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Exploring A New Path For School Climate & Safety Assessment

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EXPLORING A NEW PATH FOR SCHOOL CLIMATE & SAFETY ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

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The passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001, ushered in a new era of federal oversight in state educational accountability systems. While the act may have succeeded in identifying schools in need of support and creating data systems to help inform parents and assist educators in establishing clear and consistent goals, the state accountability systems created under this law were widely criticized for their narrow academic focus and failure to include the holistic and multifaceted nature of school quality. In response, the federal government replaced NCLB in 2015 with The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The new law included a provision widely referred to as the "Fifth Indicator" of student success, which was to be non-academic in nature. To address this indicator in state accountability plans, the federal government specifically recommended several strategies, to include measures of school climate and safety. Despite this recommendation and despite decades of research to support its inclusion, only a handful of states have adopted such measures. As a result, schools and districts in most states are left to develop their own systems of school climate assessment and improvement.

The primary purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the efforts of a single Florida school district in their quest to develop such a system. The Sunshine School District (SSD) had begun looking at innovative ways to assess and improve school climate as the ESSA was passed. An instrument had been developed that was loosely based on research and had not been tested in school settings. This instrumental case study provided an in-depth examination of

the literature and an analysis of archival data to help refine the instrument and prepare it for a pilot test in nine district schools. Through this study, a follow-up focus group with pilot participants was conducted to determine whether the instrument held promise as a means to assess school climate and safety, as well as drive improvement. Analysis of the data revealed participants found the instrument to be flexible, useful, and effective – particularly as it pertains to the assessment of school climate and safety practices and establishing improvement goals. The analysis additionally revealed the instrument can be lengthy and may not be equally applicable to all schools and grade levels. Although the instrument needs further refinement, pilot participants reported it to still be effective and beneficial as an informal assessment and improvement tool.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

It is an unquestioned right that all children in America have access to a quality education. However, the concept of what a quality education entails varies from state to state, as evidenced by the indicators found across systems of educational accountability. Collectively, these state systems of accountability have been criticized on several fronts – particularly in failing to capture the multifaceted nature of school quality (Gagnon & Schneider, 2019). Each of these state systems includes standardized test scores, as well as other academic measures such as graduation rates or the narrowing of achievement gaps (Schneider, Jacobsen, White, & Gehlbach, 2017). However, the majority of these systems exclude other critical non-academic indicators of quality, which can have the effect of discouraging improvement practices at the school level (Cohen, 2014), as all resources and instructional time become dedicated to what is being measured. Not including indicators that address safe and positive learning environments which optimally support the healthy social and emotional development of our children not only fails to address a complete picture of school quality in the accountability system, it also represents an unjust denial of our children's unquestioned rights (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). In addition to these failures, many current systems have been criticized for holding schools accountable for measures that are largely out of their control and not for the many purposes and multiple aims they advance through a variety of interconnected practices (Gagnon & Schneider, 2109). A great number of these practices fall under the umbrella of what is commonly referred to as school climate.

School climate is by no means a new concept, as it has been the subject of educational research dating back more than a century (Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016). Despite this

lengthy presence under the microscope of researchers, there is still no universal agreement on what the concept of school climate entails, or how it should be defined (Cohen et al., 2009). In 2007, the National School Climate Council defined school climate as the "quality and character of school life" (p. 1). However, this eloquently simple definition belies an extremely complex phenomenon. Wang & Degol (2016) further describe school climate as representing "virtually every aspect of the school experience, including the quality of teaching and learning, school community relationships, school organization, and the institutional and structural features of the school environment" (p. 315). School climate also includes the norms, values, and expectations that support stakeholders feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe (Cohen et al., 2009). The U.S. Department of Education (ED) states that a positive school climate is the product of a school's effort to foster safe and supportive academic, disciplinary, and physical environments; and building respectful, trusting, and caring relationships throughout the school community.

Most models of school climate incorporate a multi-faceted construct of safety in their core structure. Because of this centrality and likely due to its importance in today's schools, the term safety is commonly found separate and alongside "climate" to emphasize its critical inclusion. Such references are found throughout the literature (Cornell et al., 2017; Kostyo et al., 2018; Kutsyruba et al., 2015) and used by organizations such as the National Association of School Psychologists, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the American Institutes for Research. The ED also refers to the construct of school climate and safety as a way for states to address the non-academic indicators of school quality in recent federal legislature (Cornell et al., 2017). Following suit, this study refers to the concepts of *school climate* and *school climate and safety* equally in the sections and chapters to follow.

Beyond the various qualities and constructs it represents, school climate has shown to have a significant impact on important student outcomes (Zullig et al., 2015). Although they acknowledge inconsistent findings across studies, Voight & Hanson (2017) note that most studies have found that generally, a more positive school climate promotes higher academic performance. Further, Berkowitz, Moore, Astor, and Benbenishty (2016) found that overall, a positive climate led to an increase in academic achievement among all students, but especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds - offering powerful evidence for school climate as a moderating influence with our most underserved populations. Beyond academic outcomes, Cohen et al. (2009) note that "a sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributive, and satisfying life in a democratic society" (p. 182). Staying with that same societal benefit, Wang & Degol (2016) argue that a "high-quality school that meets the psychological, physical, and cognitive needs of its students is a school that will produce better-educated citizens to take on the problems of tomorrow" (p. 343). Whether it involves increases in academic achievement, helping students reach their unique potential, or providing the foundation for a democratic society, school climate has proven its centrality to quality schooling and its value to the core mission of public education.

Since 1963, when Halpin and Croft began to systematically study the effects on student learning and development, the evidence to connect school climate with academic achievement and a host of other desirable youth outcomes has continued to grow. By the late 1970s, Brookover and colleagues determined that school climate was positively linked to outcome differences between schools, even when adjusting for race, SES, and other demographics (Zullig, Koopman, Patton, & Ubbes, 2010). Over the years, many other important outcomes have been correlated with a positive school climate and include decreased student absenteeism in middle

school and high school (de Jung & Duckworth, 1986; Durham, Bettencourt, & Connolly, 2014; Gottfredson, G. & Gottfredson, D., 1989) and lower rates of student suspensions in high school (Durham et al., 2014; Hough, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2017; Lee, Cornell, Gregory & Fan, 2011; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982). Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Debnam, & Lindstrom-Johnson (2014) noted that school climate is also a significant predictor of rates of dropout, drug use, and violent and aggressive behavior. These same relationships were also presented by Durham et al. (2014), Gage, Larson, Sugai, & Chafouleas, (2016), and Kopischke-Smith, Connolly, & Pruseski, (2014). Other outcome data such as lowered rates of bullying (Bradshaw et al., 2014; Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016) and lowered teacher turnover rates (Cohen, 2009; Thapa et al., 2013) have also been correlated with positive school climates.

There are now hundreds of empirical studies that clearly demonstrate it is possible to translate research findings into safer schools that promote achievement and an array of other positive outcomes (Cohen et al., 2009). Bradshaw et al. (2014) also noted the decades of research showing that a positive school climate provides the conditions for learning and directly translates into a range of positive academic and behavioral outcomes for students. This powerful body of research has helped school climate gain significant traction among policymakers, educators, and the broader public as an increasingly important educational aim (Hough, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2017; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D' Alessandro, 2013; Voight & Nation, 2016).

School climate and safety have now become so definitively linked to school success and positive outcomes that it is recommended by the federal government as a way for states to address what is colloquially known as the "fifth indicator" of school quality and student success in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA guidelines released in 2015 mandate the use of at least one non-academic measure in their accountability plan to include student engagement,

educator engagement, student access to and completion of advanced coursework, post-secondary readiness, or school climate and safety (Hough et al., 2017). Despite this open invitation and direction provided by the federal government and despite the decades of research definitively linking school climate to several critical outcomes, only eight states selected a school climate and safety measure in their approved accountability plan (Kostyo, Cardichon, & Darling-Hammond, 2018). Why?

Statement of the Problem

Traditional means of assessing school climate focus on measuring the perceptions of stakeholders - primarily through the use of student and staff surveys. This method has produced numerous valid and reliable assessment instruments, as well as widely recognized models that define and break down school climate into essential core components - commonly referred to throughout the literature as domains. However, this method is also the source of widespread disagreement in deciding what should be measured when it comes to school climate and has likely contributed to the failure of states to include school climate and safety measures in their accountability plans. After decades of building a vast body of research, there remains a wide variance in the construct of school climate models and no agreed-upon universal definition (Kutsyuruba, Klinger, & Hussain, 2015; Thapa et al., 2013). These challenges are due in part to the inherent complexity of school climate and the difficulty of finding agreement on definitions, models, and dimensions that address the many facets that it incorporates (Thapa et al., 2013). This problem "has stymied and continues to stymie the advancement of school climate research [that is] so necessary to inform school improvement efforts. In addition, it hampers the development of the field in general and measurement practices in particular" (p. 370). It would appear the discord involving the various models and definitions of school climate may play a

role in the widespread exclusion from state accountability models. However, this variance and disagreement among models is not the only possible contributing factor – nor is it the only issue faced by school climate assessment.

Using self-reports or surveys to assess school climate has also received criticism. These surveys rely on the perceptions of stakeholders, which are subject to a variety of influences – particularly those of students. Research has shown student responses to climate surveys may be influenced by their immediate mood, classroom experiences, peer attitudes, or a recent incident that might compromise their overall assessment of the school (Hough, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2017; Wang & Degol, 2016). Using student self-reports to assess the perception of school-level conditions was also seen as an important validity concern by Wang and Eccles (2013) since students might answer questions about their own behavior or that of their teacher in ways that they perceive to be socially desirable. Duckworth and Yeager (2015) first noted that student self-reports may be inaccurate because participants may misinterpret questions or may give misleading answers that they think they should be giving. Duckworth and Yeager also noted the process that students must undertake in responding to self-report questions. This progression requires students to "(1) first read and understand the question, then (2) search their memories for relevant information, (3) integrate whatever information comes to mind into a summary judgment, (4) translate this judgment into one of the offered response options, and finally, (5) edit their response if motivated to do so" (p. 240). This process demonstrates the possibility for errors at multiple steps. In addition to unintentional errors, the results of school climate surveys can also be manipulated or "gamed" by school officials, especially as those data may provoke higher-stakes consequences (Melnick, Cook-Harvey, & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The authors argue inaccurate assessment may occur by stressing to students the importance of

favorable results or even inflating their own responses on staff surveys - providing significant latitude for the accuracy of the results to be compromised.

In addition to these concerns, Cohen et al. (2009) noted several glaring gaps between research findings and state departments of education, school climate policy, and practice guidelines. These gaps included the inability to link school climate data to improvement plans and technical assistance. Piscatelli & Lee (2011) also found that although 27 states offered some type of school climate technical assistance to schools and districts, only three mandated such assistance be provided. The authors additionally found that most of the technical assistance provided by states consisted of a listing of "web resources and occasional webinars or training opportunities" (p. 5). A sampling of state departments of education websites reveals substantial growth in state agency oversight and guidance in school climate and safety in the intervening years. However, just before the release of the ESSA, Cohen (2014) suggested several major factors continue to prevent meaningful school climate improvement from being realized, to include educational policies and accountability systems that actually discourage principals and superintendents from actively supporting school climate reform. Even after the ESSA, Melnick et al. (2017) noted the continuing need for states to provide technical assistance for program development, professional development, and funding to support school climate improvement efforts. In the absence of such accountability, policy, guidelines, and assistance from state agencies, it can be challenging for schools to address climate in a sustained and systemic way. For those schools and districts making this attempt on their own, it can remain difficult to connect climate data to improvement plans. Having to translate the data derived from school climate surveys that are based on how students and staff feel increases the difficulty of that task.

Conceptual Framework

Despite decades of research (Bradshaw et al., 2014; Cohen et al., 2009; Zullig et al., 2010) and the federal government's recommendation, only eight states ultimately incorporated measures of school climate and safety in their ESSA response plans and accountability models for schools (Kostyo et al., 2018). The failure of states to include such measures in the face of overwhelming evidence and direction has forced districts and schools across the country to develop innovative approaches to accountability and improvement. This study explores the efforts of a single Florida school district to develop such a system. The district's attempt to assess and improve the climates of their schools may be predicated on the development of a unique instrument that measures practices and activities across a broad range of school climate and safety domains. The instrument under development by the district offers a possible alternative to current assessment methods and addresses many of the criticisms that potentially prevent indicators of school climate and safety from state accountability systems.

Chapter Two includes an examination of current and pertinent literature on school climate with the intent of uncovering gaps and issues with existing methods of assessment. These challenges are due in part to the inherent complexity of school climate and the difficulty of finding agreement on definitions, models, and dimensions that address the many facets that it incorporates (Thapa et al., 2013). Other important issues include the difficulty in assessing feelings and perceptions on self-reported survey items (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015; Hough et al., 2017; Wang & Degol, 2016), the potential for intentional influencing of responses by school staff (Melnick et al., 2017), and the issues involved with applying user-level responses to assess school-level characteristics (Konold & Cornell, 2015; Wang & Degol, 2016). The role of these challenges in the continued omission of school climate and safety measures from state

accountability plans might be significant, but it is ultimately not known. What is known, however, is these challenges represent opportunities to advance the field and spark the exploration of innovative approaches for assessing and improving school climate and safety.

The instrument that is the focal point of this study shifts the point of school climate assessment from the perceptions of stakeholders to the activities and practices conducted in schools. It is argued that measuring school-based efforts may address several of the challenges and criticisms that potentially inhibit the widespread adoption of school climate measures in state plans. It is further argued that such a shift also has several other practical implications. The potential benefits of shifting the point of assessment include a more consistent and comprehensive system of assessment; eliminating the need for translating survey results into action plans; and perhaps most importantly, a more direct path to adopting best practices and evidence-based approaches - driving school climate improvement.

The improvement effort undertaken by the district in this case study centered on increasing the number of best practices and evidence-based approaches in school climate and safety for all their schools. Although a prototype instrument was developed to assess existing school efforts, it was not informed by extensive research and had not yet been evaluated through a pilot study. To help refine and prepare the instrument for piloting, the district did seek input on its design from leading school climate and safety researchers. This feedback also included their thoughts on attempting to measure school climate through the activities and practices found in schools, as compared to stakeholder perceptions. This study used an extensive examination of existing school climate models found throughout the literature to further inform and refine the instrument under development, in order to optimally prepare it for piloting in district schools. Along with the feedback from expert researchers, a focus group interview was conducted with

the pilot participants to determine whether the instrument holds promise as a practical and effective tool to assess school-based efforts and guide improvement. The argument behind this study asserts that by measuring the number and quality of best practices and evidence-based approaches across all domains of school climate, the efficacy of implementing additional practices aimed at improving school climate will be more intentional. This supposition follows the adage that "what gets measured gets done." It is further asserted that an increase in the number and quality of best practices and evidence-based approaches conducted in schools directly impact the perceptions of stakeholders, leading to improvements across the spectrum of school climate and safety. This underlying connection between the practices of a school and the resulting climate is also supported by Practice Theory, which provides the lens through which this study was viewed.

Theoretical Support

According to Nicolini (2012), Practice Theory is centered on the premise that the creation and perpetuation of all aspects of social life rely on human activity. This applies even to social structures such as family, authority, institutions, and organizations, which are all "kept in existence through the recurrent performance of material activities, and to a large extent they only exist as long as those activities are performed" (p. 3). Practice theory emanates from the research of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu whose original work represented an attempt to bridge the gap between subjective first-person accounts of behavior and objective third-party observations (Maggio, 2017). However, this work contained the idea that social life is a contingent and ever-changing texture of human practices (Nicolini, 2012). Although Practice Theory is distinguished by five primary tenets, it is Nicolini's first argument that human activity, performance, and work creates and perpetuates all aspects of social (and organizational) life, which underpins the focus

of this study. This lens of Practice Theory would argue that the perceptions of stakeholders (students, staff, and parents) are the direct result of conducting activities and practices that are correlated to safe and positive school climates. It is hypothesized that how well and to what extent these practices and activities are carried out within a school will generally determine the perceptions of its members.

Because no existing research could be found that applies Practice Theory to any construct of school climate and safety, it serves to only support the initial supposition that school climate – the quality and character of school life - is largely a product of school-based human activities and practices. While this offers an important theoretical backing to the position taken by this study, it does not speak to how practices and activities can be assessed, what elements such an assessment instrument should include, or the promise such a method might hold as a practical way to guide improvement efforts. Exploring the answers to these questions is at the heart of the research conducted for this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the construction of an instrument under development in a Florida public school district that is designed to both assess the activities and practices conducted in their schools and guide school climate and safety improvement efforts. The name of the instrument evaluated through this research study is the *Transformational Assessment of School Quality* (TASQ). This study did not seek to establish whether the TASQ accurately predicts or correlates with a more positive school culture. It is intended only to explore whether it is possible to develop a logically-sound instrument (based on practices and activities) that can address known gaps and challenges of existing school climate assessment instruments, be practical for use by school leaders, demonstrate promise as a way to assess

school climate, and drive improvement efforts. Through a comprehensive review of the most relevant and current literature, examination of existing data collected by the district, and a focus group interview with the school staff who piloted the TASQ, conclusions were reached for each of these queries.

The review of the literature frames the study, provides theoretical support, explores the various issues that exist with current methods of assessment, and better describes how the TASQ could be constructed and what elements it should logically include. Before the TASQ was piloted by the district, data from the review of existing models and input from leading researchers in the field solicited by the district were analyzed to help establish credibility for the approach and refinement to the instrument. The piloting of the TASQ was then conducted by the district in volunteer schools. Following the pilot, the focus group interview took place with school leaders who piloted the TASQ to provide an in-depth exploration of their experiences in using the instrument. The experiences of the leaders who participated in the pilot helped to determine whether the TASQ is suitable for measuring objectives and Key Performance Indicators for the district strategic planning process and guiding improvement efforts across all schools. The pilot was intended to not only assess the number of high-quality school climate and safety practices already being conducted in the participating schools but also to determine the usefulness of the TASQ and whether it can assist in the implementation of additional evidence-based approaches and best practices.

Through an analysis of existing school climate models, feedback from experts in the field of school climate and safety, and the experiences of the school leaders piloting the TASQ, this study sought to determine whether an effective and practical instrument can be developed to measure the breadth and quality of school climate practices and guide improvement efforts.

Ultimately, it is the aim of this study to also provide a foundation for the construction of a valid and reliable instrument to measure school climate and safety that educational agencies may find worthy of incorporating into their systems of accountability.

Research Questions & Design

The purpose behind the study resulted in the formation of three specific research questions that inform and guide the research:

RQ₁: What distinct domains and target areas are necessary to construct the TASQ and how should they be organized?

RQ₂: How do experts in the field of school climate research describe the use of the TASQ as an instrument to assess school climate and safety and guide improvement practices?

RQ₃: How do the experiences of the school leaders who conduct the TASQ pilot study reflect its potential as an effective, useful, and practical instrument?

Delimitations

The scope of this study is bounded by the purpose, research questions, and design. The first delimitation involves the approach taken by this study to only explore the possibility that school climate and safety can be legitimately assessed using practices and activities. This study does not seek to establish whether the TASQ accurately predicts or correlates with a more positive school culture. It is intended only to explore whether it is possible to develop a logically-sound model that can address known gaps and challenges of existing models, be practical for use by school leaders, and is worthy of future studies to determine validity and reliability. Rather than attempt to develop a valid and reliable instrument, then correlate the

results with other established measures of school climate, such as survey results or outcome data, it was decided an exploratory approach should be taken.

Because this instrumental case study design focused on the efforts of a single school district that is developing and piloting a unique instrument, it necessarily includes only staff from the schools participating in the pilot. Volunteer participants were solicited from each of the pilot schools through the use of a total population sampling technique. The schools asked to pilot the TASQ could have been expanded by the district to include charter or contract schools. However, because the instrument is being considered for measuring objectives in the district's strategic plan and to assess practices in district schools, charter and contract sites were not considered for the pilot and consequently for the study.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study, introduced by its design, focus, and scope. Because this study is confined to the experiences of using the TASQ in a single Florida school district, it limits participant perspective on assessing the phenomenon of school climate. A second limitation is the use of focus groups, rather than individual interviews with school leaders who participated in the pilot. Although this likely aided in reducing the amount of data to be transcribed, it potentially limited the responses each participant had within the group setting. Another disadvantage to focus group interviews is the possible outcome of *groupthink*, described by George (2013) as "a hazard common in groups when participants may censure or withhold information for the sake of conformity" (p. 261). Additionally, not every participant responded to every question asked in the focus group, thus limiting the range of responses on each item. This setting also introduced the possibility of researcher bias influencing the design of the semi-structured interview protocol, the facilitation of discussion itself, and the coding of the

transcription. A final limitation is the scope of the study has inherently excluded any attempt to determine whether the TASQ is a valid and reliable instrument that can be compared with currently accepted measures of school climate. This research study should instead be viewed as the first step in exploring the possibility that school climate and safety can be practically and effectively assessed through evaluating the practices and activities conducted in schools.

Assumptions

This study carries with it several critical assumptions. First, it is assumed that if a logically-sound and practical instrument can be developed using existing models as a basis, that the instrument has the potential to be both valid and reliable. Even if the TASQ is found to be logical, practical, and addresses the known gaps and challenges that face existing models, future studies may be unable to validate an instrument that measures the self-reported practices within a school. A second important assumption is that if the TASQ was eventually found to be a valid and reliable instrument, it will also be suitable for use in state accountability systems. The guidelines for current models of accountability provided by the ESSA may not permit the use of an instrument such as the TASQ - primarily due to the inability to disaggregate the data based on student subgroups and individual performance.

In conducting this study, it is also assumed that the feedback from experts, as well as the feedback from school leaders involved with the pilot study was open, honest, and free of bias. It is unknown whether feedback from experts on the TASQ conflicts with their personal views or infringes upon work they are associated with. It is important to remember that many of the experts who were solicited have all contributed to the research behind existing models of school climate and assessment instruments. Likewise, it is understood that school leaders involved in the pilot may have viewed the TASQ as one more "task" added to their plates. Excessive time or

effort needed to complete a comprehensive assessment may have impacted the integrity of their responses or documentation to support their responses.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study carry multiple implications. Educators who seek to actively improve the climate and safety of their schools may ultimately have a practical instrument capable of assessing what they already do, how well they do it, and where they have an opportunity to bring evidence-based approaches or best practices to their school. The TASQ assesses practices across eight broad domains and 27 target areas, combining the domains and subdomains of the most widely used and cited instruments currently used to measure school climate. By assessing the practices under each target area and larger domain - and the level to which those practices are conducted – school leaders are immediately able to recognize where opportunities for improvement exist, in addition to the specific practices or activities they may be able to implement. This eliminates the need for translating school climate data that can be time-consuming and burdensome for schools (Kostyo et al., 2018).

Ultimately, however, the findings of this study offer the potential to blaze a new path in school climate and safety assessment that addresses the gaps and issues present with current methods. The review of the literature presented in Chapter Two shows how research has shaped the currently accepted methods of school climate assessment and contributed invaluable knowledge to the field of study. However, it remains true that the current methods of assessment have also failed to gain the broad support necessary to be included in most state models of accountability (Kostyo et al., 2018). Perhaps that broad support might be garnered by holding public schools and institutions of education accountable for not just the academic achievement of

our children, but also for what they do to help ensure their safety, well-being, and optimal development. This study explores the first steps in reaching such a vision.

Definition of Terms

Accountability (System) – the set of policies and practices that a state uses to measure and hold schools and districts responsible for raising student achievement for all students, and to prompt and support improvement where necessary. Accountability systems have two closely related parts: 1) a way of signaling how well schools are doing (like A-F grades, or 1-5 stars) and 2) the actions that must result from those ratings, including rewards or recognition for high-performing schools and districts, and resources, supports, and interventions for those that are struggling. (The Educational Trust)

Academic Achievement – Learned proficiency in basic skills and content knowledge. (McCoy, Twyman, Ketterlin-Geller, & Tindal, 2005)

Best Practice – The wide range of individual activities, policies, and programmatic approaches to achieve positive changes in student attitudes or academic behaviors (Educational Opportunity Association Clearinghouse).

Dimensions of School Climate – The complex sets of elements that make up school climate. (Cohen & McCabe, 2009)

ED – United States Education Department

Evidence-Based Approach (or Practice) – Refers to any concept or strategy that is derived from or informed by objective evidence—most commonly, educational research or metrics of school, teacher, and student performance. (Glossary of Educational Reform)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) – A U.S. law passed in December 2015 that governs the United States K–12 public education policy. The law replaced its predecessor, the No Child Left

Behind Act (NCLB), and requires states to have at least one non-academic indicator of school quality or student success (US Department of Education).

NSCC – The National School Climate Center

Practice Theory – The theory emanating from the research of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who proposed that the creation and perpetuation of all aspects of social life rely on human activity. (Nicolini, 2012)

School Climate – The multi-dimensional construct describing the quality and character of school life (National School Climate Center).

Conclusion

This study explores the promise of assessing school climate and guiding improvement efforts through an instrument called the TASQ - which measures the breadth and quality of practices and activities conducted in schools. The data collected and analyzed from a comprehensive review of the literature, the analysis of pre-existing data collected by the district, and the experiences of school leaders involved in a pilot study will inform the continued development of the TASQ and help determine whether it is suitable as a strategic assessment instrument for the district. It is the intent of this study to further advance the school climate and safety improvements of the district and to also forge a path for future research to possibly establish the validity and reliability of the TASQ. The remainder of the study is organized into four additional chapters, as well as a bibliography and appendices. Chapter Two presents a review of the literature that identifies the gaps and challenges with existing models of school climate assessment, as well as an analysis of how these models are constructed. The review of the literature is intended to provide background information and frame the case study, as well as directly inform the refinement of the instrument. Chapter Three delineates the research design

and methodology of the study. In this chapter, the justification for the design of the study will be provided in addition to a description of the site, sampling techniques used, data collection and analysis procedures, limitations of the study, and ethical considerations made. An analysis of the data previously collected from the expert feedback and the focus group of pilot study participants, as well as a discussion of the findings are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter Five contains the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

School climate can be defined as the "quality and character of school life", encompassing the norms, values, and expectations that support stakeholders feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe (Cohen et al., 2009). Wang & Degol (2016) describe school climate as representing "virtually every aspect of the school experience, including the quality of teaching and learning, school-community relationships, school organization, and the institutional and structural features of the school environment" (p. 315). Over the past 50 years, research has increasingly linked school climate to academic achievement and a host of other important youth outcomes (Bradshaw et al., 2014; Cohen et al., 2009; Zullig et al., 2010). Traditional methods of assessing school climate most often center on measuring the perceptions of stakeholders - primarily through the use of student and staff surveys (Wang & Degol, 2016). This method has produced numerous valid and reliable assessment instruments, as well as multidimensional models that overlap significantly in their definitions and construction. However, these models of school climate and the instruments developed to measure the construct remain the source of widespread disagreement. This level of discord in the field, along with its host of contributing factors is likely one reason only eight states have included school climate and safety measures in their ESSA accountability plans (Kostyo et al., 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Despite any agreement on the impact a safe and positive school climate has on desired outcomes or the overlap in various models, decades of research has failed to resolve definitional and conceptual challenges in positioning school climate as a meaningful construct (Kutsyuruba, Klinger, & Hussain, 2015; Thapa et al., 2013). These challenges are due in part to the inherent

complexity of school climate and the difficulty of finding agreement on definitions, models, and dimensions that address the many facets that it incorporates (Thapa et al., 2013). Thapa et al. (2013) further recognized how such problems impact both school climate research efforts and how that research, in turn, informs school improvement efforts on the ground. Rudasill, Snyder, Levinson, and Adelson (2017) also note that various descriptions of school climate "form a virtual grab-bag of characteristics", and include examples such as teacher assignment patterns and leadership structure (Lee & Shute 2010), school maintenance and appearance (Esposito 1999; Kuperminc et al., 1997), overarching customs and values (Fan et al., 2011), academic emphasis (Goddard et al., 2000; Lee & Bryk 1989), fairness and clarity of rules (Gottfredson et al., 2005; Rodgers & Rose, 2001; Welsh et al., 1999), and the relationships between staff, students, parents, and administration (Esposito 1999; Fan et al., 2011; Koth et al., 2008). Clearly, school climate has been established as a complex multidimensional construct across a vast body of research.

The issue of complexity is also a concern when it comes to school climate assessment. The traditional method of assessing school climate centers on the use of self-reports or surveys – most commonly from students and staff. These surveys rely on the feelings and perceptions of stakeholders, which are subject to a variety of influences – particularly those of students. Research has shown student responses to climate surveys may be influenced by their immediate mood, classroom experiences, peer attitudes, or a recent incident that might compromise their overall assessment of the school (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015; Hough, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2017; Wang & Degol, 2016). Duckworth and Yeager (2015) also questioned the accuracy of student self-reports, due to the cognitive process that students must undertake in responding to such questions.

Wang & Degol (2016) in turn argued that using aggregated individual student self-reports may not represent an accurate method to measure the climate of a school. The authors noted that because each student's views about the school are based on personal characteristics, individual interactions, and perceptions of the organization, it "might be inappropriate to aggregate student perceptions to construct an average school climate score for assessing school effects" (p. 336). This same issue was also noted by Konold and Cornell (2015), who argued that potential errors and problems of measurement may exist when student-level analyses are used to infer school-level characteristics. In addition to these unintentional influences, Melnick et al. (2017) also pointed to the reality that results of school climate surveys can also potentially be influenced by school officials – either through the coaching of students or their own responses to staff surveys. Together, these challenges with using student self-reports or the feelings and perceptions of stakeholders cast a shadow on their ability to accurately measure the climate of a school – and perhaps contribute to the dearth of school climate and safety measures in state and local accountability systems. It must be noted that this study does not advocate for the replacement of stakeholder surveys. Their collective voice must be heard and as noted by Cohen et al. (2009) is critical for sustaining improvement efforts and transforming schools. This researcher instead argues that practices and activities become the assessment point for accountability purposes.

Conceptual Framework

The National School Climate Center (NSCC) defines school climate simply as the quality and character of school life. Cohen et al. (2009) stated this definition is further based on patterns of student, parent, and school personnel experiences of that school life, as well as the "norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (p. 182). This definition not only begins to touch on the various components of

school climate, but it also reflects the primary way in which it is traditionally measured –
through the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders. These perceptions are what is largely
measured when assessing school climate, especially as it pertains to the use of surveys and
questionnaires.

Although these instruments are the most prevalent form of assessment (Wang & Degol,
2016), other methods such as school audits, focus groups, walk-throughs, checklists, other
observational strategies, and even outcome data such as student Grade Point Averages (GPAs),
attendance rates, and disciplinary referrals are also used (Kohl, Recchia, & Steffgen, 2013). The
use of these additional methods supports the notion that school climate and safety exists as more
than just the perceptions of stakeholders. Even if it might be agreed that the perceptions of
students and staff are the best way of measuring school climate and safety, these attitudes are not
simply created out of the ether, nor formed in isolation. Although there are many internal and
external factors impacting the feelings and perceptions of stakeholders - particularly students –
(Duckworth & Yeager, 2015; Hough et al., 2017; Rudasill et al., 207; Wang & Degol, 2016), this
study suggests the perceptions of stakeholders are largely shaped by the number and quality of
the practices and activities that are conducted in their schools.

By moving the point of school climate assessment from the perceptions of stakeholders to
the activities and practices conducted by schools, the problems associated with self-reports and
surveys can be mitigated. Again, it is not known what factors inhibit the widespread adoption of
school climate measures in state accountability plans, but this method addresses one potential
obstacle. Such a shift in assessment also has several other practical implications. These potential
benefits include a more consistent and comprehensive system of assessment; eliminating the
need for translating survey results into action plans; and perhaps most importantly, a more direct

path to adopting best practices and evidence-based approaches – which in-turn drives school climate improvement. Following the adage that "what gets measured gets done", a key idea behind this study asserts that by measuring the number and quality of best practices and evidence-based approaches across all domains of school climate, it will incentivize the implementation of additional practices.

