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A Study of the Perceived Effects of School Culture on Student Behaviors.

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A Study of the Perceived Effects of School Culture on Student Behaviors

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by

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ABSTRACT

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Research has confirmed that the behaviors of human beings are influenced by their social environments. The school is the principal social environment of adolescents; thus, the school environment necessarily influences the behaviors of students to some degree.

This research project used the interview method to focus on perceptions of school personnel with regard to the elements of school culture that may negatively influence students' behaviors both inside and outside the school environment. The primary influences of school culture on students' behaviors were found to be peers, teachers, administrators, and parent involvlement. Governmental regulations, including those resulting from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, were found to be an indirect and sometimes negative influence on the long-term behaviors of students and their ability to function in the world.

This study resulted in the discovery that teachers, administrators, and other school personnel perceive that school culture, over time, has become more tolerant of inappropriate and even aggressive acts by some students while, at the same time, the culture successfully supports the implementation of problem-solving techniques and positive behavior supports for most students.

The conclusions reached in the study indicate that school culture and its relation to student behaviors must be carefully examined and that, if further research confirms the findings of this study, action should be taken to effect change. Those changes should include the expansion of efforts to provide equitable and respectful treatment and opportunities for students of all socioeconomic backgrounds as well as lobbying for changes in federal and state regulations, such as some provisions of the IDEA, that have promoted a lack of student accountability for behaviors.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my brother, Michael, who was always proud of my every accomplishment and who encouraged me all my life simply by looking up to me as his big sister. He was the best friend I will ever have, and he was a firm believer in facing issues. I would also like to thank my father who urged me to return to the doctoral program to complete my work after a long absence.

Finally, I thank the students who have come in and out of my life through the years. My life has been enriched by all of them. I wouldn't change a thing.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The overall trend in the juvenile arrest rates as reported in 2008 by the United States Department of Justice (USDOJ) - Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) has decreased steadily since 1994. Congruently, students are less likely to be victims of crime at school than in other settings; however, the rate of students who report involvement in physical fights has remained relatively unchanged at about 15% per year, as has the percentage of students reporting being threatened while at school. From 1996 to 2000, it was reported that 603,000 teachers were victims of violent crimes (USDOJ-BJS, 2002) In 2003, 15% of all male arrests and 20% of all female arrests involved a person younger than 18. Also in 2003, a juvenile was the alleged offender in 51% of arson cases, 39% of vandalism, 29% of motor vehicle theft and burglary, 23% of weapons law violations, and 12% of drug abuse violations (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). The Bureau of Justice Statistics (USDOJ-National Crime Report [NCR], 2002) indicated that 2.7 million crimes are committed in schools each year.

Minor assaults on teachers by students, rarely reported occurrences during the first two thirds of the 20th century, are commonplace today. During the 5-year period from 1997-2001, teachers were the victims of about 1.3 million nonfatal crimes at school (National Center for Education Statistics, [NCES] 2009). Even though many teacher assaults, particularly as perpetrated by younger students, go unreported, the 2009 *Indicators of School Crime Report* from the NCES indicated no measurable difference in the rate of assaults or threats of violence toward teachers by students compared to rate reported in the 2003-2004 report. An estimated 54.2 per 1000 middle school teachers were victims of crime in the workplace during 2001 (BJS, 2001 as cited by ETSU Student Counseling Center memo, 2007). The overall rate of juvenile arrests for simple assault also remained relatively constant from 1994 through 2003 (USDOJ, 2004). Declining rates in homicide and suicide notwithstanding, these two occurrences remain

the second and third leading causes of death in persons under the age of 18 in the United States (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2009).

More pertinent to the overall successful function of public schools than student criminal activity outside of school is disruptive classroom behavior by students. Cotton (1990) estimated that about half of most teachers' classroom time is spent on topics other than instruction, with disciplinary issues being chief among them. The 29th Annual Gallup Poll of Teachers' Attitudes (Rose & Gallup, 1997) ranked a lack of discipline as one of two problems cited most frequently by teachers.

Usova (2001) reported that student disruptions in the classroom are of major concern to teachers; Ingersoll (2001) indicated that student discipline problems are a factor in teacher attrition; and Herschell (1999) reported that disruptive behaviors are being exhibited by growing numbers of American children. Marzano, Marzano, and Pickering (2003) stressed that teacher effectiveness is the most critical element in student success in school and added that ". . . a strong case can be made that effective instructional strategies and good classroom design are built on the foundation of effective classroom management" (p. 2). The Phi Delta Kappa 38th Annual Gallup Poll (Rose & Gallup, 2006) reported discipline as a continued problem, ranking below only financial support and overcrowding. There is still work to be done by educators in terms of understanding cultural influences on the decision-making processes and resulting behaviors of adolescents both in and out of school.

History and Context

Evidence that scholars, philosophers, historians, sociologists, and educators have attempted to relate the behavior of youth to the characteristics of culture is present from the earliest of writings. Plato sought to correlate the behaviors of the youth of his day with the failings of government and society. Crediting his teacher, Socrates, Plato postulated that where there was too much societal freedom, the educational environment suffered. The teacher came

to fear his own pupils and, in the philosopher's words, "fawns upon them" (Plato, 562). Pupils held their teachers in low esteem and were inclined to "contend hotly with them in words and deeds" (Plato, 563-e). The father of Western philosophy indicated that societal norms, educational relationships, and the behaviors of the young were all linked (Medway & Cafferty, 1992).

A link between success in K-12 schooling and success in adulthood has long been acknowledged. For example, although a cause-effect relationship has not been proven, there is a positive correlation between low educational levels and imprisonment (Lochner & Moretti, 2004). The United States Department of Education (USDOE, 2006) estimated that 19% of all inmates in the country are completely illiterate and 60% read at or below the 5th-grade level.

Detailed census figures are not available for the year 2007; but for the year 2000 the United States Census Bureau estimated that 7.2% of the population of the United States was between the ages of 15 and 19 years and the 10-14-year-old bracket comprised 7.3% of the population. In other words, the exact percentage of the population that may typically be classified as middle or high school students (those roughly between the ages of 13 and 18) is not provided in the 2000 Census, but it is clear that this group constitutes a significant portion of population of the United States. The current national focus on education attests to the extreme importance that American society places on the future of its youth. Again, if students are successful in school, they are far less likely to become engaged in deviant behaviors and more likely to become successful, functioning members of society (Medway & Cafferty, 1992).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to determine whether a relationship was perceived to exist between societal elements manifested in school culture and the behaviors of adolescents and to identify how and why particular elements of culture affect student behaviors. The researcher examined the perceptions of school personnel in a single school system in Northeast

Tennessee regarding school culture and its impact on student behaviors. Many of the same students for whom noncompliant or oppositional behaviors are reported tend to be the same students for whom academic success is limited (Director of Student Data Services - Carroll City Schools, personal correspondence, August 13, 2010). The researcher proposed to examine the issue of teenage behaviors using a lens focused on a single school system in Northeast Tennessee. This particular school system was deemed appropriate for study because it is one of the top performing systems in the state academically (Tennessee Department of Education, 2009), yet teachers and administrators consistently report troublesome student behaviors. The appropriateness of this system for study was further enhanced by its reputation for excellence and professionalism, one hallmark of which is its culture of openness to self-reflection for the purpose of improvement. A pseudonym is used for this school system throughout this manuscript. If school culture contributes to the behaviors of youth, as has been indicated by other studies, then educational leaders are obligated to identify those elements of the culture that may engender appropriate student behaviors so as to nurture and promote those practices. Educational leaders are also obligated to identify those elements that may engender deviant behaviors by students, promote inappropriate behaviors by students, or that may simply fail to dissuade students from poor behavioral choices so that practice and student outcomes may be improved.

Research Questions

The following overarching research question served as the focal point of the study: *To what degree did respondents perceive that school culture affects student behaviors both in and out of school?*

The following served as research subquestions:

1. What are the components of school culture that are perceived to have formed the educational experiences of students in Carroll City Schools?

2. What are the roles of students, teachers, administrators, parents, the media, and government educational policy in the formation of school culture?
3. What did respondents perceive as positive aspects of school culture that impact student behavior? Does the literature regarding school culture support these perceptions?
4. What did respondents perceive as negative aspects of school culture that impact student behaviors? Does the literature regarding school culture support these perceptions?

Significance of the Study

With the current focus of national attention on academic success in public schools, acts of noncompliance or outright opposition by students toward teachers inside the school and other persons outside the classroom tend to be of particular concern to the public and to school personnel. It is possible that many of the social factors contributing to the culture of American schools, and possibly in an indirect way to the behaviors of students, are similar across settings. Findings from this study may contribute to a knowledge base related to school culture as it pertains to the acceptance by some school-aged individuals of opposition and noncompliance as acceptable behaviors. Likewise, identification of those cultural elements that engender student success may enhance the knowledge base, providing useful information to educators. An understanding of the role that school culture is perceived to play, if any, in influencing the mindset of students whose behaviors result in either success or disciplinary sanctions as well as academic success of failure in schools may lead to positive changes in that societal climate.

Scope of the Study

This was an exploratory case study as defined by Tellis (1997). It also met the parameters of the instrumental case study as defined by Cresswell (2005) referencing Stake

(1995) in that it focused on a case in order to understand an issue. It was bounded by the parameters of a single school system in Northeast Tennessee. The researcher collected data via interviews and documents. Interviews were conducted with teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, and school resource officers of Carroll City Schools. In order to protect confidentiality and in accordance with the ETSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) directive, interviewees were not identified by name; and questions regarding cultural influences on students did target specific students.

Statement of Researcher's Perspective

I am the researcher in this case study. I have held the position of Director of Special Services since 1998. Throughout my tenure in this role, I have supervised programs for many students with academic learning disabilities. I have also supervised programs for students with behavioral disorders, including attention deficit disorder, conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, intermittent explosive disorder, reactive attachment disorder, bi-polar disorder, borderline personality disorder, and others.

Prior to my current position, I served for 8 years as an assistant principal at a comprehensive high school with an enrollment of approximately 2000 students. As an assistant principal, I supervised high school curriculum and discipline. Prior to my years as a high school assistant principal, I was a high school English teacher for 12 years and an elementary teacher for 2 years. I have formed some opinions based on more than 30 years' experience about the influences of school culture on student behaviors; nevertheless, my interest in obtaining informative and objective data related to perceived school culture and its impact on students drove this study.

Definition of Terms

Culture - That complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by individuals as members of society (Taylor, 1871, p. 1).

School Climate - The shared perceptions, values, and behaviors in a school (Hoy, 2010). School climate is driven by how well and how fairly the adults in a school create, implement, model, and enforce the attitudes and beliefs of the school (Saufler, 2005).

School Culture - The stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals built up [in a school] over time (Peterson & Bass, 1998). The shared ideas, values, assumptions, and beliefs that give an organization its identity and standard for accepted behavior (Tableman & Herron, 2004).

Society - A population of people living in the same geographic area who share a culture and common identity and whose members fall under the same political authority (Newman, 2009).

Sociology - The science of human society (Comte, as cited in Stuckenberg, 1903).

Developmental Psychology - The branch of psychology concerned with the changes in cognitive, motivational, psycho-physiological, and social functioning that occur throughout the human lifespan (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2009).

Learning Theory - Theory that purports to explain all aspects of the learning process and how it translates into behavior (Kleine & Mower, 2001).

Social Learning Theory - Theory that focuses on the learning that occurs within a social context. It considers that people learn from one another, including such concepts as behavioral learning, imitation, and modeling (Ormond, 1999).

Assumptions

The study was based on the following assumptions:

1. Participants in the study would express their honest perceptions and experiences within the scope of each specific interview.
2. Interviews would be guided by an overarching research question and related specific interview questions.
3. Participants would be invited to expound on interview questions in any direction they believed would provide additional explanatory information to the researcher (Hampton, 2007).

Overview of the Study

This study is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction, a historical overview, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, and the scope of the study. The chapter also includes a statement of researcher perspective, definitions of terms, and assumptions.

Chapter 2 contains a review of related literature. The literature review begins with an exploration of the influences of society on behavior. If society influences the behaviors of individuals, then school culture as a significant component of society must also influence the behaviors and decisions of students. Attention is given to the definitions of and possible distinctions between school climate and school culture. Previous studies related to school climate and school culture and their impact on the educational experiences of students are reviewed. A brief review of what is known of the elements of American school culture, including a historical review of American schooling, is included.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology and research design, a discussion of the methods of data collection, the participants, the data analysis, and the trustworthiness of the study. Chapter

4 consists of the data analysis, and Chapter 5 provides a summary of findings as well as implications and recommendations to improve practice.

Summary

My intent in this case study was to determine whether a relationship exists between societal elements manifested in a particular school culture and the behaviors of adolescents. The researcher examined the Carroll City Schools system for the purpose of ascertaining the perceptions of school personnel related to the topic of school culture and student behaviors. The study was bounded by the parameters of a single school district.

This case study focused on the perceptions of teachers, administrators, guidance personnel, and school resource officers with regard to the cultural climate of the school and the resulting impact, if any, on the behaviors of students. The concept of the accepted norms and values of a culture influencing the behavior of individuals is as old as the earliest writings of Western civilization. While it appears to be self-evident that individuals drive and are driven by society, little if any research has been done related to specific behaviors, including deviant behaviors, of students and the driving influences in school culture, if any, on those behaviors.

The following overarching research question served as the focal point of the study: *To what degree do respondents perceive that school culture affects student behaviors both in and out of school?*

Findings from this study could serve as a catalyst to spark debate among educators, policy makers, and parents regarding the elements that make up the culture of schools and whether that culture is healthy and promotes academic and behavioral achievement and positive student outcomes. As members of the greater society, we are all stakeholders in this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

An effort to determine whether a link exists between a school culture and the behaviors of adolescents who are part of that culture should logically begin with a review of literature related to the topic of the influence of culture on the behaviors of individuals. If society helps to mold human behaviors, then school, as one primary social arena for children ages 5-18, might reasonably be assumed to exert a primary influence on the behavior of school-age individuals.

There is no shortage of literature devoted to the topic of societal influences on human behavior. American public schools are social institutions closely regulated by federal, state, and local governments, wherein a culture exists. The purpose of this literature review is to examine the history of existing theory and research supporting the impact of culture and society on the behavior of individuals in general and the influence of school culture on the behaviors of students in particular in order to support further research examining the perceived impact, both positive and negative, of a particular educational culture on the behaviors of students.

Culture and Human Behavior

Some of the earliest recorded Western thought is sociological in nature and addresses societal influences on behavior. Aristotle wrote in *Politica*, "Organized social life is essential to the existence of man as man." He added that, "the human individual has been developed in and through society" (Elwood, 1938, p. 134).

Sociology, defined literally, is the study of social institutions and social relationships (Merriam-Webster [online source], 2007). The concept or discipline of sociology was developed many years after Plato and is generally considered to be the brainchild of French positivist, August Comte. Comte established the use of the term *sociology* around the year 1838. Comte held that sociology was the highest science. The lower order, analytical sciences,

were mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology because those sciences dealt with the fundamental laws of nature, thereby providing the basis for sociology, the study of how human beings functioned in societies. Comte held that only through the science of sociology and the resulting understanding of the stages of human social development could society become stable. Comte's aim was to understand how society developed and to provide policy makers with ideas to control and improve it (Thompson, 1979).

Other pioneers in modern sociological thought noted the influence of society on human behavior. For example, Karl Marx (1867) writing in his great study of societal structure, *Das Kapital*, asserted that ". . . one cannot make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he remains," and further that "Just as society itself produces man as man, so is society produced by him" (as quoted in Fernandez, 2003, p. 18).

Emile Durkheim, writing in 1895, laid the foundation for the study of society's influence on the behavior of individuals and explored elements of human behavior that are relevant to this study. Durkheim observed that the desires of human beings, unlike those of other animals, were unlimited. In the course of his study of how the unlimited desires of humans were regulated, Durkheim, believing himself to be a man of science, coined the term "social fact" to reinforce his argument that his observations were scientific truths and not merely theory (as cited in Hechter & Horne, 2009, p. 46). Durkheim explained that "a social fact is every way of acting capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint" (as quoted in Hall, 1987, p. 232). Furthermore, a social fact was recognized by its power of external coerciveness on the individual. Durkheim wrote that human behavior was held in check by these external controls or social facts and that society exerted "a regulative force [that played the same role regarding] moral needs which the organism plays for physical needs" (Hall, 1987, p. 234). When the regulations of society broke down for whatever reason, individuals entered a societal state called "anomie" or a state of moral normlessness. In a societal state of anomie, the desires of

individuals were not regulated by social facts, and individuals were left to invent their own moral codes. Anomie could occur in whole societies or in particular elements of societies (Hall, 1987).

To illustrate the influence of society on the behavior of the individual, Durkheim observed that the rates of suicide in societies varied curvilinearly with the degree of social control exerted on the individual. Durkheim noted that high rates of suicide were related to both excessive regulation and lack of regulation by society on the individual (Durkheim, 1897/1951). One example of extreme societal control is the practice of suicide that has existed during some periods of Japanese culture. The control of societal expectation in this culture has been at times so strong that some persons, the Samurai for example, have been induced to take their own lives under certain social circumstances. For the Samurai suicide was sometimes the honorable and, indeed, the only thing to do. Consider also the examples of the Kamikaze bombers of World War II. Japanese pilots used planes as bombs and crashed them into U.S. military targets, taking their own lives in order to exact a toll on the enemy. There was strong social support for this practice; indeed, it was state sponsored. The Japanese military even went so far as to provide training manuals for the kamikaze pilots (Varley, 1973). The influence of cultural expectations was stronger in these two examples than even the most basic of all natural instincts: that of survival.

On the other hand, when the constraints of society fail to operate as society intends and human beings detach themselves from society, they become susceptible to what Durkheim (1897) termed "egoistic suicide," or suicide owing to one's own unhappiness with oneself. Such types of suicides are not unusual and have gained particular notoriety in the world of art. Examples are Ernest Hemingway, author, 1961; George Reeves, actor, 1959; and Sylvia Plath, poet, 1963 (Stack, 1987).

Another and more recent example of human beings committing suicide under the influence of a prevailing culture can be seen in the al Qaeda bombers of September 11. The stated motivation of the 9-11 killers was Islamic martyrdom. Whereas rational Muslims might be quick to point out that the Quran forbids the taking of lives in most circumstances, certain subcultures of the religion, al Qaeda for instance, actually espouse a mission statement that includes a directive for every Muslim to kill Americans anywhere they are found. The killing of American infidels is, according to al Qaeda, a divine mission (Atran, 2006).

