routines for the morning admission process?

YES  NO

18. Do the majority of the adults in the school help supervise the admission process?

YES  NO

19. Most days students enter the school...?

1. In a very organized and controlled manner
2. In a mostly organized and controlled manner
3. A little noisy but without infractions
4. In a disorderly and loud fashion
5. In a chaotic and disruptive fashion

20. Is the admission process usually quiet?

YES  NO

21. Is the admission process void of major and minor infractions?

YES  NO

22. Entering the school building each morning usually makes me feel...?

1. Extremely happy
2. Improves my spirits
3. Nothing at all
4. A little tired
5. Extremely stressed

23. Are there established rules and routines during the lunch periods?

YES  NO

24. Do the lunchroom supervisors provide good supervision?

YES  NO

25. Is the lunch period usually orderly?

YES  NO

26. Is the lunch period usually quiet?

YES  NO

27. Is the lunch period void of major and minor infractions?

YES  NO

28. Are there established rules and routines during the dismissal process?

YES  NO

29. Do the majority of the adults in the school help supervise the dismissal process?

YES  NO

30. Daily student dismissal is...?

1. Very organized and controlled
2. Mostly organized and controlled
3. A little noisy but without any infractions
4. Disorderly and loud
5. Chaotic and disruptive

31. Is the dismissal process usually quiet?

YES  NO

32. Is the dismissal process void of major and minor infractions?

YES  NO

33. The greatest strength of the school program is...?

1. The quality of the relationship between teachers and students
2. The quality of the instruction
3. Administrative leadership
4. The quality of the student population
5. The quality of special programs and extracurricular activities

34. The biggest challenge facing the school program is...?

1. Student behavior
2. Staff turnover
3. Student achievement
4. Poor programming
5. Lack of qualified teachers

## Appendix B:

**Faculty Climate Survey**

**I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS SURVEY:**  YES  NO

**I PARTICIPATED IN THIS SURVEY IN 2010:**  YES  NO

1. Is the school building clean?
  1. Always clean and organized
  2. Often clean and organized
  3. Sometimes clean and organized
  4. Seldom clean and organized
  5. Never clean and organized
  
2. Does the school have the facilities and resources needed for a high quality education?
  1. Very little
  2. Some
  3. Most
  
3. How effective is the central office in implementing system-wide initiative?
  1. Poor
  2. Average
  3. Excellent
  
4. Which of the following do you emphasize the most?
  1. Grades
  2. Effort
  3. Behavior
  
5. Is there a bullying problem at this school?  
 YES  NO
  
6. Do you believe that there is a significant amount of negative student behaviors that occur on school grounds that the adults here are not aware of?  
 YES  NO
  
7. Are there established rules and routines for the morning admission process?  
 YES  NO
  
8. Do the majority of the adults in the school help supervise the admission process?  
 YES  NO

9. Is the admission process usually orderly?
1. Very organized and controlled manner
  2. Mostly organized and controlled manner
  3. A little noisy but without infractions
  4. disorderly and loud fashion
  5. Chaotic and disruptive fashion
10. Is the admission process usually quiet?
- YES    NO
11. Is the admission process void of major and minor infractions?
- YES    NO
12. Entering the school building each morning usually makes me feel...?
1. Extremely happy
  2. Improves my spirits
  3. Nothing at all
  4. A little tired
  5. Extremely stressed
13. Are there established rules and routines during the lunch periods?
- YES    NO
14. Do the lunchroom supervisors provide good supervision?
- YES    NO
15. Is the lunch period usually orderly?
- YES    NO
16. Is the lunch period usually quiet?
- YES    NO
17. Is the lunch period void of major and minor infractions?
- YES    NO
18. Lunchtime in the school cafeteria can best be described as...?
1. Well-organized with healthy student social interaction
  2. Sometimes organized with good student social interaction
  3. A fairly organized gathering of students requiring good adult supervision
  4. An unstructured and loud gathering of students
  5. A stressful period for many students where something negative can occur at any minute



19. Are there established rules and routines during the dismissal process?  
 YES    NO
20. Do the majority of the adults in the school help supervise the dismissal process?  
 YES    NO
21. Is the dismissal process usually orderly?  
 YES    NO
22. Is the dismissal process usually quiet?  
 YES    NO
23. Is the dismissal process void of major and minor infractions?  
 YES    NO
24. Daily student dismissal is...?  
1. Very organized and controlled  
2. Mostly organized and controlled  
3. A little noisy but without any infractions  
4. Disorderly and loud  
5. Chaotic and disruptive
25. The greatest strength of the school program is...?  
1. The quality of the relationship between teachers and students  
2. The quality of the instruction  
3. Administrative leadership  
4. The quality of the student population  
5. The quality of special programs and extracurricular activities
26. The biggest challenge facing the school program is...?  
1. Student behavior  
2. Staff turnover  
3. Student achievement  
4. Poor programming  
5. Lack of qualified teachers

## Appendix C:

### **Interview Questions**

#### **Student Questions**

##### **General Climate**

From your vantage point as a student, describe the overall cleanliness of the school.