No such instrument or process for assessing school climate and safety practices was located throughout the literature that would allow for this assertion to be tested. However, a school climate improvement effort underway in a Florida school district offers an opportunity for conducting case study research to explore whether a practical instrument can be constructed to measure and test the arguments behind this study. The district improvement effort is centered on increasing the number of best practices and evidence-based approaches in school climate and safety across all member schools. To potentially assist with this improvement effort, an instrument that would later become known as the Transformational Assessment of School Quality (TASQ) was under development to measure the practices within schools. However, the instrument was not informed by extensive research and had not yet been evaluated through a pilot study. The district did take steps to prepare the instrument for piloting that included consulting with several leading school climate and safety researchers regarding its design and practicality. This confluence of location, timing, and circumstances created an opportunity to not only further inform the development of the TASQ but to also study the feedback collected from researchers and the experiences of school leaders who participated in a pilot study of the instrument. Through an analysis of these data sources and a comprehensive review of the most relevant literature, this study uncovered the information necessary to determine whether the

TASQ holds promise as an innovative and practical way to assess school climate and safety, as well as drive improvement efforts in schools.
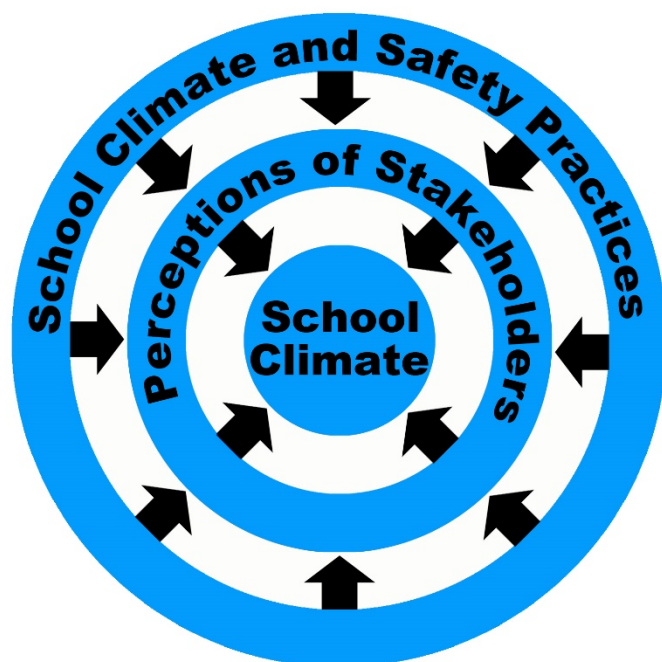
Figure 1. The Conceptual Model Behind the TASQ.

The Purpose of the Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to assemble a comprehensive collection of recognized school climate models and instruments, to examine the various assessment methods used, the domains found across models, and the outcomes these domains and practices have been positively correlated with. The review of literature is also used to identify issues that exist with traditional assessments of school climate or where opportunities for improvements may be presented by shifting the point of assessment to practices and activities. The bulk of literature collected spanned the years from 2009 to 2019 and sought to frame and fuel the purpose of this study, provide theoretical support, and directly address the study's first research question of:

(1) What distinct domains and target areas are necessary to construct the TASQ and how should they be organized?

      This research question reflects a shift in the point of measurement, compared to traditional school climate assessment instruments or models. Abundant research exists that divides school climate into various interrelated categories or domains. However, nearly all studies base these domains on the self-reported perceptions of school climate by stakeholders (generally students and staff) or social-emotional competencies that are strengthened within students (Melnick et al., 2017; Wang & Degol, 2016). This study will instead explore the domains of school climate and safety through the lens of the activities and practices undertaken in schools. In this proposed model, domains are identified based on their capacity to serve as a major category for distinct activities and practices to be conducted. The domains on the TASQ are based largely on traditional models, such as those developed by the NSCC and the U.S. Department of Education (ED). In addition to these widely-cited frameworks, a research-based model known as the 5Essentials, the Authoritarian School Climate model, an analysis of 41 school climate surveys found in the Compendia of Reliable and Valid Instruments developed by the ED, and 66 empirical or meta-studies were used to fully address the first research question. The Threat Assessment Model developed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Secret Service, as well as the evidence-based Comprehensive Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) were also studied, to incorporate best practices in violence prevention and safety.

The Methodology of the Literature Review

      The frameworks and models that were selected for examination in this study were used based on the prior knowledge of the researcher and due to their prevalence in school climate and

safety literature. To help identify existing studies and additional sources relevant to the research questions, a comprehensive search was conducted using the University of New England Online Library and Google Scholar. The keywords used in the search parameters included *Dimensions of School Climate*, *School Climate Models*, *School Climate Assessment*, *School Climate and Safety Assessment*, *School Climate Measurement*, *School Climate Assessment/Measurement Challenges, Issues and Gaps in School Climate Assessment, School Climate and Accountability, School Climate and Safety Practices*, *School Climate Best Practices*, and *School Climate Evidence-based Practices*. Original studies using quantitative analysis of school-level data and meta-analysis of other empirical studies proved to be the most common method employed across the collected literature. The 66 studies included in this collection were selected from an original group of 79 that were reviewed, due to their direct alignment to the research questions, level of rigor, and their applicability across school grade levels and socio-economic conditions. The literature review provides theoretical support for this shift in assessment by searching for theories related to the impact of human activity on perception. One such theory was located.

Theoretical Support

According to Nicolini (2012), Practice Theory is centered on the premise that the creation and perpetuation of all aspects of social life rely on human activity. This applies even to social structures such as family, authority, institutions, and organizations, which are all "kept in existence through the recurrent performance of material activities, and to a large extent they only exist as long as those activities are performed" (p. 3). Practice theory emanates from the research of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu whose original work represented an attempt to bridge the gap between subjective first-person accounts of behavior and objective third-party observations (Maggio, 2017). However, this work contained the idea that social life is a contingent and ever-

changing texture of human practices (Nicolini, 2012). According to Nicolini, no unified theory of

practice exists and it should instead be viewed as a "family of theoretical approaches connected

by a web of historical and conceptual similarities" (p. 1). These theories are distinguished by five

tenets that are shown in Figure 2 below.

The Five Tenets that Distinguish Practice Theories	
1	That all practice theories foreground the importance of activity, performance, and work in the creation and perpetuation of all aspects of social life.
2	Practice theories bring to the fore the critical role of the body and material things in all social affairs.
3	Practice theories carve a specific space for individual agency and agents.
4	Knowledge is conceived largely as a form of mastery that is expressed in the capacity to carry out a social and material activity.
5	All practice-based approaches foreground the centrality of interest in all human matters and therefore put emphasis on the importance of power, conflict, and politics as constitutive elements of the social reality we experience.

Figure 2. Five Tenets that Distinguish Practice Theories

Although no research could be found that applies Practice Theory to school climate, each

of these five tenets can be related to the concept. It is the first argument, however, that human

activity, performance, and work creates and perpetuates all aspects of social (and organizational)

life, which supports the focus of this study. The tenets of Practice Theory argue that the

perceptions of stakeholders (students, staff, and parents) are the direct result of conducting

activities and practices within schools that are correlated with safe and positive school climates.

It is hypothesized that how well and to what extent these practices and activities are carried out

within a school will largely determine the perceptions of its members. Although these feelings

are influenced by several factors that extend far beyond the walls of a classroom or physical

structures of a school, they effect findings in established method of using surveys to assess perceptions of school climate and safety (Hough et al., 2017; Wang & Degol, 2016). Reducing those influences from school climate and safety accountability models should be viewed as one of several potential benefits realized by measuring practices and activities, rather than feelings and perceptions.

The Case for Improved Assessment

Shifting the unit of measurement to the activities and practices undertaken in schools has several practical implications. First, the change may help researchers overcome the noted inconsistencies and disagreements in what aspects of school climate should – or can be measured (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015; Hough et al., 2017; Wang & Degol, 2016). Regardless of the variance within existing definitions, this study posits that using the activities and practices that correlate with safe and positive school climates as the unit of measurement creates a more comprehensive and reliable system of assessment. It can be presumed that most schools conduct activities and practices that lead to positive student outcomes and competencies – whether as complex as the use of a school-wide curriculum or as simple as publicly displaying exemplars of student work. How well and to what extent schools implement these practices across a broad spectrum can be consistently measured from school to school. Activities and practices are easily substantiated through documentation or other evidence that they are taking place within a school. Observational data, such as the School Quality Reviews used by the New York City Department of Education, have also been used to substantiate tangible activities and practices undertaken by schools to assess climate and culture (Kostyo, Cardichon, & Darling-Hammond, 2018). In New York City's model, teams of outside observers conduct two-day walk-throughs of a school, using

a performance rubric to guide observations of classrooms, discussions with stakeholders, and examine supporting documentation and data (NYC Department of Education, 2019).

If schools are to be held accountable for their climate and safety by states and Local Education Agencies (LEAs), then it makes sense that they should be evaluated on tangible criteria that can be measured across all schools – not the hard-to-measure feelings or competencies of stakeholders that are subject to a wide array of influences. These influences are typified by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Rudasill et al., 2017), which demonstrated safe and positive school climates are the product of an interwoven tapestry of activities and practices that occur both within and outside the school. These influences and those previously identified by Duckworth and Yeager (2015) may skew school scores on climate surveys. Wang and Degol (2016) pointed to problems with using the aggregated data of individual responses in accurately assessing a school's climate. They noted that, because each student's views about the school are based on personal characteristics, individual interactions, and perceptions of the organization, it "might be inappropriate to aggregate student perceptions to construct an average school climate score for assessing school effects" (p. 336). Wang and Degol also discussed the problem of diverging opinions when the perspectives of two or more groups are surveyed, giving rise to the question of which view is more reliable, "since different reporters represent different levels of influence" (p. 334). The authors also noted that survey data "provides a gross estimation of the degree of agreement or disagreement to item questions and overlooks the why and how of participants' responses" (p. 333). The "why" and "how" are exactly what the TASQ seeks to measure.

It is not difficult to argue that schools should be celebrated for the number of best practices they intentionally embed into the daily routines of their school to foster the safety, well-

being, and healthy development of their students. Despite the proliferation of state accountability models that lack school climate and safety measures (Kostyo et al., 2018), many schools find the time to weave these critical practices and activities throughout the fabric of their community. Such practices are ordinarily quite easy to document in a variety of different ways. Whether they take the form of curricula evaluations, professional development offerings, minutes of meetings, memos, school improvement plans, teacher lesson plans, or the collection and analysis of student outcome data, there exist myriad ways to document and verify the activities and practices undertaken in schools. As further evidence to support the pursuit of shifting the focus of school climate measurement, Thapa et al. (2013) suggest that future studies examine school climate from multiple perspectives, including "experimental, quasi-experimental, and correlational…and as much as possible integrate process and outcome concepts into time-sensitive analyses" (p. 37). Gagnon and Schneider (2019) noted the number of influential groups and prominent academics that have strongly advocated for the inclusion of multiple measures in determinations of school success. If nothing else, this study represents an attempt to search for a different type of measurement that may bridge the gap between research and practice.

The Increased Need for Best Practices in Safety and Violence Prevention

Beyond accountability, the tragic reality thrust upon public schools in the 21st Century also demands a prioritization of violence prevention and safety. The federal, state, and local response to the continued proliferation of shootings and other acts of violence in our schools must address every facet of the problem, from the physical security of our buildings to the perceptions of safety felt by our students, staff, and parent populations. Kingston et al. (2018) noted the existing research that consistently finds a comprehensive approach to school safety, integrating scientific evidence and school-based strategies offers the greatest potential for

preventing youth violence. However, "schools and communities continue to encounter enormous challenges in articulating, synthesizing, and implementing the complex aspects of a comprehensive approach to safety" (p. 433). As the safety of our schools becomes increasingly important to society – particularly with state and federal legislators – it becomes more important to examine where resources should be allocated and what strategies are proven to be successful.

The National Education Association (2019) noted that, while educators, school leaders, and school safety experts are championing proven best practices, state and federal legislators have committed $800 million to equipment and other school security expenditures over the next decade. Despite the enormous spending, physical security measures represent but one small piece of the overall puzzle. It must also be considered that it is possible to negatively impact school climate and perceptions of safety with too much security (Lindstrom Johnson, Bottiani, Waasdorp, & Bradshaw, 2018). Instead, schools' efforts should be balanced and focus on a range of best practices that also include school-wide Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) practices to address issues such as student rejection, isolation, exclusion, and unresolved trauma.

The early identification and treatment of students in need of mental health services has also been cited as a key practice (National Association of School Psychologists, 2018). The reality behind acts of mass violence in our schools is that in the majority of incidents, the threat is not from someone outside the school, but rather a student who is a past or present member of the school community. Often, these students exhibit warning signs or even overtly announce their intentions through letters or social media posts. Any measure of physical safety in our schools must address the proactive steps taken to train students and staff on what to look for and how to respond to the warning signs and potential threats they may encounter. While those valid and reliable survey instruments can measure stakeholder perceptions of feeling safe at school,

this study makes the argument that they cannot speak to the proliferation or fidelity of best practices that actually keep schools safe. This could have potentially grave consequences. Students and staff may report feeling safe, but that might largely be due to no threat arising that compromised or challenged those feelings. Conducting best practices in safety and security – which may be largely invisible to stakeholders in the first place – can help to ensure those areas are not eventually compromised and any feelings of safety are well placed. Thapa et al. (2013) also noted the study by Cornell, Sheras, Gregory, and Fan (2011), which found schools where threat assessment guidelines were followed, students reported less bullying, felt more comfortable seeking help, and possessed more positive perceptions of school climate. Additionally, these schools had fewer long-term suspensions.

Threat Assessment

Cornell's Threat Assessment model grew from a Federal Bureau of Investigation conference in the aftermath of the Columbine shooting in 1999 and became mandated in all Virginia schools following the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in Connecticut (Cornell & Maeng, 2018). This adoption across all Virginia schools offered an opportunity to conduct randomized controlled studies in 40 school settings, due to staggered training and implementation. In 2013, the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (VSTAG) became the first form of threat assessment recognized as an evidence-based practice in the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (Cornell & Maeng, 2018). Cornell found that students who made threats of violence in schools using the VSTAG were approximately four times more likely to receive counseling services and two-and-a-half times more likely to receive a parent conference than students in wait-list control schools (Cornell, Allen, & Fan, 2012).

Additional quasi-experimental studies showed students in schools using the VSTAG model reported less bullying at their school, greater willingness to seek help for bullying, fewer threats of violence, and more positive perceptions of school staff than students in control schools. Additionally, school records indicated that there were significant reductions in both short and long-term suspensions that importantly were lower for both white and black students in schools using the Virginia Guidelines, substantially reducing the racial disparity in long-term suspensions (Cornell, 2019).

The results of Cornell's multiple studies using the VSTAG model demonstrate that the actual implementation of best practices in violence prevention not only have a significant impact on student perceptions of school climate and safety but also in reducing negative consequences and violent outcomes. Cornell's VSTAG model was later renamed the Comprehensive Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) and in 2019, was adopted across the state of Florida for all 67 public school districts, as part of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act (Florida Department of Education, 2019). Cornell (2018) also noted that a U.S. Secret Service and Department of Education study of 37 school shootings conducted in the wake of Columbine strongly supported the use of threat assessment, which was broadened by Fein et al. (2002) to include "a general prevention effort aimed at establishing a positive, caring school climate that would reduce problems of peer conflict and bullying that often preceded violence" (p. 117). When it comes to physical safety and security, the practices undertaken in schools are critical and we need to be mindful that practices generally do not take place in the absence of accountability or funding. It is also important to note the evolution and spread of practices such as threat assessment tend to be reactive responses to tragic acts of violence in our schools.

Bridging the Gap Between Research and Practice

In addition to assessing what a school does and how well they do it, the TASQ is intended to foster more approaches rooted in research across the school climate spectrum. Because specific evidence-based approaches or best practices are used as the benchmark for achieving the highest possible score for each question item on the TASQ, school leaders are not only assessing their current efforts, they are at the same time provided with the approach or practice needed to improve. The focus on activities and practices also reduces the burden of translating the results of school climate surveys into action plans. Kostyo et al. (2018) recommended that districts and states support schools in interpreting school climate data through specific training on data collection and analysis as well as the implementation of high-quality programs and professional development. Such breadth demonstrates that translating school climate survey data can be a daunting task. The ability to link school climate data to improvement plans and technical assistance was also among several gaps identified by Cohen et al. (2009). It can be difficult to connect research or stakeholder self-reports regarding the quality of relationships, feelings of connectedness, or the fairness of rules to the activities or practices that are supposed to foster such perceptions. This difficulty is compounded when schools are not supported with guidance, technical assistance, and professional development, or must seek out costly school climate measurement suites that connect their survey results to general action plans. Kirkland et al. (2017) proclaimed "the evidence is clear: school systems can only be as strong or effective as the support systems surrounding them" (p. 2). In such a landscape, Rudasill et al. (2017) noted that school practitioners are left with little pragmatic guidance on how research might guide interventions in their schools.

Meaningful school climate improvement demands a significant amount of time and resources, generally over a 3 to 5-year period (NSCC, 2019). It stands to reason that streamlining the school improvement process by directly connecting the assessment score to a visible action step would save substantial time – particularly over the multiple years involved with the improvement process. By assessing the actual activities and practices in the various domains and target areas derived from traditional models, it allows school leaders to more readily see where their efforts can be improved across the spectrum of school climate. Instead of attempting to ascertain what steps are necessary to improve the perceptions of stakeholders or having to interpret results through pre-packaged action plans, school leaders can directly determine to what extent they might (for example) carry out student recognition activities on their campus or how many students are reached with an evidence-based social skills program across all grades. When those activities and practices become the metric of assessment, there is no need for translation of climate surveys, no need for professional development on how to interpret data, no cost necessary in purchasing pre-packaged measurement suites, and a direct path from accountability score to action plan. When considering the adage of "what gets measured gets done" it becomes critically important to move the point of assessment toward the action plan.

If such an assessment is to improve all facets of school climate (despite any disagreement in what that might entail), then it must address the practices and activities across a broad spectrum of domains. Another gap in the existing literature is noted by Voight and Nation (2016), who found there has been "no comprehensive synthesis of the empirical evidence for what works in school climate improvement" (p. 174). By identifying a multitude of domains and target areas extracted from an examination of the most widely used and supported school climate models or surveys, then assessing the possible activities and practices under each area, it is

posited that more research-based approaches will be incorporated across the spectrum. Such a holistic composite of leading models is an attempt to address the comprehensive synthesis that Voight and Nation (2016) found to be lacking in the research. To further that point, the TASQ also includes domains and target areas that are not ordinarily associated with traditional school climate models, such as data collection and analysis, professional development activities, and the inclusion of school climate goals in policy and strategic planning. This also helps to address the gap between research findings and school climate policy, practice guidelines, and teacher education practice identified by Cohen et al. (2009).

Savings of Time and Resources

Survey instruments that seek to gather the perceptions of all stakeholder groups can be time-consuming, expensive, and logistically cumbersome (Rudasill et al., 2017). Costs associated with surveys can range from the purchase of the instrument to the administration, collection, analysis, and translation of the results (Kostyo et al., 2018). Whether the cost is measured in either time or dollars matters not, as both are scarce resources in public education – particularly as it relates to non-academic pursuits. Wang and Degol (2016) noted the expense of surveys, particularly when they involve surveying multiple groups, such as students, staff, and parents. However, there are free valid and reliable surveys available through the ED and whenever possible schools should take the time to survey their stakeholders. When it comes to expeditiously assessing climate however, having a school-based team evaluate the breadth and depth of the activities and practices conducted on their campus is a far easier task to undertake and demands few resources. It should be acknowledged that this type of assessment could conceivably run the spectrum from a simple checklist to a full-blown process evaluation for

every activity conducted. Somewhere in the middle is where this study seeks to travel – a place where the ease of use and time to complete intersect with meaningful measurement.

Developing a Flexible Assessment Instrument

With these implications in mind, the overarching goal of the study is to explore the potential of an instrument that school leaders can use to readily assess the various activities and practices that target areas correlating with safe and positive school climates. The TASQ is not intended to eliminate the need for valid and reliable school climate surveys. The collective voices of stakeholders not only must be heard, but they also provide a valuable means to assess whether the activities and practices undertaken in schools are having their desired effect. Their aggregated perceptions are at the heart of an organization's climate, and the subjective impressions of its members become the reality that climate seeks to describe (Steffgen et al., 2013). However, the central argument made by this study is those perceptions are not the unit of measurement that schools should be held accountable for.

As previously noted, what schools proactively do to address climate and safety also holds tremendous importance. Whether school leaders are committed to implementing climate and safety practices, or district and state leaders are committed to holding schools accountable and guiding their efforts, the TASQ offers both a formative and summative assessment opportunity that is not practical with survey instruments. Due to the comparative ease of completing the TASQ, school leaders can assess activities and practices at the beginning of an academic year to see where opportunities for improvement exist. The same instrument can then be used to measure any increase in the proliferation or quality of research-based activities and practices at the end of a year. In this same light, the TASQ is also suited as an implementation guide for schools and districts when planning strategically for school climate and safety efforts. Most

schools conduct a great many activities and practices that directly contribute to a positive and safe school climate. Some of these practices may be a component of larger, comprehensive programs, such as Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS), while others are isolated or common practices that have been embedded within the culture of the school (such as student awards assemblies). All of these practices matter, and school leaders should consider the efforts they already undertake as they strategically plan for the improvement of their school climate. Using an instrument such as the TASQ, district leaders can obtain a baseline score for all schools to highlight what they are already doing well and to help shine a light on where improvement efforts should lie.

The TASQ also offers flexibility in how it is conducted, particularly as compared to school climate surveys. Generally, school climate surveys are taken at a single point in time and involve the dedication of classroom instructional time or staff planning time (the time it takes to complete the survey, which is usually no more than 30 minutes to an hour). However, there is also a dedication of significant resources involved in setting up the surveys, analyzing the results, and interpreting the results into action plans (Kostyo et al., 2018). The TASQ instead may be completed by a single school leader or ideally, a small team of school leaders and be completed over the course of several days or weeks, if necessary. This diffusion of burden on staff time and resources, despite the comprehensive assessment across eight broad domains of school climate, has significant implications for the practicality of the instrument.

Assessing school climate through the measurement of activities and practices also potentially serves as a more direct means of improving stakeholder responses on traditional school climate surveys. As more states add reliable and valid school climate survey instruments to their ESSA response plans, the TASQ ties directly to the domains measured on the most

widely used surveys and instruments. By focusing on activities and practices that directly impact the perceptions of stakeholders in these same domains, school leaders may identify a more effective means of improving their overall school climate survey responses. Used in this way, survey data and scores on the TASQ offer multiple data points for a deeper understanding of a school's climate, addressing another gap identified in the literature (Gagnon & Schneider, 2019; Gagnon et al., 2013).

Shifting the focus of school climate and safety from the perceptions of stakeholders to the activities and practices conducted in schools appears to have many potential benefits and may address critical gaps identified in the literature. Two of the most prevalent issues found across studies were the disagreement on what should be measured in school climate and safety and the limited presence of research in the realms of practice and improvement. The TASQ seeks to address both critical gaps, in addition to providing a more equitable, uniform, and comprehensive assessment process. The remainder of the topical research presented in Chapter Two is dedicated to addressing the construction of the TASQ and the question of how comprehensive should the instrument be if it is to adequately assess the full spectrum of school climate - a challenging task, considering the wide range of variance and disagreement in the research presented.

Domains of Climate & Safety

Across the literature, several different models and variations of school climate can be found (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018; Cohen et al., 2009; Wang & Degol, 2016; Zullig et al., 2015). Models of school climate appear to be as abundant as definitions of school climate and the facets they encompass. Often the constructs, dimensions, and different domain headings themselves overlap in their definitions and connections. One of the most cited models of school climate across the collected literature has been developed by the National School Climate Center

(NSCC) and now includes five distinct dimensions and 13 sub-dimensions (Table 1 below).

Research by Cohen (2006 & 2009), Frieland (1999), Thapa et al. (2013), and others contributed

to the development of these core components of school climate, connecting each to an array of

positive student outcomes. The TASQ was originally developed solely based on the NSCC

model and thus it serves as an excellent source to begin an exploration of the various domains

found throughout the literature. The table below depicts the five major domains of school climate

used by the NSCC, along with related sub-dimensions for each. The second column includes

indicators for each sub-dimension.

Table 1

NSCC Dimensions, Sub-dimensions, and Indicators

Dimension & Sub-dimension	Major Indicator
Safety	
Rules and Norms	Clearly communicated rules about physical violence, clearly communicated rules about verbal abuse, harassment, and teasing, clear and consistent norms and enforcement for adult intervention.
Physical Security	Students and adults feel safe from physical harm at school.
Social-Emotional Security	Students feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion.
Teaching and Learning	
Support for Learning	Use of supportive teaching practices, such as: encouragement and constructive feedback, varied opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills, support for risk-taking and independent thinking, atmosphere conducive to dialogue and questioning, academic challenge, and individual attention.
Social and Civic Learning	Support for the development of social and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions including: effective listening, conflict resolution, self-reflection, emotional regulation, empathy, personal responsibility, and ethical decision making
Interpersonal Relationships	
Respect for Diversity	Mutual respect for individual differences (e.g. gender, race, culture, etc.) at all levels of the school—student-student, adult-student, adult-adult and overall norms for tolerance.
Social Support—Adults	Pattern of supportive and caring adult relationships for students, including high expectations for students' success,

Dimension & Sub-dimension	Major Indicator
	willingness to listen to students and to get to know them as individuals, and a personal concern for students' problems.
Social Support—Students	Pattern of supportive peer relationships for students, including friendships for socializing, for problems, for academic help, and for new students.
Institutional Environment	
School Connectedness-Engagement	Positive identification with the school; norms for broad participation in school life for students, staff, and families.
Physical Surroundings	Cleanliness, order, appeal of facilities; adequate resources and materials.
Social Media	
Social Media	Students feel safe from physical harm, verbal abuse/teasing, gossip, and exclusion when online or on electronic devices (ie: Facebook, Twitter, other social media platforms, by an email, text messaging, posting photo/video, etc.).
Staff Only	
Leadership	Administration creates and communicates a clear vision and is accessible and supportive of school staff development
Professional Relationships	Positive attitudes and relationships among school staff that support effectively working and learning together

In Baltimore City Schools, the NSCC model has been used to inform system-wide school climate assessment and improvement efforts. One report from this school district found a strong connection between student attendance rates and perceptions in the domains of Teaching and Learning, the Institutional Environment, Interpersonal Relationships, and especially Safety (Durham, Bettencourt, & Connolly, 2014). School-based efforts addressing these dimensions were then put into practice to impact student attendance rates across the district. Relationships are also one of the more fundamentally important domains of school climate, particularly to what extent students feel attached to at least one caring and responsible adult at school (Cohen, 2009). Cohen also cites additional research demonstrating that school connectedness is a powerful predictor of adolescent health and academic outcomes.

When examining which of the NSCC dimensions and sub-dimensions (referred to as domains in this study) would best fit within the model of school climate & safety reflected in the

TASQ, it was first done through the lens of the practices or activities that can be conducted under each particular domain. In today's school environment, social media plays an important role in the daily lives of many students and invariably becomes intertwined with the social climate of a school, particularly as it involves the toxic effects of bullying and harassment (Thapa et al., 2013). For the purposes of the TASQ however, it was believed that most activities related to social media would be covered under the active instruction of social skills, school-wide expectations, and the discipline policies protecting all students from such harmful behavior. Social Media is therefore not included as a domain on the TASQ. One of the most critical domains on the TASQ is Teaching and Learning, which includes the NSCC dimension of SEL instruction. Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 213 SEL instructional programs involving 270,034 K-12 students suggested that students receiving such instruction, compared to the control groups, demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance - to include an 11 percentile point gain in achievement. The sub-dimensions of Student Engagement and Physical Surroundings found under Institutional Environment were also found across the literature and offer critical measurement areas on the TASQ. However, they were thought to be only loosely connected and are found under separate domains in the TASQ. One more important feature of note found in the NSCC model is the separation of the "Staff Only" dimension that included Leadership and Professional Relationships. These categories were also found across the literature and included in other models and are seen as essential components of school climate and safety. However, student and staff activities are not separated from other domains on the TASQ. All programs, practices, and activities that are necessary to assess and improve school climate & safety efforts are included equally, regardless of whom they might involve or impact.

The U.S. Department of Education Model

The next school climate model that was evaluated was developed by the United States Education Department (ED) and is measured using the ED School Climate Survey (EDSCLS). This model contained only the three domains of Engagement, Safety, and Environment but the sub-dimensions offer more specific examples of areas that can be impacted by programs, practices, and activities. All three primary domains are echoed in the dimensions of the NSCC model, as are the nine of the 13 sub-domains. The ED model introduces additional areas of *Substance Use, Emergency Readiness & Management, Physical Health*, and *Mental Health*. These areas are found throughout the literature on school climate and enjoy various levels of support. Promoting adolescent mental health and well-being is a global priority (Marquez & Saxena, 2016) and one that Aldridge and McChesney, (2018) also found to correlate strongly with school connectedness, relationships, and students' perceptions of school safety. Given the role of mental health in the world of school violence prevention and safety (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018; Cohen et al., 2012), these additional dimensions present critical activities that today's schools must assess. Missing from the ED model are the areas related to leadership and SEL found in the NSCC model. Once again, these categories represent obvious areas where school activities or practice can impact school climate & safety and demonstrate the benefit of combining elements from multiple models. The two models do include many of the same domains and dimensions, yet there is a significant amount of variance in how they are grouped. This likely demonstrates the interconnected nature and relationship that many of these areas enjoy. However, this level of variance also points to the many different voices and opinions on what constitutes school climate.

The Authoritative School Climate Model

The next conceptual model of school climate reviewed is based on the *Authoritative School Climate Theory*. Cornell (2017) states that the *Authoritative School Climate* model is derived from Baumrind's (1968) work on authoritative parenting, which serves as the basis for a large volume of research on parenting styles. Baumrind's Authoritative Parenting Theory centered on two primary components of parenting - high expectations and emotional support – and how they might work together to influence parenting styles and outcomes. The most effective style of parenting was labeled Authoritative and involved high levels of structure and expectations, as well as high levels of emotional support. The Authoritative School Climate Theory similarly establishes two key domains of structure and supportiveness, which mirror the parenting model. Cornell (2017) defines structure as high disciplinary and academic expectations for students, to include discipline policies that are fairly applied and a high bar for achievement for all students. The second domain of supportiveness concerns whether the adults in a school establish respectful, caring, and helpful relationships with students. Although Cornell admits these two domains do not encompass all aspects of school climate, he argues they deserve a central role.

In a series of seven studies over three years, Cornell and colleagues developed a set of 13 scales and 12 subscales that further divided the two domains of structure and support. These studies examined both student-level and school-level properties of the scales and subscales, using student and teacher survey data from grades 7-12. These surveys sought to measure perceptions of school climate, as well as safety conditions, using 71 different question items. The school climate measures included perceptions of the school's disciplinary practices, student support efforts, and the degree of student engagement in school. The safety conditions covered

reports of bullying, teasing, and other forms of peer aggression, including threats of violence, physical assault, and gang activity. Although the Authoritative School Climate model uses different terminology than the NSCC or ED models, several of the scales and subscales measure very similar qualities of school climate. The Student Support scale includes respect for students and their willingness to seek help, primarily addressing the relationships that are so central to those models. Student Engagement included affective and cognitive subscales that reflected the connectedness to school and high academic expectations for students. The Discipline Structure scale addresses discipline policies, with subscales addressing fairness and justice. Like the other models, the Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying is also included as a primary scale.

While other models and instruments address student perceptions of feeling safe, the Authoritative School Climate model places significant emphasis on specific types of acts that might contribute to an unsafe environment. In addition to the prevalence of bullying, questions regarding threats of violence, physical assault, victimization, sexual violence, peer aggression, and gang activity are also used. Students were also asked about their attitudes towards expectations of safety and risky behaviors, while an entire scale and two subscales were dedicated to positive values. Each of these areas represents opportunities for critical activities and practices to be undertaken by schools and offer important contributions to the design and scope of the TASQ.

The 5Essentials Model

The final framework presented from the literature review is an evidence-based system the State of Illinois has included in its plan to address ESSA's "Fifth Indicator". The *5Essentials* system is based on more than 20 years of research by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research and centers on five components found to be critical for school success.

According to Gagnon and Schneider (2019), "this framework measures the effectiveness of school leaders to implement a clear and strategic vision, the level of support for teachers, the involvement of families, the safety and orderliness of the school, and the level of academic challenge in classes" (p. 739). Although the 5Essentials is considered a school climate model, it is also a school improvement system predicated on research demonstrating that schools that are strong in at least three of the five essentials were 10 times more likely to show learning gains than schools that were weak in three or more essentials. Additional research shows that a persistent low score in even just one of the essentials decreased the likelihood of improvement to less than 10 percent (5Essentials, n.d.).

The model further divides each of the five dimensions into 20 subscales to measure the factors of school climate that create the conditions for improvement. Each of these areas is assessed using student and teacher surveys that incorporate a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not yet organized) to 5 (well-organized) for improvement and success (Ruiz, McMahon, & Jason, 2018). The subscales include areas found in the other models, such as safety, the prevalence of discipline and behavioral incidents, relationships, high academic expectations, student engagement, and parent involvement. In addition to these subscales, the 5Essentials introduces measures not found in the other models presented. Among them, particular attention is paid to leadership (four subsections) and teacher collaboration (five subsections). Interestingly, the construct of trust (between teachers and leadership, between teachers, between students and teachers, and between parents and teachers) was measured across four of the five dimensions. This underscores the importance of trusting relationships as a truly essential component of school quality and improvement. In total, the subsections found on the 5Essentials offer further evidence for the inclusion of several core domains of school climate found in other models, as

well as the introduction of new areas, which may serve as appropriate domains or target areas on the TASQ. This fit is further enhanced, as each dimension and subscale also offers an excellent opportunity to conduct programs, practices, and activities.