Max Weber (1910) commented on society's influence on the individual in his treatise on society and economy, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. According to Weber, "The most pervasive feature that distinguishes contemporary life is that it is dominated by large, complex, and formal organizations" (as quoted in Fernandez, 2003, p. 75). To illustrate the impact of society on human beings, Weber (Shils & Rheinstein, 1968) pointed to the example of the Calvinists of the American Colonial period. Those early Americans conducted their lives based on the generally accepted religious concept that one was called by God to work hard in order to demonstrate that one was not to be among the damned in the next life. Although it was true that, according to Calvinist doctrine, one had no way of knowing whether one was among those whom God would choose to dwell in heaven after death, not working hard as God demanded was a sure way to demonstrate that one was not among them. So strong was the influence of Puritan society on its members that they adapted their entire lifestyle to this cultural philosophy. Sanctions were severe for those who did not conform to society's dictates. Yet, Weber attributed the political and economic success of the United States in part to the work ethic of those early Protestants whose individual behaviors were shaped substantially by their culture (Shils & Rheinstein, 1968).

Idealists, beginning with the ancient Greeks, have long believed that reality exists inside the mind. In this tradition, Fleck (1979), a Polish physician, was the first to question the very

existence of scientific fact apart from social life or apart from the socially influenced thought process of human beings. He argued that even scientific research became accepted as fact only through the process of social negotiation (Hechter & Horne, 2009). History is replete with examples of facts that were not accepted as facts, even in the face of evidence, until the prevailing social structure permitted their acceptance. The work of Galileo is an example. Describing this phenomenon, Fleck wrote: "This negotiation leads to (. . .) a thought style: that is a social product formed within a collective as the result of social forces" (as cited in Hechter & Horne, 2009, p. 46).

Writing in 1937, Parsons, a student of Weber and Durkheim, posited in *The Structure of Social Action*, that in all societies there was a striving by individuals to reach the valued norms of that society. Different societies value different things, but in general all societies valued power, status, and wealth of some definition. Merton (1996) expanded Parson's theory and stated that at times ". . . antisocial behavior is in a sense called forth by certain conventional values of the culture and by a class structure that dictates differential access to the approved opportunities for legitimate, prestige-bearing pursuit of the culture goals" (p. 144). Put another way: Individuals within a society have varying access to avenues of success within that society. Paradoxically, because access to valued norms differs, individuals sometimes try to meet their needs within society in ways that are in fact antisocial (Merton, 1996).

Sociology is a close cousin to psychology, the science of the mind and behavior (Merriam-Webster). Psychology, like sociology, has its roots in ancient Greece. Aristotle, Plato's student, wrote the first book devoted to psychology, *Para-Psyche*. In it Aristotle proposed that there were two opposing forces within the mind. These are desire and reason. Reason projected that there was a future, and thus reason may have prevented a person from committing irrational acts. Desire could spur action that defied reason and could often produce harmful results. Aristotle was one of the earliest intellectuals to actually define human beings in

social terms. He theorized that man by nature was neither good nor bad, but in his essence he was merely social. It was man's socialness that drove man's behaviors. Socialization, being innate to human beings, was not the result of conscious choice (Challenger, 1994). Interestingly, Aristotle noted that education and good training formed habits that in turn developed social character. When education and training were good, just societies would result. When education and training were defective, societies would reflect the defects (Challenger, 1994).

Most psychologists have traced the beginnings of modern psychology to David Hume and Immanuel Kant, two pioneers representing opposing points of view. Hume, writing in 1739 in his *Treatise of Human Nature*, indicated that there was no such thing as free will. He explained human behavior as the result of cause and effect. Human acts were the result of cumulative impressions that had been made upon the psyche over time (Graham, 2004). Kant, on the other hand, writing in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* in 1793 asserted that everyone had a conscience and was capable of making decisions based upon what the conscience deemed to be right or wrong. Kant believed that all persons had the capacity for good and evil but acknowledged that a good deal of evil was deliberately brought about through civilization (as cited in Gardner, 1999). Most psychologists who have come after these two men have fallen roughly into one of their camps in terms of what drives human behavior.

The blending of some of the characteristics of sociology and psychology has emerged as the field of social psychology, defined by Gordon Allport in 1954 as the use of science ". . . to understand and explain how the thought, feeling, and behavior of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of other human beings" (as quoted in Lindzey & Aronson, 1985, p. 3).

Norman Triplett, a pioneer in the field of social psychology, writing in 1898, described the effect of individuals on the behavior of other individuals. Specifically, Triplett first

observed that the bicycling performance of individuals was enhanced when they were either joined or were observed by others. He then tested 40 children playing games in pairs or alone. He observed that the effect of the presence of others on the performance of the children playing the games was the same as the effect of others on the bicyclists he had observed. The presence of others tended to improve performance. Triplett termed this phenomenon "social facilitation." Triplett was the first to empirically document the effect of individuals on other individuals (Strubbe, 2005). Triplett's findings were supported to a degree by Allport (1920). Allport also found that the presence of individuals affected the performance of other individuals; however, he did not find that the effect was always positive. Allport's observation was that performance was not always enhanced by the presence of others, but it was always affected (Strubbe, 2005).

In 1913, Mead, one of the original modern pragmatists, studied relationships between individuals. Mead pioneered the concept of symbolic integration. Symbolic integration, also known as social reaction theory, is built around the belief that human beings are shaped by their perceptions of their environments and that these perceptions are the result of social interaction (Stolley, 2005). Mead was influenced by Cooley, who had insisted that "self and society are twin born" (as quoted by Coser, 1971, p. 305). His point was that there was no such thing as independent behavior. All behavior was shaped by society. Cooley called this concept the "looking glass theory of self" (Coser, 1971, p. 307). He further indicated that people were influenced not only by the way others related to them but even by the way people thought that others related to them (Cooley, 1922).

Like Mead and Cooley, Tannenbaum (1938) purported that society's influence on individuals could be observed in what he called the "dramatization of evil" (p. 19). In this process the engagement of individuals in deviant behavior was a result of maladjustment to society. Because of that deviant behavior society came to look on the individuals themselves as deviant. When society began to view persons as deviant, those persons involuntarily changed

their own self-concept to reflect society's concept of them. Because of this labeling and the resulting change in self-concept, individuals began to associate only with other deviants; thus societal influence actually engendered a downward spiral of behavioral change (Tannenbaum, 1938, p. 20).

Building on the work of Mead and Cooley, among others, Becker (1963) is generally credited with the development or at least the refinement of labeling theory, an epistemological viewpoint that considers the impact of society's labeling on an individual's self concept. Becker posited that deviance differed across cultures and, in fact, deviance only existed in the collective minds of societies insofar as different societies labeled different behaviors as deviant. Lemert (1951) used the term "social reaction" (p. 73) instead of labeling, but he too determined that individual behavior resulted from a reaction to society. Further, Lemert distinguished between primary and secondary deviance in the following way: "Primary deviance occurs when the individual behaves deviantly without thinking of himself as deviant. Secondary deviance is the result of an individual's defense or adjustment to society's reaction to him. "In secondary deviance, the individual changes to fit society's view of him" (p. 75). Later in life Lemert wrote ". . . societal control actually precedes deviance in the individual" (Winter, 1996, p. 72).

Hull, writing in *Principles of Behavior* in 1943, used quantitative research to test theories of behavior. Working, from Pavlov's stimulus-response studies, Hull proposed a more complex framework for behaviorism by adding other components to the stimulus-response theory. One of these elements was the organism itself along with its characteristics. When a stimulus acted on an organism, the response depended upon the characteristics of both the stimulus and the organism. The needs of the organism were important to the resulting response. In fact, Hull proposed that organisms possessed an order for the attainment of needs that figured into their response to stimuli or, put simply, that all behavior was goal driven, either consciously or subconsciously. This idea was developed by Maslow as the Hierarchy of Needs

and published as *A Theory of Human Motivation* in 1943. Maslow's hierarchy is widely recognized and used today in educational practice and virtually every other discipline.

Erickson (1950) also studied the impact of society and culture on human development. Erickson identified eight stages of human development and found that the manner in which the individual responded to crises at each stage drove that person's development. According to Erickson a child had to successfully adapt to each stage of development in order to progress to the next; however, the manner in which the child adapted to conflict within each of the stages was closely tied to the values of the parents and society. Relevant to this study are Erickson's stages four and five. Stage four, occurring from about ages 6 to 12, is the first stage during which the individual must master social and intellectual challenges outside the home in the broader society, i.e., school. Stage five, occurring during ages 12 to 18, is crucial. It is the stage at which an individual struggles to develop an identity. Self-confidence is particularly tenuous during the teenage years, and insecurities relative to the interactions of the individual with the prevailing culture help to drive behaviors in either a healthy or unhealthy direction.

Somewhat related to the work of Erickson is the work of Rogers, a social cognitivist and clinical psychologist who studied how individuals develop self concept. For Rogers the most significant element in the development of self-concept was the need of individuals to be accepted by others and to achieve the best possible existence. Rogers termed this phenomenon the "actualizing tendency" (Rogers, 1961, p. 26). Rogers also indicated that all life forms possessed this tendency to strive for the best for themselves or for self-actualization. A conflict occurred for the individual when the need to be regarded positively by the culture was met conditionally by that culture. In other words, each society imposed conditions on its members if they were to be regarded highly by that society. These conditions varied according to the values of the particular society. When the needs of individuals for actualization and the reactions of the society were incongruent, conflict developed within those individuals who felt that their self-

worth was threatened. As a result of perceived threats, individuals developed defenses that could, in turn, manifest as neurotic or even anti-social behaviors (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989).

Kelly (1955) also a social cognitivist, contended that human beings developed "personal constructs" or a view of the world through their experiences. According to Kelly, all individuals interpreted reality through those constructs. Each person had a different social construct and, consequently, experienced things in different ways. A positive construct engendered positive experiences and vice versa. One's experiences within one's culture shaped that individual's world view and, consequently, that individual's behaviors.

Behavioral psychologist B. F. Skinner (1974), another behaviorist who followed in the footsteps of Pavlov and his renowned experiments, studied the effects of outside influences, specifically positive and negative reinforcements, on the behaviors of individuals. Building on Pavlov's stimulus-response trials, Skinner designed a box in which he placed a rat for behavioral study. Put simply, the rat learned to press a bar in order to release a pellet of food. This experiment demonstrated that learning occurred when reinforcement followed a specific behavior. Skinner's focus was on the correlation between stimulus and response. A reinforcer was any stimulus, positive or negative, that increased a desire to respond. It was this correlation that Skinner insisted formed the basis for all human learning. Skinner's work is particularly relevant to educators because it applies to academic as well as social learning, both of which took place in the social institutions of America's schools (Walker & Herriot, 1984).

The field of social psychology uses empirical data to study behaviors. It is informed by a number of perspectives, three of which have some relevance to this study. The social-cognitive perspective focuses on the individual's cognitive processing of the observed behavior of others. Proponents of this perspective assert that all human beings observe and both consciously and unconsciously evaluate the behavior of others within their social environments and then adapt

what they have observed to their current belief system or change that belief system to adapt to the new information. Social cognitivists pay particular note to the dimension of social learning that is linked to moral behavior in that they distinguish between the ability and the inclination of the individual to behave according to moral codes (Bandura, 1977).

Secondly, the social learning perspective, one that is akin to the social-cognitive perspective, stresses that children learn behavior by observing and mimicking the behavior of others in a social setting. Proponents of this perspective differ with behaviorists in that they assert that not only can people learn through observation but they are perfectly capable of learning without exhibiting a change of behavior as a result of that learning (Bandura, 1977). Again, the experiences unique to any child within the structure of culture, whether family, school, or community, frame the learning of that child.

Finally, the socio-cultural perspective holds that all behaviors are shaped by prior learning experiences and by social or cultural context. Because most learning takes place within some social context, social norms and culture are driving influences on the learned behavior of children. In fact, human development can only be understood by studying individuals in the context of their social worlds (Vygotsky, 1986).

Elements of School Culture

Certainly a strong case can be made for the impact of culture on human behavior. Given that assumption, what specifically is school culture, and how does it impact student behavior? To determine this it is first necessary to agree upon an understanding of the word "culture," albeit the term is amorphous. Geertz (1973, p. 89) defined it as an "historically transmitted pattern of meaning," expressed explicitly through symbols and implicitly in shared beliefs. Another definition of culture, attributed to Kroeber, is a " . . . mass of . . . learned and transmitted motor reactions, habits, techniques, ideas, and values - and the behavior they induce" (as quoted in Valsiner, 2000, p. 8).

A Google scholar (search engine tailored to the search for scholarly articles, books, and studies) search yields about 3,200,000 results on the topic of school culture. My own perusal of a substantial number of those articles has resulted in the observation that most of them explore and define school culture in terms of how teachers, parents, community members, and particularly school leaders can support learning, which is, after all, the purpose of schools. The focus is on the necessity of building a culture that will engender academic success while attending to the various humanistic needs of students and staff. *The School Administrator*, a publication of the American Association of School Administrators, frequently addresses the topic of how to change school culture for the better. One such example is "Can School Culture Change?" by Kelleher and Levenson (2004). The authors of this article insisted that it was possible for leaders to change the culture of schools if conditions of trust and commitment by the staff and leaders of a given school district were met (Kelleher & Levenson, 2004).

Generally the educational community's interest in school culture centers on school improvement measured mostly by student performance and brought about by effective school leadership through the concept of change. Adults set the parameters for student acquisition of knowledge and skills as well as the parameters for student behaviors; however, the adult leadership in any public school is both informed and constrained by governmental authority and the culture of the broader educational community. A brief review of the history of the cultural elements that dictate educational policy is useful in order to understand the forces at work in the formulation and sustainment of the culture of schools.

Government and School Culture

In earliest Colonial America, education was the prerogative of parents and was largely reserved for the children of the wealthier classes, but very early on, government began to exert some control over the education of all children. The first compulsory education law in America was the Massachusetts Education Act of 1642. Essentially, this law required all parents and

masters of indentured children to provide basic education in literacy to those children. The law further stated that, should parents or masters prove inadequate in that responsibility, it was the right of the government to remove the children from the home and place them where they could learn to read and write sufficiently. In 1647 the Old Deluder Satan Act, also passed in Massachusetts, required towns of 50 or more citizens to actually hire a man to teach reading to all children, primarily so the citizenry would be able to read the Bible, a necessary requirement in Puritan culture (Urban & Jennings, 1999).

During the following century little changed with regard to governmental policy related to education; but, during the 1800s, the common citizen again began to benefit from greater access to education. The first publically-funded secondary school was established in 1821. This school, located in Boston, came about in no small measure through the efforts of Horace Mann, a lawyer and Massachusetts state senator who fervently advocated for education for all citizens. Mann worked tirelessly toward this goal and became the first Secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education. It was during this period that the *common school system* developed in New England. Those schools used public funds to provide an elementary education to all children regardless of class. Because those schools were publically funded, they were accountable to local school boards and state government (Karier, 1986). Thus began the influence of government on our schools.

From its inception American public education has had a cultural agenda. For example, during the common school era, schools were used, among other things, to Americanize foreigners. A tragic example of Americanization in the extreme was that of the American Indian schools of the late 19th and early 20th century. Many children were taken by force from their homes to boarding schools so that the students could adopt the customs of the prevailing culture at the expense of their own culture and become good citizens (Karier, 1986). In other words, from the country's infancy the U. S. government, the chief socializing agent of the

citizenry, assumed a role in the regulation and thus the establishment of the culture of American schools.

While prominent public figures of their time such as Franklin and Jefferson in the late 18th century and Mann in the 19th century were promoters of public education, legal mandates to ensure its development were slow in evolving. More than 200 years passed between the first compulsory education act in America and the first compulsory school attendance act. This act was also passed in Massachusetts in 1852. By 1900, 32 states had compulsory attendance laws, and by 1930, all states had codified some type of compulsory education for the masses (Urban & Jennings, 1999).

Most of that with which the public is familiar regarding public schooling came about during the 20th century. It was during this time that the practice of dividing student populations according to age groups began. For example, the first junior high schools were established in 1909 in California. Also in 1909 a social catalyst was taking form. That was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, an organization that later, in 1954, prevailed in its landmark case: *Brown v. Board of Education*. The culmination of a lengthy battle against segregated schools, primarily in the South, this case argued by Thurgood Marshall before the Supreme Court of the United States, established that separate schooling was not equal schooling. Specifically, Marshall was able to prove that while the average White child in the South had $38 spent yearly toward his or her education, the average Black child's education received an expenditure of only $18, clear evidence of inequality. Schools were soon forced to desegregate. The culture of American schools obviously changed as a result of governmental influence through both the courts and resulting legislation (Spring, 2008).

In 1965 the United States Congress passed the first Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the federal government's first real incursion into the jurisdiction of the states with regard to K-12 education. The brainchild of then United States Commissioner of Education and

former Harvard Dean of the College of Education, Francis Keppel, the ESEA's primary objective was to provide funding to local education agencies that served disadvantaged children. Part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, this act aimed to level the educational playing field between poor children and those from the middle and upper classes. The ESEA established the Title I funding program that provided federal funding to schools with high percentages of economically disadvantaged students. An added advantage of the ESEA for the Johnson administration was that the funding was conditional upon school systems' compliance with the recently passed Civil Rights Act of 1964. No school system guilty of the practice of segregation was eligible for federal funding (Robelen, 2005).

In 1968 the ESEA was expanded to include programs for migrant children, bilingual children, and neglected or delinquent children. In the 1978 reauthorization of the act, President Jimmy Carter signed into law the authorization for Title I aid to be spent school-wide in schools where at least 75% of the children were eligible for the aid. In 1981 the act was again reauthorized under the administration of President Ronald Reagan. The new law consolidated a number of the programs into block grants, reduced paperwork requirements for states and local districts, and renamed Title I as Chapter I. In the 1988 reauthorization, while Reagan was still President, accountability at the local school level was added in that districts were required to use test scores to assess the effectiveness of the use of Chapter I programs. This was the first outcomes-based version of the ESEA. The 1994 reauthorization of the act, signed by President Bill Clinton, was called the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) and required school districts to include all students in a yearly assessment of progress and to make plans for improvement if progress was not adequate (McGuinn & Hess, 2005).