Considering all of the changes that occurred in your tenure as a student at the high school, does the school building have the facilities and resources needed for a high quality education? Provide the interviewer with specific examples.

##### **Admissions Process**

Think about the daily admissions process at the high school. Are there established rules and routines for morning admissions that help to keep the transition orderly? Provide the interviewer with specific examples.

Describe your average admission into the school building. Do the majority of adults in the school help supervise the transition?

##### **Lunchtime Environment**

Think about your experiences in the high school lunchroom. Are there established rules and routines for the lunchroom? Provide the interviewer with specific examples.

Describe your average experience in the lunchroom. Do the lunchroom supervisors provide good supervision?

##### **Dismissal Process**

Think about the daily dismissal process at the high school. Are there established rules and routines for dismissal that help to keep the transition orderly? Provide the interviewer with specific examples.

Describe your average dismissal upon conclusion of the school day. Do the majority of adults in the school help supervise the transition?

## Appendix D:

### **Faculty Questions**

#### **General Climate**

From your vantage point as a faculty member, describe the overall cleanliness of the school.

Considering all of the changes that occurred in your tenure as a faculty member at the high school, does the school building have the facilities and resources needed for a high quality education? Provide the interviewer with specific examples.

#### **Admissions/ Process**

Think about the daily admissions process at the high school. Are there established rules and routines for morning admissions that help to keep the transition orderly? Provide the interviewer with specific examples.

Describe the student admission process into the school building. Do the majority of adults in the school help supervise the transition?

#### **Lunchtime Environment**

Think about your experiences in the high school lunchroom. Are there established rules and routines for the lunchroom? Provide the interviewer with specific examples.

Describe your average experience in the lunchroom. Do the lunchroom supervisors provide good supervision?

#### **Dismissal Process**

Think about the daily dismissal process at the high school. Are there established rules and routines for dismissal that help to keep the transition orderly? Provide the interviewer with specific examples.

Describe the student dismissal transition upon conclusion of the school day. Do the majority of adults in the school help supervise the transition?

Appendix E:  
Approval Letter

**LEBANON SCHOOL DISTRICT**

1000 SOUTH EIGHTH STREET • LEBANON, PA 17042

**Ann V. Dall****Board President****School Permission To Conduct Research**

January 15, 2014

Dear Institutional Review Board:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that I give Dr. Ken Mawritz, Principal Investigator, and Christopher M. Danz, Sub-Investigator, permission to conduct the research titled The Resiliency Education Program and its Impact on Changing School Climate at Lebanon High School. This also serves as assurance that this school complies with requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) and will assure that these requirements are followed in the conduct of this research. Investigators have permission to conduct the following listed research activities: historical survey data and records review, and personal interviews with students and educators who volunteer to participate in the study.

Sincerely,



Ann V. Dall  
Board President, Lebanon School District

## Appendix F:

## Drexel University IRB Letter



## APPROVAL OF PROTOCOL

March 21, 2014

Kenneth Mawritz, Ph.D  
 School of Education  
 Mailstop: Drexel University

Dear Dr. Mawritz,

On March 21, 2014 the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial
Title:	The Resiliency Education Program and its Impact on Changing School Climate
Investigator:	Kenneth Mawritz, Ph.D
IRB ID:	1401002569
Funding:	Internal
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
IND, IDE or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	HRP 211 Application Form, HRP 201 Contact Forms, Financial Conflict of Interest Forms, HRP 503 Template Protocol, Data Collection Tools, Proposal, Consent Form, Assent Form, Permission and Recruitment Tools

According to 45 CFR 46.110, this study is Approved Expedited Categories 6 and 7. This research study will enroll 309 subjects recruited the Lebanon School District, Lebanon, PA to participate in interviews and surveys.

Risks to Children: 45 CFR 46.404 – Minimal Risk

Permission of one parent is sufficient even if the other parent is alive, known, competent, reasonably available, and shares legal responsibility for the care and custody of the child.

The IRB approved the protocol from March 21, 2014 to March 20, 2015 inclusive. Before February 8, 2015, which is 45 days prior to study closure, you are to submit a completed "FORM: Continuing Review Progress Report (HRP-212)" and required attachments to request continuing approval or closure

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of March 20, 2015 approval of this protocol expires on that date.

Attached are stamped approved consent documents. Use copies of these documents to document consent.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,



Danyelle S. Gibson, CIP  
Member, Social and Behavioral IRB #3