The Compendium

In addition to the four frameworks presented, an analysis of 41 school climate and safety surveys found in the ED's Compendium of reliable and valid instruments yielded several distinct and common areas measured. Along with each survey in the Compendium, the ED also lists the various constructs measured by each instrument. These constructs were grouped and totaled to determine the frequency in which they appeared across all instruments (see Table 3 on Page 118). To help consolidate the list, several individual constructs were grouped, based on their similarity. It should be noted that the four school climate models presented previously in this literature review are also included in this data. Several of the instruments found in the Compendium included constructs that were specific to parent surveys, such as their cultural and linguistic competence, or perceptions of the physical appearance of the school. Many of these constructs were either repetitive of the areas measured on staff and student surveys or focused on factors that lied outside the school environment (and in the home). Therefore, the analysis of constructs from the compendium of instruments only includes student and staff surveys and did not include parent surveys. It should also be noted that just as with the NSCC model, this study has sought to erase the distinction between areas that might be considered staff-related or student-related.

The three constructs measured most often across all surveys (*Safety, Order & Discipline*, and *High Academic Support & Expectations*) were also the only three categories found in each of the school climate models presented. This lends strong support to their inclusion as domains or

target areas on the TASQ. Cohen et al. (2009), additionally stated that "virtually all researchers agree that there are four major areas that clearly shape school climate: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the (external) environment" (p. 182). Other constructs measured also appeared in multiple models, including peer relationships, parent and home support, student-teacher relationships student engagement, and administrative support.

Although grouped with administrative support, leadership emerged as a concept that extended beyond supporting teachers, students, or initiatives and more as a driving force behind any practices or activities that might be undertaken across all domains. The external communities that schools serve also emerged as an important actor. With 12 different instruments using some measure of connection and support from the surrounding community, this construct also presented a strong case for consideration as a domain on the TASQ. Less prevalent across models, the physical environment of a school was not easily combined with other traditional categories, nor did it fit as a subset of any other category. However, the critical need for assessing physical security in today's schools and the array of best practices that exist, created new meaning for this area and placed the external environment as a key domain of school climate. The area of data collection and analysis is discussed nowhere in the literature as a domain, dimension, or sub-dimension of school climate, which is most likely due to the different lens of traditional models. However, the collection, analysis, and reporting of data are recognized as critical elements of school climate improvement (ED, 2019). The collection and analysis of data – whether it is through survey administration or interpreting results - is also a key thread that runs through every model and instrument. This critical addition to traditional models is viewed as necessary for both the assessment and improvement of school climate & safety efforts as well as student and school improvement in general.

Each of the school climate models presented, as well as the Compendium of valid and reliable instruments, has provided a framework on which to build the TASQ. Although the TASQ measures the activities and practices found in schools, the review of literature supports the use of many of the same domains, dimensions, and scales used to measure the perceptions of stakeholders that are the basis of these existing instruments. The research supporting practices and activities under the domains and target areas on the TASQ is presented throughout the remainder of Chapter Two. This research is grouped under the final domain (bold subsection titling) and target area (bold and italicized subsection titling) headings that were used for the piloting of the TASQ.

Safety & Order

Safe and positive learning environments, along with order and fair discipline policies were each found as the most common domains amongst all instruments on the ED's Compendium of school climate surveys. Safety itself is a multifaceted construct, incorporating physical safety, social safety, and emotional safety (Moritz et al., 2017). Like many of the domains found on the TASQ and other models of school climate, there are several conceptual facets and interconnected relationships with other domains. On the TASQ, elements of physical, social, and emotional safety are impacted by practices and activities in virtually every domain. The areas of safety and discipline are included together in several of the models found in the Compendium of School Climate Surveys, to include the NSCC and ED models. Moritz et al. (2017) found that frequently cited models of safety "describe rules, behavioral norms, the sense of order, physical and social-emotional safety, and the fairness with which discipline is used in schools" (p. 43). In causal models of school climate, the constructs of safety and discipline also have strong relationships with outcomes such as school violence and bullying (Moritz et al.,

2017). This provides a sound rationale to include school-based prevention and intervention efforts for violence and bullying in the same domain as safety and discipline practices.

Discipline Policies & Practices. In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) released a set of guiding principles for school climate and discipline policy improvement. These guidelines served as the foundation for developing question items under this target area and contribute to other target areas under the domain of Safety and Order on the TASQ. The guidance from the ED was grounded in three principles:

- Create positive climates and focus on prevention;

- Develop clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive student behaviors; and

- Ensure fairness, equity, and continuous improvement.

Under these principles, the ED also has specific action steps that include developing the goals and needs to improve school climate; the use of evidence-based prevention strategies, such as tiered supports; the promotion of school-wide Social-Emotional Learning; effective professional development to support the use of sound instructional strategies that motivate and engage students; and collaboration with multiple community organizations, agencies, and other stakeholders. Each of these action steps is found throughout the remainder of the Safety and Order domain and other domains on the TASQ.

Behavioral Intervention & Supports. The use of a tiered support system for preventing and addressing student behavioral issues was specifically mentioned by the ED as an action step in creating a positive school climate. Tiered systems, such as those behind Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), employ three tiers of support to address school climate and behavior – universal (Tier One), targeted (Tier

Two), and individualized (Tier Three). Universal supports are inclusive of school-wide

prevention efforts, such as social skills or character education curriculum that is delivered to all

students. The expectation is that such a curriculum (in conjunction with all universal prevention

efforts) will allow the vast majority of students to be successful and meet or exceed behavioral

expectations (generally 80%). For those students who need additional supports and services,

school-based teams use data and a problem-solving approach to target specific behavioral issues

and interventions at the Tier Two level. Supports and interventions at this level may involve

small groups or many students receiving the same intervention. Tier Three supports and

interventions are individualized require more intensive approaches.

Bullying & Harassment. Along with the findings of Moritz et al. (2017), Bradshaw et al.

(2014) also noted the existing research that connects student perceptions of bullying and peer

aggression with a safe and positive school climate. Although safety was the most commonly

found construct across all models and instruments studied, some measure of bullying was found

separately 11 times – most often included alongside safety or as a sub-dimension of safety.

Norwegian researcher Dan Olweus is largely credited with conducting the first research

on bullying in schools. Olweus (1993) identified a platform of prevention strategies for schools

that focused on policies, class rules, school rules, class meetings, and clear expectations. Olweus

also stressed the importance of increasing awareness and involvement through the use of student

surveys to help identify the scope of the issue within a school and drive prevention and

intervention efforts. Cornell (2017) found that using evidence-based bullying prevention and

intervention efforts created a safer environment and increased student achievement. Cornell also

noted that bullying prevention programs that are successful in elementary and middle school are

not necessarily effective in high school, pointing to a need for age-appropriate prevention strategies.

      Mental Health Supports & Services. Several school-based or itinerant positions are typically involved in providing an array of mental health services for students, to include school psychologists, school social workers, and school counselors. Often, however, these positions fall short of recommended staffing guidelines or are saddled with tremendous caseloads. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends a ratio of 500-700 students per school psychologist, depending on the comprehensiveness of services being provided. However, national data show an average ratio of 1,526 students to one psychologist (NASP, 2019). This ratio failed to meet the minimum recommended ratio of students to psychologist and is over 200 percent to 300 percent greater than what is recommended by the experts. More than 19 million students, or 43 percent of public school students, were enrolled in a school that failed to have a school psychologist.

      Another school support position often responsible for providing on-campus mental health services are school social workers. According to the School Social Work Association of America (2019), social work services should be provided at a ratio of 250 students to one social worker. Federal data once again reveals a ratio of 2,106 students to one social worker, creating a caseload for social workers nearly eight times greater than what is recommended by the experts. Less than 3 percent of schools nationwide, only about 3,000 schools, met the professional recommendation. More than 67,000 schools reported no social workers serving their students. The U.S. Department of Education's 2016 *First Look* found 21 percent of high schools nationwide did not have access to any school counselor. An analysis of the most recent data reveals more than 24,000 schools (25 percent) reported having no counselor on staff. Roughly

8.7 million students attend these schools. Although charter schools represent just 7 percent of public schools nationwide, they made up 15 percent of schools that reported no counselor (ACLU, 2019). Although these staffing ratios fall largely outside the control of schools and to some extent districts, they have been included on the TASQ as a mechanism to reward schools and districts that make such commitments and to provide an important goal for others to reach.

Threat Assessment & Violence Prevention. Threat assessment is considered a violence prevention strategy (Cornell, 2019), which might fit appropriately under behavioral interventions and supports. However, it merits inclusion on the TASQ as a distinct target area, due to the critical importance of effectively responding to threats or signs of potential threats. According to Cornell (2017), violence prevention is defined as "the promotion of school safety, such that students and school personnel are free from violence and disruptive acts, including sexual harassment and abuse, and victimization associated with prejudice and intolerance, on school premises, going to and from school, and at school-sponsored activities, through the creation and maintenance of a school environment that is free of weapons and fosters individual responsibility and respect for the rights of others" (pp. 168-169). The Comprehensive Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) developed by Cornell and colleagues has been examined in a series of studies involving hundreds of schools and is the only threat assessment program recognized as an evidence-based practice in the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP; 2013). The CSTAG model utilizes a multi-disciplinary threat assessment team approach, emphasizing elements that include distinguishing between less serious transient threats and more serious substantive threats, stressing non-punitive consequences, and procedures for referring students for mental health and other follow-up services. Additional studies found that schools using the CSTAG experienced lower suspension rates and less peer

aggression and bullying, compared to schools not using threat assessment or using some other approach to threat assessment (Cornell et al., 2011; Cornell et al., 2009; Nekvasil & Cornell, 2015). Further studies found that students reported a greater willingness to seek help for threats of violence (Cornell et al., 2009, 2011), which has direct implications for reporting pathways created by schools, as well as the importance of trusting relationships. Importantly, none of the threats reported in schools using the CSTAG model were carried out and suspension rates were lower for both White and Black students. The CSTAG model is built on the threat assessment model developed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and U.S. Secret Service, providing significant alignment between models. In addition to the multidisciplinary team and procedures for the follow-up of students, the DHS model also stresses the inclusion of central and anonymous reporting systems, identifying specific behaviors of concern, defining the threshold for law enforcement intervention, and training for all stakeholders (DHS, 2018).

Physical Environment & Security

The physical environment, to include considerations such as cleanliness and comfort, appeared on just nine of the 41 instruments or models in the compendium. Although this level of frequency is far lower than all other domains found on the TASQ (other than data collection – which is found nowhere as a construct of school climate), the physical environment is an integral component of widely-cited definitions of school climate, such as the NSCC and Department of Education. The physical environment, however, is not grouped with security in any of the instruments, models, or studies found throughout the literature. This is likely due to traditional models of school climate relying on staff and student perceptions, rather than activities and practices. In today's schools, stakeholder perceptions of safety rely in part on visible security measures (such as camera systems, security personnel, or single entry points) that are embedded

throughout the physical environment of the school and the level of preparedness to respond to disaster or tragedy. When considering the activities and practices that schools conduct, the physical condition and security of the school facilities become more closely related and thus grouped together on the TASQ.

Cleanliness and Order of Campus. Physical characteristics of the school, including general cleanliness and cleanliness of bathrooms, comfortable temperature, and the absence of vandalism and broken windows, doors, or desks were all associated with greater perceived safety among students (Plank, Bradshaw & Young, 2009). According to Voight and Nation (2017), Maintaining a clean, comfortable, and well-maintained school was shown to promote a positive school climate. Important aspects of the physical environment include classrooms with natural light and views of the outside world, accessible outdoor spaces, and displays in common areas of school pride, student achievement, and behavioral expectations.

Bradshaw et al. (2017) conducted a study of the MDS3 Student Survey developed by the Johns Hopkins Center for Youth Violence Prevention. Researchers from the Center undertook a comprehensive review of the literature focusing on the 3 domains of school climate included in the USDOE model. According to Bradshaw et al. (2017), there is evidence to suggest that evidence of physical disorder like broken windows, trash, and graffiti can create an environment of social disorder in schools. When students perceive their environment to be in social disorder (ie, threatening, violent, or disruptive interactions among people within a school), they are less able to learn and be successful in school. (p. 601)

According to Kutsyuruba et al. (2015) research has determined a positive relationship between facility conditions and student achievement, while conversely, school buildings in poor shape lead to reduced learning. Several other reviews documented relationships between various

school building design features and academic outcomes, while "building features related to human comfort that have been shown to be related to student achievement include building age, climate control, indoor air quality, lighting, acoustical control, design classifications and overall impression" (p. 110). It is not particularly challenging to understand how the quality of environmental conditions can impact the climate of a school and ultimately the achievement of students.

Emergency Preparedness. In 2013, several federal agencies (to include: the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of Justice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency) jointly produced the *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans*. This guide serves as the basis for identifying the tenets of emergency preparedness on the TASQ.

The multi-agency guide outlines a six-step process for schools to take for optimal emergency preparedness and response. The initial step involves the formation of a multidisciplinary team. Like threat assessment teams, this core planning team should have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. However, core planning teams for emergency preparedness should involve a wider partnership with all community emergency response agencies, as well as stakeholders from the school. The planning team should be small enough to permit close collaboration with first responders and other community partners, yet large enough to be representative of the school, its families, and its community. It should also be large enough as to not place an undue burden on any single person. (p. 6)

Additional guidance for teams includes the roles and responsibilities for each member, training, and meeting structure. Integral to the core planning team's mission and the guide itself

is the development of the emergency response plan itself. Emergency plans must account for a wide range of possible hazards and threats and assess the risk and vulnerabilities each poses. Interestingly, among the possible assessments available to teams are behavioral threat assessment and school climate assessment. Also included is a complete security site assessment and capacity assessment to determine the ability to carry out the plan. The plan must prioritize the potential threats and develop goals and objectives based on the outcome of the assessments conducted. The plan must account for preparedness, response to situations, recovery, drills and training.

Physical Security of Campus. Few empirical studies could be located that examine best practices in school security. A study by Tanner-Smith & Fisher (2015) did examine correlations found between visible security measures and the impact on academics, attendance, and college aspirations and found there was no discernible effect. However, the effect of these security measures on student perceptions of safety was found to be an area recommended for future studies. Students explained that consistent supervision of all areas of the school building—either by camera or in person—helped to reduce incidents of violence (Johnson et al., 2012). Kutsyuruba et al. (2015) noted the increased security measures such as metal detectors and security cameras that are found in today's schools and the mixed research results behind their presence. They found that some studies report these methods of safety precaution had the effect of increasing perceptions of safety among students, teachers and school administrators, while others "create avenues for racial profiling, coercion and social reproduction of stereotypes and prejudices" (p. 110). Skiba & Losen (2015) showed that over a 20-year period in which the use of these measures increased, there are very few empirical evaluations of their effectiveness. Ruiz, McMahon, & Jason (2018) in fact found that some school interventions aimed at reducing violence and improving safety (particularly metal detectors) may have unintended negative

consequences on student academic performance and student perceptions of being in a safe environment.

In a review of school security studies Reingle-Gonzalez, Jetelina, and Jennings (2016) found that other methods, such as security officers (particularly School Resource Officers) were more effective than metal detectors in preserving student safety. However, studies reviewed by the authors suggest that not only were weapon detection systems inversely associated with perceptions of safety but also the number of visible security measures (such as window bars, locked doors, and security personnel or SROs). The authors found discrepancies between studies as well as between staff and students. In one study "Faculty noted that cameras, fences, lighting, and the presence of SROs were associated with better school safety. Students, however, reported that cameras, hall monitors, locked entry doors and gates, and police or SROs were related to school safety. Notably, both teachers and students associated cameras and SROs with feelings of safety" (p. 442). Despite the findings from this study and others, use of security measures such as surveillance devices and SROs is not uniformly supported by the literature. Great care must be taken to ensure best practices in security are being conducted in schools, while the perceptions of student safety are not compromised.

Teaching & Learning

Whether it is concerning student-teacher relationships, student engagement, the prevention of negative student behaviors, or the school-wide promotion of character, constructs related to teaching and learning are distributed across many of the various domains and dimensions of instruments were found in the Compendium. Areas associated with academic support, student motivation, high expectations, access to rigorous coursework, and growth mindset were found in 21 of the instruments, placing it as the most frequently mentioned topics,

along with safety, order, and discipline. Additionally, there were 10 instruments in the compendium that included measures related to Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies, and several others that touched on bullying and violence prevention (8), substance use prevention (8), positive values or character education (6), or even opportunities for meaningful participation (6). In fact, items related to teaching and learning could be connected to several other areas found across the instruments in the compendium. From a teaching and learning perspective, this domain necessarily involves both the climate of the school and the climate of the individual classroom. Teaching and Learning also includes both the content and the strategies used by teachers to deliver it.

 Intentional Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning. The quality of a school's climate is dependent not just upon the non-academic or Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) that takes place within a school, but also the academic learning. These concepts have become increasingly integrated. As suggested by Cohen, rather than simply SEL instruction, the TASQ should frame this area as "intentional social, emotional, and academic learning for a couple of reasons: (1) SEL is always inter-related to academic teaching and learning; (2) We are always teaching SEL lessons knowingly, systematically and helpfully or not" (personal communication. August 20, 2019). According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), social and emotional development refers to the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2019). CASEL further defines social-emotional learning as comprising five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. As

pointed out by Cohen (2019) intentional SEL lessons may be found embedded in everyday practices and integrated within many different subject areas. SEL lessons are also intentionally delivered via school-wide or classroom curricula that include topics such as social skill development, conflict resolution, bullying prevention, emotional regulation, substance use prevention, or character education.

There is research indicating that evidence-based character education programs lead to higher achievement scores for elementary school students (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2003). Thapa et al. (2013) also pointed out that "evidence-based socio-moral emotional learning programs have resulted in impressive gains in test scores and in increasing the academic emphasis of elementary and middle school students" (p. 366). The use of SEL curricula in schools is often justified by connecting them with improved academic outcomes, but it must be noted that schools are tasked with helping to raise healthy children by fostering not only their cognitive development but also their social and emotional development (Durlak et al., 2011). Although studies examined by Durlak et al. differ substantially in terms of which intervention strategies, student populations, and behavioral outcomes were examined, they concluded that universal school-wide SEL interventions are generally effective. However, they also found that no review to date has focused exclusively on SEL programs to examine their impact across a host of diverse student outcomes. Regardless of outcome diversity, Durlak et al. (2011) found that programs following a sequenced, active, focused, and explicit approach (referred to as SAFE practices) were effective in multiple outcome areas. Programs that did not incorporate SAFE practices experienced no successful outcomes. The authors also noted the critical nature of assessing implementation, using SAFE practices as a guide. Unfortunately, surveys and research indicate that many schools do not use evidence-based prevention programs or use them with poor

fidelity (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2002; Ringwalt et al., 2009). Durlak et al. speculated this may occur "because schools are not aware of effective programs, do not implement the interventions correctly, or do not continue programs even if they are successful during a pilot or demonstration period" (p. 420). Clearly, there is more to teaching SEL effectively than choosing a program that addresses a particular desired outcome.

Durlak et al. (2011) describe how SEL programming incorporates two coordinated sets of educational strategies to enhance student outcomes and development. The first involves the teaching, modeling, and opportunities to practice SEL skills in "developmentally, contextually, and culturally appropriate ways" (p. 406). These are the personal skills that students can use to prevent problems such as substance use, violence, or bullying, as well as contribute to their classrooms, schools, and communities, to make them better places. Secondly, SEL programming "fosters students' social-emotional development through establishing safe, caring learning environments involving peer and family initiatives, improved classroom management and teaching practices, and whole-school community-building activities" (p. 407). In other words, having a safe and positive school climate is what allows for the optimal growth and development of personal SEL skills students need for success. In this way, school climate and students' personal SEL growth become intertwined and provide a powerful synergy that allows both to flourish.

Teaching Strategies. Included in the SAFE practices described by Durlak et al. (2011) were active forms of learning where students had more of a hands-on opportunity to engage with course materials and practice the skills being taught. The authors state that it is well-documented that skill acquisition cannot take place in the absence of practice. It therefore becomes critical that teaching strategies incorporate these opportunities to the extent possible. In addition to

experiential learning, other instructional approaches such as proactive classroom management and cooperative learning have also been shown to enhance student performance in school (Durlak et al. 2011). Espelage et al. (2013) presented research indicating that practices facilitating both effective classroom management and intentional SEL, enhance academic engagement and achievement of students while reducing levels of violence and aggression. Other outcomes associated with effective classroom management practices include the reduction of classroom disruption and problem behaviors, higher levels of student engagement, and higher social-emotional competence (Sebastian, Herman, & Reinke, 2019). Collier-Meek, Johnson, Sanetti, and Minami (2019) describe classroom management as a "foundational practice for teachers to efficiently, proactively, and effectively support class-wide academic engagement and students' long-term academic competence" (p. 349). Effective classroom management should therefore be a priority for both classroom teachers and school leadership. This is especially true for new teachers, who report being unprepared for handling student misconduct by their preparation programs (Collier-Meek et al., 2019; Espelage et al., 2013; Sebastian et al., 2019). Sebastian et al. (2019) also noted the need for ongoing interventions and the use of evidence-based classroom management training that are implemented with fidelity.

Academic Support. Academic support, to include motivation, high expectations and access to rigorous coursework, were found in 21 of the school climate models or instruments studied in the literature. Along with safety, order, and discipline, this domain was found across more models than any other recorded category. Academic support may include afterschool opportunities for students to complete extra work or receive tutoring, credit recovery for students experiencing academic failure, assistance with college prep or entrance exams, and providing clear expectations (Kopishke-Smith et al., 2014). Academic support also includes previously

mentioned instructional strategies such as differentiated instruction, formative assessments, authentic assessments, and inquiry-based instructional strategies (NSCC, 2019).

Just as with a school's problem-solving process for addressing student behavioral issues through a tiered system of supports and services, there is a similar process of academic intervention. The MTSS framework for academic support and intervention is built upon the foundational work of Response to Intervention (RtI), in much the same way the MTSS behavioral framework is derived from PBIS (Charlton, Sabey, Dawson, Pyle, Lund, & Ross, 2018). Charlton et al. (2018) also point out that the ESSA specifically recommends the use of MTSS to address multiple issues, including the improvement of targeted literacy instruction. That recommendation is "the result of years of accumulating evidence supporting the effectiveness of tiered service delivery models" (p. 191). Like the MTSS framework for behavior previously described, there is a universal curriculum that is prescribed for all students in a school. For that estimated 20% of students who do not meet proficiency, a platform of evidence-based Tier Two and Tier Three interventions is available to assist them in reaching proficiency. In a study involving the MTSS leadership of 27 State Educational Agencies, Charlton et al. (2018) were able to identify several facets of MTSS that were critical for "upscaling" the MTSS practices in their schools. These factors included leadership involvement, consistent language and practices, access to professional development and technical assistance, developing model school programs, connections to existing policies and projects (especially those that are similar in nature), and using high-quality data systems and student outcome data to drive the process.

High Academic Expectations and Motivation. Kopishke-Smith et al. (2014) listed several strategies designed to motivate students and set a high bar for academic achievement. These strategies include: "(a) Provide high and explicit expectations with clear plans of action

for all students, for example, hang student work in hallways and public areas with improvement focused rubrics attached; (b) Provide more opportunities for celebration and attention to academic strengths and success; (c) Develop a culture of hard work to succeed; (d) Strategically develop scheduling to highlight academics as a focus for the school, such as adopting a school-wide reading hour where teachers, administrators, and staff lead leveled reading sessions; and (e) Reward student success, announce and share successes (academic and otherwise) with the whole school" (p. 38). In their Authoritative School Climate Model, Cornell et al. (2017) argued that an authoritative school was characterized by high expectations and support for students. High expectations were indicated by high disciplinary structure (strict but fair discipline) and high academic expectations for students. High support for students was indicated by the teachers and other adults at school demonstrating respect and concern for students" (p. 5). While high expectations are included within this domain on the TASQ, the discipline structure, and respect and concern towards students are hallmarks found in other domains and target areas.

Diverse Curriculum with Access to Rigorous Courses. Another way to encourage high academic expectations is the availability of and access to challenging academic coursework. In its Guide to School Climate improvement, the ED (2014) noted the relationship between school climate and academic achievement and suggested "schools should take deliberate steps to create a positive school climate in which every student can learn, fully engage in a rigorous curriculum, and feel safe, nurtured, and welcome" (p. 5). The ED stated that research suggests time spent in rigorous and relevant instruction can positively impact student achievement. Access to advanced coursework was also mentioned by the ESSA as a means to address the new fifth indicator of school quality or student success (Gagnon & Schneider, 2017). In examining the relationship between school climate and SEL, Osher and Berg (2017) noted the dual benefit of challenge and

high expectations on student competencies and the climate of the school. Students are more personally motivated to succeed, more actively engaged in learning, and work better with others when they, their peers, and adults have high expectations for achievement that are experienced as relevant to them; when they are surrounded by peers who have academic aspirations; and when curricula, pedagogy, and opportunities to learn are rigorous, engaging and aligned with their goals (p. 6). Equitable access and encouragement to engage with such coursework and professional development for staff were critical aspects mentioned throughout the literature (Gagnon & Schneider, 2019; Hough et al., 2017; Kostyo et al., 2018; McCarley et al., 2014).

Trusting Relationships

Across the 41 instruments in the Compendium compiled by the ED, 15 contained specific measures to assess peer (Student-Student) relationships, while 14 others specifically targeted teacher-student relationships. Relationships were also found at the heart of many other measurement areas found throughout the compendium such as respectful and positive environments, high expectations, caring relationships with parents and community, or respect for diversity and culture. It is likely that threads of interpersonal relationships run through every domain and target area on the TASQ, underlining its critical importance to school climate and safety. Voight and Nation (2016) sought to identify school-based programs and practices that were shown to have a positive effect on safety and a positive school climate. Among their findings were "programs and practices that improve or co-occur with the relationships domain of school climate were supported by the most evidence (26 studies), followed by safety (18), disciplinary environment (14), respect for diversity (12), student participation (10), and physical environment (4)" (p. 186). One program in their study that met the criteria for very strong evidence involved a school-based mentoring program, where school staff volunteered to serve as

mentors and meet with assigned students at least once per week—before or after school or during lunch or non-academic times during the school day—for 18 weeks. Several curricular-based interventions also demonstrated strong evidence to support climate improvement. These include programs and curricula targeting life skills, character-education, peer mentoring, gang reduction, studies on inter-group conflict, culturally relevant instruction and even teacher collaboration and connectedness by involving them directly in selecting the interventions for improving school-wide climate. Individual teacher and adult practices were also found to have moderate effects on relationship building and school climate improvement. Such practices included teachers promoting mutual respect among students during instruction, helping students with academic and personal problems, having stronger classroom management, using hands-on and small group activities, allow student choice and participation in rule-making, provide student opportunities for improving their school and community, and providing comprehensive guidance programs.

Adult-to-adult. The relationships between staff and between staff and school leadership influence school climate. Voight and Nation (2016) also noted that in schools where teachers reported a more positive relationship with their administration, students and teachers reported being the victim of bullying and harassment less frequently. Kutsyuruba et al, (2015) discussed the pioneering work of Halpin and Croft (1963), who conceptualized school climate along a continuum from open to closed. According to Halpin and Croft, a more positive organizational or school climate was associated with a more open one. "The openness of a school's climate was measured by exploring open and authentic relationships between teachers and principals and among teachers themselves" (p. 106). Open and collaborative adult relationships can also be strengthened by several school-based practices. Brewster and Railsback (2003) identified peer coaching, mentoring, team teaching, professional learning communities, and networking

opportunities as models that can be used to strengthen adult relationships by bringing individuals together around issues of mutual interest or concern. Kutsyuruba et al. (2015) also discussed the important role that adults play in the school setting by demonstrating what healthy relationships look like to students through modeling. The way the adults interact with each other, resolve conflicts, and work together collaboratively not only enhances the climate of the school but also helps foster the growth of student SEL competencies.

Adult and Student. Perhaps even more important in the growth of student SEL competencies are the caring relationships they establish with adults inside the school. Durlak et al. (2011) studied over 200 universal K-12 SEL programs and their impact on positive social behavior, problem behaviors, and academic performance. Along with increased SEL competencies, the researchers found several factors that contributed to students exhibiting the desired behavioral changes and outcomes targeted by the programs. Among them was caring teacher-student relationships that were described as fostering commitment and bonding to school. Interestingly, the additional factors identified by Durlak et al. (2011) also include other target areas found on the TASQ, such as high adult expectations and support, engaging instructional approaches, classroom management, and safe and orderly environments that encourage and reinforce positive classroom behavior.

One of the more common methods of developing adult and student relationships is the aforementioned practice of mentoring. However, according to Kirkland et al. (2016), there is very little research to support the conclusion that mentoring has a positive impact on academic achievement. Instead, they point to mentoring as a way to provide youth with positive social experiences and valuable support systems needed to be successful in school and life. The researchers noted that "more educators are embracing the idea that the educational and social

challenges confronting vulnerable youth can be solved, or at least ameliorated, through positive mentorship programs" (p. 7). Kirkland et al. (2016) also found that when implemented with fidelity, effective mentoring programs lead to safer schools "where students feel as though they can be themselves; where the peer culture reinforces the value of learning; and where character, ethics, and moral development are far more important than rigid discipline policies" (p. 7). While there may be little research connecting mentoring to academic improvement, the practice is without question important to building trusting relationships and improving school climate.

Student-to-Student. Mentoring programs in schools are not relegated to using adults in the mentor role. Often, mentoring programs use older students, or peers who have received specialized training. Peer mentoring may be seen as a component of a larger peer support system that also includes, conflict resolution, welcoming new students, befriending socially isolated students and the promotion of students' rights through clubs or organizations. In their *Lessons from the Field*, the NSCC (2018) found that such peer support systems in schools are "generally flexible structures in which students are trained to offer emotional and social support to fellow pupils in coping with and preventing distress. Peer support can go beyond one-on-one interactions, looking like a cooperative community founded on mutual trust, respect, and open communication" (p. 23). The NSCC also found that, regardless of the type of peer support, students who engaged in such a program or process report that they benefitted from the experience.

Leadership

Like practices and activities intentionally taken to promote trusting relationships, leadership practices are woven throughout the fabric of a school's climate. Within the complex variety of factors and forces that shape the quality and character of the school, Cohen et al.

(2009) stated that "it is clear that one of the single most important 'forces' is the school leader: the principal" (p. 187). McCarley, Peters, and Decman (2014) also found the leadership actions of a school's principal have proven to be predictive of school climate and that combination can, in turn, predict overall school improvement. Many of the question items found throughout each domain and target area on the TASQ can be rightfully viewed as a direct product of leadership. Topics such as administrative support, leadership, the provision of resources, and professional development are also included in 13 of the instruments found in the ED's Compendium of valid and reliable instruments, placing it among the more common areas measured. Beyond those activities and practices embedded throughout other domains on the TASQ, there are several leadership practices that have been shown to positively correlate with safe and positive school climates. McCarley et al. (2014) studied the relationship between various aspects of transformational leadership and school climate and like numerous other researchers, found that transformational leadership strongly contributes to overall school improvement, as well as positive and innovative school climates. According to the authors, "transformational leaders build capacity for change, embrace teachers as leaders, encourage professional development, and provide opportunities for collaborative growth among the staff" (p. 328). Their research supported the conclusion that successful, inclusive schools have leaders who lead by example, promote peer learning, share in their decision-making power, and can motivate their students and staff to a higher degree of achievement.

Shared Decision-making and Distributed Leadership – One way for leaders to support and motivate their staff is by creating shared opportunities for leadership and involving staff in major decisions that impact the school – particularly as it relates to climate improvement efforts. McCarley et al. (2014) found "the more transformational that a principal is perceived, the more

leadership that is distributed or shared among the many other actors in the school who yield influence" (p. 325). Empowering teachers, staff, and even students with a meaningful voice are essential to motivating and building the trusting relationships necessary to cultivate safe and positive school climates. Kutsyuruba et al. (2015) noted such relationships "are dependent on a substantial, discernible level of interpersonal trust" (p. 125). Villenas & Zelinski, (2018) also noted the importance of actively recruiting and integrating diverse voices from the entire school community into school policy-making and daily practices to establish such trusting relationships and leverage the full capacity of their human resource capital.

 Professional Development. Teacher and staff empowerment is not only derived from shared decision-making, but also from enhancing their skills and knowledge through high-quality professional development. Brewster and Railsback (2003) recommend choosing a professional development model that promotes relationship-building, such as peer coaching or mentoring, team teaching, or the establishment of professional learning communities. These types of activities strengthen teacher relationships and bring individuals together around issues of mutual interest or concern. Skiba and Losen (2016) noted the importance of integrating professional development and technical assistance for teaching strategies that are adopted to strengthen and maintain safe and productive school climates. This becomes particularly important as it relates to new programs or practices and with approaches such as "restorative practices, culturally responsive approaches to PBIS, social and emotional learning, implicit bias training, and culturally responsive classroom management" (p. 10). Leaders must consider how much professional development they can fit into existing schedules, as well as any additional training and resources (such as time) that might be necessary for each new practice.