The current incarnation of the ESEA is the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. The NCLB radically changed the original act by tying even greater teacher accountability for student performance to funding (Hanna, 2005). Referencing the passage of NCLB, President George

W. Bush stated in an address at Hamilton High School in Ohio: "Today begins a new era, a new time in public education in our country. As of this hour, America's schools will be on a new path of reform, a new path of results" (Robelen, 2005). The words "reform" and "results" were key here. A system of graduated penalties for failure to show progress in the test results of all students was implemented with the NCLB of 2002. Speaking in 2005 on the evolution and expansion of the ESEA, David S. Seeley, education professor at City University of New York, an employee of the United States Office of Education (USOE) during the Johnson Administration said the following:

> There was still a lot of fear (in 1965) that federal money would mean intrusion into local school systems. Now we come along with a conservative Republican pushing through a bill that has far more intrusion into local education policy than anything that could have been imagined in the 60's. (Robelen, 2005)

While the ESEA was evolving, other movements in the field of public education were occurring. One that focused on the rights of children with disabilities culminated in the passage by Congress of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHC), in 1975. Essentially, this law decreed that because all the states were exercising their prerogative to provide a public education to children, the states must provide an education to all children, even those with handicaps. The EAHC mandated a free and appropriate education for all children with disabilities and required that these children be educated in the least restrictive environment. It also provided parents of disabled children the right to active participation in educational decisions made for their children, and, very importantly, it gave parents of disabled children the right to due process to allow them to prove that a free and appropriate education was not being provided if they chose to do so. The primary vehicle for the delivery of educational services to disabled children was the Individual Education Plan (IEP), which was also mandated by this law. The EAHC was amended rather inconsequentially between 1975 and 1990. In 1990 the law was reauthorized and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (IDEA) (Spring, 2008). The IDEA defined assistive technology devices for use by children with disabilities and added categories to the list of disabilities for which children could be declared eligible for special education services (USDOE, 2010).

Further amendments to the IDEA were passed in 1992 and 1997 (USDOE, 2010). The 1997 version of the IDEA was so complicated and difficult to interpret that the United States Department of Education did not issue rules and regulations for its implementation until the year 2000 and did not finalize these regulations until 2002. The latest incarnation of the IDEA is the IDEIA, or Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act. This bill was signed into law on December 3, 2004, and mandated to go into effect on July 1, 2005 (USDOE, 2010). Again, regulations providing guidance to state and local school systems for the implementation of this law were slow in coming. The U. S. Department of Education did not issue regulations for IDEIA 2004 until 2007. Lengthy committee meetings were held allowing representatives from all stakeholder groups to offer input regarding the new regulations. The Department of Education published detailed notes from these meetings so that the public would have access to the rationale behind each decision that resulted in a regulation. These notes as well as the law itself are available online (USDOE, 2010).

Like the ESEA and the EAHC, educational bureaucracy also evolved during the second half of the 20th century. Prior to 1979 the responsibility for education, not being specifically granted to the federal government by the Constitution, was left primarily to the states. Even the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act of 1975 had been loosely enforced. Although a Department of Health, Education, and Welfare with limited power and focus regarding education had existed since 1953, the federal government had little power to enforce education law. During the sixties and seventies, there was a growing sentiment in the country that the role of the federal government in education should be expanded to protect the educational interests of the poor and other disadvantaged. In 1979 President Jimmy Carter signed the Department of

Education Organization Act or Public Law 92-88 (Woolley & Peters [online source], 2010). This act elevated the department of education to that of a presidential cabinet post and forever altered the landscape of education in America by putting the federal government in virtual control of public education insofar as control follows funding. President Carter contended that the growing number of national issues centered on education demanded that Congress pass this legislation.

> There is a compelling need for the increased national attention a separate Cabinet department will bring to education issues. Our Nation's pluralistic education system (. . .) faces many challenges. The primary responsibility for education in our nation lies with state and local government. The federal government has a limited, but critical, responsibility to help public and private institutions (. . .) to ensure equal educational opportunities (. . .). (Carter, 1979)

On April 1, 2009, U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, announced that $44 billion for all states and schools was available under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. On Friday, April 3, 2009, Secretary Duncan convened a briefing for over 150 education association and organization leaders to discuss the implementation of ARRA. The stipulations for states and local school systems to receive ARRA funding were that the monies be used to stimulate the economy through the provision of innovative practices designed to improve student performance (USDOE, 2010).

In July of 2009 President, Barack Obama announced yet another federal initiative designed to improve schools. The Race to the Top (RTTT) competitive grant program consisted of $4.3 billion to be distributed to state and local education agencies who could meet the following criteria.

- Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;
- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;

- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- Turning around our lowest-achieving schools. (USDOE, 2010)

In order to qualify for RTTT awards, states were required to demonstrate a commitment to the above stated principles. Tennessee and Delaware were the only two original recipients of the awards, announced in March of 2010. Tennessee, having had a student accountability system and database in place for a number of years, was able to quickly pass legislation in January 2010, six months after the initial RTTT announcement by the federal government, that essentially changed the state's longstanding tenure and teacher accountability laws to accommodate RTTT demands (Chattanoogan, 2010). The entire Tennessee Race to the Top grant application is available online at the Department of Education's website. It does not yet contain information regarding precisely how the teacher accountability requirement will be implemented by state and local systems.

The School As a Social Organization

Educational sociology focuses on the nature of schools and the processes in place in schools as well as with how schools function in society. Educational sociologists examine not only the various types of interactions that take place within schools but also the interactions of schools with the larger society. The historical development of educational sociology parallels that of the field of general sociology and may actually have begun with the philosophy of Spencer (1896) as expressed in his *The Study of Sociology (1873)*. Spencer was perhaps the first structural functionalist in that he likened the function of the individual within society to that of individual organs in the human body. According to Spencer all of society consisted of a structure of related parts (Turner, 1985). Durkheim (1895/1982), having studied Spencer, developed the functionalist perspective in his exploration and identification of the concept of social facts, or those social constraints that developed in a society based on the function of each

component of that society. Like Spencer, Durkheim used a biological metaphor to explain how societies function.

A variant of structural functionalism, general systems theory, has been used for studying living beings and their interrelationship since the 1950s. General systems theory also looks at social organisms in the same way that it views biological organisms, as a system of relationships between individual units and their environments. It is most closely associated with Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (Barker, 1999). Gary Bowen of the University of North Carolina School of Social Work (2007) used a general systems theory perspective to describe the social organization of schools. In general systems terminology, schools influence and are influenced by the totality of their environments:

> . . . schools are social systems with complex properties and subsystems (parts of the larger whole) and suprasystems (environmental contexts). As open systems with permeable boundaries, schools function in dynamic equilibrium with their environments; that is, they have both internal and external inputs and outputs. (Bowen, 2007, p. 62)

Bowen (2007) described external influences on schools in general systems terminology. According to Bowen, external influences on schools exist on three levels: the district level, the local community level, and the institutional level. Bowen described the organizational fields that influence policies and practices at the local and community level as:

> federal and state public welfare policies, mechanisms for financing and administering health and social services, court decisions, policies from state boards of education, the functioning of labor unions and teacher associations, training curriculums in schools of education, and marketplace dynamics. (Bowen, 2007, p. 65)

Bowen's conception of the organization of schools as a top-down hierarchy with school administrators at the top and students at the bottom, all of whom were encircled and influenced by the educational suprasystem can be seen in Figure 1.

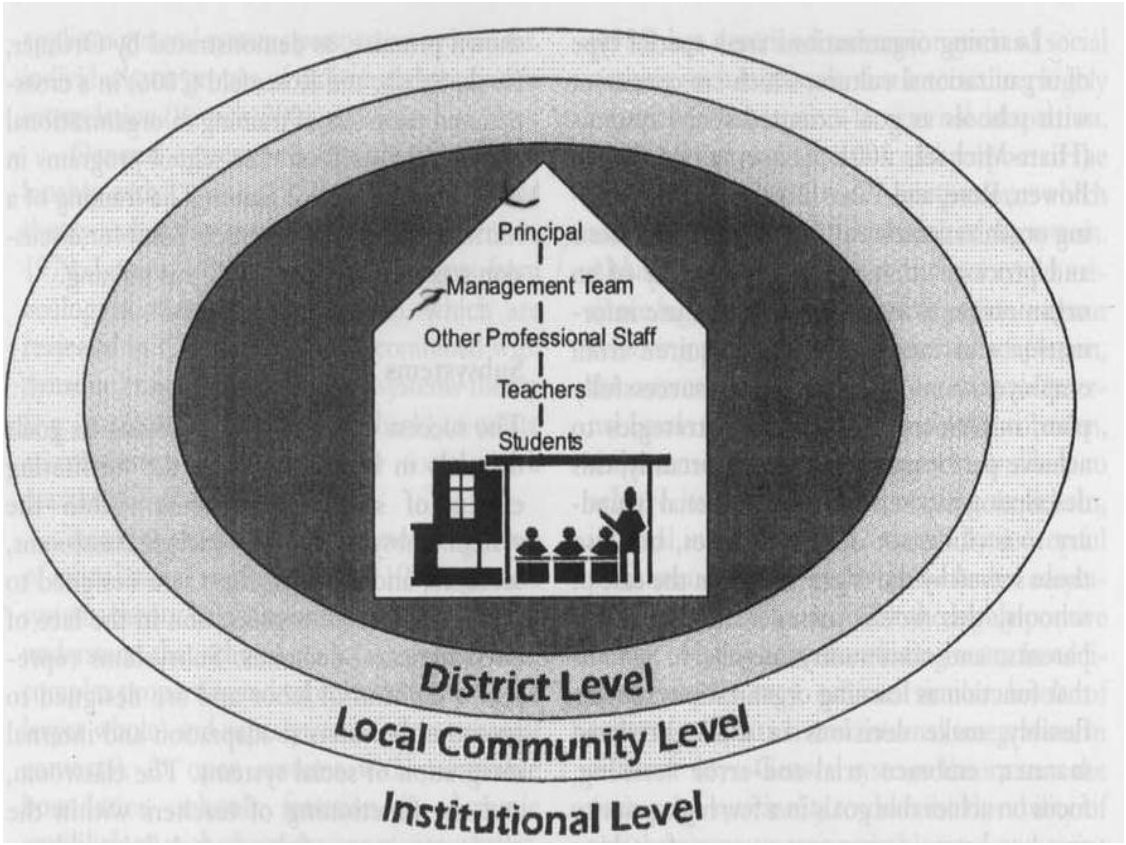

Figure 1. Bowen's Organizational Structure of Schools: Subsystems and Suprasystems

School Climate and School Culture

During recent years a body of research devoted to the topics of school climate and school culture has accumulated within the educational community. Often the terms are used interchangeably, and there appears to be no consensus as to the precise meaning of either school culture or school climate. Both terms are used by researchers to describe the social environment of a school. Generally, the concepts of both school climate and school culture are described, rather than defined, in terms of their affect on the academic and behavioral successes of students.

The concept of school climate, in particular, has been studied extensively, primarily for the purpose of improving student achievement. Researchers have attempted to describe school climate, identify the elements of a healthy school climate, and measure the impact of school climate on student outcomes. Numerous studies have supported the notion that the climate or the culture of a school impacts both the academic and social behaviors of students.

Willard Waller investigated the sociology of schools as long ago as 1932. According to Waller, schools were in a constant state of potential conflict owing to the lack of student discipline and both academic and administrative threats from students, parents, and school boards. Waller was also one of the first to characterize the school as a miniature society, reflecting the values of the greater society (1932/1965).

Coleman's (1961) study of 1950s schools indicated that the social system of most high schools was so strong that it influenced all aspects of the student's life and drove the student's life in nonacademic as well as academic directions. Coleman's study also suggested that the social system of schools provided rewards for athletic and other social achievements. Other studies have indicated that a positive school climate is a critical dimension of behavioral risk prevention, health promotion efforts, and the process of teaching and learning (Najaka, Gottfredson, & Wilson, 2002; Rand Corporation, 2004; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982). In terms of behaviors that placed students at risk for failure in schools, a relationship has been demonstrated between school climate and student suspension (Wu et al., 1982) as well as school climate and student absenteeism (deJung & Duckworth, 1986).

School climate has been demonstrated to have an impact on the quality of the educational experiences of individual students. For example, students' self-esteem has been linked to two elements of school climate in particular: commitment to school and positive feedback from teachers (Hoge, Smit, & Hanson, 1990). Kasen, Johnson, and Cohen (1990)

indicated that the emotional climate of schools is predictive of alcohol use and psychiatric problems in children as reported by their mothers.

In 1993, Haynes, Emmons, and Comer assessed students' perceptions of school climate and identified seven elements that affect that climate:

1. achievement motivation
2. fairness
3. order and discipline
4. parent involvement
5. sharing of resources
6. student interpersonal relationships
7. student-teacher relationships

Dolcini and Adler (1994) examined the role of self-esteem and peer group membership in relationship to risk behaviors by eighth graders and, like Haynes et al., found evidence that student interpersonal relationships in the form of group memberships were closely tied to student behaviors.

In other studies the social climate of a school has been shown to influence the spectrum of student outcomes from social-emotional functioning and behavior to grades and academic performance (Cook, Murphy, & Hunt, 2000; Freiberg, 1998). Similarly, peer social interactions such as the level of teasing and bullying have been shown to impact student performance (Smith & Brain, 2000). A caring and positive school climate was shown to foster attachment to school, which in turn promoted learning, by Osterman (2000) and McNeely, Nonnemaker, and Blum (2002). Hoy and Sweetland (2001) supported Freiburg's earlier findings and demonstrated that the relationships among school staff (the level of trust in particular) have an effect on student outcomes. In yet another study producing similar findings, McNeely et al. concluded that a

fundamentally important dimension of school climate involves the degree to which people feel "connected" to one another in school.

Stolp and Smith (1994) assessed and defined what they termed "school culture" as "the historically transmitted patterns of meaning that include the norms, values, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, traditions, and myths understood, maybe in varying degrees, by members of the school community" (p. 2). Supporting the idea of the environmental impact of school culture on student behaviors, that same study noted that "this system of meaning often shapes what people think and how they act" (p. 3).

Clark (1995) acknowledged the impact of parents on the success of their children in school and ultimately on the culture of the school by reporting that academic achievement and parental involvement in schools show a positive correlation. The importance of a student's relationship with parents and of the parents' attitude toward the student and toward parenting have been thoroughly documented, particularly with regard to how student morale and attitudes affect success in school (Smith, 2001).

Bowen , Richman, Brewster, and Bowen (1998) reported that a school environment in which students felt safe and in which teachers were perceived as supportive had a positive impact on a student's sense of cohesion within the school and, along with other factors such as the size of the school and the relationship between and among staff, might serve to ameliorate certain other factors that placed students at risk for school performance.

Some practitioners have actually attempted to distinguish between school climate and school culture. Saufler (2005), for example, described climate as a creation of the adults in a school in terms of their attitudes, norms, beliefs, and values that underlie instructional practices and culture as the product of the climate in that culture results from how the adults in the climate implement the attitudes, norms, beliefs, and values of the school or system, thereby creating the feel of the school. To Saufler culture and climate were related and interactive but

nevertheless distinguishable; however, as stated earlier in this review, a clear distinction between the two terms has not been established in the literature and, likewise, in this study participants described elements of school culture in terms that have been identified as elements of climate in other studies.

Societal Values and School Culture

Building on the earlier discussion of the elements of culture in the larger sense, it is generally agreed that culture is formed from a collection of knowledge, beliefs, customs, norms, values, and sanctions of particular human groups (Kendall, 2007). Cultures vary widely with respect to ecological and socioeconomic conditions. Cultures also differ in their sanctioned social rules, which take the form of customs and laws and dominant religious beliefs (Kornadt, 2002). It follows from the earlier discussion of culture that its elements generally figure into the development of American school culture which, in turn, figures into the behavior of students.

Ballantine and Spade (2008) acknowledged the impact of "changing values in society, political and economic constraints, home environments of students and school personnel, business and technology, special interest groups, and other external influences" (p. 213) on the culture of schools. Ballentine and Spade pointed to the whole of the educational environment as defining the function of the school. Further, those authors asserted that "population changes, technological advances, fads in society for a particular curriculum idea, and social movements all influence the schools" (p. 214). With regard to technological advances, a study released in 2010 by the Pew Internet and American Life Project supported the claims of Ballantine and Spade with regard to the influence of technological advances and fads in society. For example, the Pew study reported that text messaging was the most common form of communication for teenagers between the ages of 12 and 17. The same study also indicated that half of all teenagers, 12-17 years of age, sent 50 or more text messages per day, and 15% sent or received at least 200 messages per day. Technology is a part of the everyday life of students.

Summary

This chapter has presented a review of literature focusing on the concept of culture and the impact of culture on the behavior of human beings. The nature of school culture, sometimes referred to in the literature as school climate, and the driving forces in the development of that culture were then reviewed. The literature was consistent in the description of the elements of culture or climate. Studies reviewed indicated that an individual's behaviors reflect his or her values (Bardi, 2003). If, as the literature revealed, it is true that culture is a shared set of values, that it influences a person's behaviors, and that the individual cannot easily act outside its influence, then it follows that the same is true of the culture in America's schools. The literature was consistent in acknowledging a correlation between the social environments of schools and student outcomes. The link between educational culture, that culture spawned by the reciprocal influences of current societal trends and educational practices, and the behavioral choices of students who are a part of, as well as a product of, that culture drove this inquiry. An attempt to identify the origin and nature of those elements of the culture that impact students and their behaviors was also an element of the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction and Rationale

In his famous address to the Prussian Academy of Sciences in 1929, Einstein posited that mathematical measurement may not always reflect reality (Einstein, 1921). The qualitative researcher's perspective is, to some degree, similar to that of Einstein in that the qualitative researcher assumes that reality is the result first of curiosity and then of exploration. This is particularly true as it regards understanding the realities of what drives human behavior. The intent of this case study was to explore and identify the elements in contemporary school culture that were perceived to be linked to the behaviors of students. In order to formulate theory related to student behaviors, the researcher must assume an approach. The two primary approaches to the study of human behavior are the positivist and the interpretivist approaches. Both approaches are legitimate; it is the researcher's intent that should guide the choice of a method.

The positivist approach is quantitative; the interpretivist approach is qualitative. The assumptions for each mode are different. The positivist collects data and uses that data to form generalizations that can be used to predict cause and effect in a larger population (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). A positivists begins with a hypothesis. To the positivist, research is a true science wherein measurements can be taken and predictions can be made. The interpretivist may develop a hypothesis as the study progresses, but the basic belief of the interpretivist is that the *why* of things is to be uncovered in layers of truth and that there is no such thing as truth that is independent of interpretation. The interpretivist interacts with the participants in the study. Unlike the positivist, who uses instruments that have been tested for reliability and validity, the interpretivist is the instrument for the study (Glesne, 1999). Interpretivists don't want just to know; they want to understand. They want to use extensive data to interpret an issue, hence the

label for the approach, but beyond that interpretivists believes that understanding can bring about positive change.