Teacher Evaluation. In addition to providing high-quality training and support, the professional growth of teachers also depends on meaningful feedback of their instructional practices. According to Yoder (2014), well-designed teacher evaluation systems include "professional teaching frameworks that describe the behaviors, skills, and practices representing effective teaching" (p. 10), and that when used properly, provide teachers with fair, reliable, and accurate feedback on their instruction. While this type of meaningful feedback has obvious implications for the growth and development of teachers, research also suggests that the evaluation of instructional practices can directly contribute to the social and emotional growth of students. Yoder (2014) points out that teacher evaluation systems can be leveraged to support Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) instruction in the classroom through purposeful observation. Citing research validating the connection between observation data collected during evaluations and student academic learning, it was argued that similar outcomes could be achieved for non-academic, or SEL competencies. Yoder (2014) developed a "crosswalk" between the instructional practices assessed in three major evaluation frameworks (the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, Danielson's Framework for Teaching, and Marzano's Observational Protocol) and 10 teaching practices found to promote SEL skills in students. The findings of this process suggest that, even though there is not perfect alignment, teacher evaluations already assess developing student social-emotional competencies through targeted instructional practices. This highlighted the fact that increasing SEL competencies in students through teacher evaluations are not an "add-on" – it is something that is already being done. Teachers and administrators need only to make similar connections with their existing evaluation of instructional practices to integrate the improvement of SEL competencies in their regular

routines. When combined with explicit SEL instruction, such evaluation systems can lead to positive outcomes for students and enhance the climates in which they learn and grow.

Staff Mental and Physical Wellbeing. The trusting relationships so necessary for safe and positive school climates are most often achieved by adults expressing genuine care for students (NSCC, 2018). It stands to reason that cultivating environments where expressions of genuine care towards students are the norm, requires leadership that embraces an ethos of care that is also extended to teachers and staff. Such an ethos necessarily includes a genuine concern for the overall wellbeing of teachers and staff – particularly when signs of stress or burnout may appear. Individuals working in school settings are particularly vulnerable to work-related stress and burnout. Data from the 2013 Gallup-Healthways Global Well-Being Index found that 46% of teachers in K-12 settings report high levels of daily stress during the school year. This level of stress is similar to that of nurses (46%) and physicians (45%) and is the highest (along with nurses) among the 14 professional categories included in the study (Gallup, 2014). As stated by Lever, Mathis, & Mayworm (2017), "the stress that educators experience affects their enthusiasm about the profession and longevity in the field" (p.1). This has obvious implications for teacher turnover rates and the climates of schools where stress levels are high. Teacher stress and burnout affects not just the adult staff but also appears to affect the stress levels of the students they teach (Lever et al., 2017). Zhang & Sapp (2009) additionally found that teacher burnout is predictive of negative student academic outcomes, including lower levels of effective learning and motivation to learn.

The multidimensional components of wellness vary across different theories of wellness and wellness programs but often include medical, emotional, environmental, occupational, physical, intellectual, spiritual, social, and financial components (National Wellness Institute,

n.d.). According to Lever et al. (2017), wellness programs that incorporate such a holistic approach have been shown to increase teacher morale, improve their perceptions of being able to handle job stress, reduce absenteeism, and result in higher levels of overall well-being. In addition to the positive personal and professional outcomes for the adults, the associated cost savings and impacts on student outcomes should make the establishment of holistic staff wellness programs a priority for school leaders.

Allocation of Resources. Although the core of instruction is the interaction between teachers and students, that interaction is often facilitated or enhanced by technology, equipment, materials, supplies, and other resources. Resources can also be conceptualized as teacher education and experience, class size, teacher-student ratio, and facilities (Wang & Degol, 2016). Wang and Degol also note that, while inadequate resources are often a reflection of community poverty, resource sharing and allocation is an important consideration, regardless of availability. The authors found that "when schools restructure classrooms and programs to increase availability and access to resources, students experience more positive academic outcomes, especially among high poverty schools where materials may be limited" (p. 325). Although having resources brings with it obvious benefits, Wang and Degol (2016) argue that is equally important that schools know how to best employ the resources at their disposal. The authors discuss the long-standing criticism of simply pouring more money and resources into education and stressed the importance of making the most of what you have. Whether at the building or district level, resource allocation is a critical function of leadership.

According to the ED (2016), resource allocation is also a critical component of planning for school climate improvement. Schools and districts should develop a theory of action (or logic model), that connects the resources or inputs necessary for achieving intended outcomes. A key

idea behind this point is not just connecting the inputs to the outcomes, but ensuring that the school or district has the necessary resources to enact the strategies contained in their improvement plans. School leaders should carefully note the resources that are necessary to achieving these intended outcomes before they commit to taking on any new school climate improvement initiative.

    School Improvement Planning. According to the ED (2016), effective planning is essential to maximize the impact of school climate improvements, ensure efficient resource use, and enhance the likelihood efforts will have a lasting effect. The ED lists several key strategies and activities that schools and districts should consider when planning for school climate improvement. This list includes the establishment of a core planning team, integration with other school improvement initiatives, and the creation of a collective vision.

    The ED recommends the core planning team for climate improvement be composed of a diverse collection of stakeholders, representing all groups in the school community. The team should have the necessary time, knowledge, and support from leadership to carry-out their improvement efforts. To the extent possible climate improvement efforts should also be aligned and integrated with other important initiatives such as professional development, overall school improvement, or multi-tiered system of supports). Although a core team is recommended for steering all school climate improvement efforts, the core team would be well served to also be a part of the overall school improvement team. The ED also recommends that school climate practices are seen as a critical component of instruction and are blended fully with school and classroom practices. The establishment of the vision is meant to include the components of school climate that are valued by the diversity of a school's stakeholders. These components

should form the basis of the logic model that ties the inputs (resources) with the activities and ultimately, the intended outcomes of the school climate improvement plan.

Student Engagement and Connectedness

Elements measuring student engagement (both affective and cognitive) were found on 13 of the instruments in the ED's Compendium of valid and reliable survey instruments. Student engagement, as proposed by Ladd, Buhs, and Seid (2000), encompasses school liking as the antecedent to cooperative participation and independent participation, which leads to increased student achievement (Zullig et al., 2015). Along with parental involvement, Zullig and colleagues determined the importance of including the domain of Student Engagement in an evidence-based instrument called the School Climate Measurement Scale (SCM). The authors theorized these two domains to be important in the assessment of secondary school students' "comprehensive perceptions of their school experiences" (p. 1,078). Student engagement encompasses the connection that students have with and throughout their school. Bradshaw et al. (2014) states that school connectedness is closely related to social relationships and has been measured by assessing the existence of meaningful roles for students at school, the level of public recognition of students' achievements and constructive behavior, feelings of closeness between staff and students, level of engagement of learners, and students' sense that their input is valued. (p. 594).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services additionally states that school connectedness only trails family connectedness as a protective factor against such issues as emotional distress, eating disorders, and suicidal ideation and attempts.

The ED school climate model includes respect for diversity under its primary domain of student engagement, proving support for including respect for diversity and culturally responsive

practices under this domain on the TASQ. Not included under Student Engagement however, are practices and strategies for increasing academic engagement and the connectedness students form with adults and peers. Academic engagement strategies are included under the Teaching and Learning domain of the TASQ while building trusting relationships was seen as a domain important enough to stand on its own. Like many domains and target areas on the TASQ (and within the concept of school climate itself), there is a strong interconnection and overlap. For instance, the clubs, sports, and extracurricular activities found under Student Engagement on the TASQ offer the opportunity for students to socialize and form powerful bonds with adults and peers. To measure the remaining elements of student engagement and connectedness, the TASQ focuses on practices and activities that foster opportunities for social interaction, leadership, and meaningful participation.

Extracurricular Opportunities. The NSCC's Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) was developed with action plans for schools, should they discover challenges or deficits in any given dimension on the survey. In the action plans for social and civic learning and student connectedness/engagement, the NSCC recommends that schools strongly encourage students to take part in extracurricular activities such as sports, student government, arts, and clubs to help develop their social-emotional skills. Voight and Nation (2016) stated there is evidence that schools can help to foster a positive climate through hosting fun and interactive events, as well as promoting the formation of clubs and extracurricular activities that allow students to socialize with one another and with adults. Specifically, they presented research that such involvement led to higher academic aspirations, more positive attitudes towards school, an increase in the reported academic behaviors of their peers, and experienced lower rates of suspension. Coker, Martinez, McMahon, Cohen, and Thapa (2018) also acknowledged that the

availability of and participation in school-based extracurricular activities have received attention as strategies to promote positive youth outcomes and are closely related to school connectedness or belonging.

    Student Leadership & Voice. According to the NSCC (2018) the idea of "student voice'' has recently gained traction as a potential way to improve both student outcomes and school climate. Student voice is a term used to describe the various opportunities students have to contribute to the decisions that will shape their school experiences and that of their peers. The NSCC found that providing students with a choice and a voice was found to improve academic outcomes, engagement with school, and relationships with adults. Enhancing the voice of students "can help instill in them a belief that they can improve themselves and the institutions that affect them, develop the skills and knowledge to work toward developing these beliefs" (p. 22). Aldridge and McChesney (2018) additionally presented research indicating that along with relationships, opportunities for students to have a voice and contribute to decision-making at school were two aspects of school climate that promoted student mental health and reduced risk behaviors. When it comes to student voice within the classroom, Voight and Nation (2016) found the benefits of establishing collaborative in-class activities between teachers and students were similar to providing a student voice in school-wide activities. A study of Restorative Practices by Gregory, Clawson, Davis, and Gerewitz (2016) further showed that when individual student perspectives and the collective voice of students are accompanied by consistent and fair accountability for jointly developed classroom rules, it improves relationships and "may reduce the likelihood that students in stigmatized groups will be excluded from the classroom for discipline reasons" (p. 345). This represents one simple way for any teacher to provide a voice for all students in their classroom.

When it comes to school-wide voice and activism, the extracurricular activities mentioned previously not only assist in further connecting students with their schools and positive peers, they also provide a vehicle for exercising that voice. This is particularly true of civic-minded clubs and student government bodies. Although CASEL (2019) rightfully points out that such opportunities can be limited to the participation of a select few students, they recognize the importance of creating meaningful opportunities for students to "share their opinions, take on leadership roles, devise strategies for school improvement, and inform decision-making around issues that they prioritize" (p. 64). It therefore becomes important for school staff to create additional opportunities for student leadership that are embedded within classrooms and throughout the school community.

Creating Welcoming and Culturally Responsive Environments*.* Respect for Diversity is one of the 13 dimensions found on the CSCI and focuses on the extent to which adults and students in the school respect differences such as gender, race/ethnicity, or physical differences. The survey asks students whether they perceive such respect in other students, in the way students view adults, and in the way the adults interact with each other. Other questions ask whether their school welcomes and accepts people from diverse backgrounds or if they like working with others who are different than they are (another gender, race, culture, disability, sexual orientation, learning differences, etc.). In the action guide for this domain, the NSCC recommends structured opportunities to help foster a sense of common ground and interconnectedness for students, staff, and families. Within the dimension of Engagement on the ED School Climate Surveys (EDSCLS) is the subdimension of Cultural and Linguistic Competence. This topic area concerns an awareness that respondents have of their own cultural identity as well as an understanding about differences with other cultures, and the ability to learn

and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families (ED, 2019). According to the ED, these competencies provide the basis for the creation of culturally responsive learning environments and teaching practices.

Family & Community Engagement

Although comparatively few schools conduct parent and community climate surveys (Wang & Degol, 2016), these stakeholder groups play critical roles in shaping the climate of a school. Home and parent supports were identified on 15 of the 41 instruments in the ED's Compendium of valid and reliable surveys, while community supports were separately found on 12 instruments. The CSCI measures the degree that students and parents feel families are made to feel welcome and are encouraged to participate in school life, as well as the effort the school makes to communicate with parents and families. The CSCI also asks students about civic learning and engaging in activities that help communities. The NSCC (2019) asserts that "recruiting parents and communities to be involved in school life is perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of the job for teachers and administrators" (p. 29).

The ED model also places a strong emphasis on the school and family connection, particularly on the staff and parent surveys. The EDSCLS asks these stakeholders questions related to communication and outreach to parents, positive parental contact, feeling welcome, understanding and supporting the needs of children, and connecting families to community resources. Like the NSCC, the ED (2016) sought to address the challenge of family and community engagement and developed a set of strategies that include messaging, communication, obtaining feedback from forums and surveys, a shared understanding and ownership, and developing multiple family-school-community partnerships. CASEL (2019) also notes the importance of the school-family-community partnership and echoes many of the same

recommendations as the NSCC and ED. They encourage schools to include parents, families, and community partners in developing a shared vision, goals, and priorities for major SEL initiatives that are to be implemented. The recommendations from leading authorities on school climate and SEL improvement demonstrate there are activities and practices that schools conduct which can engage parents, families, and the larger community. Beyond engagement, these recommendations seek to strengthen and maintain relationships with these stakeholder groups to form meaningful partnerships.

   Parent Communication. In its *Guiding Principles for Improving School Climate* (2014), the ED noted research showing a powerful effect that engaged families can have on a student's academic and behavioral outcomes. To help facilitate that engagement, the ED recommended several parent communication strategies for schools. Among them were establishing discipline policies and practices that engage parents and guardians as partners as much as possible by "establishing comprehensive communications between school staff and family members, and by promoting supportive roles for family members in identifying and addressing student behavior challenge" (p. 12). To further engage parents as partners, the ED recommends schools should establish and maintain regular communication with parents about all aspects of the school's activities and each child's learning and development. Communication should be in a user-friendly format that is in a language the parent can understand, with considerations for language or disability. The NSCC (2018) also found that schools that are successful in engaging parents and the greater community adopted a culturally attuned approach to outreach and sought to "meet parents where they are"– tapping into their interests and availability. Both the NSCC (2018) and ED (2014) recommend embedding regular communications channels into school policies and procedures to increase engagement, enhance partnerships, and protect the civil and

due process rights of students and families. CASEL's Guide to School-wide SEL (2019) additionally recommends a comprehensive communications plan that takes into consideration two-way communication with all stakeholders, provides opportunities to receive input from stakeholders, and checks to ensure the communication process put in place are effective at engaging stakeholders.

   Civic Engagement Opportunities. Civic engagement on the TASQ refers to service learning – where students work collaboratively to develop solutions to authentic problems in their school or larger community. Such collaborative civic-minded project learning not only helps to strengthen the relationship between all community members but also provides deeper and meaningful learning beyond the classroom – setting the table for the more global application of the attributes we seek to instill within our students (Cohen et al., 2009). According to Geller, Voight, Wegman, and Nation (2013), many studies suggest that participation in activities that promote civic behaviors such as helping, leadership, and improving their surrounding communities, are associated with increased student connectedness and engagement with their school. The NSCC (2018) also states that opportunities for interactive and service-learning - whether they take place within school or in the community - adds invaluable depth and dimension to a student's education and they "are edified by the chance to work with their hands and hearts to authentically create things and change the lives of others" (p. 35). The equal inclusion of civic activities conducted within schools and communities is an important distinction, as it allows for a greater number and range of students who can benefit from service-learning.

   Thapa et al. (2013) believed service learning beyond the walls of a classroom is an effective way of incorporating civic education into a school's curriculum. However, the authors

note that "active and collaborative learning through authentic projects is most effective in an environment with a civic mission that encourages trusting relationships between all members of the school community" (p. 366). In other words, schools and classrooms that fully embed the ethos of community activism into their climate and culture experience greater returns with student learning. Thapa et al. (2013) point to the belief that service-learning activities promote civic learning because it shows students how to apply knowledge learned in the classroom to real-world settings and problems. Activities such as community service or even debating what service projects to take on, provide students with opportunities to participate in and begin forming their own opinions of social and government systems. When students are allowed and even encouraged to collaborate with peers, it allows them to problem-solve and build upon the ideas of each other. The authors also presented research indicating that when students are given ownership and choice in the service-learning projects, it reinforces student concepts of themselves and increased their tolerance for diversity.

Community Partnerships. While the mission of developing the hearts and minds of children may be the central purpose of public education, schools are by no means the only organizations dedicated to that purpose. Regardless of the resources at a school or district's disposal, it makes sense to align educational efforts with the array of available community service providers that exist to support children and families. In its *Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline* (2014), the ED recommends that schools "collaborate with local mental health, child welfare, law enforcement, and juvenile justice agencies and other stakeholders to align resources, prevention strategies, and intervention services" (p. 7). Wang and Degol (2016) noted that a strong school-community partnership is inviting to parents and community members and promotes the development of mentoring programs, business

partnerships, and safety patrols that can have a positive effect on student achievement and behavior" (p. 324). Such community partners may include out-of-school time providers (such as before school and afterschool programs), embedded direct service providers, community-based nonprofit organizations, health care providers, university research centers, colleges of education, mission-driven foundations, governmental agencies, and local businesses.

In their review of 66 studies focusing on school climate improvement, Voight and Nation (2016) described a program that incorporated a parent and community component that demonstrated very strong evidence for improving rates of school-based violence, student provoking behavior, and school delinquency. The program involved the creation of task forces of school staff, students, parents, and community members that met regularly to discuss the implementation of the curriculum, potential school policy changes to promote student health, and school-community partnerships that may support student health. Moderate improvements to school climate were noted by Voight and Nation (2016) when schools coordinated their student services with outside service providers to create a broad network of support for students' health-related and family needs. The moderating effect was found to be most effective when schools worked with a small number of highly committed outside partner organizations.

When it comes to community representation in school improvement efforts, the recommendations and research appear not as robust as parent and family involvement. In their School Climate Improvement Resource Guide, the ED (2016) still recommends community representation in improvement planning, as well as embedded processes that help the school obtain input from stakeholders – to include community members. The ED also points to several advantages of community involvement in the planning process, to include assistance in engaging students and families, offering perspective and resources, reinforcing climate improvement

efforts with families and other community organizations, sharing their data, hosting meetings or focus groups for parents and families, and aligning community services with climate and school improvement strategies.

Data Collection & Analysis

One domain not found across any of the surveys or models of school climate and safety that were examined, was *Data Collection & Analysis*. Because the TASQ shifts the point of climate assessment to the activities and practices conducted in schools, this category merits consideration as a unique domain. Despite not being measured on existing climate assessment instruments, data collection and analysis is one of seven key school climate improvement activities, according to the ED (2016). "Data collection furnishes evidence of how your stakeholders perceive the school climate. This set of activities provides you with strategies on how to collect, analyze, and report your school climate data" (p. 11). In addition to conducting valid and reliable school climate surveys, the ED recommends multiple types of data be collected to better understand the climate of a school. Which data should be decided by a core planning team to help ensure they align with the objectives of the improvement plan. The ED also recommends a data collection plan that details each of these data sources, communicates the importance of data collection to stakeholders, and identifies who will be involved in each data collection activity (such as engaging key stakeholders or conducting focus groups). A data analysis plan is also recommended to answer critical questions about the data collected. The ED (2016) recommends all data be disaggregated by student subgroup (race, sex, disability, age, and English learner status) and stakeholder (student, staff, parent). Disaggregation of survey results by subgroup is important because student experiences often vary significantly, even within a single school (Kostyo et al., 2018). Disaggregation of student data by student subgroups is also a

requirement of state accountability models under the ESSA. The ED (2016) recommends the analysis of data should be facilitated through clear and actionable data reports. This information should also be shared with stakeholders and publicly posted, along with support to assist in understanding the data and how to take away key points. The ED (2016) notes that school climate data should then be used for developing action plans to guide improvement efforts and to assess and support the effectiveness of those efforts.

Data can inform other efforts that relate to school climate, such as bullying and violence prevention or behavioral interventions and supports through the MTSS (ED, 2016). Data Input & Analysis is also one of the 10 core domains found on the Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ). This instrument is used to help determine the level of fidelity that schools implement School-wide PBIS, which is a widely used framework in K-12 education and is backed by strong research (Childs et al., 2016). PBIS also uses a data outcome summary that incorporates discipline data such as the number of referrals, In-School Suspensions, and Out of School Suspensions to assist in evaluating the program's effectiveness. However, when it comes to discipline, the ED (2104) recommends a more comprehensive collection of data. In addition to demographic characteristics that allow for disaggregation, schools should collect complete information about all discipline incidents to include "a description of the misconduct, grade level of each student referred for discipline, attempts to address the behavior prior to the referral for discipline, witnesses to the incident, prior history of the student, referring staff member, discipline imposed, and law enforcement involvement, if any" (p. 29). Kostyo et al. (2018) also notes the increased use of suspension rates in state accountability assessment systems and presented other school climate-related data now being used by states, such as chronic absenteeism, extended-year graduation rates, and college and even career preparedness indicators.

The ESSA requires state accountability models to incorporate data supporting both academic and non-academic indicators of school quality or student success (Kostyo, 2018). Because the domains on the TASQ also capture both measures (particularly under the target area of Academic Support and Excellence), the collection and analysis of academic data are also included, along with behavioral, disciplinary, attendance, and school climate data. According to Kostyo (2018), the ESSA requires each of these indicators to offer valid, reliable, and comparable information within each state's accountability system and have the ability to be disaggregated by student subgroup (race, sex, disability, age, and English learner status) and individual performance measures. Because the TASQ does not measure student-level indicators, it cannot meet the ESSA-mandated criteria for disaggregating data based on student subgroup and individual performance. Thus, the TASQ could not currently be incorporated into state accountability models to meet the "Fifth Indicator" of the ESSA. However, the TASQ does assess the critical practice of collecting and analyzing multiple forms of disaggregated student-level data, following the criteria recommended by the ED and supported by research.

To disaggregate data in meaningful and consistent ways, schools must establish formal systems and structures to support the management and monitoring of the information and ensure it complies with all applicable privacy laws and best practices in data security (ED, 2014). These systems should allow for data to be analyzed in meaningful and consistent ways and allow for the creation of easy to understand reports that are shared with stakeholders and publicly posted (ED, 2016). It is clear from the recommendations by the ED and the research that several key activities involving the collection, analysis, and reporting of data drive school climate improvement and school improvement efforts in general. How well schools adhere to these

recommended practices appears to play an equally critical role in developing a safe and positive school climate as any evidence-based practice under one of the more traditional domains.

Conclusion

Decades of research have attempted to define and measure school climate through the lens of its various components (Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016). All models and measurements of school climate must necessarily incorporate a multidimensional construct, to address the multiple and unique characteristics of a school's climate (Zullig et al., 2015). Traditionally, these separate domains of school climate are predicated on the perceptions of stakeholders and primarily measured through the use of student and staff surveys (Wang & Degol, 2016; Zullig et al., 2015). The Transformational Assessment of School Quality (TASQ) offers a different view of school climate and safety assessment that instead centers on the activities and practices undertaken in schools. This shift in focus creates new meanings and purposes for the various domains of school climate and safety, and perhaps more importantly, advocates for changing the metric that schools are held accountable for. Using the lens of Bourdieu's Practice Theory, the TASQ is an instrument designed to assess the practices and activities a school conducts, which in-turn largely shapes the perceptions of school climate experienced by stakeholders. The TASQ not only seeks to provide a more consistent and comprehensive point of assessment but also a more direct path to school climate improvement by fostering the increased use of best practices and evidence-based approaches. Because specific evidence-based approaches or best practices are used as the benchmark for achieving the highest possible score for each question item on the TASQ, school leaders are not only assessing their current efforts, they are at the same time provided with the approach or practice needed to improve.

This review of the most relevant literature in school climate and safety was intended to frame the study and explore not only the gaps and issues that exist with current methods of assessment but how the TASQ could be constructed and what elements it should include – directly addressing the first research question of: What distinct domains and target areas are necessary to construct the TASQ and how should they be organized? To answer this question, this study relied heavily on traditional domains and dimensions of school climate, through an analysis of the most widely used instruments and cited models. The domains, target areas, and evidence-based practices extracted from the most relevant studies on school climate and safety have contributed to the further development of the TASQ.

A potential deficiency in the research used to build the TASQ includes the assumption that all evidence-based practices carry equal weight when it comes to scoring. In fact, no research was located that determined which practices or activities might be more important when it comes to impacting school climate or safety. Future research on the efforts undertaken by schools to positively impact school climate, should study the impact of these practices across different school levels and populations and attempt to make such determinations. Research has also shown how student's differing cultural and socio-economic backgrounds contribute to differences in their perceptions of school climate and safety (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018; Durlak et al., 2011). Another consideration warranting further research is the interconnected nature between many of the scales found on the TASQ and traditional models. For example, discipline practices that seek to limit the use of exclusionary discipline not only have a profound impact on the safety and order of a school, they have also been shown to improve interpersonal relationships and student connectedness with their school. Many such practices found throughout the literature similarly have been shown to positively impact multiple domains and dimensions.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

For more than 100 years, research behind school climate - to include the various

definitions and constructs - has continued to evolve and increasingly shown to positively impact

a wide range of academic and non-academic student outcomes (Bradshaw et al., 2014; Cohen et

al., 2009; Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016; Zullig et al., 2010). Despite the significant

body of research connecting school climate improvement to important outcomes (Zullig, 2010),

wide disparities in the definition and multidimensional constructs of school climate still remain.

In addition to the lack of a universal definition, the methods of school climate assessment have

also faced criticism. By far, the most common method of assessing school climate centers on

measuring the perceptions of stakeholders - primarily through the use of student and staff

surveys (Wang & Degol, 2016; Zullig et al., 2015). This method has produced numerous valid

and reliable assessment instruments, as well as evidence-based models that define and break

down school climate into essential core domains. However, the use of surveys and self-report

methods have also been the subject of criticism, due to concerns about as the manipulation of

responses, the accuracy of responses, and the issues involved with applying user-level responses

to assess school-level characteristics (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015; Hough et al., 2017; Konold &

Cornell, 2015; Melnick et al., 2017; Wang & Degol, 2016).

Regardless of these criticisms, the construct of school climate has a vast body of research

and a long history of practice that supports it as a core function of public education. So much so

that the federal government specifically recommended states incorporate measures of school

climate and safety into their educational accountability plans to address the ESSA's non-

academic indicator for success. Despite the quantity and quality of research and despite the

specific recommendation by the federal government, only eight states submitted accountability plans for their schools that contained school climate and safety measures, and none incorporated SEL indicators (Kostyo et al., 2018). The absence of these measures in accountability systems, to include the structures, policies, guidelines, and assistance from state agencies that accompany such measures, presents significant challenges for districts and schools to address school climate in a sustained and systemic way. In many instances, such systems have left behind a sterile academic landscape, leaving Ciccione and Freiberg (in Fink, Cohen, & Slade, 2017) to proclaim that "in school (especially in our urban centers), students have become 'scholars' who often do not experience or learn anything beyond the original three R's" (p. 44). While this may present a slight exaggeration of the content students are learning, too many of our schools are not delivering the type of holistic education their children rightfully deserve.

It is against this backdrop that schools face the moral imperative of providing a high-quality and holistic educational experience for their students. As more schools and districts take up this challenge in states where there is little support and no accountability for school climate measures, it offers an opportunity to examine innovative approaches to strengthening and improving safety and climate. In one Florida district, the local decision to improve the climate and safety of their schools led to the development of an instrument called the Transformational Assessment of School Quality (TASQ). The TASQ is designed to assess the number and quality of practices and activities conducted in any of the district's PK-12 schools. This setting presented a unique opportunity to conduct case study research that has informed the continued development of the TASQ and explored the experiences of school leaders who conducted a pilot study of the instrument.

This chapter provides insight and a rationale for the selection of the research design and how it addresses both the purpose of the study and the research questions. Information about the research site and target population are also given, as are the sampling method to identify pilot participants who will be solicited for the focus group interview. Procedures and protocol for the collection and analysis of data are described in detail, to include coding methods and triangulation of data. Chapter Three also identifies the limitations and intentional delimitations of the study, in addition to methods for increasing credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of the findings. Finally, ethical issues arising in this study are identified, as are the strategies used to mitigate them to the extent possible.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the construction of an instrument under development in a Florida public school district that seeks to both assess the activities and practices conducted in their member schools and guide school climate and safety improvement efforts. Through this study, a comprehensive review of the most relevant literature, an analysis of preexisting data collected by the district, and a focus group interview has been used to help determine the potential of the TASQ as a practical and effective assessment tool. This study did not seek to establish whether the TASQ accurately predicts or correlates with a more positive school climate. It was intended only to explore whether it is possible to develop a logically-sound model that can address known gaps and challenges of existing school climate models, be practical for use by school leaders, holds the potential to drive improvement, and is worthy of future studies to determine validity and reliability.

The review of the literature framed the study and explored not only the gaps and issues that exist with current methods of assessment but how the TASQ could be constructed and what

elements it should include. Input from leading school climate and safety researchers that was previously solicited by the district was also analyzed to help establish credibility for the approach and add further refinement to the construction of the instrument. Following the refinement process, the TASQ was piloted by the district in nine targeted volunteer schools. Leaders from each of the pilot schools were solicited for participation in a follow-up focus group discussion using a total sampling technique to capture the experiences of all teams conducting the pilot. The experiences of the leaders who participated in the pilot helped to determine whether the TASQ is suitable for measuring objectives and Key Performance Indicators with the district strategic planning process and guiding improvement efforts across all schools. The focus group interview was conducted following the pilot study to collect these data and examine the experiences in greater detail of the leaders who used the TASQ. Each of the school leaders who volunteered to participate were asked to meet with the small teams at their school who assisted in responding to questions on the TASQ, in order to better represent the collective thoughts of their team.

Through an analysis of these data elements, this study sought to determine whether an effective, useful, and practical instrument can be developed to measure the breadth and quality of school climate practices and guide improvement efforts. Ultimately, it was the aim of this study to also provide a foundation for the construction of a valid and reliable instrument to measure school climate and safety that educational agencies may find worthy of incorporating into their systems of accountability.

Research Questions & Design

The purpose behind the study resulted in three specific research questions that informed and guided the research:

RQ₁: What distinct domains and target areas would be necessary to construct the TASQ and how should they be organized?

RQ₂: How do experts in the field of school climate research describe the use of the TASQ as an instrument to assess school climate and safety and guide improvement practices?

RQ₃: How do the experiences of the school leaders who conduct the TASQ pilot study reflect its potential as an effective, useful, and practical instrument?

To fully address the research questions and purpose of the study, an instrumental case study design was selected. Creswell (2015) states that case studies are used to provide an "in-depth exploration of a bounded system based on extensive data collection" (p. 469). A "case" may be relegated to a single person, an entire organization, or it could involve a program, events, or activities. The bounded system in this study is the school district developing the TASQ and specifically, the case involves the activities undertaken to assess and improve the climate of their schools. Creswell states that an instrumental case study is used when research seeks to "illuminate a particular issue" (p. 470). Stake (2017) adds that instrumental designs are used when the purpose of the study is to go beyond the case itself. In this instance, the issue at hand is addressing the gaps and challenges that may contribute to the continued exclusion of school climate measures from state accountability systems and inhibit school climate and safety improvement efforts. The development of the TASQ in the district has created an opportunity to explore the potential of this innovative approach in greater detail and is therefore appropriate for the instrumental case study design.

To address the three research questions, the design of the study provides an analysis of data derived from existing literature, two sources of preexisting data collected by the district, and

a focus group interview with school leaders who piloted the TASQ. The first research question was informed through a thorough examination of the most relevant literature in the field and widely cited models of school climate. Included within the literature are government documents, such as the multi-agency *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans* and the Threat Assessment Model developed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Secret Service, that incorporate best practices in emergency response, safety, and violence prevention. Together, these sources were used to identify a comprehensive picture of the primary domains and target areas of school climate and safety that might be incorporated into the TASQ. The review of the literature is intended to not only identify the domains found on existing models but also identify additional domains that become necessary when shifting the point of assessment from stakeholder perceptions to school-based practices.

In addition to the examination of existing models and instruments, the first research question was also addressed through an analysis of feedback provided by school climate and safety researchers that was collected by the district. To assist in preparing the TASQ for piloting, an outline of the domains and target areas derived from an examination of the literature was sent to research teams at the National School Climate Center (NSCC), the Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning (CASEL), and individual experts found throughout the literature. These experts were solicited by the district to provide insight into the construction of the TASQ, including the domains and target areas used, the design of the questions, and other important details they wished to offer. The district used this feedback to refine the TASQ prior to it being piloted in schools.

In addition to addressing the first research question, the analysis of feedback from school climate and safety experts directly informed the second research question pertaining to the

potential ability of the TASQ to adequately assess school climate and safety. The experts

contacted by the district offered their insights to this central question through open-ended

responses. Their insight was intended to provide a measure of credibility for the TASQ to

adequately assess school climate and safety and guide improvement efforts. This was seen as

critical, as no similar instrument could be located in the literature and little research existed to

support the notion that such an approach to school climate assessment and improvement held

merit.

The third research question is addressed through an analysis of the experiences of leaders

from each pilot school that were explored in a follow-up focus group discussion. The study

enlisted nine volunteer leaders from each of the schools that piloted the TASQ, to participate in a

follow-up focus group discussion that sought to explore more deeply the construction, ease of

use, and perceived effectiveness of the instrument. Leaders were asked how time-intensive the

effort was in addition to the design of the questions and how effectively it captured their

perceptions of school climate. Importantly, the discussion also included the ability of the TASQ

to bring a greater number of best practices and evidence-based approaches to their school.

Site Information & Population

The setting for this study is a school district on Florida's Gulf Coast that is referred to as

the Sunshine School District (SSD). The geographical region where the SSD is located is among

the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the nation (US Census Bureau, 2019), placing

significant challenges with not only the growth of the student population but also with shifting

demographics. The SSD is located in a mixed urban-rural community with an overall county

population exceeding 350,000. The district serves over 50,000 students in more than 60 traditional

public and charter schools. Nearly a third of these schools are classified as Title One - a federal

program that is designed to support high-quality learning outcomes for socio-economically disadvantaged students. The SSD employs a staff of over 7,000 employees and draws from thousands of parent and community volunteers, who assist with an array of school functions. In addition to the K-12 public schools, the district also operates a world-class Technical College that serves over 4,000 high school-aged students and adults, as well as a Voluntary Pre-K program that serves approximately 2,000 pre-school children and their families.

The history of prevention activities and school climate improvement efforts in the SSD has largely been a piecemeal approach, particularly since the loss of the federal Safe and Drug-Free Schools program in 2010. The SSD has promoted Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in cooperation with a local university. However, survey data collected by the university shows that few schools have consistently implemented PBIS with fidelity. The SSD additionally implemented a behavioral Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework for use in all schools. Much like the PBIS initiative, few schools have consistently followed the MTSS framework for behavior and few district resources have been dedicated to overseeing and supporting this process. The SSD has also sought to impact prevention and life skills education through grant funding and partnerships with local law enforcement. However, there have been no actionable sustainability plans for continuing grant-supported initiatives beyond the funding period and budget cuts to all partnering agencies led to the loss of instructional programming for prevention that was led by School Resource Officers (SROs). Aside from these initiatives, there has been little coordinated focus on prevention, intervention, school climate, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), or any substantive effort to address school climate at the district level. Schools in the SSD that have carried out such activities have done so largely on their own.

Despite the lack of time and resources dedicated to addressing school climate across the SSD, change is underway. Prior to the onset of a new strategic planning process, the current Superintendent had made a concerted push for increased mental health services, universal SEL instruction, and a multitude of school safety initiatives. Each of these areas falls under the umbrella of school climate and is also assessed through the TASQ. This alignment with the Superintendent's priorities and the ability to assess and potentially improve the climate and safety of each school has created the proving ground for the TASQ to be piloted and considered for district adoption across all schools. However, other forces are contributing to the push for school climate and safety initiatives.

In 2019, state allocations for mental health and school security were awarded to all Florida school districts and the new legislature has mandated school-based efforts to address these areas. The funding for district allocations and sudden attention to school safety stemmed from the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act, formed in the wake of mass shootings at that school in February of 2018 (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], 2019). Despite its tragic impetus, the act represents an opportunity for funding and accountability to be directed towards elements of school climate and safety and a renewed attention to violence prevention. In the SSD, this confluence of events has served to reinforce the decision of executive leadership to embed school climate and safety as a focal point of the new strategic plan. The use of school climate surveys and the development of the TASQ to evaluate the activities and practices conducted throughout SSD schools are under consideration as elements of the strategic planning process and are a sign of the district's commitment towards innovation and improvement – particularly in the absence of state accountability for these critical areas. It

has also provided a setting conducive to conducting an instrumental case study, to more closely examine the use of this innovative method of assessing school climate and safety.

Sampling Method

Once the feedback from school climate and safety experts was incorporated into the design of the TASQ, it was piloted in nine district schools (4 elementary, 2 middle, 2 high, and 1 K-8). The pilot was conducted by the district to help determine whether it holds promise for use with the district's strategic plan and to serve as a new local assessment instrument. A survey coordinator was assigned to each school and asked to recruit a small team of staff to assist in responding to the 64 question items on the TASQ and providing supporting documentation for responses. Following the pilot, volunteers from each of the participating schools were solicited to represent their team and take part in a follow-up focus group discussion. For this aspect of the study, a total population sampling technique was used, due to the small number of schools that participated in the pilot. According to Etikan (2016), total population sampling is a purposeful sampling technique where the entire population meets the criteria (e.g. specific skill set, experience, etc.) of the research being conducted. It is most often used where the number of cases being investigated is relatively small. The district did consider the demographic and socioeconomic makeup of students, as well as having representation from multiple grade levels, and a diverse range of discipline or climate-related challenges, when targeting schools to conduct the pilot. The diversity sought through the purposeful sampling taken by the district was carried over to the total population sample used to identify participants for the focus group discussion. To recruit volunteer participants for the focus group discussion, the researcher relied on professional and personal relationships cultivated with school leaders inside each of the pilot schools. The researcher also leveraged the leaders' sense of duty regarding the critical

importance of improving the climate and safety of their schools. Understanding they have an opportunity to shape the way our schools are evaluated was also seen as an important motivator for leaders to participate.

Data Collection

To help in fully addressing the three research questions, data collection for this study took place on three separate fronts. Yin (2018) discussed the use of multiple sources of data as a tactic to help increase the construct validity of a case study and establish "a sufficiently operational set of measures" for the study (p. 90). Yin also identifies six sources of evidence that may be used in case studies: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. This study focused on documentation through an examination of the existing literature, archival records in the form of pre-existing data collected by the district, and data collected through interviews with pilot participants.

The first source of data was derived from a review of the most current literature, existing models, and instruments related to school climate and safety. These sources served to identify the initial framework of the TASQ, as well as the gaps and issues with current methods of school climate and safety assessment. To help select the relevant literature, a comprehensive search was conducted using the University of New England Online Library and Google Scholar. The keywords and terms used in the search parameters included *Dimensions of School Climate*, *School Climate Models, School Climate Assessment*, *School Climate and Safety Assessment*, *School Climate Measurement, School Climate Assessment/Measurement Challenges, Issues and Gaps in School Climate Assessment, School Climate and Accountability, School Climate and Safety Practices*, *School Climate Best Practices*, and *School Climate Evidence-based Practices*.

The second source of data came from an analysis of feedback from experts in the field of school climate and safety represented throughout the literature and previously solicited by district staff. A series of questions were used to elicit specific feedback regarding the alignment of the domains, target areas, and specific question items on the TASQ. Each expert was provided the opportunity to address these areas, as well as offer open-ended feedback on their thoughts of assessing school climate and safety using activities and practices the basis of assessment. The open-ended feedback intended to capture not only their thoughts regarding the ability of the TASQ to adequately assess school climate and safety, but to also potentially address the challenges and issues that continue to stymie improvement efforts in schools. Identical questions were distributed to experts found throughout the literature reviewed for this study. The questions were sent to each expert via email and collected in the same manner.

Once all expert feedback was collected from the district, it was then compiled into a single document, coded, then ultimately used to modify the domains on the TASQ, as well as the alignment of target areas under each domain. This data source helped to serve multiple functions. First, the expert feedback was used to refine and condense the TASQ, making it a far better instrument for piloting in schools. Second, the feedback from experts provided a measure of face validity to the approach being proposed by the TASQ – to measure the practices and activities in schools. Having feedback that supported the approach was considered instrumental in moving forward with the pilot, as no such research or support could be located throughout the literature.

The third source of data collected was generated from the focus group interview of leaders who helped conduct the pilot of the TASQ in the SSD. Focus groups are essentially group interviews according to Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) and possess elements of both participant observation and individual interviews, while also maintaining their uniqueness as a

distinctive research method (Liamputtong, 2011). Once the district completed the pilot in each of the participating schools, volunteers from those schools were targeted to take part in the focus group discussion. Protocol for the focus group was written down and distributed to each participant in the study. The questions used for the focus group interview were based on the 10 areas of concern that participants were asked to pay attention to as they completed the pilot of the TASQ. The focus groups were conducted within two weeks of the final participating school to complete the TASQ, so participant experiences could be recalled with greater clarity and detail. The discussion was recorded using Microsoft Teams, as well as two backup digital recording devices. The video and audio recordings were then transcribed through the transcript function of the Teams program, in order to prepare them for analysis.

Data Analysis

Data from the three distinct sources collected were analyzed using different methods. The domains and related subdomains of several school climate models and assessment instruments were placed into a comparison table, to illustrate the similarities and differences in the construction of existing models. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2015), these types of visual displays help organize and present findings to the reader. A frequency table was used to present the major domains and subdomains from each school climate model, in addition to the 41 school climate surveys found in the ED's Compendia of Reliable and Valid Instruments, to demonstrate how often each appears. This analysis intended to capture a holistic picture of school climate, combining the most recognized models and instruments and clearly showing which elements were adopted for use on the TASQ.

Pre-existing data from the experts in the field of school climate and safety were collected by the district using a set of open-ended questions that sought to elicit nuanced responses. The

questions were primarily concerned with the overall design of the TASQ and alignment of the

domains, target areas, and individual questions. One question allowed experts to offer their views

on using practices and activities to assess school climate, whether it might address known gaps

or issues, and potentially drive improvement. In all, experts responded to five questions, each

containing a subset of guiding questions. All expert feedback was gathered via email, allowing

for the responses to be combined in a single digital document, sorted by researcher and question.

The document was read through twice to develop a general sense of the data and become

familiar with it, as recommended by Braun and Clark (2006), Creswell (2012), and Saldana

(2009). Due to the small size of the document, the data was formatted and coded manually, using

Microsoft Word. Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) describe coding as "essentially a system of

classification—the process of noting what is of interest or significance, identifying different

segments of the data, and labeling them to organize the information contained in the data"

(p. 384). During the initial read-through, analytic memos were taken to help distinguish the

different types of feedback that emerged under each of the 5 questions the experts responded to

and identify possible code labels to use. A first cycle process of structural coding was then

applied to the formatted document to further identify potential codes and the breadth of relevant

responses to the semi-structured questions. According to Saldana (2009), structural coding is

particularly appropriate where data from multiple participants using standardized or semi-

structured data-gathering protocols are used. Although each of the five questions posed to the

experts sought to elicit different information, a system of codes was developed that applied to the

entire document.

Following the read-through and first cycle of structural coding, a second cycle of pattern

coding was applied to each section to determine emerging themes in the feedback and to help

categorize similarly coded data from the researchers. Notes taken in the form of analytic memos during the initial read-through of the document also identified possible patterns and themes prior to the cycle of pattern coding. The larger categories derived from the pattern coding process helped to determine which feedback directly impacted the construction of the TASQ and which feedback was more related to the general process of assessment. Those responses that directly impacted the TASQ were used to make several adjustments to the domains, target areas, and individual questions on the instrument. This proved to be an important step in providing a more refined instrument for district schools to pilot.

The final data set collected was the transcript of the focus group interviews. The questions that guided the discussion were based on 10 areas of focus that their teams took notes on as they conducted the pilot. The focus group questions however, allowed for more open-ended responses and sought to uncover common and unique experiences of the school leaders who conducted the TASQ in their schools. The focus group discussion also allowed for a deeper exploration of each area of concern, offering an opportunity for possible solutions or ideas to be generated. Like the feedback from the experts, the school leaders provided their thoughts on how well they believe the TASQ measures what it is intended to measure. This presented another opportunity for face validation of the instrument. Although not experts, the pilot participants had the benefit of using a completed version of the TASQ in a real-world setting. The focus group questions examined the ease of using the instrument, the amount of time it took to complete, the ability of the instrument to accurately capture what they believe reflects their school's efforts, the difficulty (or ease) in providing documentation for their responses, and how well the TASQ might assist in guiding improvement efforts.

Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the focus group was conducted virtually through Microsoft Teams. The focus group interview was then archived through Teams, which also produced a written transcript of the discussion that was edited and prepared for coding. The video recording was used to assist in making corrections to the written transcript and also afforded the opportunity to take hand-written notes that identified potential codes, themes, and essential comments. The coding of the transcript followed Braun and Clark's (2006) six steps of thematic analysis: (1) familiarizing yourself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Using the hand-written notes and codes derived from the video recording, the edited transcript was studied to gain more familiarity with the participant responses and refine the potential code labels and emergent themes. The transcript was then uploaded to web-based application called Dedoose and an initial code system was built using the hand-written notes as a guide. Like the feedback from experts, a structural coding process was used, due to the use of the semi-structured question protocol that guided the focus group discussion. Using Dedoose, the transcript then underwent a second cycle of structural and pattern coding to refine the codes and associate them with specific participant comments. The second cycle of pattern coding was also used to develop larger categories where similar codes could be grouped together and identify subthemes. This explanatory and inferential exploration of participant responses to each question offered critical information that will likely lead to additional changes to the design of the TASQ and help determine whether it holds promise as a practical instrument for the district to use. Table 7 in Chapter Four shows the organization of all codes, subcodes, categories, themes, and subthemes.

Limitations of the Research Design

There are several potential limitations of this study, introduced by its design and focus. The scope of this study is confined to the experiences of using the TASQ in a single Florida school district, thus limiting the perspective on assessing the phenomenon of school climate. Many of the school leaders involved with the pilot study and follow-up focus group likely have little experience in implementing school climate and safety assessments of any kind, due to the absence of such measures at the local and state level. This may have potentially limited their ability to compare the use of the TASQ with previous experiences in conducting other methods of school climate and safety assessment. The piloting of the TASQ in a single school district also may restrict the diversity of opinions towards school climate initiatives. Many of the school leaders participating in the study may view school climate initiatives as ancillary because it is not a component of any local or state accountability plan they have previously experienced.

A second potential limitation is the use of a focus group, rather than individual interviews with school leaders from the pilot. Although this assisted in reducing the amount of data to be transcribed, it potentially limited the responses each participant had within the group setting. This limitation was further compounded by having to conduct the discussion virtually, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Another disadvantage to focus group interviews is the possible hazard of *groupthink* as previously identified by George (2013). Additionally, not every participant responded to every question asked in the focus group, thus limiting the range of responses on each item. This was the case despite the care taken to involve each participant as much as possible for each response. Because the total population sampling technique used in this study captured a diverse range of schools and participants, some schools naturally have higher levels of implementation and higher corresponding scores on the TASQ. Some participants may have

been reluctant to openly discuss low scores on the TASQ and whether they are an accurate reflection of what they perceive as their actual level of implementation. This setting also introduced the possibility of researcher bias influencing the design of the semi-structured interview protocol, the facilitation of discussion itself, and eventually in the coding of the transcription. To help offset these potential sources of bias the interview questions were derived from the areas of concern identified by the district. Although follow-up and probing questions designed by the researcher were also used to facilitate the discussion, the use of the questions was seen as less prone to researcher bias. Having this unbiased structure of questions to frame the discussion also helps to address any bias that may be introduced through the relationships developed between the researcher and many of the school staff who volunteered to participate in the study.

Finally, because the instrumental case study design examined the experiences of school leaders as they attempt to assess their level of climate and safety practices, it has inherently excluded any attempt to determine whether the TASQ is a valid and reliable instrument that can be compared with currently accepted measures of school climate. This research study should be viewed as the first step in exploring the possibility that school climate and safety can be practically and effectively assessed through evaluating the practices conducted in schools.

Credibility

In addition to acknowledging the potential for bias and limitations of this study, the credibility of the findings was addressed using multiple strategies. First, the triangulation of data from multiple sources was conducted using the existing literature, an analysis of expert feedback, and the experiences of participants piloting the TASQ. The data from a review of the existing literature and models served to frame the case study and provided the foundation for constructing

the TASQ. The initial framework of the TASQ resulting from this review was sent to school climate and safety experts for their input, as well as their thoughts on the overall potential of the TASQ to serve as a quality assessment tool. Finally, the experiences of school leaders conducting a pilot of the TASQ was used to further corroborate the ability of the TASQ to serve as an effective and practical instrument when used in a school setting. These sources of data were each organized and coded to develop robust and relevant themes that are intended to fully explore the question of whether school climate and safety can be logically and effectively assessed by focusing on the activities and practices in schools.

Another strategy to address the credibility of the findings was the use of member checking with the school climate and safety experts, as well as the participants in the pilot focus groups. The final revised version of the TASQ was sent back to those experts who offered feedback, to have them check the accuracy of how their feedback was incorporated, as well as the feedback of all experts as a whole. The participants in the focus group were likewise afforded an opportunity to review the developed themes, a summary of responses, and conclusions that were derived from the focus group discussion.

The validity of the findings was also bolstered through the transferability and dependability that resulted from the design and focus of this study. The selection of participants for the focus group interview used a total population sampling technique to target the complete diversity captured by the district pilot. The use of leaders from multiple and diverse school settings contributed to the external validity of the findings, while reliability was addressed through the use of clearly defined operational procedures and standardized questions.

Ethical Issues in the Study

Important ethical considerations were made at multiple stages throughout the study. From the design of the study to the data collection, analysis, and reporting, this study approached the research with a conscious eye on possible ethical concerns and developing strategies to mitigate them. One ethical issue considered in the design of the study was the voluntary participation of school leaders in the follow-up focus group discussion. Any perceived coercion from the district leadership or suggestion that participation is required was explicitly avoided. All participants were asked to embrace the opportunity to provide feedback that could potentially improve the climate and safety of their school and potentially all district schools.

The protection of confidentiality for the district, schools, and individuals who willingly participated in the study was also of paramount concern. Unique characteristics and other identifying information of the district and schools where the study is taking place were completely washed from the study. Permission to conduct research in the district was also an ethical concern (Creswell, 2015) and was necessarily sought before the start of the study. Data collected from the TASQ pilot were scrubbed to protect the identity of each school location and participant. Focus group volunteers were informed of the steps taken to ensure that confidentiality has been kept with the scores on the TASQ, as well as their identities and that of their schools. In addition to protecting the identity of the individuals participating in the study, the time and energy needed to meet with their pilot teams and participate in the focus group discussion was also protected. Each volunteer was sent an email clearly outlining the effort that would be asked of them to include an estimation of the time it might take.

The data collected for this study not only sought to ensure confidentiality and minimize the demands on participants but was also done so objectively and honestly. Both positive and

negative feedback from experts and focus group responses were captured and presented in Chapter Four. All evidence and data collected must be presented and considered if the TASQ is to be effectively used beyond the pilot. The honest reporting of the data and findings are not just used to support or refute a preferred conclusion to this research but they will be used to make real-world decisions in the district that potentially involves an enormous commitment.

Conclusion and Summary

This study explores the promise of assessing school climate and safety in an entirely new way. The data collected and analyzed have informed the continued development of an instrument designed to both assess the activities and practices correlated with safe and positive school climates and guide school climate and safety improvement efforts. An analysis of how existing models of school climate are constructed and feedback from experts in the field of school climate research, directly addressed the first research question of: What distinct domains and target areas would be necessary to construct the TASQ and how should they be organized? If an instrument or model of school climate and safety can be constructed using the activities and practices, then it should rightfully stand on the shoulders of the vast amount of existing research and evidence-based models that have laid the foundation for the field of study. These models and evidence-based surveys have been thoroughly examined through this study and greatly informed the preliminary structure of the TASQ. The feedback from a panel of experts further refined the TASQ and helped to ensure the district was piloting an instrument that had the potential to transform the climate and safety of their schools.

The feedback from school climate and safety experts and the participants who piloted the TASQ directly addressed the second and third research questions. Not only did the school climate and safety experts offer feedback on the design of the TASQ, their thoughts regarding

the potential of assessing school climate and safety using the metric of activities and practices was also explored. This study used an analysis of that feedback to refine the TASQ that greatly assisted with developing a quality instrument to pilot in the school setting. The experiences of pilot participants from each pilot school were explored in greater detail through a follow-up focus group discussion. An analysis of these participant experiences was used to determine how effective and user-friendly the instrument is or has the potential to be. Through this triangulation of data, a clearer picture was formed of the possibility that school climate and safety can be effectively assessed in a completely new way. Future research must still be dedicated to establishing the validity and reliability of the TASQ as an instrument, as well as any correlation – or even causality - that exists with accepted and desired school climate and safety outcomes.

The results of this study carry multiple implications. Educators, seeking to actively improve the climate and safety of their schools may ultimately have an instrument capable of assessing what they already do, how well they do it, and where they have an opportunity to bring evidence-based approaches or best practices to their school. Since the TASQ is built on the foundation of existing school climate models and survey instruments, it has the potential to directly impact the scores derived from these instruments. As more state and local agencies adopt the use of school climate surveys, the TASQ can serve as a prescription for improving those scores. Ultimately however, the results of this study offer the potential to blaze a new path in school climate and safety assessment that addresses the gaps and issues present with current methods. So far, research and development behind the currently accepted methods of school climate assessment have contributed invaluable knowledge to the field of study and have eliminated the debate over their critical importance within public education. However, the current methods of assessment have also failed to gain the broad support necessary to be

included in federal, state, and local models of accountability. Providing safe and welcoming environments that foster the academic, social, and emotional development of our children is the unquestioned mission of public education. It is time the social and emotional pursuits join the academic with seats at the accountability table.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to explore the development of a unique

school climate and safety assessment instrument by a single Florida school district, called the

Transformational Assessment of School Quality (TASQ). An examination of existing literature

and feedback from experts in the field helped to shape the TASQ and prepared it for piloting in

nine district schools. In addition to preparing the TASQ for piloting, this study analyzed data

derived from a follow-up focus group to explore the experiences of participants from each pilot

school. Together, these sources of data were used to address the following research questions for

this study:

RQ1: What distinct domains and target areas would be necessary to construct

the TASQ and how should they be organized?

RQ2: How do experts in the field of school climate research describe the use of

the TASQ as an instrument to assess school climate and safety and guide

improvement practices?

RQ3: How do the experiences of the school leaders who conduct the TASQ pilot

study reflect its potential as an effective, useful, and practical instrument?

Method of Analysis

To thoroughly address the research questions for this study, the data collected were

analyzed using specific methods for each source. The review of the literature included an

examination of the most relevant research in the field, four widely-used frameworks and models,

the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) compendium of 41 valid and reliable school climate

instruments, and several government-sourced documents, such as the multi-agency Guide for

Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans and the Threat Assessment Model developed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Secret Service. Together, these sources were used to identify a comprehensive picture of the primary domains and target areas of school climate and safety that were incorporated into the TASQ. Data from these sources were placed into a frequency table (Table 3) to demonstrate the prevalence of specific domains and target areas across all models. This analysis captured a holistic picture of school climate, combining the most recognized models and instruments, and illustrated which scales were best suited for adoption on the TASQ.

The second source of data was comprised of feedback from expert researchers in the field of school climate and safety that was collected by the district. The feedback from these experts lent credibility to the assessment approach used by the TASQ (assessing practices and activities), as well as the construction of the instrument itself. The experts were identified through the literature reviewed for this study and feedback was initially solicited via email from 15 individual researchers and two organizations. Where the initial request for feedback went unanswered, a second email request was sent to the original recipients. This process resulted in feedback from four individual researchers, who offered their insight on the ability of the TASQ to assess and improve school climate, as well as its design. Although this was not a significant number, the researchers who did respond were among the most prominent experts found throughout the literature.

Feedback from the experts was assembled into a single document and organized by question and respondent. The responses were read through twice to gain familiarity with the data and underwent a first cycle of structural coding to determine the various code labels to be used. The first cycle process also included in vivo coding in order to capture specific data elements in

the words of the experts themselves. A second cycle of coding was then used to help refine the codes and organize them under larger categories of similar data. The larger categories captured data that was intended to inform either the design of the TASQ or the assessment process itself. This division of data helped to identify which specific feedback should be applied to the refinement of the TASQ and what could potentially impact the pilot protocol adopted by the district. The categories also allowed the researcher to identify the data elements that addressed either of the first two research questions. The expert feedback additionally provided important credibility that helped gain support from the district's leadership to consider using the TASQ as an assessment and improvement instrument.

The third research question was addressed through a discussion with school-based personnel who had recently piloted the TASQ. The semi-structured focus group was conducted with a representative from each of the nine pilot schools in the Sunshine School District (SSD) to further explore their collective experiences as they completed the pilot of the TASQ. The focus group was conducted through Microsoft Teams, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and resulting social distancing guidelines. The focus group discussion was video recorded through the Teams application, then converted to text using the transcription function of the program.

The video recording was first used to become more familiar with the participant responses and identify potential codes and emergent themes. The codes were written down by hand, along with analytic notes regarding important participant comments and how they might relate to the emergent codes or themes. Because the written transcript of the focus group discussion contained numerous errors, the video recording was also used to help make corrections and clarify participant responses. This process also presented the opportunity to further refine and adjust the initial hand-written set of codes. The formatted and edited transcript

was then uploaded to a web-based research application called Dedoose, where it underwent a second cycle of pattern coding to help refine the codes and associate them with specific participant comments. The second cycle of coding was also used to develop larger categories where similar data could be grouped together and further illuminate the themes and subthemes. A group-level analysis of the transcript corpus from the focus group interview yielded data that directly addressed the third research question relating to the effectiveness, usefulness, and practicality of the TASQ,

Focus Group Participants

The participants for the focus group were selected based on their involvement with piloting the TASQ. Nine schools (four elementary, two middle, two high, and one K-8) in the SSD took part in the pilot and one participant from each school was recruited for the follow-up focus group discussion. Participants were asked to meet with others in their school who also participated in completing questions on the TASQ, to discuss the experiences of the entire team and adequately represent those experiences in the group discussion. Participants representing pilot schools in the focus group have careers in public education ranging between 10 and 25 years, with an average of 17 years. However, the majority of participants were relatively new to their school, with only one having served longer than four years and an average tenure of just over two and a half years. Participants included one principal, five assistant principals, one dean, one student support specialist, and one school counselor. Table 2 below lists each focus group participant, to include their gender, position, school level, and experience.

Table 2

Focus Group Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Current Position	School Level	Years in Education	Years at Current School
Daenerys Targaryen	Female	Support Specialist	Middle	11	1
Wile E. Coyote	Female	Assistant Principal	Elementary	10	5
Frank Drebin	Male	Assistant Principal	Middle	22	1
D.H. Worm	Male	Dean	High	25	2
Pembroke Sutton	Female	Counselor	Elementary	18	1
Fred Flintstone	Male	Assistant Principal	Elementary	12	2
Jimmy Dean	Male	Assistant Principal	K-8	12	3
Gern Blanston	Male	Principal	Elementary	23	4
Candi Graham	Female	Assistant Principal	High	20	4

Presentation of Results

The analysis of the domains, dimensions, and other categories found across the models

and instruments presented in the literature review were used to help establish the first framework

used in constructing the TASQ. This data source was also used to address the first research

question of: What distinct domains and target areas would be necessary to construct the TASQ

and how should they be organized? An analysis of 41 school climate and safety surveys found in

the ED's Compendium of reliable and valid survey instruments yielded several distinct and

common areas to measure. Along with each survey in the Compendium, the ED also lists the

various constructs measured by each instrument. Several of these constructs were grouped

together, based on their similarity. For instance, surveys that purported to measure safe and respectful climates were grouped with those that measured a positive learning environment. Table 3 below lists each construct or construct grouping, as well as the number of times it was found across all surveys. It should be noted that the four school climate models detailed previously in Chapter Two are also included in this data, as they incorporate valid and reliable survey instruments. The list below only represents constructs from the student and staff surveys and did not include parent surveys.

Table 3

The Compendium of School Climate Surveys Measurement Areas

Frequency	Construct Measured
21	Safe and respectful climate, positive learning environment
21	Academic support, motivation, high expectations, access to rigorous coursework, Growth Mindset
21	Order and discipline, fair discipline
15	Peer (Student-Student) relationships
15	Home & parent supports (caring relationships, high expectations, opportunities for meaningful participation)
14	Student-teacher relationships
13	Student engagement (affective, cognitive)
13	Administrative support, leadership, provision of resources, PD
12	Community supports (caring relationships, high expectations, opportunities for meaningful participation)
12	Diversity, culture, equity
11	Bullying
10	Social and emotional learning & SEL competencies, mental health
9	School connectedness, sense of belonging
9	Physical environment, cleanliness, comfort
9	Staff Attitudes contributing towards positive climate, commitment, & morale
8	Violence-related behaviors (general victimization, attitudes), delinquency
8	Alcohol, Tobacco, or Other Drug (ATOD), use, attitudes, family & community
8	Positive values (personal conviction, concern for others), pro-social behaviors
8	Collaborative work environment, professional relationships

Frequency	Construct Measured
6	Opportunities for meaningful participation
4	Student support, provides for needs
2	Depression
2	Career and college readiness
2	Planning and action
2	Teacher influence in policy & decision-making
2	Special education (optional)
2	Project learning (optional)
1	Suicide
1	Sexual behavior
1	Body image
1	Physical activity
1	Trust (general)
1	Learning facilitative behavior
1	Learning barriers (risk behavior, interpersonal conflict and destructive behavior)

The analysis of the instruments found in the Compendium revealed three constructs that were measured most often across all surveys (*Safety, Order & Discipline*, and *High Academic Support & Expectations*). These constructs were also the only three categories that were common to each of the school climate models presented in Chapter Two. This provided strong support for their inclusion as domains or target areas on the TASQ. Several additional constructs measured also appeared in multiple models, including peer relationships, parent and home support, student-teacher relationships, student engagement, and administrative support.

Although grouped with administrative support, leadership emerged as a concept that extended beyond supporting teachers, students, or initiatives and more as a driving force behind practices that might be undertaken across all domains. The communities that schools serve also emerged as an important actor. With 12 different instruments using some measure of connection and support from the surrounding community, this construct also presented a strong case for

consideration as a domain on the TASQ. Less prevalent across models, the physical environment of a school was not easily combined with other traditional categories, nor did it fit as a subset of any other category. However, the critical need for assessing physical security in today's schools and the array of best practices that exist in this area offered a strong alignment and placed the physical environment as a key domain of school climate.

The area of data collection and analysis was found nowhere in the literature as a domain, dimension, or sub-dimension of school climate, which is most likely due to the different lens of traditional models. Thapa noted the oddity of the TASQ serving as a data collection instrument yet seeking at the same time to assess data collection and analysis as a primary domain (personal communication, October 9, 2019). Thapa also stated that he believed the collection and analysis of data is already inherent in the scale and the most important aspect is what one does with the data. This feedback led to a design change for all data-related questions and added best practices for how the collected data is used by school leadership. However, the collection, analysis, and use of data are still recognized as critical elements of school climate improvement (ED, 2019) and certainly qualify as a school-based practice or activity. The collection, analysis, and use of data – whether it is through survey administration or interpreting results - is also a key thread that runs through every model and instrument. This critical addition to traditional models is viewed as necessary for both the assessment and improvement of school climate & safety efforts as well as student and school improvement in general.

Feedback from School Climate and Safety Experts

Each of the school climate models presented, as well as the Compendium of valid and reliable instruments provided an initial framework on which to build the TASQ. Although the TASQ measures the activities and practices found in schools, the review of literature supported

the use of many of the same domains, dimensions, and scales used to measure the perceptions of stakeholders that are the basis of these existing instruments. This determination was reached based on the numerous activities and practices supported and recommended by research that could be found under each distinct scale. The initial framework of the TASQ – originally consisting of eight domains, 32 target areas, and 78 question topics - was provided to each of the experts contacted by the district. Specific feedback was sought using five questions regarding the domains and target areas used, the organization of the initial framework, the question design, and their overall thoughts of assessing school climate and safety through the measurement of practices and activities.

After an initial read-through of the compiled data and the first cycle of structural and in vivo coding, 34 different code labels emerged. These codes sought to identify the various concepts, constructs, and elements of the TASQ that experts were discussing, in order to better understand the total range of their comments and to prepare the data for organization under larger categories. A frequency distribution of these codes was then developed to assist in better understanding patterns and trends in the data. In 19 instances, coded data also took the form of a suggestion, which was made by an expert. Each time a suggestion was offered that appeared under an existing code label, a process of simultaneous coding was used, and the data was dually coded. This was done to highlight potential action steps that were being recommended by the experts. The codes generated from the read-through and first cycle process were applied to the entire document, despite the different information each of the five questions attempted to elicit.

Following the first cycle of coding, a second cycle of pattern coding was used to detect emergent themes, as well as to create larger categories that allowed the data to be grouped according to the first and second research questions. Because the five questions experts were

responding to aligned to either the construction of the TASQ or the method of assessment, the

larger categories that emerged from the second cycle of coding were largely drawn along the

lines of the questions themselves. Feedback that focused on the design of the TASQ were coded

as *Design*, while feedback that addressed the process of using school-based activities and

practices as the metric of assessment were coded as *Process*. Any first cycle codes that could not

be adequately placed under either category were assigned to a separate category called *General*.