Research Design

In this study, I attempted to understand which, if any, societal elements within school culture were perceived to have shaped student behaviors. The subject is complex. It is a *why* subject that does not lend itself to a survey-and-calculate approach. Even if societal elements within the school could be definitively determined via survey, their impact on student behaviors would still not be known. That would have to be interpreted.

This study is complicated in nature. It encompasses elements of more than one type of case study. The study is explanatory as defined by Tellis (1997). As previously described, the researcher in this study sought to understand. This study also meets many of the criteria used by Creswell (2007) and Stake (1995) in describing the instrumental case study. "This is a type of case study with the focus on a specific issue rather than on the case itself. The case then becomes a vehicle to better understand the issue" (Stake, 1995, p. 245). The issue requiring understanding in this case was the impact of school culture on the behaviors of students.

The study is also narrative in some respects. The element of narration in study was described by Creswell (2005) who suggested that researchers perform narrative study for paradigmatic reasons such as "how individuals are enabled and constrained by social resources, socially situated in interactive performances, and how narrators develop interpretations" (p. 55).

Selection of Participants

The 36 participants in this study were purposefully selected (Merriam, 1998) based on their knowledge of the students and of the educational culture in Carroll City Schools. The chain referral technique was used for the teaching staff. This technique allowed participants to suggest other potential participants whose experiences and knowledge base might enrich the

data and possibly confirm or refute elements of the data (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). The sample consisted of 11 teachers, 16 administrators, and 3 guidance counselors. Three law enforcement officials were also interviewed. Three system-wide personnel were interviewed. Most interviews were conducted in person, but some consisted of written questions and responses. Each taped interview was transcribed.

Recruiting Protocol and Ethics

After the projected participants were chosen, their expressions of willingness to participate in the study were obtained. Each participant received an oral explanation of the study and the procedures that would be involved. Participants were informed that their cooperation was voluntary and might be withdrawn if they so chose. An informed consent document was sent to each participant (Appendix A). The informed consent release was the standard form used by the Institutional Review Board at East Tennessee State University (ETSU), Johnson City, Tennessee. The form contained sections explaining purpose, procedures, the expected time frame for completion of the study, possible risks to the participants, a confidentiality statement, and information about compensation for participation. The IRB dated and stamped the form to indicate approval. The form required the signature of the researcher and the participant as well as the date.

Data Collection

Most interviews were conducted in the offices and classrooms of the participants. Some, out of necessity, were conducted in a more neutral setting. Before each interview, the informed consent form was reviewed with the participant and the participant was asked if there were questions or concerns. I again assured participants in person that their participation in the study would be held in strictest confidence. The nature and purpose of the research was again provided to the participant. Each interview began with the solicitation of general demographic

information such as name and position within the school system. I then sought to build rapport with the interviewee by asking him or her to describe some teaching experiences. I chose a nonthreatening starting point that nevertheless had revelatory potential. An example of a question of this nature, sometimes described as a grand-tour question, is as follows: "Tell me about your first day of teaching and what you noticed about your students. Where were you, and what do you remember from your surroundings?" (K. Franklin, personal conversation, March 8, 2007). My interview questions served as my guide as I remained focused on uncovering the information that I was seeking. I did, however, allow participants to add information when they chose, and I asked probing follow-up questions when information provided by the participants seemed limited. I conducted each interview in a conversational manner as if two friends were talking. I didn't want the participants to feel threatened in any way. I wanted rich dialogue. At the conclusion of each interview, the participant was asked to add anything he or she chose to the conversation (Franklin, 2007).

Except for instances in which interviewees did not wish to have their conversations audio-taped, interviews were recorded. Recordings and notes were transcribed and provided to each participant for verification. The member checking requirement was addressed in the following ways: Participants were provided with a copy of the transcript and invited to make corrections for any inaccuracies or to suggest any revisions that they chose. My email address, direct office telephone number, and home telephone number were provided. Participants were invited to call if they had further questions or concerns. When direct quotations were chosen for inclusion in the findings, the accuracy of the quotation was verified by me through a direct telephone conversation with the participant. At this point the participant was allowed to modify or eliminate his or her statement. The time and date of the conversation were noted.

In addition to interviews, other sources of data were used for the purpose of triangulation and to ensure validity (Denzin, 1986). The sample included local and state educational,

academic, and discipline reports generated from student data system as well as staff development information from the school system.

Data Analysis

Bogden and Biklen (1982) and Denzin and Lincoln (2000) stated that data must be constantly reduced, displayed, and verified throughout the process of the study. The constant comparison analysis methods of Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Denzin and Lincoln were used to analyze the data. In order to sift out valuable and telling information, the researcher must consistently process and reduce data so that they begin to make sense within a conceptual framework and so that additional data become more meaningful during the collection process. The nature of the interview process in qualitative research leads to what Hayes and Flannery (2000) termed narrative thinking. A benefit of this type of thought process is that it requires the participant to reflect, think critically, and develop abstract concepts with the potential to lead to improvements in the process or organization that is under study.

One way to reduce data is to look for key words and phrases. This was done using the manual coding and categorization method of Strauss and Corbin (1998). From the key words and phrases, patterns and themes emerged (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I displayed the key words, themes, and documents in my home office and from there began to write the narrative and form conclusions.

Trustworthiness

A study of such a serious nature requires attention to the element of validity. Flick (2006), citing Lincoln and Guba (1985), suggested that "trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, and conformability" were necessary criteria for validation of qualitative research, with trustworthiness being chief among these. In order to establish trustworthiness, the use of multiple sources of data and member checks is necessary. As stated, I used several sources of data. I also used member checking by soliciting the perceptions of the participants as to the

accuracy and credibility of the findings as recommended by Creswell (as cited in Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 1988). The assistance of a fellow doctoral student who recently completed a case study related to a different topic provided peer debriefing, and an adjunct instructor at ETSU in the area of special education provided the element of peer review.

Summary

The philosophy that informs qualitative research is grounded in the interpretivist perspective. Qualitative researchers contend that there is more than one reality and that knowledge does not exist outside social constructs. Qualitative researchers suggest that not only can nothing be understood in isolation, but that nothing even exists in isolation. The unit of measurement in qualitative research is words. In this study I sought primarily through words, to uncover contributing societal factors involved in the formation of school culture to estimate or assess the possible impact of that culture on student behaviors. I used the case-study approach with the reliability and validity measures suggested by recognized experts in the field of qualitative research.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to explore societal elements manifested in school culture that may illuminate the behaviors of students. The setting was a small school system of approximately 6,500 students in northeast Tennessee. The school system consists of one preschool, eight elementary schools, two middle schools, one large, comprehensive high school, and one alternative school. In addition to numerous support personnel, the system employs 760 teachers, assistant teachers, principals, and assistant principals to serve the population of approximately 6,500 students, making the ratio of adults directly involved in service delivery to students approximately 1:12 (personal communication with Amy Greear, Director of Communications, Carroll City Schools, June 1, 2010).

Socioeconomically, there is considerable disparity in the population. An operational branch of a very large, multinational corporation is located in the area. This company employs thousands of local residents of all educational and skill levels and attracts numerous highly educated and highly specialized professionals from all over the world. There is significant community involvement in this school system, partly owing to the number of professional residents in the area. The local board of education is comprised of highly professional, intelligent, and articulate individuals who take their positions on the board very seriously. The importance of maintaining a school system that will help attract talented individuals to the area is paramount. The school system prides itself on excellence in academics, sports, and related arts. Coexisting with a demanding professional clientele is a population of families who live at or below the poverty level. Five of the system's 11 schools receive Title I funds, and another 5 qualify for but to this point have not elected to receive Title I funding. Based on the poverty level of the students, only 1 school in the entire system does not qualify for Title I funding. The ethnic breakdown of the community is 92% Caucasian, 5% African American, 2% Hispanic,

and less than 1% all other races. Former students of Carroll City Schools run the gamut in terms of social and academic successes. The range includes a College Football Hall of Famer, a member of the Dallas Cowboys football team, a Nobel Prize winner, and current inmates in state penitentiaries, serving life sentences.

Specifically, I examined the perceptions of 36 school personnel, including teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, and school resource officers regarding the following subquestions:

1. What are the components of school culture that have formed the educational experiences of students in Carroll City Schools?
2. What are the roles of students, teachers, administrators, parents, the media, and government in the formation of school culture?
3. What do respondents perceive as positive aspects of school culture that impact student behavior? Does the literature regarding school culture support these perceptions?
4. What do respondents perceive as negative aspects of school culture that impact student behavior? Does the literature regarding school culture support these perceptions?

Selection of Participants

The 36 persons interviewed were selected from a purposeful, criterion-based sample for the purpose of validity. School personnel who were likely to demonstrate informed perspectives relative to the topics of school culture and student behaviors were identified and invited to participate. Participant categories selected were administrators, guidance counselors, school resource officers, system-wide discipline personnel, system-wide behavior modification teachers, representative general education teachers, and representative special education teachers. The entire spectrum of licensed school personnel who actually interact with students

was sampled. The chain referral technique that allowed participants to suggest other participants was used in the recruitment of teacher participants (Gall et al.l, 1996).

Because the topic was student behaviors with a focus toward both the positive and negative aspects of the influence of the school culture on those behaviors, the concentration in terms of data collection was at the middle and high school levels where the most serious student behaviors have tended to occur (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002); however, as the primary disciplinarians of elementary students as well as the persons bearing the ultimate responsibility for the academic successes of students, all elementary principals were invited to participate.. High school assistant principals with at least 1 year of experience at the high school level were asked to participate because they were both the dispensers of discipline and the overseers of academic progression for their student groups at the secondary level. Middle school principals and assistant middle school principals were invited to participate. All system resource officers were invited to participate. Resource officers from both middle schools and the high school were invited to participate. All behavior modification teachers were invited to participate. Several system-wide personnel were invited to participate. High school and middle school teachers, in both general and special education, were invited to participate.

An invitation was issued to each prospective participant. For administrators, guidance counselors, most high school teachers, and SRO personnel, the invitation was made via telephone or in person. For middle school teachers, it was delivered verbally via the principals at the schools. Initial response from administrators, guidance counselors, and SROs was excellent. Teacher response was less enthusiastic but did consist of both general and special education teachers, gleaned mostly through the referral technique. Of those teachers invited to participate through the chain referral technique, none refused, and 12 were scheduled. Several were rescheduled owing to other demands on teachers' time, and one of the 12 was not successfully rescheduled. Each participant was asked to meet with me or speak with me on the

telephone regarding the nature and scope of the study. All foreseeable consequences were explained to the prospective participant. The informed consent form was reviewed with each participant in accordance with the Institutional Review Board protocol as required by East Tennessee State University (Appendix A). Participants were informed that their consent was voluntary, and the nature of the questions they would be asked was explained. Participants were assured that they would not be identified by name or position and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point if they so chose. Complete confidentiality was assured. Participants then scheduled interview times with me. Informed consent forms were signed at the time each interview took place. All names of participants used in this study are pseudonyms.

Demographics

All participants were members of the professional staff of Carroll City Schools, a small school system in northeast Tennessee. The participants represented a wide cross section of school personnel in terms of experience, gender, race, and position. Of the 36 persons interviewed, 18 were female and 18 were male; 32 were white, and 4 were African American. No other races were represented in this sample. Years of participants' professional experience ranged from 1 year to 40. I believe that it is important to include statements regarding gender and race because, although race and gender were not addressed in the questions, the issues of disciplinary fairness and student social status were included, and some comments relative to race and discipline were made by participants. When issues of race were directly noted by participants, they were related verbatim in this study. The fact that all groups interviewed were as racially diverse as possible and that gender was evenly divided in the sample afforded opportunity for the topic of any inequities that might be tied to race or gender in the dispensation of discipline or other cultural issues to be addressed. In addition to teachers, 3 school resource

officers, 2 system-level personnel, 3 guidance counselors, and 17 administrators were among those interviewed.

The Interview Process

Most interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed later. I kept detailed field notes and precise quotations. The transcribed interviews and field notes were later examined and re-examined multiple times for the purpose of reflection, study, and the determination of patterns and themes. The hand-coding method was used, applying the concepts of open coding with discrimination and differentiation among categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

At the requests of the persons involved, two interviews were conducted via a written questionnaire containing the same open-ended questions asked in the live interviews. All other interviews were conducted in person and neutral settings that were comfortable to the participants, such as a principal's office, a guidance office, a conference room, or a teacher's classroom. The initial conversation of the interviews was designed to put participants at ease and to establish trust. Participants were thanked for their willingness to be interviewed and were again assured that all responses would be held in strictest confidence. I reminded participants that they would not be identified by name in the research. I also reminded them that they could choose not to answer specific questions or to end their participation at any time. Demographic questions related to educational level, years of experience, and types of experience were asked first, followed, as previously described, by some general conversation about early teaching experiences.

The interview process was semi-structured with open-ended questions. Although prewritten (Appendix B), the questions were flexible, and I allowed each participant to take the discussion wherever it led. Because qualitative research is emergent in design, I sometimes explored responses further by asking follow-up questions and asking for clarifications or examples. In most cases participants became quite involved in the conversation and chose to

expand the dialogue, particularly with regard to their personal experiences with students and their theories about what drove student behaviors but also with regard to governmental regulation of schools and its ultimate effect on the culture of schools. This resulted in the discovery of additional valuable information. Interviews were scheduled without a time limit, but with an estimated duration of 20 minutes. Most of the interviews lasted about an hour because participants tended to become enthusiastic about the topics being explored.

I ended each interview by asking the participants if there was anything they would like to add to the information they had given me regarding the topic of student behaviors and their opinions regarding the influence of school culture, if any, on those behaviors. Member checking for the purpose of accuracy was used. Participants were given a written record of their interviews and asked if these were correct and if there were changes they would like to make. When direct quotations were used, participants were contacted via email, provided with my direct telephone number, and asked to call me to verify the quotation. At this point, participants were given the pseudonym assigned to them in the study and read the exact quotation contained in the text. They were asked if the quotation was accurate and if they were comfortable with its use. Participants were allowed to make any changes they chose at this time. As participants called to confirm, the date and time of the confirmation were noted and maintained. Percentages in terms of patterns and themes represented in the data were calculated, and I attempted to include in this study a corresponding number of quotations based on the frequency and nature of participants' responses.

Discovering the Threads

After each interview, I reflected on both the process and the responses using the constant-comparison analysis method of Strauss and Corbin (1998) in order to look for and code emerging patterns and themes and to determine if follow-up questions were adequate or could have been improved in order to yield more detailed information. Threads, themes, and patterns

emerged from the data, and the findings were categorized in order to present the data in a meaningful way. It must be noted here that, although thematic categorization was done as logically as possible, there is overlap among the categories and many of the interview responses would have lent themselves to several of the identified categories.

Findings

School Culture

A working composite of the elements of school culture began to emerge almost immediately. Elements identified in the literature review for this study as components of both school culture and school climate were frequently described by participants as a part of the overall culture of schools. There were two camps of participants in terms of their thoughts related to the composition of school culture. A smaller group saw school culture as almost entirely a function of the adults, particularly the leadership, in the school system and the larger society. This definition correlates to Saufler's (2005) definition of school climate. Another group identified school culture as being a function of all stakeholders in the schools, both adults and students, correlating with the concept of school culture as defined by Stolp and Smith (1995). Both groups defined school culture as an abstract collection of feelings or attitudes, described by one participant as the "feeling that you get when you walk in the door" (personal conversation, Carroll City Schools teacher, February 16, 2010) or "how we do things here" (personal conversation, Carroll City Schools administrator, February 16, 2010). Those intangible ideas that, combined with their manifestations, create the feel of the school fell generally into the following categories: (a) values and behaviors of adults, and (b) values and behaviors of students. Participants indicated that the values of stakeholders are observable through their behaviors. The components of school culture are illustrated in Figure 2.

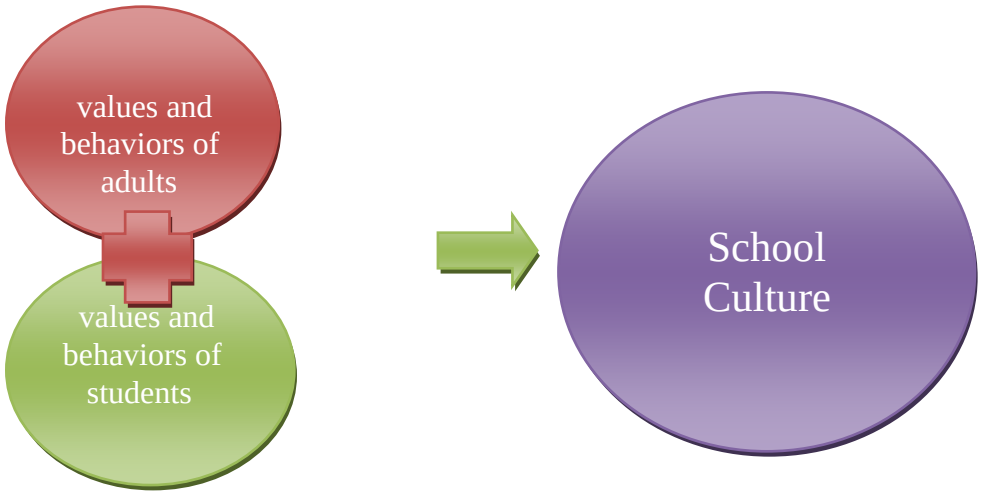

Figure 2. Suggested Components of School Culture

Values and Behaviors of Adults

Although the category of values and behaviors of adults is one that I gleaned from categorizing the data and not a term used by participants, the concept was identified as a driving force in the formation of school culture. The adult groups who were said to influence the culture of schools included parents, teachers, administrators, and the community directly, and virtually everyone in the larger state and federal communities indirectly. In a broader sense, everyone, everywhere in the country was seen to influence the culture of schools to some degree. The idea that public schools reflect the greater society surfaced often during the interviews conducted for this study and is supported by the work of Waller (1932/1965) who described schools as microcosms of society and Bowen (2007) who used general systems theory to describe the social organization of schools as one that is influenced by the totality of society.

It became clear early in my interviews that I needed to find patterns in the values and behaviors of the adults as well as the students in the system and to assess how those factors were

said to affect schools and impact the culture at the local level, according to the participants in this study. The following is a sampling of responses related to the values and behaviors of adults.