Codes were also simultaneously placed in multiple categories if it was determined the feedback

pertained to more than one area. Each of the 34 codes that were developed in the first cycle of

structural coding were then grouped under the three larger categories of *Design*, *Process*, or

General. Using this system of codes and categories, the document containing the compiled

expert feedback was analyzed one question at a time. Table 4 below depicts the codes that were

uncovered through this analysis as well as the frequency in which they were found under each

category. A complete table depicting the data elements, codes, categories, and themes can be

found in Appendix B.

Table 4

Frequency of Codes from the Expert Feedback

Code	Overall Frequency	Design Category	Process Category	General Category
Suggestion	19	14	5	2
Voice	6	5	0	2
Data	5	5	1	1
Family & Community	5	5	0	1
Holds Promise	5	3	2	2
Domains	4	4	0	1
Self-report	3	0	3	0
SEAL	3	3	0	2
Strategic	3	2	1	1
Improvement	3	2	1	0

Code	Overall Frequency	Design Category	Process Category	General Category
Target Areas	3	3	0	0
Bullying	2	2	0	2
Bias	2	0	2	0
Scoring	2	1	0	1
Stakeholders	2	2	0	0
Question Design	2	2	0	0
Safety	2	2	0	1
Best Practice	2	2	0	0
Ambitious	2	2	0	0
ISS	1	0	0	1
Artifacts	1	0	1	0
Trust	1	1	0	0
Recency Effect	1	0	1	0
Relationship	1	1	0	1
Kitchen Sink	1	1	0	0
Rules	1	1	0	0
Categories	1	1	0	0
Halo Effect	1	0	1	0
Environment	1	1	0	0
School Climate	1	0	0	1
Caution	1	0	1	0
Burden	1	0	1	0
Leadership	1	1	0	0
Partnership	1	1	0	0

Along with the review of existing models, instruments, and the literature, data analyzed from the archival expert feedback was used to shape the final design of the TASQ for the pilot and address the first research question. Although the initial framework of the TASQ was built on existing research-based models and best practices, the unique approach to assessment taken by the instrument demanded a higher level of scrutiny before it could be considered worthy of piloting in a school setting. This was the initial impetus behind district staff reaching out to the experts. Because of this objective, four of the five questions posed to the researchers related to

the design and organization of the TASQ. Each expert response coded under the *Design* category

therefore aligned with the first research question of: What distinct domains and target areas

would be necessary to construct the TASQ and how should they be organized? Four questions

and related sub-questions were used to collect that specific data. The experts were also asked to

view the initial framework through the lens of assessing practices and respond to questions that

sought to determine whether the domains, target areas, and questions made sense, were aligned

appropriately, or whether any of them should be eliminated, combined, or whether a critical scale

was missing. One question additionally sought feedback regarding the individual question

format, by providing two alternative examples. A full list of the focus group questions and sub-

questions is found under Appendix C.

Themes Related to the Design of the TASQ

The four experts who provided feedback to the district were labeled as Experts A, B, C,

& D for the purposes of presenting the data. Not all experts responded to each question and the

amount of feedback offered by each varied significantly. The analysis of the feedback revealed

four separate themes that impacted either the design of the TASQ or the process of assessment.

The first theme to emerge was the promise held by the TASQ as a legitimate assessment

instrument. Experts generally agreed with the design of the TASQ and the alignment of the target

areas and questions. In response to the domains used, all four experts offered feedback that was

either coded as *Holds Promise* under the Design category or offered affirmation of the

framework's structure. Expert A stated "Overall, I am appreciative of the categories noted",

while Expert B noted "It appears that what you have covers many existing domains of school

climate." Expert C found an alignment with what the literature suggests are the four main areas

of school climate – safety, teaching and learning, relationships, and institutional environment and

Expert D called the domains used "comprehensive, thorough, and relevant." This was indeed a promising indicator of the major structure used for the TASQ. Although this structure was very similar to other models found throughout the literature, the scales used on the TASQ are more comprehensive because they combine elements found across 41 separate instruments. However, the comprehensive nature of the TASQ also represented a concern expressed by the experts.

The second and third themes to emerge from the analysis of the feedback were concerns by multiple experts about the length and comprehensiveness of the TASQ. Regarding the length of time it might take to complete the TASQ, Expert B remarked that "Burdened participants are likely to give up and you run the risk of not attaining all the data you need." This was an obvious issue, particularly because it reinforced existing concerns regarding the amount of work required by school leaders to complete the TASQ. Although Expert D agreed with the domains used, he also noted that assessments can become "too inclusive and amorphous, so that they go far beyond measuring school climate." He cautioned for the TASQ to not become the "kitchen sink" or "laundry list" approach to school climate. Expert D later went on to remark "My concern is not what you are missing but how much you are including."

The length and comprehensiveness of the TASQ are closely related concepts but were considered to be separate themes for the purpose of analyzing the feedback. The comprehensiveness was viewed as a strictly design theme, while the length of time – particularly how it potentially impacts responses – was related to both the design and the process of assessment. Although the length of time it takes to complete the TASQ is directly influenced by its comprehensiveness, it is also impacted by other factors, such as the gathering of supporting documentation or the number of staff completing the assessment. The TASQ is a more comprehensive instrument than others found across the literature. However, it was intentionally

constructed to measure the most frequently used scales across all major valid and reliable instruments. Although Expert D expressed concerns regarding the comprehensiveness of the TASQ, he also later stated "Its strength and weakness is how thorough and comprehensive it is." This encapsulated the conundrum of attempting to assess all meaningful aspects of school climate, while not becoming too oblique or lengthy.

These concerns over the length and comprehensiveness of the TASQ expressed by two of the experts directly contributed to multiple questions and target areas on the TASQ being combined or eliminated. However, it was noted by the researcher that these concerns were also likely based on the traditional means of assessment – through stakeholder surveys. The TASQ offered not only the convenience of completing it over multiple days or weeks, it was intended to be completed by a small team of school staff. This has the effect of dividing the time on task into manageable chunks. Concerns regarding the domains becoming overly inclusive and diluting the measurement of true climate-related constructs were assuaged due to each domain and target area being drawn from the most widely used models and valid, reliable instruments supported by the U.S. Department of Education.

Changes to the TASQ Resulting from Expert Feedback

Although each expert offered valuable feedback that directly impacted the design of the TASQ, only Expert A responded with detailed feedback regarding each domain. The feedback from Expert A contributed to the inclusion of more academic topics under teaching and learning, through the introduction of SEAL (Social, Emotional, and *Academic* Learning). Expert A also stressed the importance of adding the word "intentional" to this critical target area, to denote the instructional emphasis that schools and teachers should apply to traditional SEL curricula. Another domain that was transformed by feedback from Expert A was Student Engagement.

Expert A emphasized the importance of student involvement by stating "student voice and inter-generational school improvement efforts is one of, if not the single most important strategic steps that school leaders can take." Expert A also stated, "I would urge you to consider strengthening this in the sense of recognizing the extraordinary power of including students – substantively – in virtually all aspects of the improvement process." These comments created the target area of *Student Leadership and Voice* and led to additional assessment criteria under the domains of *Leadership*, *Relationships*, and *Data Collection and Analysis*.

In all, the expert feedback regarding the design of the TASQ resulted in substantial modifications to the initial framework that was originally developed. Although the number of domains used did not change, the names of these domains and many of the constructs they contained did change. Based on the Expert feedback, the domain of *Interpersonal Relationships* was changed to *Trusting Relationships*. *Student Engagement* became *Student Engagement and Connectedness*, while *Family and Community Support* became *Family and Community Engagement*. Underneath each of the domains, the target areas also experienced significant change based on the expert feedback. The initial framework of the TASQ included 32 target areas and 78 question topics. Following the analysis of feedback from the experts, six target areas were either eliminated or combined with other existing target areas. This also led to a reduction in the number of questions from 78 to 64. This reduction in size was intentional and followed the theme of concern for the length and comprehensiveness of the TASQ. Table 5 below shows the complete list of changes to the domains and target areas of the TASQ that were a result of the expert feedback.

Table 5

Changes to the Initial TASQ Framework Based on Expert Feedback

Scale	Eliminated	Modified
Domains	None	*Interpersonal Relationships* changed to *Trusting Relationships*.
		Student Engagement was changed to *Student Engagement and Connectedness*.
		Family and Community Support was changed to *Family and Community Engagement*.
Target Areas	*Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)*	*Threat Assessment* was changed to *Threat Assessment & Violence Prevention*.
		Adequate Resources, Supports, and Materials was changed to *Physical Security of Campus*.
	High Academic Expectations	*SEL Instruction* was changed to *Intentional Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning*.
		Academic Support & Interventions was changed to *Academic Support and Excellence*.
	Student Connectedness (added to the domain of Student Engagement)	*Student Participation in Rule-making* was changed to *Student Leadership and Voice*.
		Student Recognition was changed to *Creating Welcoming and Culturally Responsive Environments*.
	Student Recognition	*Civic Engagement Opportunities and Community Partnerships* were combined to create *Civic Engagement & Community Partnership*.
		Discipline was changed to *Discipline, Attendance, & Behavior Data*.
	Early Warning Systems	*Test Scores and Academic Indicators* was changed to *Academic Data*.
		Climate Surveys and stakeholder input was changed to *School Climate and Safety Data*.

Through the analysis of both the existing literature and feedback from expert researchers, the framework of school climate & safety used to build the final draft of the TASQ for piloting identified eight separate domains and 26 distinct target areas that are found below in Table 6 These inclusions represent many of the same scales found in traditional school climate models, as well as new categories that address the critical components involved when considering school-based practices and activities. Given the large number of potential domains and target areas and considering the themes emerging from the expert feedback, the TASQ has been assembled with an intentional balance between representing the most frequently measured areas of school climate and combining as many similar measures as possible.

Table 6

Domains and Dimensions of School Climate & Safety on the TASQ

Domain of School Climate & Safety	Target Area
Safety & Order	• Discipline Policies & Practices • Behavioral Intervention & Supports • Bullying & Harassment • Mental Health Supports & Services • Threat Assessment & Violence Prevention
Physical Environment & Security	• Emergency Preparedness & Response • Cleanliness and Order of Campus • Physical Security of Campus
Teaching & Learning	• Intentional Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning • Teaching Strategies • Academic Support and Excellence
Interpersonal Relationships	• Adult-to-Adult • Adult and Student • Student-to-Student
Leadership	• Staff Empowerment, Recognition & Wellness • Professional Development • Allocation of Resources • School Improvement Goals
Student Engagement	• Extracurricular Opportunities

	• Student Leadership & Voice • Creating welcoming and culturally responsive environments
Family & Community Engagement	• Opportunities for Parent and Family Involvement • Parent Communication • Civic Engagement & Community Partnership
Data Collection & Analysis	• Discipline, Attendance, & Behavior Data • Academic Data • School Climate & Safety Data

Expert Feedback Regarding the Process of Assessment and Improvement

Feedback from the experts was primarily intended to refine the TASQ to optimally prepare it for piloting in district schools. However, one of the five questions posed to the experts asked them to express their thoughts on the method of using school-based practices and activities to assess school climate. Feedback from the experts that was placed under the *Design* category as well as the feedback coded as *Process*, directly addressed the second research question of: How do experts in the field of school climate research describe the use of the TASQ as an instrument to assess school climate and safety and guide improvement practices? Despite only one question being dedicated to the subject, 15 data elements from four of the five questions were coded under the *Process* category. In addition to the coded data, one of the themes that emerged from the feedback was that three of four experts expressed their belief that assessing school climate and safety using practices and activities held promise. The fourth expert who offered feedback did not directly address the question and neither supported nor refuted this assertion.

Process Themes in the Expert Feedback

The majority of data coded as *Holds Promise* was in relation to the design of the TASQ. However, three of the four experts offered feedback that indicated the process of assessment

found on the TASQ also held promise. In response to the question of assessing school climate and safety through practices and activities, Expert A stated, "I think it is a thoughtful and excellent idea", while Expert C proclaimed that the TASQ "certainly holds promise." Although Expert D did not directly respond to this question, his responses to all other questions clearly indicated the method held merit. In response to a separate question, Expert A offered that "I think what you are developing will help the field of school climate and SEL and character education in meaningful ways." Expert A went on to state "One of the many things that I admire about what you are doing is that it will - practically - support building and perhaps [help] district leaders to understand 'where are we now?' and use this information to then develop 'next steps' in the iterative, continuous process of school improvement." More than any other comment, this response from Expert A directly supported the TASQ as both an assessment and improvement instrument. Considering the second research question sought feedback regarding both assessment and improvement, the statement from Expert A offered unique support.

The feedback from Experts A and C to this question were critical on multiple fronts. First, it acknowledged that the development of the TASQ was worthy as a topic of continued research. Had the expert researchers not shared this opinion, or if in fact they held that it was not a sound method to assess school climate and safety, it likely would have provided cause to abandon the research study. The feedback also had a significant impact on the decision of district leadership to consider using the TASQ to formally assess the climate and safety of their member schools through their strategic planning process – which allowed this instrumental case study to become possible. Because of the standing Experts A and C hold within the school climate research community, their endorsement of the process was viewed by district leaders as instrumental in moving the TASQ forward for a pilot study in volunteer schools.

Although there was a favorable response to the method of assessment proposed by the TASQ, there were concerns expressed that were captured through the coding process. The fourth and final theme to emerge from the data was the need for school leaders to provide documentation for their responses on the TASQ. Expert A stated, "One additional step to consider (if not for all schools that eventually use this but for some) is to ask school leaders to harvest artifacts or evidence that given instructional, school wide/systemic and/or relational efforts are actually happening." Without such protocol being embedded, Expert A felt that the method of self-reporting used by the TASQ would be "thin." Expert D also wondered about the "bias and subjectivity of raters and the ability of school staff to objectively assess their school." In addition to the question of objectivity, Expert D also introduced concerns related to the *halo effect* and how "it might be difficult to provide independent assessments of so many different components of a school." Expert D also introduced a concern regarding *recency effect*, where "after a particular incident or event at a school, ratings may be skewed." These concerns expressed by the experts resulted in two changes to the pilot protocol that was conducted by the district. First, all question items on the TASQ where a higher-scoring response was provided, must be supported through some type of documentation. This transformed the TASQ from a purely self-assessment instrument to one that could potentially be used by educational agencies to hold schools and districts accountable. The second change involved the suggestion that the TASQ be completed by a small team of school leaders, rather than by a single individual. Although not a perfect solution to the concerns raised regarding either the halo or recency effect, the change did make it less likely that multiple individuals would be subject equally to these same influences. The documentation of responses to questions was also seen as a way to mitigate the potential influence of both halo and recency effects.

Results of the Focus Group Discussion

Focus group participants were drawn from each of the nine schools in the SSD that piloted the TASQ. The prospective volunteers were contacted by the researcher via email and in face-to-face conversations in order to secure their participation in the study. The district protocol for the pilot called for a small team at each school to complete the TASQ, with one individual assigned to oversee the work. However, one week after the window for beginning the pilot began, the SSD and all public schools across the state of Florida closed their campuses, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. This shift in operation required most staff to work from home and limited the ability of small teams to participate in the pilot. Thus, the majority of schools completed the TASQ using only one or two staff. The pilot protocol established by the district also called for documentation to support all higher-scoring responses on the TASQ (identified as a score of two or three). Because access to the full spectrum of documentation necessary to support responses was limited by the work-from-home guidelines, this protocol was likewise impacted. Pilot participants were instead allowed to identify the possible documentation they would use to support the higher-scoring responses without searching for and submitting the actual artifacts. This accommodation reduced the burden of documentation and likely impacted the participants' experiences in evaluating the practicality of the instrument. Despite these setbacks, the piloting of the TASQ proceeded under the modified protocol. Each volunteer participant agreed to meet with any members of their team who did assist with the pilot in order to get their input and share their collective experiences in the focus group discussion.

The focus group sought to address the third research question of: How do the experiences of the school leaders who conduct the TASQ pilot study reflect its potential as an effective, useful, and practical instrument? To address the research question and guide the discussion, the

10 areas in the pilot protocol that participants were to focus on as they completed the TASQ were transformed into interview questions (See Appendix C). These questions sought to examine the ease of using the instrument, the amount of time it took to complete, the ability of the instrument to accurately capture what participants believe reflects their school's efforts, the difficulty (or ease) in providing documentation for their responses, and how well the TASQ might assist in guiding improvement efforts.

Following the initial viewing of the focus group video recording and read through of the written transcript a set of preliminary codes and emergent themes were developed. The transcript was then uploaded to the online Dedoose analytic platform and the initial coding system applied to the document. A third cycle of coding was then applied to refine the codes, develop larger categories of similarly coded data, and further define the themes and subthemes. Each participant response for every question was captured as a separate excerpt and simultaneously coded whenever important data could be grouped with an existing code or when it merited the creation of a new code. Simultaneously coding each participant response as a single excerpt allowed the coded data elements to be viewed in full context. The system and frequency of codes, categories, and themes is found in Table 7 below. A complete list of all interview excerpts and the codes applied to them can be found in Appendix E.

Table 7

Codes, Categories, and Themes from Focus Group Discussion

Code/ Subcode	Code Count	Category (and frequency)	Subtheme	Major Theme
Length of Time	7	Intensity of Effort (17)	Participants found value in breaking the TASQ up into smaller "chunks".	The TASQ can be time-consuming but yields valuable information.
• Entire TASQ	5			
• Questions only	2			
Chunk	7			
Existing Documentation	2			
Appropriate	3			
Scale Score	4			
Time Consuming	9			
• Documentation	3			
Worth It (In Vivo)	5			
Solo (In Vivo)	3	Division of Effort (10)		The TASQ is best completed by a school team.
Split	3			
Team	7			
Together	1			
Assessment	4	Perceived Benefit (18)	The TASQ is most useful in identifying gaps and developing school climate and safety improvement goals.	The TASQ is a flexible and useful instrument.
District Improvement	1			
Enlightening	3			
Goal Setting	11			
ID Gaps	9			
Important Priorities	4			
Leadership Prep	1			
Pre-Post	3			
School Improvement	5			
Shared Understanding	4			
Accuracy	5	Perceived Effectiveness (13)		The TASQ is an effective assessment and planning instrument.
Complete Picture (In Vivo)	3			
Effective Assessment	9			
Effective Planning Instrument	9			
Applicability	7	Design		

Code/ Subcode	Code Count	Category (and frequency)	Subtheme	Major Theme
Difficult to choose best answer	1	(17)		The TASQ is well designed but may not be equally applicable to all schools.
Overlap	2			
Stakeholder	1			
Standard	6			
• Exceptions	2			
Thorough	4			
Essential Quotes	23	Essential Quotes (23)		

The structural coding process that was applied to the transcript aligned with the interview questions that guided the discussion. Although individual codes were clustered around specific questions, most codes were also found throughout the transcript as topics were revisited or were repeated across questions. Similarly coded data was then organized around the larger code categories, as well as the corresponding themes and subthemes that began to develop from the corpus. In addition to the structural coding, a separate code category labeled *Essential Quotes* was created to capture comments the researcher considered important in addressing the third research question. The data from this category was used along with the proliferation of individual codes and an inferential analysis of participant responses to fully develop the five themes and two subthemes found in Table 7. The remainder of the findings are presented around the five major themes that emerged from the focus group discussion.

Theme One - The TASQ Can Be Time-consuming But Yields Valuable Information

The first theme that arose from participant responses were most associated with questions organized under the category of *Intensity of Effort*. Data was coded under this category 17 times throughout the entire transcript and included frequently mentioned codes such as *Length of Time*, *Time-consuming*, *Chunk*, and *Worth it*. The first question posed to the focus group asked

participants how intensive or difficult they found the instrument to complete. The second question focused on how difficult or easy it was for participants to match the answer choices with the reality of what practices and activities are conducted in their school and whether those answer choices made sense. Together, these questions attempted to address participant experiences regarding the practicality of the TASQ – a key element of the third research question guiding this study.

As far as the actual time it took participants to complete the TASQ, the code *Length of Time* was used to capture this specific data element. Although the question was intended to encompass both the response to the questions and the documentation required, two participants offered specific lengths of time that reflected responding to the questions only. Two additional participants did not mention a specific length of time in the discussion. The two participants who provided specific time estimates for responding to the questions only, agreed that it took them between 45 minutes to an hour. This length of time would likely be longer than most traditional staff climate surveys, such as the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI), which takes approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. When considering the documentation necessary to support higher-scoring responses, five pilot participants reported completion times between four and six hours, with three participants stating a total of five hours. The length of time it took for participants to complete the TASQ is presented in Table 8 later in this chapter, along with other key data elements related to this theme. It must also be noted that the pilot protocol from the district for providing physical artifacts was modified, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and closing of all public schools. Had the submission of artifacts been required, it is estimated the length of time would have experienced at least a moderate increase.

No frame or system was provided to participants for responding to the first question regarding the intensity or difficulty of the TASQ. As a result, the first participant to open the discussion asked if he should use a rating scale of one to five. The researcher informed the participants they may use any descriptors that come to mind and a rating scale of one to five would be appropriate, as long as a rationale was provided for the score. Thus, a code was created for responses incorporating such a scale. Only four participants provided a score in the discussion, but those data points offer further insight into the perceived practicality of the instrument. The four participants reported scores between three and four on a scale of five, with one participant stating she felt it was a three and a half and another who placed it between three and a half and four. This placed the mean rating between 3.5 and 3.62 on a scale of five, with a range of three to four. All individual scores are also included in Table 8. The ratings provided appeared to dovetail with the actual length of time it took to complete the TASQ and the participant feelings regarding that time.

The length of time it takes to complete the TASQ is a concern shared by the school climate and safety experts who offered preliminary feedback on the design of the instrument. Expert feedback indicated that if the TASQ were too burdensome, it may impact the data collected by the instrument. This concern was also expressed by the focus group participants throughout the discussion to the extent that it helped form the first theme. *Time-consuming* was the most frequent code used under the category of *Intensity of Effort*, appearing four times in response to the first two questions and nine times throughout the full transcript. Data coded under *Time-consuming* reflected participant beliefs that the TASQ either took a significant amount of time to complete or represented a substantial burden. Participant Frank Drebin stated he thought "the instrument in and of itself is probably too big" and "too many domains for a

school to tackle at one time." Participant Pemroke Sutton described the TASQ as "more time-consuming than intensive" and used the term "laborious" to at times describe the effort. Both Daenerys Targaryen and Gern Blanston used the term time-consuming in their responses as well (giving rise to the in vivo code name), while participant Jimmy Dean stated the TASQ might be "way too much" for school teams to complete, given all their other responsibilities. Three of the participants directly attributed the intensity of the effort to the documentation that was needed to support higher-scoring responses, which was coded as *Documentation* in the transcript. Other participants did not elaborate on a specific reason they believed the TASQ to be time-consuming.

However, each of the participants expressed important caveats in their assessment of how time-consuming the effort was. These qualifiers belong to data coded as *Chunk* and *Worth It*, and were in vivo codes directly taken from participant comments. These codes helped to form a pattern that appeared to offset or mitigate concerns that the TASQ is time-consuming to conduct. These mitigating factors were mentioned frequently enough by participants that it contributed to the formation of the first theme and a related subtheme.

An important caveat to the amount of time it took participants to complete the TASQ was captured under the code *Worth It*. This in vivo tag encompassed participant beliefs that while the TASQ was indeed time-consuming, it was either appropriate for the task at hand or time well spent. Agreement with this sentiment included mild support such as from Jimmy Dean, who stated "I think is a very fair amount [of time]" and Frank Drebin, who said "I think it's a good effort and I believe the document I created can be shared with administration here to better improve the school." However, other participants were more effusive with their support of the time spent responding. Wile E. Coyote proclaimed that "It took at least five hours to do, but well worth the time and I think that time allotment was appropriate for the amount of questions that

we were answering." While Gern Blanston said the TASQ was time-consuming, he also "thought it was an excellent tool" and he would be using it to guide his school's planning process in the coming school year. Daenerys Targaryen expressed her belief that the TASQ held similar potential for all district schools and had perhaps the most supportive comment for the use of time by stating that "…it was long but awesome."

Subtheme: Participants found value in breaking the TASQ up into smaller "chunks".

Chunk was used by multiple participants to describe the process of breaking the TASQ up into more manageable segments. However, the suggestion to focus on a limited number of domains at one time took on different meanings to participants. Although Pembroke Sutton referred to the TASQ as more time-consuming than intensive, she also expressed that "it may have been helpful if we kind of split it all up and maybe didn't do it all in one shot." Although Frank Drebin thought the TASQ was "too big", he also stated "I do like the theory of chunking it and maybe looking at one or two domains for specific school improvement and focusing there." Jimmy Dean also liked the idea of taking on a limited number of domains each year, stating "Maybe we can't get to all of them this year, but let's pick the top three priorities and action plan from there." However, Gern Blanston, the only principal in the focus group felt that the TASQ could be "chunked" in a different way. Rather than focusing on a few domains, Gern believed the entire assessment could be completed, as long as the effort was divided and proclaimed "I think if you break this up amongst team members at your school or part of your instructional leadership team, [it is a] very doable document." This same thought was expressed by Daenerys Targaryen, who also noted the expertise of individuals completing the TASQ might aid with the accuracy and speed of responses. This division of effort is also captured under the next category

and theme presented, as it relates to the how the TASQ was completed. It was coded under

Chunk however, due to the connection with reducing the intensity or difficulty of the effort.

Theme Two - The TASQ is Best Completed By a School Team

Closely related to the intensity or difficulty of the effort is the method used by

participants to complete the TASQ. Although the pilot protocol established by the district called

for the TASQ to be completed by a diverse team of school staff, the COVID-19 pandemic forced

a modification to this requirement, just as it did with the supporting documentation that was to be

collected. However, this modification did allow for participants to relay their experiences when

completing the TASQ in a variety of methods – which may be viewed as a means to validate the

rationale behind the original district protocol. Because this change in the district's pilot protocol

was unforeseen, no question was developed to ask participants how they completed the TASQ.

Instead, this topic arose primarily from the first two questions regarding the intensity of the effort

and appeared elsewhere throughout the discussion. The various ways the TASQ was completed

were coded separately under the category of *Division of Effort*. Codes used under this category

were found 10 times throughout the transcript and included *Solo*, *Team*, *Split*, and *Together*.

These codes represented two distinct ways the TASQ was completed. First, the TASQ was either

completed by a single person or divided between teams consisting of between two to five

members. Participants also revealed that at least in one instance, the team went through each of

the questions together. However, the other participants who reported completing the TASQ as a

team appeared to divide the questions equally among team members. Data revealed that five

participants completed the TASQ as a team, with three distributing the questions among the

group's members. Two person teams were the most common number of teammates mentioned

and only one team reported more than two members. Four participants reported completing the

TASQ alone and were coded with the in vivo tag of *Solo*. These configurations are included in

Table 8 below, along with the reported completion times and difficulty rating.

Table 8

TASQ Completion Time, Method, and Difficulty Rating

Participant	Completion Time	Elements Encompassed	How Completed	Rating
Daenerys Targaryen	4-6 Hours	Questions & Documentation	Solo	N/A
Wile E. Coyote	N/A	N/A	Team, Together	N/A
Frank Drebin	5-6 Hours	Questions & Documentation	Solo	N/A
D.H. Worm	1 Hour	Questions Only	Team of 5, Split	3
Pembroke Sutton	5 Hours	Questions & Documentation	Team of 2, Split	3.5 - 4
Fred Flintstone	5 Hours	Questions & Documentation	Team of 2, Split	3.5
Jimmy Dean	45 Min.-1Hr.	Questions Only	Team of 2	N/A
Gern Blanston	5 Hours	Questions & Documentation	Solo	N/A
Candi Graham	N/A	N/A	Solo	4

More revealing than the numbers behind the division of effort are the participants

experiences in completing the TASQ in the various methods mentioned. D. H. Worm was the

only participant that reported using a team of more than two individuals. This most closely

followed the original protocol of the district and appeared to significantly impact his perceptions

of the effort behind the TASQ. Worm stated "…if I had to do this on my own. it obviously

would have [not been good], but…I got four other people and so we had a team of five and that

really made a difference. I mean, it really did. It just simplified everything. It was equally

dispersed." This also likely contributed to Worm offering the lowest difficulty rating of the

group, with a three. Although Wile E. Coyote also completed the TASQ as a team (with an

undefined number of members), she also was the only participant to go over each question as a

group. As a result, her experiences were markedly different, proclaiming "We didn't split it up, so you know, in terms of intensive, if we went one to five, I'd probably say it was pretty intensive." However, no actual rating was offered.

Participants who reported conducting the TASQ alone expressed the sentiment that using a team would likely have been a better approach. Pembroke Sutton stated "…it would probably be best done if it's done with the team of people instead of individually or with a small group of people." She went on to say that "I think it would have been more powerful if we were able to break it up like we were going to do before this virus hit us." Candi Graham also conducted the TASQ alone and attributed her difficulty rating of a four (the highest of the group) to her experience of not having a team. She stated, "I would give it a four because you had to have the group of people involved to answer the questions." This statement appeared to reflect both the knowledge necessary to answer each question accurately as well as the burden placed on a single individual who might responsible for answering all questions on their own.

Gern Blanston completed the TASQ alone and as previously documented, he found it time-consuming but also well worth the effort and commensurate with the task at hand. Even so, Gern acknowledged that "if you break this up amongst team members at your school or part of your instructional leadership team, [it is a] very doable document." Daenerys Targaryen agreed with Gern regarding the expected workload of such an assessment and that it would have been a less intense effort had a team been used to complete the TASQ. However, Daenerys additionally pointed to other potential benefits of utilizing a team approach by stating "Obviously, the more stakeholders you have, the greater [your] shared understanding or the more interest you have, which is important in and of itself, not just for completion." The response by Daenerys was simultaneously coded under perceived benefits and served to reinforce the rationale behind using

multiple staff to complete the TASQ. Her comments also illuminated the idea that the rationale

for using a team approach extends beyond alleviating any burden of time or increasing the

accuracy of the data.

Theme Three - The TASQ is a Flexible and Useful Instrument

With the first three focus group questions primarily addressing the element of

practicality, the usefulness and effectiveness of the TASQ were predominately explored through

a second set of questions. The first of these questions asked participants how well the TASQ

captured or reflected what they believed to be the climate of their school. This question sought to

explore how well the TASQ functioned as an assessment instrument. The second question in the

set asked participants how well they thought the TASQ might drive planning and improvement

efforts in their schools. The 14 codes that were predominately clustered around responses to

these two questions were organized under the two larger categories of *Perceived Benefits* and

Perceived Effectiveness.

The category of *Perceived Benefits* contained codes that were used a total of 40 times and

directly gave rise to the third theme that the TASQ is a flexible and useful instrument. The 10

separate codes found under *Perceived Benefits* were more than any other category and included

tags such as *Assessment* (used four times), *District Improvement* (1), *School Improvement* (5),

Enlightening (3), *Important Priorities* (4), *Leadership Prep* (1), *Pre-Post* (3), and *Shared*

Understanding (4). Each of these codes reflected a distinct benefit the participants believed they

received by completing the TASQ. Together, the coded data sought to explain the various levels

of usefulness perceived by the participants. This analysis also produced the two most prevalent

codes found under the category of *Perceived Benefits - Goal Setting* (used 11 times) and *ID Gaps*

(9). The frequent use of these codes and the underlying comments resulted in the formation of a

subtheme indicating the TASQ is most useful in identifying gaps and developing school climate and safety improvement goals.

The high number and relative low frequency of many individual codes under the category of *Perceived Benefits* indicates a diverse range of usefulness experienced by the group. Although the codes *District Improvement* and *Leadership Prep* were only used a single time (and by the same participant), the perceived benefits they underpinned were considered important enough to warrant their own code. *District Improvement* was the realization by Daenerys that if the TASQ were to be adopted district-wide, "it would be huge" for the SSD's overall improvement efforts. Daenerys also was the only participant who identified a unique benefit that was never previously considered by the researcher. As an aspiring leader within the district, Daenerys found the TASQ helped her better understand her school and how it needs to operate. "We want to learn more about our schools and the managerial systems that take place. I think that [by completing the TASQ] I grew a lot as a leader." Involving aspiring school leaders with the team that completes the TASQ may have the added benefit of cultivating leadership growth and development from within the school.

Another perceived benefit that was conveyed by multiple participants highlighted an additional benefit not considered by the researcher. The code *Shared Understanding* was used when participants believed the completion of the TASQ helped to create a deeper understanding among multiple staff as to what their school is doing to enhance climate and safety. This deeper level of shared understanding occurred in two distinct ways and opened the door for possible others. D.H. Worm worked with a team of five individuals and found that cross-collaboration while completing the TASQ helped to foster a deeper shared understanding. Worm stated "There are some tough questions and you really had to kind of pick your brain [collaborate with the

team]. So a little brainstorming between a couple of us and [it yielded] a deeper understanding of what we do." Wile E. Coyote completed the TASQ with an undefined number of teammates and shared the results of the TASQ with her school leadership team. She believed these conversations and those she anticipates having to start the next school year would lead to an increase in shared understanding among both the team completing the TASQ and the school leadership group. Daenerys Targaryen also discussed the benefit of sharing the results with leadership but also introduced the idea of involving all stakeholders. "Obviously, the more stakeholders you have, the greater you know, the shared understanding or the more interest you have, which is important in and of itself, not just for completion." Whether the involvement of stakeholders takes place on the assessment team or in sharing the results, a deeper shared understanding of what a school is doing and where it needs to go is obviously critical to the improvement process.

Another code that was found several times throughout the transcript was *Pre-Post*. This was an in vivo code that reflected the flexible use of the TASQ as more than a formal assessment tool. *Pre-Post* was used by participants to describe the TASQ as both a formative and summative instrument, providing value for both planning purposes and perhaps to save time. Gern Blanston was the first to use the term Pre-Post because of the value he saw in preparing for the coming school year. "I do believe you would want to do this like right now, for instance, at the end of the school year. So you can start planning adequately for the following school year. Again, finding where your holes are with your climate, so…pre and post it." Although it does represent additional time to conduct both a formative self-assessment and a summative assessment for accountability purposes, this was exactly how the TASQ was intended to be used.

The idea of a self-assessment without documentation was appealing to Candi Graham, as she stated "To know that you would have had to gather all those things (documents), it would have even for us as Title One [been a lot]." Once again, this indicated that even for staff with extensive experience in providing supporting documentation, this component of the TASQ represented significant effort. Although Dr. Graham appreciated the need for providing supporting documentation if the TASQ was to be used as a formal evaluation, she also valued the ability of the TASQ to serve as more of a self-assessment, stating "So maybe like you say pre was self [assessed] but post was, you know, evaluative." Because Dr. Graham's support in using the TASQ as a formative instrument appeared to be partly motivated by a savings in time and effort (while maintaining the benefits of assessment), this code was considered for placement under the category of *Intensity of Effort*. Ultimately, the rationale behind the intended use of the TASQ and the usage described by Gern placed the code under *Perceived Benefits*.

When confronted with the thought of conducting the TASQ twice in one year as a formative and summative assessment, Jimmy Dean stated plainly "If you did this as a pre and you had to action plan off of this [providing documentation], it's way too much." Certainly, time and effort are powerful considerations for the TASQ. However, the flexibility to serve as a formative and summative assessment instrument means the TASQ also allows it to be used in multiple ways. For instance, the TASQ may serve as an informal self-assessment for the first year or two of implementation in adopting schools or across the district. Schools could still be required to create SIP goals or action plan off the results and would be aware of glaring gaps they have the resources to address. By year two or three, as schools become more familiar with the target areas and documentation necessary to support their responses, a more formal assessment of the climate and safety practices could begin. Although this code was not widely

used by participants it was an important benefit that reflected the intentional design of the instrument.

Other codes grouped under the category of *Perceived Benefits* further helped to establish the usefulness component of the third theme. Codes such as *School Improvement*, *Assessment*, *Enlightening*, and *Important Priorities* shared characteristics with different code labels and with each other. However, they were not combined with other codes, because each offered distinct nuances that could be considered a separate benefit. For instance, the code *School Improvement* was used when participants expressed the belief that using the TASQ would lead to school wide improvement. *Assessment* was used when participants believed the TASQ was a good tool for them to assess their current climate and safety efforts. Data coded as *Enlightening* was used when participants found the results of the TASQ to be revealing or eye-opening, while *Important Priorities* referred to the ability of the TASQ to illuminate and juxtapose more glaring or critical needs. Although data coded under *Enlightening* and *Important Priorities* are also obvious components of the school improvement or the assessment process, they were coded separately and (in some instances) simultaneously, in order to capture subtle differences in the benefits participants perceived. These codes also shared much in common with the most frequently mentioned benefits perceived by participants.

Subtheme: The TASQ is most useful in identifying gaps and developing school climate and safety improvement goals.

The codes *Goal Setting* and *ID Gaps* were easily the most abundant codes found under the category of *Perceived Benefits* and throughout the entire transcript. The frequency of these codes gave rise to the formation of a subtheme indicating the greatest reported use of the instrument. Data coded as *Goal Setting* was mentioned as a benefit to participants 11 separate

times, making it the most oft-used code in the analysis. This code captured data that indicated the

TASQ allowed participants to establish clear climate and safety goals. The code *Goal Setting*

was not concerned with accurate assessment or the effectiveness of the TASQ in identifying

deficiencies, but rather the value participants expressed in being able to use it for setting school

climate and safety improvement goals. Jimmy Dean stated "what I like about it [the TASQ] is

that it does actually give you an opportunity to itemize where the deficits are at the school and

areas that we do need to help improve to make us better." Daenerys agreed with Jimmy's

statement and added "with this tool, it allows us to see what we do have in place and obviously

what we need." As Gern conducted the pilot, he immediately recognized important practices

highlighted by the TASQ and found himself saying multiple times "we need to improve in that

area." As a result, he proclaimed "I'm [going to] use it to craft our SIP this coming school year."

Pembroke followed Gern in responding to the question and echoed his sentiments completely. "It

definitely brought some things to our attention, things that we need to review and work

on…things that we should be discussing now in preparation for the opening of next school year."

The code *ID Gaps* was closely tied to *Goal Setting* as a perceived benefit by participants.

The clear identification of practices and activities that could be undertaken or enhanced is

considered a precursor to establishing climate and safety improvement goals. Like Goal Setting,

data coded under ID Gaps did not seek to address how accurately the TASQ determined areas

that may be in need of improvement. The code instead attempted to captured how useful

participants found the TASQ to be for clearly identifying potential practices and activities that

are connected by research with safe and positive school climates. *ID Gaps* was found nine times

throughout the transcript and data were coded simultaneously under both tags a total of seven

times. So most often, when participants expressed that they found the TASQ to be useful in

identifying opportunities for improvement, they were also agreeing that it was useful in setting school climate and safety improvement goals. This is demonstrated by each of the excerpts presented for the code *Goal Setting* above also containing the code for *ID Gaps*. Together, these codes were used 20 times throughout the transcript. Although several important but less common benefits were also identified in this category, the frequency of these two codes clearly indicates that while the TASQ is a flexible and useful instrument, it is most useful as an assessment and planning tool – just as intended.

Theme Four - The TASQ is an Effective Assessment and Planning Instrument

The fourth theme to emerge from the analysis of the focus group discussion represented only a slight shift in meaning from the third theme. This shift in meaning was the result of the nuanced analysis driven by the third research question, which sought to explore the TASQ's potential as an effective, useful, and practical instrument. With the practicality and usefulness already addressed within the first three themes, exploring the effectiveness of the TASQ still remained. Just as the category of *Perceived Benefits* was derived largely from the two questions asking participants how well the TASQ captured the climate of their school and how well it functioned as an assessment instrument – so too was the category of *Perceived Effectiveness*.

The category of *Perceived Effectiveness* was formed around a group of codes that spoke to the TASQ's ability to accurately assess all aspects of a school's climate and safety efforts, as well as how well the TASQ might drive improvement efforts. Within the category of *Perceived Effectiveness* were codes such as *Accuracy* (used twice) *Complete Picture* (2), *Effective Assessment* (9), and *Effective Planning Instrument* (7). The code *Accuracy* was used only when a participant referred to some variant of the word or if they directly responded to a question regarding accuracy, since it was viewed as a distinct and fundamental component of effective

assessment. This code was used five times in the analysis of the transcript, with all participants agreeing that the TASQ did offer an accurate assessment.

In a follow-up statement regarding how useful Jimmy felt the TASQ was as both an assessment and planning tool, he also proclaimed "I feel that it's a very…it's a very accurate instrument." Although Jimmy did additionally state that there were some questions that he believed did not apply to the elementary level, those questions were viewed as extraneous and did not impact the ability of the TASQ to accurately assess the climate of his school. This concern was shared by other elementary participants and coded under a separate category. Gern's response to the accuracy of the TASQ was also captured in the same excerpt where he discussed the usefulness of the TASQ and despite Jimmy's concerns, he thought "it did a good job capturing the climate at the school." The same sentiment was shared by Candi, Daenerys, and D.H. Worm, who each thought the TASQ accurately did the job it was designed to do.

While discussing the ability of the TASQ to accurately assess the climate of his school, Worm also used the phrase *Complete Picture* to describe the comprehensiveness of the Assessment, stating "I think it jibes very well with the secondary schools as I listened to the elementary representative speaking about it. For us. It covers so many areas it. I think it gave a complete picture of what we needed to see." This excerpt was also simultaneously coded as an Essential Quote, because it spoke to capturing all aspects of a school's climate and safety efforts. Candi also found the TASQ to provide "comprehensive information on the organization" as far as the complete picture of climate and safety efforts in her school and thought the breadth of the information yielded is what made the effort "to be expected." However, the code *Complete Picture* was also used to label data that pointed to the TASQ not representing all facets of school climate. Daenerys made the astute observation that while she thought the TASQ captured the

climate and safety efforts – or what she described as the "managerial systems" – it failed to capture the stakeholder perceptions of school climate. "It doesn't necessarily capture…the feeling or even the student perspective of "do they know where to go [or what to do] when these things go wrong?"

Although the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the TASQ may be considered an essential barometer of how effective the instrument might be, the final two codes found in this category sought to directly address the question of how effective the TASQ was perceived to be as both an assessment and planning instrument. The codes *Effective Assessment* and *Effective Planning Instrument* were each used to tag data a total of nine times, making them the most frequently used codes found under the category of *Perceived Effectiveness* and tied for the second most commonly code used throughout the transcript. Data was coded as *Effective Assessment* if the participant provided any indication the TASQ was able to do a good job of assessing the climate and safety of their school. This necessarily captured data already coded under *Accuracy* and *Complete Picture* and in several cases, information that was found under other codes such as *Assessment* and *ID Gaps*. Once again, this was a nuanced approach that sought to distinguish between the practicality, usefulness, and effectiveness of the TASQ, as well attempting to understand the subtle components of each aspect. Therefore, many of the same data elements and comments already used to support other codes, categories, and themes are applicable to this code as well.

Data coded as *Effective Planning Instrument* also was simultaneously coded under several different codes, due to the strong association with other closely related nuances of practicality and usefulness. However, this code was also used any time a participant mentioned that the TASQ would be used in their planning efforts. Most commonly, participants mentioned

they will be using the TASQ to help draft their upcoming School Improvement Plans (SIPs) or sharing with their leadership to develop action plans. SIPs were mentioned a total of seven times in the discussion, which was a strong indicator of the level of confidence participants had in the instrument and its' ability to develop action plans that target deficiencies. Gern called the TASQ "a great planning tool" and as a principal had already committed to using it "to craft our SIP this coming school year." Candi thought the TASQ assisted with more than just the SIP and stated "for us it would align with our Title One surveys, the Benchmarks of Quality for PBS and like it was stated, our SIP." As Frank was discussing the value he found in "chunking" the TASQ by domain, he added "I also look at it as a nice device though. If I am writing a SIP plan, certainly a domain or something like that, a school can choose to call from and then use those indicators to measure their level of success." D.H. Worm openly stated that he wanted to participate in the pilot because he was intrigued by the assistance the TASQ could provide in adding school climate and safety indicators to his school's SIP. Worm revealed "I'm hoping the results of this document will shed some more light on the need that we really [have, and] to take this a little more seriously."

The sentiment behind the last statement by D.H. Worm was considered significant by the researcher and was also coded as *Essential Quote*. The entire objective of developing the TASQ was to bring school climate and safety to the accountability table. Worm's belief that these areas may not be taken seriously (despite their critical nature) reflect the reality that schools in the SSD are not held accountable for their climate and safety efforts and the bulk of activities and practices are geared towards academic pursuits and the school grade. Given the participants' level of perceived effectiveness as both an assessment and planning instrument, the TASQ

clearly holds promise as a way to bring a stronger focus on school climate and safety to the everyday activities and practices in each of the district's schools.

Theme Five - The TASQ is well designed but may not be equally applicable to all schools.

The final theme to emerge from an analysis of the focus group transcript was concerned with design elements of the TASQ. All feedback from the pilot participants that addressed the design of specific questions or other elements were grouped under the category of *Design*. This category also encompassed participant responses that referred to whether the design of the questions or instrument made sense to them and whether it allowed for the climate and safety of their school to be adequately assessed. Codes from this category were used a total of 24 times throughout the transcript and were clustered around discussions regarding the two types of question designs used and how easy or difficult was it to match response choices with the reality of the practices and activities conducted in their schools.

All participant responses indicated the TASQ was well designed and thorough in its scope. However, much of the evidence to support the TASQ being a well-designed instrument was inferred through the comments made regarding the effectiveness and usefulness of the TASQ as an assessment and planning instrument. Data captured in codes under the *Design* category did not directly address whether the instrument as a whole was well designed. The code *Thorough* was used when a participant believed the questions, target areas, or domains on the TASQ thoroughly addressed the climate and safety of their school. This code was similar to previous codes used, such as *Complete Picture*, *Accuracy*, and *Effective Assessment.* However, the data captured under *Thorough* was restricted to when the reference was how the TASQ was designed or constructed. For instance, Pembroke stated "I thought it was thorough in the way that it was set up, and I think the [TASQ] itself was able to capture school climate." She then

added "this survey encompassed the idea of school climate in my opinion." Candi likewise thought the design of the TASQ captured the essential components of school climate by stating "I think the design really did give us a good overall view of where we stand and a lot of the different things we're doing. I found a lot of the areas to overlap and kind of, you know, show how they connected…so I thought that was good." These comments served to support previously coded participant responses regarding the effectiveness of the TASQ, however in this instance, the effectiveness was attributed the design of the instrument.

The pilot of the TASQ contained two distinct question formats that were evenly distributed over the 64 assessment items. One format provided four separate levels of implementation and asked participants to choose the one that best resembled the practices and activities found in their school. The other question format utilized a standard of excellence, then asked participants to rate how well they conformed to the standard, based on a Likert Scale of 0-3. Like the school climate and safety experts, pilot participants were asked if they had a preference for either of the question formats. Participants who responded universally agreed the format incorporating the standard of excellence was the preferred option. This resulted in the development of the code *Standard*. Data was tagged with this code a total of five times, with many of the responses being rather brief. Gern stated simply that he liked "referring back to the standard" as he attempted to determine his response to each question. Jimmy agreed with this use of the standard format and added "it clarifies the components needed to classify you as a 3 or 2 and I think that just seeing everything cut and dry [*sic*], it's a menu of what you need." Candi thought the format using the standard of excellence worked best because "it was easy to use those differentiations [in the standard] to really hone in on where you should land" and that "I do

prefer it [the standard] over not having it because I think it does kind of align everyone's 3. It aligns everyone's 2."

However, while all participants expressed a preference for using the standard format, not all agreed that it was best for every question. Frank introduced the thought that some questions might be better served with the alternate format. Although he could not provide specific questions, Candi quickly agreed with his statement and stated she "liked a little bit of both." Like Frank however, no specific questions were provided that could be used as an example. Pembroke however, agreed with both Frank and Candi that some questions were difficult to use a standard and offered the question regarding the use of In-School Suspension (ISS) as an example. "What type of standard would you write for the use of in school suspension? Because even though I think we feel that it is similar across schools…it's not. The way we view in-school suspension is very different than maybe another school." This led to a conversation about agreeing on and creating district-wide standards that aligned with best practices – regardless of how certain practices or activities have been traditionally viewed by individuals in certain schools or grade levels. It also continued a point already made by several of the elementary participants regarding the applicability of several assessment items on the TASQ to their grade level.

The most frequent code found under Design was *Applicability*. This code was used when participants felt an assessment item on the TASQ may not be as applicable to their school or grade level. This concern expressed by participants reflected an early challenge in building the TASQ, created by the differences in climate and safety practices at the elementary and secondary grade levels. Based on participant experiences, this concern may remain valid. *Applicability* was coded seven times throughout the transcript and was associated with two distinct phenomena -

assessment items that were not normally associated with elementary schools and assessment items that were considered out of the control of schools.

Pembroke was the first participant to point out that some assessment items may not be applicable to elementary schools. In addition to the question regarding ISS, she also stated "…not just about ISS, but even about like school clubs. We have minimal school clubs and limited service opportunities at the elementary level, so some of those could have been a possible N/A." This introduced the question of whether it was appropriate to use a score of N/A (not applicable) on any of the items or whether separate questions for elementary and secondary schools should be considered. However, the discussion turned back to best practices and while items such as opportunities for leadership or student participation in service learning or high-interest activities may not look the same as middle or high schools, they remain valid best practices that schools should seek to embed (CASEL, 2019; Wang & Eccles, 2013). Pembroke's position on ISS was also echoed by Jimmy, who stated "if you're looking at some of those questions where there's practices that are more prevalent on the secondary level. You know, maybe that's something where you have certain questions that are omitted." However, he then immediately followed that statement by recognizing that some of the question items were in fact applicable to his elementary school. "I can name off the top my head, probably about four or five school clubs that we have where students also do community service and have leadership roles." This comment was used to illustrate that, although some practices and activities may need to be reimagined at many of our elementary schools, they can and do already exist.

Applicability was also used to code an additional concern raised by Jimmy. Especially as it involved security or the physical environment, Jimmy pointed out that some of the question items are district-level issues or otherwise difficult to control.

There's other pieces here to where I would take this, and this would actually be a wish list

for me to go in and provide to either our grounds [crew] or even up to our executive

director because there are some pieces here that are out of the school's [ability] to

control,…[because] I'll tell you one thing, it addresses security camera coverage. That's

something that's been a wish list [item] and is something that we necessarily can't control,

but we can put in request to say, hey, we've seen that this is inadequate here.

Jimmy's primary concern was that his school would be held accountable for a score on an

item that was largely not within the ability of school leadership to fully address.

Summary of the Results

The primary purpose of this instrumental case study was to explore the construction of

the TASQ in the SSD and examine its use in a pilot study. The data collected and analyzed from

a multitude of sources sought to address the three research questions that guided this study and

provide evidence that the TASQ holds promise as an assessment and improvement instrument.

The research questions sought to not only offer an examination of the instrument's use in the

SSD but to also explore the possibility that assessing the practices conducted in schools might

offer a new path for school climate and safety assessment to be used with more frequency in

state and local accountability models.

The first research question was addressed through a comprehensive review of the

literature that included several of the most widely cited models of school climate, 41 valid and

reliable assessment instruments, 66 original or meta-studies, and six government frameworks or

documents. The first research question was also addressed through an analysis of archival

feedback the district sought from experts in the field of school climate and safety. Together,

these data sources provided the information needed to construct the initial framework of TASQ

and a refined version of the instrument, better suited for piloting in district schools. The review of the literature and existing models clearly indicated that many of the scales used to assess school climate in traditional models could also be used as the basis for assessing the practices and activities conducted in schools. When presented with the initial framework of the TASQ, four school climate and safety experts largely agreed with the design of the instrument. However, their collective feedback resulted in several modifications to the framework prior to piloting.

The feedback from expert researchers was also the primary source of data used to address the second research question of: How do experts in the field of school climate research describe the use of the TASQ as an instrument to assess school climate and safety and guide improvement practices? Although only one of the five questions the district asked of the experts concerned the actual method of the assessment, feedback from all five questions addressed the second research question. Three of the four experts either directly supported the potential of the TASQ in their feedback or indirectly supported the method of assessment based on responses pertaining to the design of the instrument. Two of those experts responded with positive feedback as to the promise of the TASQ. This not only directly satisfied the second research question but created a sense of confidence for district leaders to consider using the instrument for assessing climate and safety-related objectives in their emerging strategic plan. Although the fourth expert did express agreement with the organization of the domains and target areas, there was not enough feedback on any of the five questions to reach a definitive conclusion as to her thoughts on using the TASQ to assess or guide school climate improvement efforts. Overall however, the expert feedback not only addressed the second research question but fueled the interest of district leaders in continuing with the development of the TASQ.

The third research question asked how the experiences of the school leaders who conduct the TASQ pilot study reflect its potential as an effective, useful, and practical instrument. This question was addressed through a focus group interview with representatives from each of the nine schools that participated in the piloting of the TASQ. A total of five major themes and two subthemes emerged from the analysis of the discussion transcript. These themes arose from the questions contained within the focus group protocol that sought to examine the facets of effectiveness, usefulness, and practicality. The focus group questions also asked participants about specific design elements of the instrument, in order fully explore the third research question and highlight opportunities for improving the TASQ.

The focus group discussion revealed that pilot participants clearly found the TASQ to be an effective, useful, and practical instrument. Although many of these aspects were closely related and data simultaneously coded across multiple categories, the analysis captured nuances in participant responses that allowed each facet of the question to be appropriately addressed. In terms of practicality, the first theme revealed that while the TASQ was universally looked at as time-consuming, participants also agreed that the information it yielded was worth the effort. A subtheme also emerged from the question of practicality, as participants found value in either breaking the TASQ up into smaller "chunks" or conducting it as more of an informal self-assessment – without the documentation. Through coding and inference, the supporting documentation required of all higher-scoring responses was primarily expressed as the reason the TASQ was considered an intensive effort. A second theme related to practicality involved the method of completion. Participants clearly agreed that a diverse team of staff should be assigned to complete the TASQ. Participants who used a team approach credited it with saving time and

decreasing the burden of assessment. Those participants who conducted the TASQ alone

predominately conveyed the belief that they would have benefitted from using multiple staff.

The usefulness of the TASQ was determined primarily through the benefits participants

felt they received from conducting the TASQ. A major theme emerged from the data indicating

that participants found the TASQ to not only be useful but also a flexible tool. Multiple benefits

were separately coded to arrive at this conclusion, some of which had not been previously

considered by the researcher. The frequency of two of these benefits dominated the discussion

and led to a subtheme that identified the TASQ as being most useful for identifying gaps and

establishing goals to address them. This finding aligned with the two primary intended uses of

the TASQ to assess school climate and safety practices and guide improvement efforts.

The question of effectiveness was revealed by the fourth theme to arise from the analysis.

In a direct reflection of the usefulness participants experienced, they found the TASQ to be an

effective assessment and planning instrument. The effectiveness of the TASQ was separated

from concepts of usefulness by asking participants how well the instrument captured the current

climate of their school and whether it did or had the potential to bring additional best practices to

their school.

The final theme did not directly address a component of the third research question;

however it did show that while the TASQ was well designed, specific assessment items may not

be equally applicable to all schools. This was particularly true as it pertained to differences in

school climate practices at different grade levels and for items which may not be under the full

control of schools. Along with the concerns regarding the length and comprehensiveness of the

TASQ, this theme revealed important considerations that will need to be addressed should the

SSD decide to adopt the instrument. Chapter Five provides a further explanation of these

findings, their significance, suggestions of how the results can be useful to stakeholders and offer

recommendations and opportunities for further research considerations.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to explore the development of a unique school climate and safety assessment instrument, called the Transformational Assessment of School Quality (TASQ) by a single Florida school district. Educational research has encompassed the concept of school climate for more than a century (Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016), giving rise to dozens of evidence-based models and numerous valid and reliable assessment instruments. Despite the decades of research and hundreds of empirical studies behind these models and instruments, there remain definitional and conceptual challenges that have limited school climate as a meaningful construct (Kutsyuruba, Klinger, & Hussain, 2015; Thapa et al., 2013). These challenges are due in part to the inherent complexity of school climate and the difficulty of finding agreement on definitions, models, and dimensions that address the many facets that it incorporates (Thapa et al., 2013). Complexity is but one of several issues facing current methods for assessing school climate and perhaps preventing it from more widespread inclusion in state and local educational accountability systems.

Concerns with stakeholder surveys include the difficulty in assessing feelings and perceptions on self-reported survey items (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015; Hough et al., 2017; Wang & Degol, 2016), the potential for intentional influencing of responses by school staff (Melnick et al., 2017), and the issues involved with applying user-level responses to assess school-level characteristics (Konold & Cornell, 2015; Wang & Degol, 2016). The role of these combined challenges in the continued omission of school climate and safety measures from state accountability plans was not the subject of any literature reviewed for this study. However, the literature did suggest absence of school climate and safety measures from state accountability

has had a direct impact on the time and resources schools are able to dedicate towards climate improvement (Cohen et al., 2009; Gagnon & Schneider, 2019; Thapa et al., 2013). Thapa et al. (2013) additionally recognized how such problems also impact school climate research efforts and how that research, in turn, informs school improvement efforts on the ground.

Melnick et al. (2017) assert that "students' social and emotional well-being in school has frequently been called the 'missing link' in the accountability-driven practices and policies that are the legacy of NCLB and that dominate how schools operate today" (p. 1). The authors also proclaimed the passing of The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 offered "new possibilities for defining and supporting student and school success in American public education" (p. 1). The law contains an important new requirement for states that has been colloquially referred to as the "fifth indicator" of student success. This indicator was intended to help guide states to include at least one additional non-academic factor in their accountability systems and according to Melnick et al. (2017), signaled an important move toward a more holistic approach to accountability. The ESSA also provided specific recommendations for states to address this indicator that included measures of school climate and safety. Ultimately however, states were free to select any measure of school quality or student success, as long as it allows for "meaningful differentiation in school performance, [and] is valid, reliable, and comparable across the state" (ESSA, 2015). Despite the decades of research correlating positive school climates with increased academic achievement and a host of other positive youth outcomes, only eight states included such measures in their ESSA response plans (Kostyo et al., 2018).

The absence of these measures in accountability systems - to include the structures, policies, guidelines, and assistance from state agencies that accompany such measures - present

significant challenges for districts and schools to address school climate and to provide students with the type of holistic educational environment they deserve (Cohen et al., 2009; Gagnon & Schneider, 2019). This compounding effect has created a far too common landscape where the sole focus of school-based efforts becomes geared towards academics and teaching for the test (Ciccione & Freiberg, 2017), because it is the primary criteria "graded" by the state. It is against this backdrop that schools must find the time and the resources to meet their imperative of providing a high-quality and holistic educational experience for their students. As more schools and districts take up this challenge, they have increased opportunities to examine innovative approaches to strengthening and improving safety and climate. This is the scenario unfolding in the SSD, which presented the unique opportunity to conduct case study research and explore the possibilities of an approach for assessing school climate and guiding improvement efforts.

The conceptual framework that guided this study centered on a shift in the point of school climate and safety assessment away from traditional models and instruments. The question of whether the construct of school climate is best measured by the perceptions of students and staff is not addressed by this study. Even if it might be agreed that the perceptions of students and staff are the most effective way of measuring school climate and safety, there remain noted internal and external factors that can impact those attitudes - particularly students (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015; Hough et al., 2017; Rudasill et al., 207; Wang & Degol, 2016). The conceptual framework underpinning this study asserts stakeholder perceptions are also largely shaped through their experiences in the school setting. It is further asserted that school leaders can positively impact these perceptions based on the number and quality of the practices they intentionally deliver. Because stakeholder perceptions are subject to so many influences and because school-based practices can be easily and consistently documented across schools, this

study argues that, when it comes to accountability, what a school does and how well they do it is what matters.

By shifting the point of school climate assessment from the perceptions of stakeholders to the activities and practices conducted by schools, it is posited that other criticisms facing traditional school climate assessment may be mitigated. The ability to provide supporting documentation for responses on the TASQ is meant to address the identified issues associated with self-reports and surveys. Although expert feedback introduced the possibility that staff assessment of practices and activities could introduce "halo" or "recency" effects, once again, the documentation necessary to support responses on the TASQ would offer some level of mitigation. Other potential benefits of shifting the point of assessment include a more fair and comprehensive system of assessment; the elimination of translating survey results into action plans; and perhaps most importantly, a more direct path to adopting best practices and evidence-based approaches – which in-turn drives school climate improvement. Following the adage that "what gets measured gets done", a key idea behind this study asserts that by measuring the number and quality of best practices and evidence-based approaches across all domains of school climate, it will incentivize the implementation of additional practices.

The conceptual model was supported by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's Practice Theory. Bourdieu's original work represented an attempt to bridge the gap between subjective first-person accounts of behavior and objective third-party observations (Maggio, 2017). However, this work contained the idea that social life is a contingent and ever-changing texture of human practices (Nicolini, 2012). Practice Theory is centered on the premise that the creation and perpetuation of all aspects of social life rely on human activity. This applies even to social structures such as family, authority, institutions, and organizations, which are all "kept in

existence through the recurrent performance of material activities, and to a large extent they only exist as long as those activities are performed" (p. 3). Although no existing research could be found that applies Practice Theory to school climate, the first of Bourdieu's five primary tenets - that human activity, performance, and work creates and perpetuates all aspects of social (and organizational) life primarily lies behind support for the conceptual model. Applying this lens of Practice Theory then suggests that the perceptions of stakeholders (students, staff, and parents) are the direct result of conducting activities and practices within schools that are correlated with safe and positive school climates. It is further posited that how well and to what extent these practices and activities are carried out within a school will largely determine the perceptions of its members.

Interpretation of Findings

Three research questions guided this study in developing a deeper understanding of whether the conceptual model and the TASQ itself held promise as a new approach to assess school climate and drive improvement.

RQ$_1$: What distinct domains and target areas are necessary to construct the TASQ and how should they be organized?

RQ$_2$: How do experts in the field of school climate research describe the use of the TASQ as an instrument to assess school climate and safety and guide improvement practices?

RQ$_3$: How do the experiences of the school leaders who conduct the TASQ pilot study reflect its potential as an effective, useful, and practical instrument?

The data collected and analyzed through three distinct sources sought to fully address each of the research questions. An analysis of existing valid and reliable school climate

assessment instruments and research-based practices helped to determine the structure of the TASQ and address the first research question. An analysis of feedback from school climate and safety experts also contributed to the findings related to the first research question and resulted in changes to the structure of the TASQ. The second and third research questions were explored through the analysis of the expert feedback and a focus group interview of pilot participants who completed the TASQ. Nine major themes and two subthemes emerged from this data and provided the foundation for the findings of this study.

Finding 1: It is appropriate to build the framework of the TASQ using existing models of school climate.

The first research question guiding this study sought to discover whether an instrument could be logically constructed using this new lens of assessment and if so, what elements it should contain. This research question was addressed through two primary data sources. The first was a review of four widely used models and the ED's School Climate Survey Compendium, containing 41 valid and reliable assessment instruments. The second source of data used to address the first research question was data derived from the analysis of expert feedback that was coded under the *Design* category. This data captured feedback regarding the specific scales used on the TASQ and the alignment of domains, target areas, and questions. Through these two sources of data, an initial framework for the TASQ was constructed, then later refined, in order to prepare it for piloting in district schools.

The data collected from existing models and instruments indicated the domains, dimensions, subdimensions and other scales used to these build traditional models (based on stakeholder perceptions) were generally applicable as a framework for the TASQ (see Table 3). Many of these models and instruments exist as packages that often include action steps for

improving areas where scores may indicate an area of weakness or opportunity for improvement. These action plans contain specific practice recommendations for schools that are intended to improve stakeholder perceptions for each criterion measured. Additionally, the 66 empirical or meta-studies and six government documents located in the literature review contained numerous evidence-based and best practices that could easily be grouped under each of the domains and target areas found on the TASQ. These practices and the research behind them were detailed in Chapter Two and organized under the final structure of the TASQ.

Once the initial structure of the TASQ was assembled, it remained in need of refinement due to the unique nature of the instrument and not discovering any comparable model. In order to obtain a better sense of the domains, target areas, and question items and how they should be organized, the framework was sent to expert researchers in the field of school climate and safety. An analysis of that feedback regarding the construction of the TASQ largely corroborated the findings from the review of existing models and instruments. Each of the four experts offered feedback indicating general agreement with the domains and target areas used in the draft, as well as their alignment. Specific suggestions were also made for renaming several domains and target areas as well as adding or eliminating other measures. Furthermore, none of the experts questioned the applicability of traditional school climate scales to an approach that instead centered on assessing practices and activities.

Together, the review of existing models and instruments and the expert feedback fully addressed the first research question. By using the existing models and instruments that have been informed by decades of research, there was an inherent validity that was incorporated into the structure of the TASQ. However, the literature revealed that no elements of the structure had previously been applied to a model based on the assessment of school-based *practices* and no

model of school climate contained the number of domains or unique organization that is found on the TASQ. Despite these observations, the combined elements from numerous valid and reliable instruments lent strong evidence that each of the scales on the TASQ held merit. By organizing each in a logically sound manner and having that alignment reviewed by a panel of experts, the construction of the initial framework was further validated and optimized for piloting. The agreement between the results of the literature review and the analysis of expert feedback indicate the scales and their organization are appropriate.

Finding 2: Although concerns did exist regarding the comprehensiveness of the TASQ, experts believe it holds promise as a school climate assessment and improvement instrument.