On the topic of the elements of school culture, Pat offered:

> It begins with the expectations of the instructional leader. It takes a team to bring about change. We have to move together as a system. We are in a transition phase. We're looking at everything. What does our staff development look like? There has to be collaboration, not competition. Are we building a professional learning community? It is the philosophy that drives the culture.

Mark commented: "We strive for excellence here. We are defined to be the best. We try to do the right thing."

Jeff offered:

> Principals have to establish this (the culture). Faculty and staff, it's how you respond and treat them with respect. You have to maintain a positive relationship. In Carroll City, each school is unique. This year the culture is tense and stressed with the new programs and assessments, glitches in student data programs, the additional Pearson data program. Teachers feel like they are having to process a lot.

Beth described the elements of school culture as follows:

> It starts with the principal--whether they are present, willing to listen--this is the foundation. This bleeds into the teacher attitudes, and this bleeds into the student attitudes. It all shows in how comfortable the students feel or don't feel. This all has to be driven by love. If you don't love the people you are serving, you won't be happy. We try to be professional here. I am glad we have a jeans policy because you behave differently according to how you dress. For the adults, compared to other systems, Carroll has very high expectations. Carroll teachers feel a little more pressured. They are expected to perform better.

With regard to the topic of influences on school culture, Elaine referenced adults:

> I think it's good to want to be the best, and Carroll wants to be the best. Enough is not enough here. You feel it. It comes from the underlying expectation. In other systems, teachers might do their best and, if the outcome is still not as expected, it's "Well, OK." Here it's not "Well, OK."

On the same topic, Becky stated:

> The adults drive the culture, but it should be the students. A lot depends on the leadership. In Carroll, we have an illusion of eliteness that is purposeful. Adjectives to describe it would be driven, spoiled, stressed. We are driven by assessments, but we are not supported. This tension reflects in the schools' cultures.

In describing influences on the school's culture, Jake shared:

> Generally the culture is pretty positive, but there is stress in the adult culture. Some teachers feel threatened. It is hard for some people to accept that their professionalism is being questioned. There is sometimes a strong community versus administration versus school mentality. There is a push to make all the schools exactly aligned. You lose your own identity.

With regard to influences on school culture, Sarah included all adults involved but focused on the values and behaviors of adults within the school system. She shared:

> Culture is the way we do things. It's a combination of students, teachers, support staff, and community and their expectations. Our system is in the midst of change right now from traditional to progressivism. It's a contradictory mix. We're moving toward progressivism, but we still have a one-size-fits-all mentality. We still sometimes focus on what's best for the teacher, but that is changing.

Rene referenced the values and behaviors of adults as they relate to school culture in the following way: "It's a stringent and rigorous but very caring school system. Teachers and administrators here care a lot about their students."

Kim stated, "Ninety-eight percent of the teachers are positive here. They want to be the best."

Michelle offered:

> It's a divided culture. What does it feel like? It depends on the school you're in, but everywhere there is one thing in common: The people and the attitudes are about learning. Here the whole community has a stake in the learning.

Patricia offered: "For the most part, the culture of the school system is very professional. Leadership is asked of all of us. Most people want to do their job here and do it well."

Andrea commented: "It feels like a team here. People build each other up. It feels professional here."

Kathy commented:

> There is a conflict between what we are and what they say we are and what it is in this culture--whether there is a desire from the leadership to develop a culture. There is a select group of students that we discuss. Administrators put students in the center and then move out from there to what they have determined as need.

David stated: "There is pride in the school system here. The system as a whole does consider the student first. We want excellence for everybody: students, teachers, and administrators.

Andrew stated the following with regard to influences on school culture:

> The community has the biggest impact. The community itself drives the type of kid that is coming to the school. Parents, of course, are a part of the community, and the level of parental support and their expectations has an impact.

If our behaviors reflect our values (Bardi, 2003), then in schools the way one disciplines or views discipline is reflective of one's values. Of those interviewed, 55% said discipline was fairly administered at their schools; 29% reported that it was fair with qualifications; 14% said that it was not fair, and 2% said they did not know. On the topic of fairness in discipline, some were certain.

Jeff offered:

> My intention is to be consistent and fair with all students but also to look at each individual circumstance and try to make a good decision. We have to exemplify how we treat students so that they will learn how to treat each other.

Pat responded to the question of whether discipline is administered fairly at her school with: "Absolutely, partly because of my background; but fair does not mean equal."

Kathy responded: "It's probably as good as it can be. People are very conscientious about it."

Michelle said: "I have observed an amazing plan of discipline that is consistent and caring."

David responded to the question about discipline at his school with the following: "Yes, but fair doesn't mean that everyone gets the same thing."

Becky offered: "Yes, discipline is fair here. We try to teach life skills as a part of the discipline."

Derrick also indicated that discipline was fair in Carroll and at his own school. "We deal with the students in an equitable manner and follow the protocols set forth by the CCS system."

Reggie shared the following: "If you think that fair means equal, then no; but, if you think that fair means that kids get what they need, then yes."

Several participants did not expand on the idea of fair discipline but simply answered in the affirmative.

Other respondents stated that discipline was fair but added caveats. For example, Sarah responded with:

> The administration is fair; some of the teachers are not. Sometimes people even believe they are being fair when in reality they are not, and sometimes someone not emotionally involved in the situation can see that.

Laura stated: "I hope it is fair. We try to be fair, but sometimes teachers get it in for kids and wait for some kids to make a mistake."

Other respondents said they did not believe discipline was fair at their schools.

For example, Jane offered:

> Certain kids get away with more based on grades, extracurricular activities, and socioeconomics. The poorer kids get harsher punishment because staff does not think they will get parent support.

Seven respondents noted racial issues with regard to fairness in discipline or with regard to the culture itself. Given the sensitive nature of this topic in our society, I have included all responses that referenced race below.

Monica indicated:

> Sometimes African American kids get preferential treatment, extra support and extra privileges; they help them get out of trouble, let them bring in fast food, that kind of thing.

Anne stated: "I have seen (. . .) be much easier on African American students.

Rene stated:

> We have two African American girls who run the school. They are not disciplined for the same things that other kids might be, disrespect for example. Other kids are afraid of them.

Kim offered: "Young black males don't get into as much trouble when they misbehave."

On the other hand, three respondents indicated that there is still a social and racial divide in schools and that some minority students still did not feel a part of the school culture.

Reflecting a different perspective on race within the schools, Andrew shared: "They [minority groups] are wanting more diversity and to be a part of the school culture, particularly the girls. The adults try to encourage this, but there is still division among students."

Amy stated:

> As a system, we are a conservative, protestant, Caucasian culture. The degree to which we will have a successful culture is tied to the degree to which we are accepting of diversity and celebrate it.

On the topic of the student social class system in the school culture, Dean stated:

> I would have to say the social classes are pretty much determined by race. Blacks hang with Blacks, Hispanics with Hispanics, and Whites with Whites. There are also some groups like the sports groups and kids that hang together because of various activities.

Philosophically, regarding fairness in discipline, 14% of respondents linked the application of discipline to either the social or academic status of the child. Eleven percent mentioned race as a factor in the distribution of discipline. Fourteen percent tied inequities in discipline to governmental regulations that mandate a difference in the way special education and regular education children may be disciplined, eventually permeating the discipline of and

expectations for all students. Eleven percent reported that fair discipline is consistent discipline, and 14% said that discipline must be individualized in order to be fair. The exact statement, "Fair does not mean equal" surfaced four times. Again, these were expanded philosophical responses to questions regarding discipline that surfaced during the interview and were separate observations from those dealing directly with whether discipline is or is not fair at the schools. Figure 3 illustrates perceptions of fairness in discipline.

Figure 3. Perceptions of Fairness in Discipline

Values and Behaviors of Students

Eighty-nine percent of the participants identified the values and behaviors of students, either directly or indirectly, as components of the overall culture of the school. Within this component, two aspects emerged: (a) the manifestations of the values and behaviors of students, and (b) the origins of the values and behaviors of students.

With regard to student values and behaviors, Laura responded:

> There has been a decline in the amount of respect students show, a decline in the way families view education. We also have as many females as males acting out, and that was not the case several years ago.

Carrie offered the following on this topic: "In general, students no longer respect authority. They don't value education."

Kathy commented:

> Children are not as respectful as they used to be. They are less independent thinking. The product that comes to school is different. This morning a kid came in cussing. That would not have happened several years ago. How I handled it, I tried to deescalate the situation. These types of things and how teachers handle them reflect in the culture.

Kristen stated:

> Over time, parents and students have become less respectful everywhere. On the other hand, the kids also don't feel like they are respected, especially the lower SES kids; they don't value education because they don't see any relevance to them. They don't have hope. Many are just waiting until they can collect a check in the mail. They don't even understand where the check is ultimately coming from.

Becky shared: "The biggest difference is that kids don't tell the truth anymore. It's not part of their value system."

Lyle shared:

> Students have trouble connecting a work ethic with success. You have to be willing to work hard, and they don't see that connection. There is also a trend toward more severe behavior problems in the schools. Many of these are the result of mental illness, beyond the capability of school staff to address, but we are forced through federal law to try to deal with them or else pay for a private school education. We are sometimes sacrificing the education of many for the sake of a few.

Kenneth responded to questions regarding the values and behaviors of students as follows:

> Our society questions all authority now. Kids are more disrespectful and oppositional to authority now. In the past 5 to 6 years, they are more likely to curse you out. This is how they talk at home--also how society--and what they see in the media--talks.

Sam stated:

> We have two basic groups, tied generally to social class. One group is focused on learning and looking at the future--colleges, sometimes top colleges. Another group is just hanging out here until they don't have to come anymore. They might say things like

> they are going to college or something, but they have no specific ideas about how to get there and don't connect learning to getting there.

Reggie described student behaviors and values in the following way:

> In terms of behaviors there is usually a honeymoon period at the beginning of the year, but kids now push boundaries farther. You can only change behavior from the inside out. The lower-SES group is so focused on the present. It is so very hard to motivate them. They see consequences as punishment or penance and then absolution, not as learning.

Sarah shared: "There is a lack of respect for authority. There is a lack of responsibility. There is a sense of apathy, a sense of entitlement."

On the topic of student values and behaviors, Carson offered: "Most students are of the 'I hate school and teachers' mentality. It's quite an amazing place to study. No one wants to be the good kid anymore."

In reference to student behavior problems, Derrick stated: "Many of these students have not had nurturing environments and have not had problem solving modeled in their home environments."

Elaine commented: "Students just don't do their work anymore. This gives them time to misbehave. Many have absolutely no intrinsic motivation. They are more disrespectful in general."

Jason offered: "There is a lack of accountability in the children. It is not a change in the way they are disciplined; it is a trait that they exhibit."

Beth stated:

> There is a very, very strong dislike for authority. They hate policemen, the School Resource Officer. They resent anyone in authority. Many of my students also believe that they don't count. One day during a bomb drill at my school, I didn't hear the alarm or hear anyone leaving, so we stayed in class. One of my students was livid that no one came to tell us that there was a drill. He kept saying, "They don't care what happens to us."

Lewis expressed the following on the topic of student values and behaviors: "The number of children that are dealing with emotional issues is increasing at an alarming rate. The boundaries have moved. Kids don't accept any boundaries."

In total, 25 participants or 69% of participants saw a decline in student behaviors during the past 10 years or for whatever period of time the participant had been working in the field of education. Manifestations of a general decline in student behaviors were noted in the areas of accountability or responsibility by 7 (19%) participants. A lack of respect for authority and for adults in general was noted by 14 (38%) participants. A lack of empathy or compassion was noted by 3 (8%) participants. A general disinterest in education was noted by 9 (25%) participants. Interestingly, 2 (5%) participants with more than 20 years of experience said that children are better behaved today than in previous years, and 2 (5%) participants stated that during their careers, there had been no significant change in student behaviors. Of those who reported that children's behaviors have worsened over time, most noted a decline in both social behaviors and academic behaviors. Factors attributed to the decline in student behaviors were lack of parental control, the influence of the media, particularly MTV, inappropriate forms of entertainment, and the inability of school personnel to determine or provide meaningful rewards for appropriate behaviors or meaningful sanctions for inappropriate behaviors.

Influences on School Culture

Again, a common view was that school culture was in essence the people or the stakeholders of the school and all that they bring to the school environment. Information pertaining directly to influences on school culture flowed naturally from the discussion of the elements of school culture.

In general, participants in this study recognized the inter-connected relationship of all stakeholders in the school and a top-down hierarchy. As supported by Bowen (2007) participants indicated that adults run schools. Government and the community dictate how

schools are to be run by administrators and teachers, who then influence the students, and so on. In this respect, it is a circular process. The reactions and interactions of adult stakeholders affect the students just as those of the students affect the adults. Figure 4 illustrates the various inter-related sources of influence on school culture as evidenced in this study.

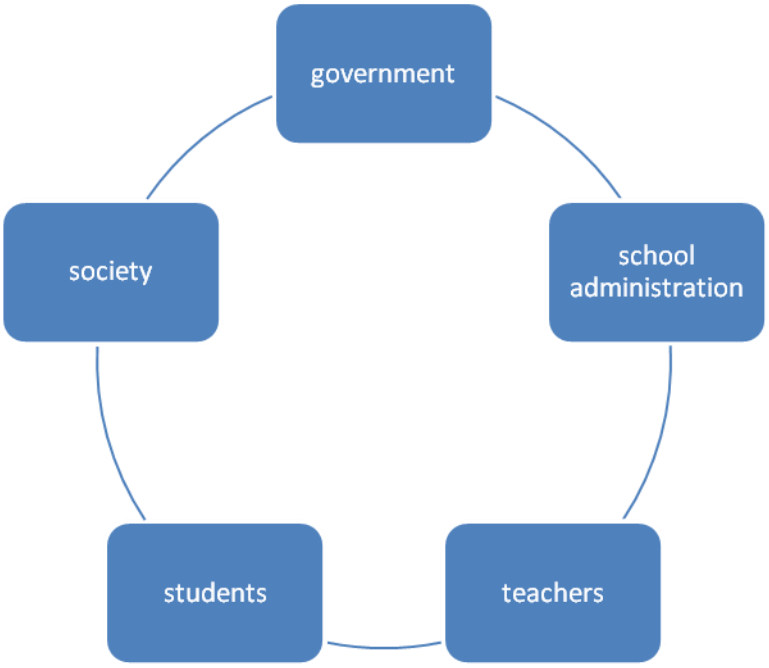

Figure 4. Suggested Inter-Related Sources of Influence on School Culture

The types of influence as described by participants that students, teachers, administrators, society (including parents and the media), and government exert on the culture of schools was generally described as originating from three basic sources: (a) expectations, (b) attitudes and relationships, and (c) perception of status. The role of each group in relationship to others dictates the type of influence it is positioned to exert.

The category of expectations was synthesized from the information gleaned in this study and encompasses both the implicit and explicit expectations of stakeholders with regard to the school and each other. A thread that emerged indicated that academic expectations for students by school personnel at all levels and by the community at large are quite high in Carroll.

Generally, participants also indicated that there is a wide variance in academic and behavioral expectations for students by their parents. Correspondingly, most participants indicated that the degree of involvement and the level of expectation by parents for their children is directly correlated to students' academic and behavioral performance. This concept is supported by Clark (1995) who demonstrated a positive correlation between parental expectations and values and student achievement. Again, there was some expressed disparity between the expectations of the adults in the school setting and the expectations of parents and, by extension, by the community in terms of student behaviors and the general management of the school itself.

In terms of governmental expectations, participants viewed legislation and bureaucratic oversight as vehicles of influence on schools. The role of government is explored fully under the subtopic of the relationship between educational experiences and juvenile behaviors and is therefore not further described here. Participants viewed teachers and administrators as affecting students' values and behaviors and thus the school culture through all three previously identified spheres of influence. Participants expressed generally that students influenced each other through their attitudes and relationships as well as through their perceptions of the status of their peers. There was a general consensus among the participants that the whole of society exerts an influence on school culture through attitudes and relationships.

Media. Comments regarding the role of the media, a reflection of the general society, and its impact on students and school culture surfaced frequently. That role is probably best suited to be classified as one of relationship. Upon first consideration, the suggestion that students have a relationship with the media may seem odd, but the clear suggestion from the data was that students do actually have a relationship of sorts with media and in a broader sense with technology. Several respondents referred to entertainment in particular and its influence on students and thus on the culture of schools. For example, Carol, shared:

> More than anything else, kids are influenced by their peers who are in turn influenced by their worlds, their entertainment in particular. Kids don't look to us for role models; they look to the world of sports or entertainment, and what they value is a reflection of the values they see represented in the media. The entertainment world glorifies violence, and kids start to think it's OK, or that there are many, many situations that justify it. What's more, in film especially, those who commit acts of violence are often heroes who don't suffer any long-term consequences. This is not to say that the media is to blame for violence. They just make the songs and films and games that people want, and I'm not sure that genie can be put back into the bottle, even if we wanted to do so.

Teachers, Administrators, and Peers. Teachers, administrators, and peers were frequently cited as influencing the culture of schools not only through expectations for students but also through their attitudes toward and relationships with students, including their (teachers, administrators, and peers) perception of a student's social status. These findings are supported by Hoge et al. (1990) who found that students' self-esteem was linked to feedback from teachers, as well as Coleman (1961) who found that schools as a social system reward athletic achievement and social status in students. Academic, economic, and physical attributes were all identified by participants as factors contributing to a student's social status, and the student's social status was frequently cited as a factor in the way he or she was treated by school personnel as well as other students.

Carson, in reference to teacher-to-student relationships and their impact, stated:

> Whether it's in the classroom or on the stage, we need to recognize students when they accomplish a goal. It has to be OK to be the "good kid" again. Negativity kills. It's a cancer that has an impact on everything . . . learning included. If you constantly tell your student body they are bad . . . guess what you'll get?

David said:

> Teachers and administrators can influence the student social system by having mutual respect, being a listener, not backing a kid into a corner. Help that kid to be more respected by peers. I try to treat a child the way I would want my own child to be treated.

Kenneth stated: "We need to just take the time to find out about them. Get them to come out and start something [activity]; encourage them to get involved. It makes a big difference in their self esteem."

Beth stated:

> We have several social groups. We have the very privileged for one. Look in the parking lot. There are BMWs and Mercedes. We have the very needy students, the athletes, the EMOS, a few Goths, the ROTC group, the band, the pretty-girl group [which] can be very cruel, the nerds. The kids know there is a difference in how the various groups are treated by the adults.

Sarah said: "Money and logistics drive the social groups."

Jake offered: "Social status is not really evident in elementary schools, but in some schools there is a great divide between the haves and have nots."

Derrick wrote:

> There are basically two social classes within my school. It centers on the socioeconomic status of the students. Basically, there is a middle-class group that has had the opportunity to have many life experiences, and then there is the lower-SES group that has had limited exposure to life experiences.

Elaine stated:

> We have smart kids, nerds, outliers that don't fit any group, jocks, the band, the African Americans, the Hispanics. Where they live and which feeder school they come from and their amount of involvement drives their status. Still, the jocks and the cheerleaders don't run things as much as they used to. The cheerleaders are not necessarily rich. The social clubs don't get as much play at school as they used to, either. We don't encourage them.

Lewis commented:

> About 15% of our students are affluent. They are the ones the system answers to and creates programs for [speaking of academics]. The middle class: very little attention there. There is not much here for them. The lower end also gets a lot of attention because of behaviors and special education, etc.

Becky commented:

> We have the athletic kids, the high-SES kids, the lower-SES kids. The lower-SES kids are pretty much ignored, although less now than in years past, because they must have good test scores. I try to make the parents of these kids feel welcome.

Beth offered:

> Most of the behavior kids are low-socioeconomic status. They are labeled in two ways--their status and their behaviors. If they mess up a little, they have immediate, severe consequences where other kids might not. They feel like they are outcasts. One of them said to me once: "We are the shadow children."

Participants viewed the way that a student's peers perceive his or her social status as a particularly strong influence upon how the student is treated by peers and consequently upon his or her behaviors and self-concept and, ultimately, on the culture of the school.

Sam said:

> The social dynamic has changed a lot here over the years. In some ways the classes are not as segregated, but in socioeconomic ways the kids track themselves. In certain ways the poor and the wealthy don't interact outside of school. There is also academic tracking. When the kids come to us [in high school] they are already prepackaged, already on an academic track. The smart kids are tracked together. Most who don't graduate are almost all low-socioeconomic kids.

Andrew shared:

> There is a big difference in our kids and kids that live in urban areas. Take drugs, for example. Most of the kids we catch with drugs are poor kids or kids that live in town. The wealthier kids have cars. They don't bring drugs to school.

Kathy said:

> The lower class functions a different way from the others. The social beliefs of the other class are valued. Those of the poorer kids are not. It shows in the students. A group of students comes down the hall one way; another group comes down the hall another way.

Lyle stated:

> We don't see social class as much at the elementary level. At the middle and high school level, students are more class conscious. We have to put in place programs to allow the in-crowd to interact with other students.

Kenneth's thoughts were as follows:

> In kindergarten, nobody cares where you live; but it begins to evolve, especially in middle school. At the high school level, distinct cliques break up more distinctly. For example, band and athletics. There are also the kids that are dedicated to academics or apathetic to academics. This is a clique. Kids in cliques talk about other kids and sometimes say hurtful things.
>
> Beth stated: "By the time you're in high school, you know where you belong."

Parents. When asked about the major influences on school culture in Carroll, a majority of the participants referred to parents as either directly affecting school policies and practices through influence on the board of education and the system leadership or indirectly affecting the culture through their impact on the students' value systems and behaviors. Correspondingly, many interviewees indicated that parental influence could be either a positive force exerted by involved parents on academic expectations for the school and the student or absent, and thus a negative influence, in that the parents were uninvolved, the result of which is student apathy toward achievement and behavior. These findings are supported by Haynes et al. (1993) and Clark (1995).

Lewis shared:

> The expectations [in the system] are unbelievably high and demanding. It is an achieving culture, driven a lot by parental expectations. We have an achieving culture that has to be the best, and then we have the other students who feel beaten down.

Amy provided the following perspective:

> The culture of the school is influenced by the leadership and the faculty. It is about their commonly held beliefs, values, and goals. It also comes from the students' life experiences, what they bring with them into the school . . . the degree to which they have been honored and respected at home and then the degree to which we honor and respect them and celebrate diversity in all its forms.

When asked about influences on school culture, Whitney indicated that the people who were in the school created the culture to a large degree and that included the students, who were very much influenced by their relationships with their parents:

> The culture derives from what everyone brings to school with them; this includes the students. It's the other adults in their lives and the guidance they provide through their home environments, their entertainment, the consistency and dependability helps kids learn stability. When there is a lack of guidance and discipline, kids don't learn how to make good decisions.

Carson related: "I do believe that students with strong family support have the ability or support to overcome most issues."

Derrick responded to the interview questions in written form.

> Unfortunately, I see some breakdowns between home-school connections. Some parents do not respect the schools or the educators within its facilities. This spirals downward to the students who also exhibit this disrespectful attitude to the teachers and administrators.

Jeff commented:

> Sometimes their parents tend not to be involved, so we need to be. We have a lot of high-needs children who appreciate anything or any interest they are given. So, at school you have to establish a positive relationship--have several positive experiences early on, so we are starting from that culture. If you do this, discipline is not a challenge You are there to help the student. Respect the student and they will respect you. It is so important.

Scott stated: "Parents no longer have control of their children. It's societal. Therefore, children become students who do not have control over their own behaviors."

School Culture and Student Behaviors

My aim in this study was to focus primarily on elements of the total culture of the school as students experience it for possible insights into the influences on student behaviors. Having identified the perceptions of the participants in terms of the elements of the culture and the roles that stakeholders play in creating or influencing those elements, the next step was to mine the data for the perceived impact of that culture on violent behaviors of students.

As previously related, participants were asked to discuss trends in student behaviors, discipline at their schools, and in the system as a whole, the impact of various relationships on students, and the long-term impact of governmental dictates, if any, particularly as it pertains to

special education, on student values or behaviors. The first three topics have already been addressed in this narrative. Questions related to the fourth topic also provided rich data as described below.

Governmental Impact

First, there was a consensus that federal and state education law and resulting regulations such as those tied to the NCLB and the IDEA exert powerful influences on the educational environment and, ultimately, through their impact on administrators and teachers, on the behaviors of students and their success in school. There was also a consensus among participants in this study that governmental influence on school culture occurs as the result of the hierarchical relationship that exists between government and schools as supported by McGuinn and Hess (2005). As indicated in Chapter 2, the U.S. Congress and the administrative arm of the executive branch of the U.S. government, the Department of Education (USDOE), have the power to regulate schools through legislation, policy, and funding. Through such acts as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the No Child Left Behind Act, and more recently the Race to the Top grand program, the government participates in the day-to-day operation of public school systems. Procedurally, through regulations tied to funding, government provides operational guidelines to public school administrators; school administrators implement the guidelines by holding teachers accountable as per legal requirements; and teachers carry out the provisions of educational legislation. Figure 5 graphically depicts this relationship.

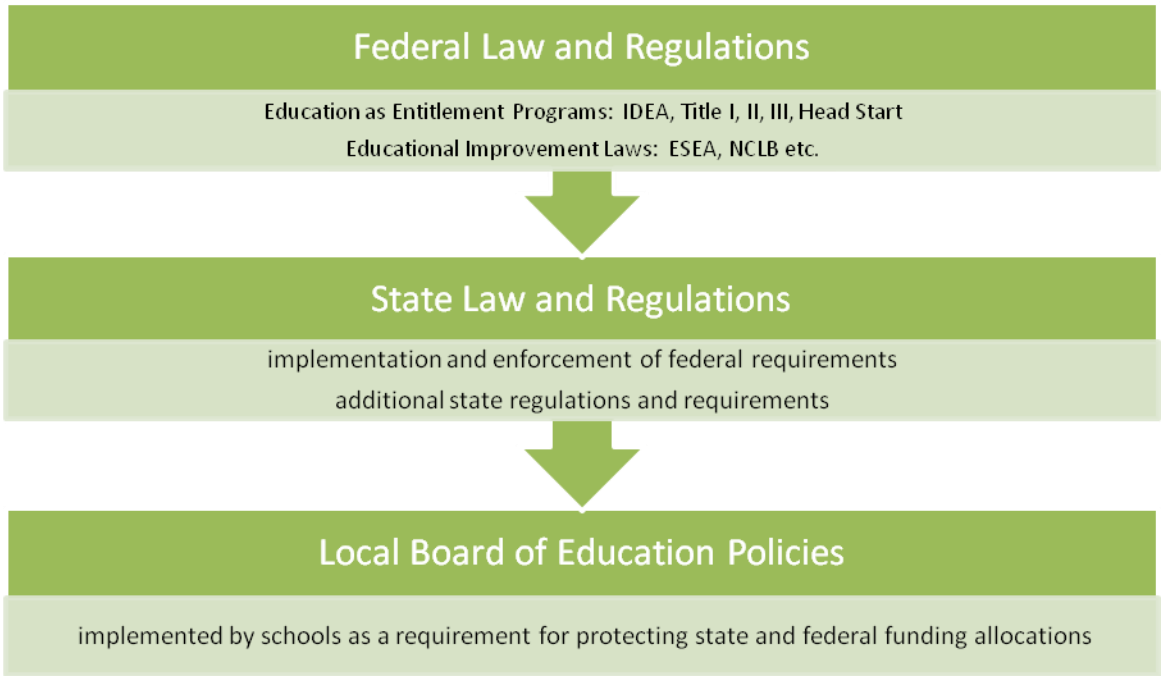

Figure 5. Flow Chart of Governmental Regulations on School Culture

No Child Left Behind

The federal No Child Left Behind Act was mentioned frequently by participants as having an impact on school culture.

Carol shared:

> The NCLB for example--this law was intended to increase accountability among teachers--to force all of us to measure and plan for the needs of students so that all students can acquire the same basic competencies. It's based on the very American ideal that everyone is equal, and we all love that idea, but it ignores the fact that, no matter how much we would like it to be so, everyone cannot learn the same things. For that to be true, there would have to be no diversity in intellectual capacity; and, of course, that is not the case. Statistically and irrefutably, 50% of the population is below average and 50% is above average in any type of ability you want to measure. So here we have this requirement that holds teachers accountable for assuring that every student can pass the same test, except for the 1% of students who are actually in the seriously intellectually disabled population, generally an IQ of 65 or below. It's ridiculous. Schools that cannot make this happen risk seizure of control by the state. The pressure is enormous. The sad thing is that teachers are rising to the occasion and, through rigorous drill and practice, managing to get most students through the hoops, at least at the elementary level. At the

> middle school level, the gap widens; and, at the high school level, it widens even more. But what happens to challenging the average and above-average kids, and how does this tense atmosphere affect the teachers and all the kids? What is their take away from this? Do these kids learn that things will always work out for them in life because someone will make that happen? Do they think their worth is tied to a score?
>
> Sam shared:
>
> Both the IDEA and the NCLB laws have had a big impact on school culture. The NCLB has actually impacted school culture more because now we have to work out a plan for all the special ed students to take the same tests as the general ed students. Most are in the general ed class, but sometimes it makes it harder for the focus in class to be on learning. Discipline is the biggest issue. Many teachers now feel that their jobs are literally threatened through these regulations, and this results in job stress.

Because the Individuals with Disabilities Education (Improvement) Act, more than any other federal mandate, directly impacts discipline in schools, six interview questions addressed the value of this special education law with reference to its impact on school culture. In order to understand the responses of participants to these questions, it is necessary to provide background information as to precisely how special education law influences academics as well as discipline and may ultimately influence culture.

The IDEA

As described in Chapter 2, the IDEA was originally passed by Congress in 1990 with the intent of providing a free and appropriate education to children with disabilities. There is great variance in the definition of disability and the criteria for diagnosis. Currently, the federal government recognizes 14 disabilities:

1. Autism
2. Deaf-blindness
3. Deafness
4. Developmental delay (applicable to children ages 3-9)
5. Emotional disturbance

6. Hearing impairment
7. Mental retardation
8. Multiple disabilities
9. Orthopedic impairment
10. Other health impairment
11. Specific learning disability
12. Speech or language impairment
13. Traumatic brain injury
14. Visual impairment

    (IDEIA, 2004)

Some states have added additional disabilities. Tennessee, for example, has added the categories of functionally delayed and gifted (Tennessee Department of Education, 2010). Importantly, the diagnosis of a disability alone does not assure that a student will qualify for special education services under the IDEIA. In order to qualify for services, a second prong of eligibility must be met: The disability must have an adverse effect on the student's ability to access his or her free and appropriate public education (IDEIA, 2004).

A brief description of the criteria for diagnosis of some of the remaining disabilities follows. These definitions are taken directly from the Tennessee Department of Education, State Board of Education Rules and Regulations (2010) with the exception of the specific details required for a medical diagnosis for ADHD which are taken from the DSM IV.

1. Emotional Disturbance means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a period of time and to a marked degree:
    a. An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors
    b. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers

c. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances
d. A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression
e. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems

2. Other health impairment means having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment that is due to chronic or acute problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, a heart condition, hemophilia, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome.

In Tennessee and many other states, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder must be diagnosed by a physician. There are three recognized types of this disorder: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder-predominately inattentive type, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder-predominately hyperactive type, and attention deficit hyperactivity-combined type. For the predominately inattentive type, a person will exhibit six or more traits of inattentiveness and fewer than six traits of hyperactivity. For the predominately hyperactive type, a person will exhibit six or more traits of hyperactivity and fewer than six traits of inattentiveness. For the combined type, a person will exhibit six or more traits of both hyperactivity and inattention (Tennessee Department of Education, 2009). The criteria for the diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder follow:

A person with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder must have six or more of the following traits for at least 6 months and to a degree that is maladaptive and inconsistent with developmental level:

Inattention.

a. Often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, work, or other activities
b. Often has difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play activities
c. Often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly
d. Often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace (not due to oppositional behavior or failure to understand instructions)
e. Often has difficulty organizing tasks and activities
f. Often avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort (such as schoolwork or homework)
g. Often loses things necessary for tasks or activities (e.g., toys, school assignments, pencils, books, or tools)
h. Is often easily distracted by extraneous stimuli
i. Is often forgetful in daily activities

Hyperactivity.

a. Often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat
b. Often leaves seat in classroom or in other situations in which remaining seated is expected
c. Often runs or climbs excessively in situations in which it is inappropriate (in adolescents or adults, may be limited to subjective feelings of restlessness)
d. Often has difficulty playing or engaging in leisure activities quietly
e. Is often on the go or often acts as if driven by a motor
f. Often talks excessively
g. Often blurts out answers before questions have been completed

h. Often has difficulty awaiting turn

i. Often interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g., butts into conversations or games)

Additional Criteria.

-- Some hyperactive-impulsive or inattentive symptoms that caused impairment were present before age 7

-- Some impairment from the symptoms is present in two or more settings

-- There must be clear evidence of clinically significant impairment in social, academic, or occupational functioning

-- The symptoms do not occur exclusively during the course of a pervasive developmental disorder, schizophrenia, or other psychological disorder and are not better accounted for by another mental disorder [e.g., mood disorder, anxiety disorder, dissociative disorder, or a personality disorder] (American Psychiatric Association, DSM IV, 2000)

3. Specific Learning Disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; of mental retardation; of emotional disturbance; or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

Once a child is determined by a team of school personnel, parents, and sometimes others, to be qualified owing to his or her disability to receive special education services, a set of safeguards backed by the full force of federal law come into play. These safeguards are clearly defined by the U. S. Department of Education and must be provided to the parent at the initial

IEP meeting and at least once yearly thereafter. The school system must work with parents to create an individualized education plan, usually referred to as an IEP, which is a legally-binding document that the school must implement. Simply put, the IEP consists of goals, objectives, special education services and related services, and other supports that will enable the student to access his or her education. Goals and objectives vary with each student and may or may not contain the attainment of grade-level skills (IDEIA, 2004).

Again, the first IEP meeting between parents and school personnel begins with the school system providing the parents with a copy and an explanation of their legal rights as required by the IDEA. The IDEA gives parents the right to due process whenever they feel that the IEP is not being implemented properly or that the school system is not providing their child a free and appropriate public education (Tennessee Department of Education, 2009). Because the IDEA is silent as to what constitutes a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), this definition has often been defined through administrative law, most notably in the landmark case of Henrick Hudson Central School District Board of Education v. Rowley (1980) in which the court attempted to define FAPE as the Chevrolet of education rather than the Cadillac. In other words, school systems were required to provide at least a ground-floor opportunity to students with disabilities. The IDEA also allows parents to collect attorneys' fees if the parents prevail in their case. Special education is the most litigated aspect of public education and the fourth most litigated federal statute, consuming approximately $80 billion annually from state and federal budgets (Shaughnessy, 2009).

Through legislation, the federal government has provided disciplinary safeguards for all children who meet criteria for eligibility for special education services, regardless of the nature of the disability. In general, a student receiving special education services may be suspended for no more than 10 school days in a calendar year unless the student brings a weapon to school, brings drugs to school, or inflicts what is considered "serious bodily injury" on another person

(IDEIA, 2004). Drug, weapons, and bodily injury offenses are considered to be zero tolerance offenses in most states, requiring expulsion from school for 1 year for all students except for students with disabilities. Further, the standard of "serious bodily injury" can be somewhat murky under the IDEA. If a general education student assaults a teacher, that student may be expelled from school. If a special education student assaults a teacher, serious injury--not just injury, but serious injury--must result before the offense can be considered a zero tolerance offense and, even then, removals or more than 10 days of the special education student from school require that the school system provide educational services to the student after the 10th day (Tennessee Code Annotated).

If a student with a disability brings a weapon to school, for example, the school is required to follow a clearly defined process. Because it is a felony to bring a weapon onto school grounds, the student may be arrested by either the school resource officer or another law enforcement official, just as a general education student would likewise be arrested. The school must convene an IEP meeting as soon as possible (within 10 school days in Tennessee) to be attended by at least the following legally required school personnel: a general education teacher, a special education teacher, an administrator, parent(s), and others as appropriate (Tennessee Department of Education, State Board of Education, Rules, Regulations and Minimum Standards for Special Education, 2010). The purpose of the meeting is to determine whether the "conduct in question was caused by or had a direct and substantial relationship to the child's disability; or, if the conduct in question was the direct result of the district's failure to implement the IEP" (IDEIA, 34 CFR 300.530[e][3]). If the behavior is determined to be the result of the system's failure to implement the IEP properly, no school-based punishment for the student results, and the system must immediately take steps to remedy its failure to properly implement the individual education plan (IDEIA, 2004). The IEP team is required to document the process and the rationale used to determine whether a child's behavior is directly related to his or her

disability. The standard set forth in IDEIA 2004 for causality requires a direct link, not merely that a disability may not be ruled out. If a consensus is not reached, either party may invoke due process to have the issue resolved (IDEIA, 2004).

Once the IEP team has determined whether a behavior is a manifestation of a student's disability, it must proceed with determining how to continue to provide the child with his or her free and appropriate public education. Just as is the case when the behavior is determined to be a result of a failure on the part of the school system, if the behavior is determined to be a manifestation of the disability, no punishment results. Further, when the behavior is a manifestation of the disability, the school system may not unilaterally change the child's placement to one that is more restrictive but may change the placement if the parents agree to the change. If the behavior is not a manifestation of the child's disability, the school system may proceed with discipline as it would for a general education student with one difference as defined by the IDEA: The school system must continue to provide the child with a free and appropriate public education after a maximum of 10 days' suspension without services (IDEIA, 2004). Even incarcerated students with disabilities must be provided their education as per their individualized education plans, the IEPs for these students being the responsibility of the school system in which the individual is incarcerated wherever that may be (IDEIA, 2004).

There are few circumstances under which a student with a disability may be removed from school for more than 10 days in a calendar year. The USDOE regulations actually do not stipulate that 10 days is the maximum allowable removal from school for a special education student. The regulations stipulate that a special education student may be suspended from school for more than 10 days in a calendar year if the removals do not constitute a "pattern of exclusion." The regulations do not clearly define this term, but, according to IDEIA (34 CFR 300.530-300.535) a change of placement (also not allowed absent parental consent or a zero tolerance offense unrelated to the student’s disability) occurs when:

1. the removal is for more than 10 consecutive school days; or
2. the child is subjected to a series of removals that constitute a pattern
    a. because the series of removals total more than 10 school days in a school year or
    b. because the child's behavior is substantially similar to the child's behavior in previous incidents that resulted in the series of removals; and
    c. because of such additional factors as the length of each removal, the total amount of time the child has been removed, and the proximity of the removals to one another.

Students with disabilities are also protected from removal from the general education setting except in certain circumstances. The IDEA requires that a child be educated in the least restrictive environment and with nondisabled peers to the maximum extent possible. What is known as the LRE requirement came about because of a history of exclusion of students with disabilities from general education settings. The intent of the IDEA is to remedy this injustice (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). While most participants in this study favor the LRE requirement of the IDEA, some noted abuses of the LRE requirement.

Seven participants, or 19%, referred to students who are placed in the general education curriculum but are unable to function academically in that curriculum as detrimental to the education of other students, primarily as the result of the extra time and resources that are expended for special education programming, but also with regard to disruptive behaviors.

Whitney contributed:

> I have a student who is just physically present in the general education classroom with his aide. He does math when we do math, but it is entirely different math than what the rest of the students are doing. For example, while they are doing pre-algebra, he might be working on triple-digit addition. He does not yet have the concept of subtraction at all. It is not unusual for him to have a behavioral meltdown and have to be removed from class by the aide. We just try to go on with our work.

Carol mentioned:

> We have had some parents demand that students who are not functioning in class without a one-on-one assistant nevertheless be allowed to take drivers education and even drive the car. Their argument is that the child can do it with the proper accommodations (the aide) as required by law.

On the topic of the impact of special education law on the culture of schools, 2% of participants said they just didn't know how to answer the question. Forty percent of the participants noted either a positive or neutral impact from federal mandates in relation to the inclusion of persons with disabilities with general education students. A heightened awareness and sensitivity to the diverse needs of others was seen as a positive result of the IDEA as well.

Amy responded to this topic as follows: "All mandates affect school culture in that it helps shape how the leadership, teachers, and other students view the affected students."

Pat shared:

> In years past, very few special ed kids were in school. Now these kids are in the least restrictive environment. There are pros and cons to this. They need socialization, but sometimes we sacrifice the learning of 20 children for the sake of one in the general education classroom.

Kristen shared: "Inclusion (of students with disabilities in the general education classroom) is a wonderful thing for most students."

Jeff shared:

> It has brought an awareness of student differences. We are aware that we learn differently and at a different pace. Success and achievement has helped boost special education students' confidence. It was a transition for a lot of veteran teachers, but teachers have realized that these kids should not be identified as a label. It has had a positive impact. Special ed kids have equal opportunities now.

Lewis stated: "Inclusion (of students with disabilities with general education students) is one of the best things we've done. We look at students more as individuals now."

David said: "Long term, special ed should have a positive impact on kids. If discipline has been done in a respectful and appropriate manner, it should be a way for kids to learn from their mistakes and learn how to solve problems."

Jake added: "Teachers need to understand and treat children differently. I think that is happening more. All children respond differently, and we have to treat children differently based on their own needs."

Lyle shared:

> There has been some positive impact. For example, I am encouraged when I hear teachers say they want to do more inclusion. On the other hand, many teachers are nervous about having special education students in the general education classroom simply because of NCLB and RTTT requirements. Particularly with RTTT, some teachers fear for their jobs if they cannot get students with disabilities to perform at a level that the state determines is adequate progress. It's not that they don't want to teach students with disabilities; they are just afraid that they will not be able to meet the standards through no fault of their own or the student's.

Anne stated: "It [the IDEA] has allowed for an acceptance of more diversity, but it makes teachers timid about disciplining special ed kids."

Ronald offered: "It has had a mixed impact. Some students have benefitted and turned their lives around. Others will lead difficult lives no matter what we do."

Scott stated:

> Many special education kids get good services. If I had a kid who was special ed, I would say that special ed law has had a positive impact on school culture. On the other hand, if I had a middle-of-the-road kid, I would probably say the educational system failed my child because money goes to the high functioning and the low functioning. The middle-of-the-road kids are left out.

A less positive set of opinions also emerged in terms of the impact of the IDEA on the culture of schools. Fifty-eight percent of participants saw the long-term effect of special education law on students' behaviors and school culture as negative. The comments of one respondent who felt that special education law has had a negative impact on special education students could be called an outlier in that this person stated that the negativity of the impact

comes from the fact that the student takes away a poor self-concept as a result of having participated in special education programming.

Jake stated:

> Sometimes a negative image of school results for these kids because they are different. For example, if a kid has to ride the short bus--everyone knows what that means. Some may be thankful that they received special ed services; but, in most cases, they may still have a negative image of school.

All others who said they believed that special education law had influenced students negatively indicated that they perceived an unintended impact on the long-term behaviors of students and on the very culture of the school which has been forced to become more permissive because of the special protections afforded to special education students. All participants who referred to inappropriate student behaviors as being unfairly protected by special education law indicated that they were referring to students with behavioral disabilities rather than learning or intellectual disabilities. When asked if any disability categories should be removed from the federal umbrella of behavioral protections, none of the participants indicated that children with intellectual disabilities should be removed. The disabilities most frequently mentioned by participants as requiring removal from the dual discipline code of special education and general education were ADHD and Emotional Disturbance.

On the topic of behaviors, Carson shared: "In some instances, the rights of special ed students impede the learning and progress of the other students in the classroom setting."

Pat stated: "Sometimes special ed kids are allowed to behave in ways that general ed kids can't. Some special ed kids sometimes learn to take advantage of this."

Scott opined: "Once they leave school, they leave the protection of the IDEA. Natural consequences will take over. Special ed does not teach them natural consequences."

Andrew stated: "There is no IEP when kids are on the street. It is unfair to the student to have had these protections [in school]."

Kim said:

> If someone commits a violent act after they are out of school, no one is going to ask if they are special ed. It has an impact. They are shielded until they are 18. All of a sudden they aren't protected by ADHD. They might assault a police officer like they have assaulted an SRO when they were in school. The police officer won't care if they're ADHD. They're going to jail at best. I'll bet the percentage of special ed kids in prison is large. Schools have taught them there is no consequence for their behavior. I have actually seen special ed kids quote the law when they get in trouble.

Marie offered:

> Sometimes these kids have a feeling of entitlement. They are entitled to behave poorly and not be punished. A kid the other day was using the F word and being disrespectful to a sub. He told her that he will not be punished because he is ADHD.

Whitney stated:

> Most of our kids are too young to know they have protections, but the parents have realized that they have protections and can manipulate the system. A special ed diagnosis, very easy to get, can be used as a crutch. Parents want too much extra--the stars and the moon.

Jane said: "In real life they will have consequences. They will be held accountable if they break the law. Then they will be treated like general ed. We have put them at a disadvantage."

Monica shared:

> People are afraid to discipline special ed students--afraid of lawsuits. That makes people not want some of the disabilities in class. The long-term effect--they think they're above the law. They have a good chance of going to jail or at least being non-functioning because of the protections they have had.

Lyle shared: "Special ed law has had a negative impact on student behaviors. As students get older they are aware of the protections. They think there are no consequences for bad behaviors."

Sam shared:

> Kids know that they are protected by the time they get to high school. Some will now ask for an IEP meeting. Some will tell you that they don't have to go to alternative

> school or the behavior class when their 10 days [allowed suspension without services for special education students] are up.

Kenneth stated: "They don't receive the same consequences as regular ed kids. Other kids see this and the overall behavior has declined. Other behaviors are continuing to grow."

Reggie said: "Probably special ed laws were originally created for kids with true biological conditions. We now apply them to essentially everyone who is not on grade level, even lazy kids. It has been devastating in terms of student accountability."

Rene stated:

> It [special ed law] has absolutely made them worse. We have one group that is embarrassed to be in special ed, the LD [learning disabled] kids, and another group [those with behavior disorders] that knows everything on their IEP and everything they are allowed to do. They know they have been covered. They have learned to do things and get away with it and they will continue to do these things and end up in jail just because someone gives them a diagnosis to excuse all behaviors. We have one doctor in this area who diagnoses most of the kids he sees with ADHD. When you look at the criteria, you can see how easy it would be to get that diagnosis and then parents not only get an excuse for bad behavior but might also get a disability check. No one wants to talk about this because no one wants to be seen as not caring about kids with disabilities. True disability kids are not what I'm talking about. They deserve every break they can get, but many, many people have learned how to work the system.

Mary offered:

> For most special ed kids, the privileges they have had will hinder them. At some point, the privileges will have to end, and that could put them at a disadvantage in the real world. What will happen when a boss reprimands them? What will happen in the military if they are yelled at? They never learn how to take criticism or direction. Discipline wise, if they commit infractions [at school], they don't get into any trouble.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Introduction

The impetus for conducting this research study was both my observation and the comments of colleagues regarding the alarming level of student acts of disruption in schools, contrasted with the observation of some remarkable student academic and behavioral successes during recent years. I wanted to know what, if anything, within the culture of Carroll City Schools influences the behaviors of students.

Summary of Findings

Research Question #1

What are the components of school culture that form the educational experiences of students in Carroll City Schools?

Generally, participants described the culture of any school as the atmosphere of the school created by the conglomerate of values and behaviors of all stakeholders, supporting the definition of school culture by Stolp and Smith (1995) as patterns of meaning including norms, beliefs, values, rituals, and traditions, among other elements. Participants indicated that culture varies among school systems and among schools within systems. Participants identified the behaviors of adults and students, insofar as behaviors reflect values, as the means to view the culture of a school.

In terms of adult values as evidenced by behaviors, the culture of Carroll City Schools was described as one that specifically values excellence in academics by 94% of those interviewed. The culture was described as one that values excellence in all areas, academic and extracurricular, by 86%. Forty-four percent of participants described the adult culture of the

school system as learning focused, using the terms "professional" or "very professional." Twenty-seven percent viewed Carroll City Schools as superior to other systems in terms of professionalism of staff and student achievement.

Additionally, with regard to values as manifested by adult behaviors, 37% of the sample of participants described the adult culture of the school system as one in which staff members experience considerable job-related stress owing to increased teacher accountability for student performance, regardless of student aptitude, motivation, or behavior. Increased clerical and data collection requirements, dealing with increasingly difficult student behaviors, and top-down administrative dictates and constraints with regard to curriculum and teaching practices were also identified as contributors to the stress levels of faculty members and support staff. In terms of support, most participants indicated that the administrators at their own schools were supportive of teachers.

Research Question #2

What are the roles of students, teachers, administrators, parents, the media, and government educational policy in the formation of school culture?

Students. Fifty-four percent of those interviewed stated that peers have a more profound impact on the values and behaviors of students, and therefore on the school culture, than do any other entities or groups. Peers were perceived to influence the types of activities, both in and out of school, in which students engage. This concept is supported by the work of Dolcini and Adler (1994) who found that peer-group membership is related to at-risk behaviors by students, as well as the work of Haynes, Emmons, and Comer (1993) who found that student interpersonal relationships were closely tied to student behaviors. Further, the participants identified a student's status among peers as having a direct bearing on the student's attitude

toward school, including motivation for or against academic achievement and appropriate behaviors.

Student Popularity. Participants indicated that a student's social status with his or her peers influenced the way he or she was treated, not only by peers but also by school faculty and staff. Thirty percent of participants reported that students who were popular with other students were also popular with faculty and administrators. Athletes and cheerleaders were noted as members of elite groups who sometimes received preferential treatment from teachers and administrators. Social status was reported to be linked to the income level of the family, a student's physical appearance, a student's academic ability, or a student's participation in extracurricular activities. Some participants indicated that students from select groups were perceived to be given more leniency in terms of having contraband food items, cell phones, assignment due dates, and others.

Teachers and Administrators. Teachers and administrators were identified as having a major influence on the culture of schools as supported by Peterson and Deal (1998). The primary impact of teachers and administrators on the culture was found to be through their interaction with students; whereas, a secondary impact was perceived to result from teachers' interactions with all other adult stakeholders. Listening to students and treating them with fairness and respect were frequently noted as necessary elements for a positive school culture; however, with regard to the interactions of teachers and administrators with students, some participants said that those adults in the school system tended to treat students differently based on either parental support, student popularity, or both.

In response to the interview question, *"Can teachers or administrators have an impact on the student social system?"* 63% responded that the adults in the school system could influence the social status of students either positively or negatively, again based on how the

adults interact with the students. Some examples of ways in which teachers and administrators could positively impact the status of a student were as follows:

1. Place a lower-performing student in a study or project group with higher-performing students, and then facilitate the workings of the group so as to assure that the lower-performing student is a full participant.
2. Actively recruit low-SES students and other marginalized students into band, clubs, sports, and other activities. There was consensus that both band and athletics were avenues for a student's possible transition from one level of social status to another.
3. Carefully place some students who struggle academically in honors-level classes; then monitor and support them so that they can participate and succeed with students who are academically stronger.
4. Treat lower-SES students and other marginalized students with, not just kindness, but also with respect. Take opportunities to genuinely and appropriately ask questions of and compliment those students in front of other students.

Parents. Parents were viewed as having an impact on school culture in several ways.

1. As voters in local elections, parents were perceived to exert influence on school board members and on school administrators in terms of policies, curriculum issues, and administrative issues, and ultimately on teachers who do not want parents to contact school board members with complaints.
2. The values of parents in terms of academic aspirations and support for their children was identified as an influence on school culture.
3. The values and beliefs of parents in terms of what constitutes acceptable discipline for their children were perceived to influence the culture of schools. Some participants noted a trend over time among parents toward less discipline for their own children. Several participants described the overall culture of schools as one of

permissiveness. For example, one teacher cited two parents who would not allow their son to remain after school to complete work that he had not completed during the school day. This was a service of the school, commonly referred to as "The Power of I," designed to allow any student to complete unfinished work for the purpose of keeping up in class as well as improving grades. The parents noted refused to allow their son to participate at any time and for any reason in this recovery activity because they feared the child would see the opportunity as a punishment. To the parents, any academic value to be gained by completing assignments was neutralized by even the possibility of the child's perception that he was being punished for failure to complete work, an unacceptable concept to them because they viewed their child's failure to complete work as a trait of his disability.

Twenty-eight percent of teachers and administrators indicated that a child from a family of middle-to-high socioeconomic status was likely to receive significant parental support; therefore, teachers and administrators tended to be more lenient with these students in some regards, thereby influencing the educational experiences of the students. For example, some participants said that teachers were more likely to do things such as providing extra grade opportunities, allowing alternative assignments, or extending deadlines if they believed that a child had substantial parental support. Some participants also reported that administrators were likely to meet out lighter disciplinary measures to children from the middle to upper classes than to poorer children, precisely because the children of the middle and upper classes had parents who typically knew their rights and knew how to advocate for their children.

Media. Media, entertainment in particular, was seen to influence school culture because it influenced society in general, especially young people. Violent films and video games were identified as negative influences on students' values and behaviors as supported by the research of Anderson et al. (2003) and thus on the culture of schools according to the participants in this

study. Technology itself was identified as having both positive and negative influences on school culture. The access to information, collaboration, coursework, and a myriad of other opportunities open to students through the use of technology were cited as positive influences that have brought about rapid change in the culture of schools. On the other hand, a negative impact was perceived in the amount of time that students spend participating in some type of technology-related entertainment rather than studying or reading. Excessive text messaging was viewed as having a negative influence on students and therefore on school culture, particularly when messaging takes place during class and distracts students from learning. One teacher also speculated that text messaging is ruining the spelling skills of students. An even darker side to the influence of technology on school culture, that of cyber-bullying and character assassination, was mentioned by several participants.

Government. Government was identified by 69% of participants as having a major influence on the culture of schools. Both teachers and administrators acknowledged the growing role of the government in the administration of schools over time. The ESEA, RTTT, and IDEA were the examples of government regulation of schools most cited by participants.

Participants viewed governmental regulation as both positive and negative. Of those who commented on funding, the consensus was that, whereas federal and state funding are inadequate, without federal and state funding, it would be impossible for local school systems to operate, at least in a form that compares to the programming and services provided to children today.

On the other hand, participants expressed angst with regard to the NCLB and RTTT acts as they are tied to funding and possibly to teacher evaluations. Eighty-one percent of those who referred to the NCLB law considered it unreasonable in terms of expectations for some teachers as well as for some students. Specifically, the concern was that holding the same rigorous expectations for all students, regardless of ability or parental support, is unrealistic and forces

too much instructional concentration on the lowest performing students and too little on the middle and top performing students. Teachers and administrators expressed fear with regard to the way RTTT will be implemented because the details are still unknown. Because their livelihoods are now tied to student performance, several teachers conceded that most of their energy will necessarily be spent on getting as many students to pass the standardized tests as possible. Participants felt that creativity in the classroom has already suffered as a result of unreasonable regulatory expectations. All participants expressed in some form the belief that all students can learn. Their concern with some of the requirements contained in NCLB and RTTT was precisely that, although all students can learn, they cannot all learn the same things or at the same pace. Twenty-nine percent of participants saw both the NCLB and RTTT as major contributors of stress to the overall school culture in that government pressures local administrators, administrators pressure teachers, and teachers pressure students, all in an effort to meet the student performance requirements of those two major educational initiatives. This is significant because none of the interview questions directly addressed either the NCLB or RTTT.

Regarding long-term impact on the culture of schools, the Individuals with Disabilities Act was viewed by participants as having a positive influence on student access to education and a generally negative influence on student behaviors. Forty-one percent of those interviewed identified increased access to education for students with disabilities as a positive outcome of the legislation; however, many participants, including those who noted positive results from the IDEA, also saw the impact on school culture of the regulations tied to this legislation as substantially negative in one or two regards: (a) the impact on individual student behaviors, and/or (b) the gradual change in the culture itself. Specifically, those respondents who tended to perceive a negative impact on the culture derived from the IDEA saw that negativity as the

result of across-the-board disciplinary protections for students of all disability categories, regardless of the nature or degree of impairment accompanying the disability.

Research Question #3

What do respondents perceive as positive aspects of school culture that impact student behavior? Does the literature regarding school culture support these perceptions?

Put simply, the educational experiences of students were viewed by the participants in this study as having a significant impact on the long-term behaviors of students. Among the positive influences of school culture on the behaviors of students was the current focus on respect for diversity, attention to academic standards and achievement, and current trends in the teaching of problem solving. Some participants gave specific examples of school experiences and programs that positively impact the long-term behaviors of students. One example provided was that of the service learning initiative currently in place. Selected middle school and high school students, particularly those with disabilities and behavioral issues, participate in service learning. Marked improvement in student behaviors was noted by participants familiar with these programs, and a number of the participants expressed a perception that the social skills acquired by students in these programs may be life-long assets that will help these students function in the adult world.

The current trend in school culture involving cooperative learning among students was also referenced by some participants as having a positive impact on students' abilities to work cooperatively in adult life. Having high achieving peer role models at school was noted by some participants as having a positive impact on students' academic and behavioral motivations.

Research Question #4

What do respondents perceive as negative aspects of school culture that impact student behavior? Does the literature regarding school culture support these perceptions?

The impact of the IDEA on school culture was viewed as a negative influence in some regards on the behaviors of students, particularly during the past 2 decades. Overwhelmingly, participants indicated that the overall concept, that of access to education for students with disabilities, of the IDEA and special education was both positive and necessary. Access notwithstanding, an unintended consequence of this legislation was perceived to have been a pervasive influence on the culture of schools owing to the protections of the IDEA for special education students, regardless of the nature of the disability, who had exhibited unacceptable behaviors. Because special education students have been protected from disciplinary sanctions as described in Chapter 4, an overall tolerance of unacceptable student behaviors was perceived to have permeated the culture of schools according to participants. Despite opportunities during the interviews to do so, only one participant noted the disciplinary protocol outlined in the IDEA as having had a specific positive impact on the behaviors of students that may have carried over into their adult lives. That one participant stated that the procedures of completing behavioral assessments and behavioral plans for students with disabilities would hopefully help those students learn to solve problems in the world of work or education beyond high school.

Participants in this study worried that the limited and largely ineffective disciplinary consequences for unacceptable behaviors that special education students (specifically those with behavioral as opposed to cognitive disorders) have experienced, and by extension that all students have experienced as the resulting paradigm of the IDEA, has negatively influenced school culture which, in circular fashion, has influenced student behaviors. Many participants felt that the current paradigm will leave students unprepared for the very different set of consequences that they will encounter in life after high school. Participants also felt that the unintended and harmful consequence of the IDEA on students' educational experiences as related to behavioral learning has not been addressed as an issue precisely because no one wants to be seen as unsympathetic to students with disabilities. Only the uniform treatment of

disparate disabilities was seen as problematic, particularly because a number of the diagnoses recognized as disabilities by the IDEA will not meet the threshold necessary to mitigate certain behaviors in the adult world of work and the court system.

Participants also indicated that adult stress related to other governmental mandates contained in the NCLB and RTTT acts have had a negative impact on the whole of school culture, thereby impacting student behaviors, particularly academic motivation. One teacher described that particular phenomenon in this way: "Forced feeding tends to decrease the appetite."

Summary of Results

The results of this qualitative study indicate that participants selected from a small school system in Northeast Tennessee generally expressed that school culture has changed over time, particularly during the past 2 decades, to a culture that is likely to have both positive and negative long-term impact on students' values and behaviors. The changes in the culture were viewed as the result of societal changes as well as of governmental mandates. Parental support, peer relationships, and student-adult relationships were all seen as having significant impact on school culture and, therefore, on the educational experiences and behaviors of students.

Positive influences of school culture on student behaviors were identified as teacher and administrator attitudes and behaviors in terms of respectful treatment of all students as well as an increased attention to supporting academic achievement and a sense of belonging for all students. The IDEA was identified by participants as having had a positive impact on school culture in terms of increased student access to learning.

Negative influences were identified in student involvement with some types of media, particularly violent films and games. A lack of parental involvement in schools, particularly with regard to parents of lower-SES students, was viewed as a negative influence on the culture and on student behaviors. The IDEA was the governmental mandate most directly linked to

cultural changes that have resulted in a culture that is more accepting of student misconduct, thereby negatively affecting students' behaviors. The NCLB and RTTT were also viewed as negatively impacting the culture in terms of stress placed on adults as well as students. The topic of possible negative impact of the IDEA on students' learned behaviors and thus on their educational experiences was deemed very sensitive, and none of the participants wanted to be identified as having expressed this view.

Implications for Stakeholders

My motivation for this study was a desire to assess whether identified elements of school culture may in any way help to explain the behaviors of students. My hope was to shed light on any connection that might exist between school culture as the learning environment and primary societal influence on adolescents to both the positive and negative behaviors of some students. An awareness of cultural elements in schools as potential influences on the developing psyche of students would be an important step in the direction of correcting perceived flaws and supporting perceived successful elements of the culture so as to ultimately help students to learn to overcome problems in ways and contribute to student success in schools.

Primary stakeholders in this research study are parents, students, the educational community, and the general community. Given that the literature supports the precept that the educational experiences of children influence their self-concept and resulting behaviors, the implications of this study are far reaching.

There is no question that arrests for most categories of criminal activity by youth have been in decline for more than a decade. Although it is possible to find correlations in the culture to the decline in juvenile crime, direct causality is unknown. Some of the cultural changes that have occurred since the rate of juvenile crime peaked and then began to decrease in 1994 are as follows: increased cultural focus on parenting skills; anti-violence, anti-bullying, and good character programs in schools; a deliberate curricular focus on diversity and acceptance in

schools as evidenced by changing staff development offerings and textbook revisions; a mandate from NCLB that school systems increase graduation rates, thereby keeping students in school longer; passage of the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 instituting zero-tolerance policies for drugs, weapons, and assaults resulting in serious injury in most states; state-mandated alternative education programs, increased surveillance capacity both in schools and virtually everywhere else in society; changes in juvenile sentencing laws in many states, allowing juveniles to be tried as adults. The list could go on indefinitely, but the point here is that these are all changes that occurred in American culture during the past decade. Some of these changes have been welcomed by the educational community, and others have not; but the extent and nature of their impact on the youth of our country, whether positive or negative, would be very difficult to measure and indeed has not been determined.

A suggestion for stakeholders is to get involved in an assessment of the culture of our schools that includes an examination of the way school personnel interact with students of all socioeconomic and academic groups. If some groups are being marginalized, steps should be taken to change the situation to enable more students to feel they are a vital and respected part of the school community. If the culture is one that is leaving children with the impression that there are no meaningful or long-lasting consequences in life for misconduct, then those elements of the culture need to be changed as well, so that the world view of the students is humane and realistic. If the current culture of the school does not teach students the value of personal accountability, then change is required. If negative elements of school culture derive from government as indicated by the interview responses, then stakeholders need to first admit the problem, explain it to the public, and then lobby for appropriate adjustments in regulations so that students who need protection are protected and students who need to be held accountable are held accountable.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research study culminated in an enhanced understanding of the elements of school culture that school personnel perceive as influences on student behaviors, both in the short and long term. The study confronted sensitive issues, and the information gleaned from the study can prove valuable to all stakeholders in that it may help effect positive change in the culture of schools and in the resulting influence the culture exerts on the behaviors of students. This study resulted in the discovery that teachers, administrators, and other school personnel perceive that school culture, over time, has become more tolerant of inappropriate and even aggressive acts by some students while, at the same time, the culture successfully supports the implementation of problem-solving techniques and positive behavior supports for most students.

A qualitative study consisting of interviews with school personnel, by its nature, cannot prove causality in terms of positive or negative influences on school culture. The nature of such a study is to chronicle the perceptions of participants who have valid and informed perspectives regarding the topic, thereby adding to the knowledge base of qualitative information. Because this study is relatively uncommon in nature, recommendations are made for further research in this field that may lead to improved educational experiences for students and, in turn, influence students' behaviors, both in and out of school, in positive ways.

The first recommendation for further research is that additional studies assessing the perceptions of school personnel of impact of the IDEA on the culture of schools be conducted.

The second recommendation for further research is that a longitudinal study be conducted following general education students with behavioral problems and special education students with behavioral disabilities, specifically attention-deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and emotional disturbance, across a variety of settings and geographic regions from kindergarten through 12th grade, tracking behavioral problems and interventions and their effectiveness.

A complimentary study conducted in a different school system from a different region of this state or another state would help to provide reliability to this study. Questions similar to those asked in this study might be included, with added follow-up questions designed to ascertain, from among those who state that there has been a decline in acceptable student behaviors and an increased tolerance for some misbehaviors over time in schools, the reason for this increased tolerance. For example, one might ask if school personnel perceive that the added costs of implementing mental health programs in schools for qualifying students with disabilities has been a deterrent to providing these services.

This study was based on a small sample size from one school system. Broadening the study to include additional populations and research objectives would add reliability and validity to the results rather than relying solely on the perceptions of school personnel from one system. This type of research would provide a broader scope of understanding of the problem and therefore offer more possibilities for improvement in the educational experiences of all students, particularly insofar as the quality of students' educational experiences are tied to their behaviors.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

Spring 2010

Introduction to Participant: Please read carefully the following information pertaining to the research project in which you are being asked to participate. Sign Informed Consent only if you freely give your permission to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this Informed Consent document for your records.

Researcher: Linda Cox Story
Student, Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
East Tennessee State University
423-378-2169

Purpose of the Study: To explore elements of societal elements manifested in school culture that may illuminate the violent behavior of students.

Request for Participation: The researcher requests your voluntary participation in this study. Your participation is strictly voluntary, and you do have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without impunity. In addition, you have the right to withdraw your words from this study at any time without impunity.

Research Description and Procedures: The researcher will interview employees of Carroll City Schools currently serving as administrators, teachers, counselors, and other staff. The researcher will ask the interviewee questions concerning the educational environment and school culture including special education programming and policies and their effects on student behaviors. Data collected from the interviews will be used to develop a theoretical framework explaining the impact of school culture on student behaviors.

Duration of Research Participation: You will participate in one interview of approximately 30 minutes during the spring of 2010.

Possible Risks or Discomforts: There are no known risks or discomforts that will result from your participation in this study.

Confidentiality: Your name will not be used on the audiotape, the final printed transcript, or the final research report. Only the researcher will know of your participation in this study. The audiotape and transcripts will be destroyed on completion of the data analysis phase.

Method of Recording Interview: The researcher will tape record your interview to ensure complete recall of the interview. The tape will be transcribed on completion of the data analysis phase.

Right of Refusal: You may refuse to participate in this study without impunity.

Right to Withdraw: You may withdraw from this study at any time without impunity. You may withdraw your words from this study at any time without impunity.

Feedback and Benefits: You will receive a copy of the final research report to review. The benefit of your participation in this study is to share with scholars and policymakers your opinion about elements of school culture that may illuminate the decisions made by some students to commit acts of violence.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423/439/6002 or 423/439/6002. You may also contact me, the researcher, at the address and number above with any questions about the research or about your rights as a voluntary participant.

_____ _____

Signature of Voluntary Participant Date of Participation

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

1. Would you please share with me your current position with the school system and how many years you have been in this position and in the field of education?

2. How would you define the term "school culture"?

3. What in your opinion are the major influences on school culture?

4. How would you describe the culture of Carroll City Schools at the level at which you teach or in general?

5. Do teacher attitudes toward students, toward each other, and toward the school system influence the culture of individual schools?

6. Describe the student social class system in your school.

7. What are the factors that help maintain the student social class system as it now exists?

8. How does the student social class system influence student behaviors if at all?

9. Can teachers or administrators have an impact on the student social system? If so, how?

10. Is discipline fairly administered at your school? Explain.

11. Describe any trends in student behaviors that you have noticed during your career and comment on when these changes appear to have occurred. Comment on changes in the behaviors of both the general and special education student populations.

12. Describe your experiences with teaching special education students.

13. Is there a disability (or disabilities) that you have found more challenging to work with than others?

14. All special education disabilities carry the same legal protections with regard to disciplinary sanctions by school authorities. Is this fair? Do you have suggestions for a better system?

15. Should any disabilities be removed from the umbrella of behavioral protection?

16. Should special and general education students be disciplined differently?

17. In your opinion, what, if any, is the impact of special education law on school culture?

18. In your opinion, what, if any, is the impact of special education law on student behavior?

19. Do you believe that school culture influences student behaviors? If so, how?

20. Please share anything else you would like to share related to this topic.

APPENDIX C

Letter to Superintendent of Schools

December 14, 2009

Dr. Andrew Holcomb, Superintendent of Schools
2100 West Elm Street
Carroll, Tennessee 37664

Dear Dr. Holcombr:

Please accept this letter as a formal request to conduct interviews with administrators, teachers, counselors, and other staff in Carroll City Schools. In addition to being the Director of Special Services for Carroll City Schools, I am also a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University. The research interviews will be the foundation for the completion of my doctoral dissertation. My doctoral dissertation is a case study exploring the societal elements manifested in school culture that affect student behaviors, particularly violent behaviors. The title of the project is *A Study of the Perceived Effects of School Culture on Student Behaviors.*

Interviews will focus on a cross section of educators with both limited and extensive experience in the field of education. The interviews will be semi-structured to allow for a broad range of responses from participants. Once the interviews have been conducted and transcribed for this study, all tapes will be destroyed. The names of the interviewees and schools or other identifying items will not be disclosed. Participants will be free to withdraw consent or discontinue participation at any time during the study. All participants will have signed an informed consent document.

At the conclusion of the study, a report will be generated to communicate the findings. This information could prove beneficial to Carroll City Schools and to all school systems in that it will provide insight into the cultural influences on student behaviors. Copies of the report will be made available to you.

Please feel free to contact my doctoral advisor, Dr. Terrence Tollefson, or me if you have any questions or would like further information. Dr. Tollefson's office number is 423-439-4430.

Sincerely,

Linda Story
Doctoral Student
East Tennessee State University

APPENDIX D

Letter from Peer Debriefer

Carroll, TN 37664
423-378-2169

June 14, 2010

to Whom It May Concern:

I served as a peer reviewer for Linda Cox Story during her work on her dissertation, "A Study of the Perceived Effects of School Culture on Student Behaviors." To ensure credibility, we discussed the entire process of the study throughout its evolution.

During the progression of this qualitative study, Linda and I discussed aspects of her work pertaining to all areas of her research activities. I provided inquiry and feedback related to methodologies as well as to the accuracy and completeness of data collection and analysis. My perspective was that of a qualitative researcher having recently completed a similar process. I had both the insider's perspective of a teacher in a school system currently under study and the outsider's perspective of an educator with no direct responsibility for or stake in the topic explored in the study. From this dual perspective, I was able to understand the concepts of the study while maintaining a disengaged interest in its outcome.

I am confident that the treatment of data in this study is valid and that the conclusions and recommendations are supported by evidence extrapolated from the data. I am happy to have had the opportunity to participate in this research process.

Yours truly,

Karen Reed-Wright, Ed.D.

APPENDIX E

Letter from Peer Reviewer

TO: Linda Cox Story
FROM: Peggy Rochelle, Ed.D.
SUBJECT: External Review of Selected Dissertation Analyses
DATE: 01/16/10

Thank you for providing a draft copy of your dissertation, *A Study of the Perceived Effects of School Culture on Student Behaviors*, for my review. I have completed an external review of your findings. Based on my involvement with the students and adults forming the culture in the school system, I see how the findings of this study accurately describe the culture of this school system and its perceived impact on the behaviors of some students.

Your presentation of the data, rich description of the process, and extensive data analysis and findings show the elements of the culture of Carroll City Schools in clear detail. Your notes clearly emerged from collective responses of participants and were supported within the literature review and throughout your body of research.

The reflective component of the study clearly shows your passion for understanding influences on student behaviors as well as the relevance of the topic for quality professional development for teacher efficacy. At the same time, I am confident that your research was conducted in a manner that presents an unbiased view of the impact of various elements of the culture on student behaviors.

The results of your research clearly indicate the great value of examining the elements of school culture and designing appropriate staff development for the purpose of improving practice. It is my hope that this topic is further expanded in an attempt to improve cultural experiences and behavioral outcomes for students.

I am glad to have had the opportunity to review your study and to participate in your research process.

Best wishes through the next steps of your journey.

Sincerely,

Peggy Rochelle, Ed.D.
Caarroll City Schools
Teacher of the Year, 2010

VITA

LINDA COX STORY

Place of Birth: Jacksonville, Florida

Education:
Science Hill High School, Johnson City, Tennessee
University of Tennessee
B.A., Elementary Education, 1977
Vanderbilt University
M.Ed., English Education, 1984
University of Tennessee
Ed.S., Curriculum and Instruction, 1992
East Tennessee State University
Ed.D., Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, 2010

Professional Experience:
Elementary Teacher
Cheatham County, Tennessee, 1977-1980
High School Teacher/English
Cheatham County, Tennessee, 1980-1988
Teacher Evaluator (on loan from school system)
State of Tennessee, 1988-1989
Vice Principal
Sevier County High School, 1989-1998
Director of Special Services
Carroll City Schools, 1998-Present

Honors and Awards:
University of Tennessee, magna cum laude
TASSP, Tennessee Assistant Principal of the Year, 1996
Leadership Carroll Class of 2001
Tennessee Career Level III Teacher, current