The second research question guiding this study was: How do experts in the field of school climate research describe the use of the TASQ as an instrument to assess school climate and safety and guide improvement practices? While a great deal of the expert feedback concerned the design and organization of the TASQ, experts were also asked about the proposed method of assessment (using practices and activities) and the ability of the TASQ to drive improvement efforts. The analysis of responses to these questions gave rise to the first theme that the TASQ held promise as a legitimate assessment instrument.

Three of the four experts offered their thoughts regarding the use of the TASQ to guide assessment and improvement efforts in schools. Expert B did not directly address this question, despite the agreement she found with the domains and target areas being used. Experts A, C, & D however, each provided multiple statements regarding the proposed process that were coded as positive. The feedback from Expert A - who is one of the world's leading authorities in school climate - was especially effusive in its praise. This expert not only indicated the method of

proposed assessment was a "thoughtful and excellent idea", he also believed the TASQ could potentially benefit the areas of school climate, SEL, and character education in meaningful ways. By offering their thoughts and suggestions regarding the design of the TASQ, there was also a tacit acknowledgement of agreement each of the experts had with the proposed method of assessment. If there was disagreement or skepticism regarding the process of assessment proposed by the TASQ, then it is posited that the expert feedback would have included critical comments regarding the use of traditional scales for this new model.

Expert A was also the only individual to offer specific feedback regarding the potential of the TASQ to drive school climate and safety improvement. Because any question items receiving a lower score on the TASQ automatically provide the practices and activities that are needed for improvement, the instrument would appear to function equally as an assessment and improvement tool. Expert A agreed with this assertion and found the instrument to be "admirable" in its attempt to help principals understand where their school is currently at and provide the next steps in the "iterative, continuous process of school improvement." Despite this positive feedback regarding the potential of the TASQ to drive improvement efforts, only one expert ultimately responded to that facet of the question. The feedback offered by the experts clearly indicates support for the TASQ to serve as a school climate and safety assessment instrument. However, the lack of feedback from experts regarding the ability of the TASQ to drive improvement efforts did not yield a similar level of support. This could be due to oversight on the part of the experts or a poor phrasing of the question by the district.

Despite positive feedback regarding the TASQ's potential as an assessment and improvement instrument, there were concerns expressed by the school climate and safety experts. One of the four themes that emerged from the analysis of this feedback revealed the

instrument may be too lengthy or attempt to measure too many distinct areas. Expert B noted that "Burdened participants are likely to give up and you run the risk of not attaining all the data you need.", which represented an obvious potential issue. Expert D offered that assessments can become "too inclusive and amorphous, so that they go far beyond measuring school climate" and went on to remark "my concern is not what you are missing but how much you are including". However, Expert D also proclaimed the TASQ's "strength and weakness is how thorough and comprehensive it is." The combined expert feedback helped underscore the importance and difficulty in striking a balance between thoroughness and practicality. Because the TASQ is intended to provide a comprehensive assessment of school climate practices, the opportunities to further reduce the number of domains or target areas may be limited. However, the concerns expressed by the experts were also later echoed by many of the pilot participants. This clearly indicates all facets of the instrument and the process of assessment must continue to be examined for ways to reduce any burden of time or effort.

Finding 3: Completion of the TASQ can be time-consuming. However, the instrument was found to yield valuable information and multiple strategies exist to mitigate the effort.

The third research question guiding this study was: How do the experiences of the school leaders who conduct the TASQ pilot study reflect its potential as an effective, useful, and practical instrument? To address the final research question, a focus group discussion was conducted using one volunteer representative from each of the nine schools where the TASQ was piloted. The discussion explored participant experiences with the pilot, using questions designed to elicit responses that addressed the effectiveness, usefulness, and practicality of the TASQ – each aspect of the third research question.

The practicality of the instrument was determined by asking participants how difficult or intensive the effort was. Data from participant responses to this question revealed similarities and differences in the actual time it took to complete, the rating of intensity they assigned, and their perceptions of the effort involved in completing the TASQ. The most frequently used code in the analysis was *Time-consuming*, which was applied to data from every participant. The proliferation of this code led to the emergence of the first theme in the analysis that the TASQ can be time-consuming but yields valuable information. This theme reflected data that indicated participants found the TASQ to take a significant amount of time to complete, but that important mitigating factors also existed. In addition to the frequency of the coded data, participant comments regarding all facets of the effort involved, clearly indicated that completing the TASQ was no easy task. Through the coding of data and inference of participant comments, evidence pointed to the supporting documentation required of all higher scoring responses as a major factor in the intensity of the effort. Although the comprehensiveness of the TASQ certainly has a direct impact on how time-consuming the instrument is to complete, participants appeared to attribute their experiences to other facets of the assessment. Most participants also provided other important caveats that mitigated their opinion of whether the TASQ was too long or burdensome.

Five participants provided comments that were coded as *Worth It*, which indicated that despite the effort it took to complete, the TASQ was a valuable use of their time. Participants predominately believed the TASQ yielded such important information that the time spent conducting the assessment was either to be expected or well worth the time and effort. Other participants found value in conducting the TASQ as a formative assessment without providing documentation and several more liked the idea of breaking the TASQ up into "chunks". This division of the instrument itself led to the formation of a subtheme in the analysis. However, one

of the most frequently mentioned ways to reduce the burden was to follow the district-recommended protocol and utilize a small team to divide the effort.

The division of effort played a significant role in participant perceptions of the length and intensity of the assessment and gave rise to the second theme in the analysis - that the TASQ is best completed by a school team. Only one participant reported using a team of more than two staff. However, that participant reported the lowest intensity rating score and was effusive in his belief that using five team members and dividing the questions equally, directly contributed to the TASQ not being considered a burden. Other participants who used teams of two members reported the TASQ to be more time-consuming or burdensome, as did those who had no team. The clear indication from all participants was that if using only one or two staff, the TASQ is likely represents a laborious endeavor.

It is important to note that regardless of how many staff assisted with completion, the overall length of time it took to complete the TASQ did not vary significantly among the participants. This indicates that any reduction of time is experienced by the individual(s) completing the TASQ and does not lead to a quicker or easier assessment. However, it was surmised in the focus group discussion that as school teams become more familiar with the documentation and involve members with direct knowledge of the assessment items, the TASQ would likely take less time to complete.

Finding 4: The TASQ was found to be effective and useful for assessment and planning but may not be equally applicable to all schools and grade levels.

Analysis of the focus group transcript also revealed important feedback that addressed the usefulness and effectiveness components of the third research question. Usefulness was primarily determined by the perceived benefits participants reported, as a result of completing the TASQ.

Participants elaborated on several benefits such as the important or enlightening information produced by the instrument, how it helped to create a deeper shared understanding of intentional practices, and even better prepare aspiring leaders within a school. By a significant margin however, the two most reported benefits were the ability of the TASQ to identify gaps in climate and safety practices and to develop improvement plans. These were two of the primary intentions behind the development of the TASQ and directly points to their value as an assessment and improvement tool. This was further supported by five participants stating the TASQ will assist them in developing their School Improvement Plan (SIP), with the only principal in the group proclaiming he is already using it to plan for the upcoming school year. This represented a significant level of confidence in the TASQ, considering it is still under development and is unique in its design.

In addition to the question of usefulness, the benefits reported by participants also encompassed multiple uses for the TASQ. This gave rise to the third theme to emerge from the analysis that indicated the TASQ was both a useful and flexible instrument. Several participants found value in using the TASQ as a formative assessment, while others thought it should best be used as both a formative and summative instrument. However, one participant expressed that doing both would represent too much time and effort. It was inferred that the value of a formative "pre" assessment was the ability of the TASQ to still highlight opportunities for improvement and create goals, yet not require staff to document their responses. This represented another example of the documentation contributing to perceptions of how intense or difficult the TASQ was to complete. Combining the formative and summative approaches with the ability of the TASQ to serve as an assessment and improvement tool, and the multiple methods of

completion (chunking, using teams, or breaking up over time), provides evidence it is both a useful and flexible instrument.

The fourth theme to emerge from the analysis of the focus group transcript found the TASQ is an effective assessment and planning instrument. Although this data was closely related to the usefulness of the TASQ, the differences were viewed as a subtle but important distinction by the researcher. While an instrument might effectively assess a given phenomenon, it does not necessarily indicate that it is useful for the task at hand. In this case however, participants found the TASQ to be most useful for identifying gaps and establishing improvement goals. As might be expected, the TASQ was also found to be an *effective* assessment and planning instrument. Separate codes were used to identify data that indicated the TASQ effectively captured the climate and safety of their school or whether participants found it effective as a planning instrument. The proliferation of these two codes, combined with data coded under the labels *Accuracy* and *Complete Picture*, indicated the TASQ was clearly perceived as effective in both areas.

The focus group discussion also elicited feedback regarding the design of individual questions, target areas, and domains, as well as the instrument as a whole. This data helped to form the fifth and final theme of the analysis - that the TASQ is well designed but may not be equally applicable to all schools. Although participant responses generally supported the TASQ was a well-designed instrument, there were several issues illuminated by the discussion. Three of the four elementary participants expressed their belief that some assessment items may not be as applicable to their grade level as secondary schools. This was particularly mentioned in reference to the use of In-School Suspension (ISS), student clubs, and service opportunities. It is also possible this concern may apply to other items such as the availability of rigorous academic

curricula and student leadership opportunities, or that secondary schools may be at a disadvantage when it comes to aspects such as parent involvement.

The concern of applicability also extended to some items, such as security cameras being largely out of the control of schools. This opened up the possibility that while all items on the TASQ should be assessed, local education agencies should also determine which items schools should be held accountable for when it comes to their overall score. These two facets of applicability indicated the TASQ is well designed as far as its overall structure but may not be appropriate for all schools equally. This concern was recognized as the TASQ was being constructed and while great effort was taken to make the assessment items applicable to all grade levels and schools, further refinement is necessary.

Implications

This study carries significant implications for state and local leaders, educators, researchers, and for the SSD. For policymakers, legislators, and leadership within State Education Agencies, this study has followed in the footsteps of previous research and made a strong case for the inclusion of school climate and safety measures in educational accountability systems. Only eight states included such measures in their ESSA response plans, while no states included SEL measures (Kostyo et al., 2018). This study explored the question of why so few states included school climate and safety measures, despite decades of research and despite the federal government's suggestion to include such measures to address ESSA's "Fifth Indicator" of success. Many of the issues that potentially prevent the adoption of these measures in state accountability systems, such as the lack of a universal definition of school climate, the use of stakeholder surveys, or the ability to manipulate responses have been explored in detail. By shifting the point of assessment from stakeholder perceptions to the activities conducted in

schools, this study has argued that many of the limiting factors that prevent climate measures from inclusion may be mitigated. The TASQ represents a new approach to hold schools accountable for providing a more holistic education and provides a way to equitably document the assessment of their practices.

For educators, the implications of this study go beyond the accountability system and directly impact what they do each day. This study presented the argument that most schools already conduct a great number of practices and activities that lead to a more positive and safe school climate. It was further argued that schools should be rewarded for the number and quality of such practices, particularly as they lie outside what they are held accountable for doing by state agencies. The TASQ offers the opportunity for schools to trumpet these practices and activities, as well as the overall climate of their schools. Importantly for educators, there is evidence the TASQ may serve not just as an assessment instrument, but also a means to drive school climate and safety improvement. Even for those schools that currently conduct climate surveys, it involves a significant amount of work to translate the scores from those surveys and devise action plans for improvement. The TASQ requires no interpretation and action planning is simplified. If a school has a low score on any question item or in any domain, the best practices for improvement are already provided within the question itself. This "short cut" from assessment to action planning represents a significant savings in time and training, as well as the elimination of any guess work from prescriptive efforts to address deficiencies.

For researchers, the TASQ could signify a new frontier in school climate and safety assessment and if nothing else, represents an additional promising path. Few instruments or models were located across the literature that deviated from the traditional method of assessing school climate via stakeholder perceptions. Thapa et al. (2013) suggested that future studies

involving school climate should examine the issue from multiple perspectives, and as much as possible, integrate process and outcome concepts into the analysis. Cohen (2009) noted the gap between research and practice that has had the effect of actually discouraging school climate improvement and continues to perpetuate the denial of our children's collective rights to a holistic education. Gagnon and Schneider (2019) noted the number of influential groups and prominent academics that have strongly advocated for the inclusion of multiple measures in determinations of school success. Since no instrument or model could be found that used the activities and practices conducted in schools as the basis for school climate assessment or improvement, this study represents a new path for researches to explore. Based on the feedback from several of the leading experts in the field of school climate and safety, this new approach holds promise and could potentially take the field of school climate and safety research in new directions.

In addition to policymakers, educators, and researchers, there are implications for other groups. Stakeholders - to include staff, students, and parents - are potentially the greatest beneficiaries of this research study. If the TASQ can lead to an increased number of practices that are proven to correlate with safe and positive school climates, the educational experience of all stakeholders will be enhanced. This may translate to more engaging lessons in a classroom, reduced rates of bullying or harassment, an increase in the quality of adult to student relationships, or families that become more involved with their children's education. These are the outcomes of intentional practices that can be stymied through academically dominated accountability models. By incorporating the number and quality of such practices within state accountability models, it not only sends the message to schools that they matter, it provides the incentive to carry them out with excellence.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of all data sources, there is strong evidence to support the continued development of the TASQ and the promise it holds as an instrument for assessing and improving school climate. However, there remain important steps to not just refine and further develop the instrument, but to more generally embrace the inclusion of school climate and safety measures in accountability systems and provide our children with the holistic education that is their fundamental right. The following recommendations are targeted at four populations: state education leaders, district leaders, school leaders, and researchers.

Recommendations for State Education Leaders

State Educational Agencies are powerful actors in determining the daily activities that are conducted in schools. This stems from educational accountability systems that hold all public districts and schools accountable for their performance. In response to the ESSA in 2015, several states have adopted measures of school climate and safety into their accountability models and even more have incorporated these measures within their school improvement frameworks (Kostyo et al., 2018). However, far too many states have not embraced the recommendations of that federal legislation to address this non-academic indicator of student success and school quality with measures of climate and safety measures or SEL. This includes the State of Florida, home to the Sunshine School District (SSD).

The collection of research presented in the literature review for this study clearly points to the integral relationship between school climate and the quality of the school. It is recommended that state education leaders closely examine their ESSA response plans and seek out avenues for incorporating measures of school climate and safety into their accountability system. If the goal for state education leaders and agencies is to develop and support systems of

high-quality schools, then it makes sense to define all meaningful facets of a quality school and make them count. The outcomes associated with NCLB and academically dominated accountability systems have shown us that what schools and districts are held accountable for is primarily what gets done (Ciccione & Freiberg, 2017; Melnick et al., 2017). Once such measures are adopted, it is further recommended that state agencies encourage their districts to develop innovative and scientifically-sound approaches to achieving those measures, share best practices, and provide the technical support necessary for successful statewide diffusion.

Recommendations for School District Leaders

In states where school climate and safety measures are not included in accountability systems and requisite support systems are absent or limited, opportunities exist for district superintendents and local school boards to carry the torch of building quality schools. Kirkland et al. (2017) noted that schools can only be as strong or effective as the support systems surrounding them. If support is not being provided from above, then it must come from within. It is recommended that district leaders seek the input of stakeholders in determining the facets of quality, climate, and safety that are of paramount concern. These elements should be incorporated into the district's strategic plan and capacity for the successful realization of strategic goals must be built. It is further recommended district leaders seek partnerships with the research community, universities, organizations, and the private sector to develop evidence-based approaches that can be adapted to fit the unique needs and populations found in each school.

The TASQ should not be considered for adoption by the SSD or any other district as a *formal* assessment instrument until it undergoes further research and refinement. However, participant responses clearly indicated the TASQ already holds value as a more formative

assessment tool that can assist schools in identifying gaps and developing improvement goals. If the TASQ were to be used across a district in such a fashion, it is recommended that school leaders conduct the assessment at least once each year and be required to include multiple goals in their School Improvement Plan (SIP). It is also recommended that protocol be developed, calling for a team of no less than four individuals to complete the TASQ and a timeframe of adequate length in which to complete the assessment.

Recommendations for School Leaders

Individual school leaders who wish to bring a stronger focus to climate and safety practices face many of the same dilemmas as district leaders in the absence of state accountability. It can be difficult to dedicate scarce resources and instructional time to school climate and safety matters, when such practices and activities are considered ancillary. However, principals are the ultimate arbiter of the daily practices and activities that take place in their schools. This study has provided ample research linking safe and positive school climates with increased academic performance and a host of other positive youth outcomes. Regardless of the current academic performance of a school, it is recommended that principals closely examine their school climate and safety efforts, as a means for making further academic gains. Beyond academics, leaders who wish to provide their students and staff with optimal environments to learn, work, and grow *must* make these same evaluations.

The TASQ offers a way for school leaders to systematically and effectively assess what they do and how well they do it when it comes to school safety and climate. The TASQ also offers a direct path from assessment to identifying the best practices needed for improvement. It is recommended that principals and other school leaders use the TASQ as a formative assessment tool as they plan for upcoming school years and establish annual improvement goals. Used in

this fashion, the TASQ can also serve as an informal summative assessment by comparing the scores from each domain and target area from the previous year. Although it represents additional time and resources, student and staff climate surveys should also be conducted on a regular basis to further evaluate the effectiveness of all activities and practices.

It is further recommended that principals establish a core team of diverse staff to oversee the coordination of all climate and safety related activities on campus. These teams may be responsible for the completion of the TASQ or similar assessment instruments, as well as establishing goals and action plans for improvement. To the extent possible, teams should provide opportunities for student, staff, and parent voices to be heard in each phase of the process and data must be regularly analyzed and shared with all stakeholders.

Recommendations for Further Study

Although the TASQ is based on numerous valid and reliable models and received significant positive feedback from pilot participants, it is not ready for use as a formal assessment instrument. The feedback from pilot participants echoed concerns by school climate and safety experts that the TASQ may be time-consuming and burdensome to complete. Participants additionally reported some questions as being difficult to answer, choices not being clear enough, or some items that may not be applicable to their school. Although participants indicated a clear preference for the question format that incorporated the use of a single standard and Likert Scale response, not all questions were found to lend themselves best to this format. Future research on the TASQ must include a close examination of the language, elements, and formatting used for all questions and response items. It is also recommended that research include a factor analysis to help determine the fewest number of scales that can be effectively used. This will assist with any overlap of questions and how concise the instrument is.

Additional validity for the TASQ needs to be established through further expert review and comparing the results with other established valid and reliable school climate assessment instruments.

Should the SSD decide to adopt the TASQ as an informal assessment instrument while further validation is underway, it offers the opportunity for testing the internal consistency and inter-rater reliability of the instrument through additional piloting and use. If the TASQ can be established as a valid and reliable instrument, then perhaps it can join the pantheon of existing instruments used in schools across the country and offer a new path for assessing school climate and safety.

Summary and Conclusion

This study was undertaken in order to explore the possibility that an instrument could be constructed which might assess school climate and safety through a new approach centering on the practices and activities conducted in schools. This study also sought to inform the further development of such an instrument already under construction in a Florida school district (that would become known as the TASQ), then explore its potential as an effective, useful, and practical tool. The TASQ was designed to not only function as an assessment instrument, but also to help guide improvement efforts and increase the prevalence of best practices. Because no similar instrument could be located throughout the literature, the purpose of the study was one of exploration and did not seek to produce a valid and reliable instrument.

The data collected and analyzed for this study was predicated on three research questions that collectively guided that exploration. Because the TASQ was built using an analysis of 41 valid and reliable school climate instruments, there is a sense of confidence that it captures the all major elements of school climate already identified through decades of research. In addition

to these instruments and models, documents, such as the multi-agency *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans* and the *Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines* (CSTAG), were used to incorporate best practices in emergency response, safety, and violence prevention. Together, these sources contributed to the development of an instrument that more fully incorporates the elements of school climate and safety and integrates them into a framework already established by research.

The piloting of the TASQ revealed that, even though there are issues regarding the length and applicability to all schools, it was an effective, useful, and largely practical instrument. Participants reported the TASQ excelled at identifying important gaps in their school climate efforts and with developing climate and safety elements of their School Improvement Plan (SIP). These attributes make the TASQ worthy of use as an informal instrument, despite the need for further research and development. These findings should assist the SSD leadership in determining if the TASQ warrants continued use – whether through additional piloting or to assess the climate and safety goals found in its strategic plan.

Continued research, testing, and use of the TASQ are critical not just to the development of the instrument, but to the ongoing evolution of school climate and safety research. Despite the decades of research and proliferation of numerous valid and reliable instruments, most state educational accountability plans still do not contain measures of school climate and safety. This has contributed to a familiar environment in too many U.S. public schools where the push for academic improvement and higher test scores consume instructional time and focus. If our children are to receive the type of holistic educational experience that is their unquestioned right, then non-academic outcomes must be made to matter. The continued development of new and

innovative approaches to school climate assessment and improvement may offer the bridge that

is needed to finally join research and practice.

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Appendix A
The Transformational Assessment of School Quality (TASQ)

The Transformational Assessment of School Quality (TASQ) is designed to measure the breadth and quality of activities and practices conducted by K-12 schools that are correlated by research with safe and positive school climates. The TASQ is not intended to replace stakeholder feedback, but as a separate measure of school climate. The TASQ consists of eight interconnected domains, each containing individual target areas for activities and practices. Each target area measurement contains questions that are scored on a 4-point rubric, which ranges from not being present, to a "gold standard" of implementation, using best practices or research-based approaches. Below are the eight domains and the respective target areas found in each.

The TASQ

Domain	Target Areas
Safety & Order	- Discipline Policies & Practices - Behavioral Intervention & Supports - Bullying & Harassment - Mental Health Supports & Services - Threat Assessment & Violence Prevention
Physical Environment & Security	- Emergency Preparedness & Response - Cleanliness and Order of Campus - Physical Security of Campus
Teaching & Learning	***Intentional Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning*** - Teaching Strategies - Academic Support *and Excellence*
***Trusting* Relationships**	- Adult-to-Adult - Adult and Student - Student-to-Student
Leadership	- Staff Empowerment, Recognition & Wellness - Professional Development - Allocation of Resources - School Improvement Goals
Student Engagement	- Extracurricular Opportunities ***Student Leadership & Voice*** *Creating welcoming and culturally responsive environments*
Family & Community *Engagement*	- Opportunities for Parent and Family Involvement - Parent Communication *Civic Engagement & Community Partnership*
Data Collection & Analysis	- Discipline**, *Attendance, & Behavior* Data** - Academic Data - School Climate & Safety Data

Domain A - Safety & Order

Target	Domain A - Safety & Order	Score

Target A1 - Discipline Policies and Practices

A1A

Fair and Equitable Discipline

0 = There is no discipline matrix in place, or the discipline matrix is poorly followed. There are no opportunities for student or parent input into discipline policies or procedures.

1 = There is a discipline matrix that is regularly followed and prescribes a singular consequence for each offense that is the same for all students.

2 = There is a progressive discipline matrix that is regularly and consistently followed and allows for a range of appropriate consequences. Exclusionary discipline (removal from regular classes-such as ISS or OSS) may be used for any level of offense. Students and parents are provided with this information annually through handbooks, codes of conduct, and other means.

3 = Our school utilizes a progressive discipline matrix that allows for a range of appropriate consequences and does not allow for exclusionary practices for lower-level offenses. Parents are provided with this information annually through handbooks, codes of conduct, and other means, while students receive additional instruction on discipline policies each year. Discipline policies and the code of conduct are developed with staff, student, and parent input.

A1B

The Use of In-School Suspension (ISS)

0 = There is no use of ISS, despite the use of Out of School Suspension.

1 = ISS is used, but there is little structure to the program and it is staffed by uncertified personnel.

2 = ISS incorporates students' regular coursework to prevent academic regression and certified instructional staff are able to assist students with their work.

3 = Our school utilizes an ISS program or behavioral intervention center that incorporates student's regular coursework and utilizes a coordinated, evidence-based approach (curriculum, program, or other practice) to assist with social skill and behavioral improvement. ISS is staff by appropriately certified personnel.

A1C

The Use of Out of School Suspension (OSS)

0 = OSS is used for all levels of offenses, with few or no intervention attempts prior to use.

1 = OSS is used for a wide variety of discipline issues except those which are considered the lowest-level offenses. Other than ISS, no alternatives are utilized prior to using OSS and there is little connection to early intervention services to reduce recidivism.

2 = OSS is only used for more serious discipline issues and in most cases is not used for a first offense. There is school-wide use of positive reinforcement systems and a good connection to behavioral intervention services is in place

3 = OSS is only used in situations where the safety of students and staff or the orderly operation of the school are threatened. Otherwise, our school utilizes an evidence-based approach to providing alternatives to OSS (such as Restorative Practices) and intervening with behavioral problems before they escalate by using positive reinforcement and early intervention through our MTSS. The length and frequency of OSS are either capped or are closely monitored and addressed through increased intervention.

A1D

Clear Behavioral Expectations

0 = No student handbook (and/or code of conduct) with behavioral expectations is available. Rules or behavioral expectations are not posted in common areas and only sporadically in classrooms.

1 = A student handbook (and/or code of conduct) with behavioral expectations is available. Rules and behavioral expectations are posted in most classrooms and in a few areas throughout the school.

2= A student handbook (and/or code of conduct) with behavioral expectations is available and communicated to all members of the school community. Rules and behavioral expectations are posted in all classrooms and in a common areas throughout the school

3= Our school utilizes a student handbook (and/or code of conduct)) with behavioral expectations that is provided and communicated to all members of the school community. Our school deliberately posts positively-stated behavioral expectations and messages in all classrooms and common areas throughout the school.

A1E	**Use of Positive Rewards & Reinforcement** 0 = The use of positive rewards for meeting or exceeding behavioral expectations is not used or used sparingly by individual teachers. 1 = Many teachers use positive rewards for encouraging students to meet or exceed behavioral expectations on an individual basis but not through a coordinated, school-wide effort. 2= Many teachers and staff use positive rewards for encouraging students to meet or exceed behavioral expectations, as a component of our school-wide system. Teachers establish individual rewards systems for their classrooms and seek the input of their students. There is school-wide recognition for good character or behavior. 3= All staff in our school use positive rewards for encouraging students to meet or exceed behavioral expectations as a component of our school-wide evidence-based system. Staff are trained annually in the use of the positive rewards system and it is followed with fidelity. Student input on the rewards available is sought each year at the school and classroom level. Students are recognized in the school and community for their character and behavior, through awards, ceremonies, and public displays or acknowledgement.

Target A2 - Behavioral Intervention & Supports

A2A	**Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) Teams** 0 = No problem-solving team for behavioral prevention and intervention exists at the school level. 1 = A problem-solving team for behavioral prevention and intervention exists. However, it does not meet with regularity or is combined with academic problem-solving, resulting in behavior not being regularly discussed during meetings. Representation from school leadership or discipline staff may not be consistent. 2 = A multidisciplinary problem-solving team for behavioral prevention and intervention exists, meets regularly, and enjoys participation from school administrative and discipline staff. However, the consistent use of data to identify universal prevention efforts, individual students in need of support, or progress monitoring of attempted interventions may be lacking. 3 = Our school has a multidisciplinary problem-solving team for behavioral prevention and intervention that has consistent representation from the school administrative and discipline staff, meets with regularity, and uses data to drive prevention and intervention efforts across 3 tiers of support.
A2B	**MTSS Guidelines and Interventions** 0 = There are no comprehensive district MTSS guidelines or implementation standards for behavioral prevention and intervention - or such guidelines are not regularly followed with fidelity, due to communication, staffing, or other issues. 1 = Comprehensive guidelines or implementation standards are used to guide our behavioral prevention and intervention efforts, but there is a lack of Tier 1 universal prevention, or a poor connection to evidence-based interventions at the Tier 2 or 3 level, due to limited staffing, resources, professional development, or other issues. 2 = Comprehensive guidelines or implementation standards are used to guide our prevention and intervention efforts for behavior and attendance, using a sound array of strategies and interventions across 3 tiers of support. 3 = Our school utilizes MTSS procedures for behavioral and attendance prevention and intervention that are based on comprehensive district guidelines and implementation standards. All core prevention instruction and an adequate array of behavioral interventions and strategies are evidence-based and delivered across all grade levels. All staff are provided with high-quality professional development to implement prevention and intervention across 3 tiers of support.

Target A3 - Bullying & Harassment

Bullying & Harassment Policy

0 = No formal policy on bullying or harassment is in place or the policy is not followed with regularity.

1 = A policy on bullying and harassment is in place and contained within our student handbook or code of conduct. However, the policy may not contain specific language regarding the reporting or investigation of reports and expectations on bullying are not visibly posted throughout the school.

2 = An approved policy is in place and is regularly communicated to all students, staff, and parents through our handbook or code of conduct, as well as visible expectations or rules posted throughout the school. However, no compliance measures have been established at the school or district level to ensure the policy is being followed with fidelity.

3 = Our school utilizes an approved model policy on bullying and harassment that is communicated to students, staff, and parents. The policy contains language on prohibiting, defining, reporting, and investigating acts of bullying, as well as the consequences for violating any tenet of the policy. Expectations specifically for bullying and reporting acts of bullying are also visibly posted throughout our school. Our policy on bullying and harassment is reviewed annually by school or district staff to ensure optimal compliance.

A3A

Bullying & Harassment Prevention and Intervention

0 = No universal prevention or targeted intervention specifically for bullying exists in our school.

1 = Universal bullying prevention strategies are used across some grade levels, but bullying prevention is not incorporated into the curriculum at any grade level. There are also few or no specific interventions available for students who bully or who may be victims of bullying.

2 = Bullying prevention is specifically incorporated into the curricula across several grade levels. Specific strategies and interventions for both bullies and victims of bullying are available.

3 = Our school uses a platform of age-appropriate, evidence-based bullying prevention curricula and other prevention strategies across all grade levels. In addition, students who have been identified as bullies or victims of bullying receive evidence-based interventions and close follow-up monitoring. High-quality professional development is provided to all staff on a regular basis, to help provide a consistent school-wide approach to prevention and intervention.

A3B

Bullying & Harassment Awareness and Involvement

0 = There are no surveys conducted to determine the scope of bullying and no reporting procedures for acts of bullying have been established or communicated.

1 = Student surveys are regularly conducted, but no questions specific to bullying are asked. Our school relies on students to report bullying to a caring adult, but has no published or posted procedures.

2 = Student surveys are regularly conducted and contain specific questions regarding the scope of bullying. However, the results of the survey are not consistently used to make changes to our procedures or prevention effort related to bullying. Anonymous reporting systems are in place but not visibly communicated across our school or community.

3 = Our school regularly conducts climate surveys that contain specific questions regarding bullying, to help determine the scope of the problem on our campus. The results of the survey are consistently used to help inform prevention and intervention efforts. Anonymous and first-hand reporting procedures have been established and communicated across our school and community to help ensure students know how to reach a supportive adult.

A3C

Target A4 - Mental Health Supports & Services

Mental Health Staffing & School-based Resources

0 = There are no school personnel assigned to assist students with mental health needs and no staff have been formally trained in youth mental health awareness or response. There are also no school-wide activities to promote positive mental health for students.

1 = There is at least 1 school counselor for every 500 students, but less than 1 school social worker for every 800 students and less than 1 psychologist for every 1,400 students, who regularly provide on-campus mental

A4A

health services for students in need. Few additional staff have been trained in youth mental health awareness and response. There are efforts to promote positive mental health for all students, most of which are contained within classroom instruction.

2 = There is at least 1 school counselor for every 500 students; 1 social worker for every 800 students; and 1 psychologist for every 1,400 students to provide on-campus mental health services. Most staff have been trained in youth mental health awareness and response and there are school-wide strategies and activities to promote positive mental health for all students.

3 = Our school meets (or comes close to meeting) the recommended staffing ratios for school counselors (250:1); social workers (400:1); and psychologists (700:1) to provide adequate on-campus mental health services for students in need. All staff are appropriately trained in youth mental health awareness and response, to include trauma-informed care. Our school incorporates instructional and non-instructional school-wide strategies and activities that promote positive mental health for all students and staff.

Mental Health Referral Procedures & Community Resources

0 = There are procedures for referring students to school-based mental health services. However, such services are limited by the availability of trained staff. Referrals to community providers are either unavailable or are likewise limited.

1 = Procedures for referring students to school-based mental health services include mandatory referrals for specific infractions or concerns. Most students in need of mental health services are appropriately connected either on-campus or a referral can be made to community service providers. However, communication and knowledge of referral procedures is lacking.

A4B
2 = There are specific written procedures for students to receive on-campus mental health services, that include mandatory referrals for specific infractions or concerns. All students referred for on-campus mental health services are connected in a reasonable amount of time. Partnerships with community mental health providers exist, but these services are not available on campus and coordination with providers can be difficult. All referral procedures are clearly communicated and available for those seeking assistance.

3 = Our school utilizes specific written procedures for referring students to on-campus and off-campus mental health services, that include mandatory referrals for specific infractions or concerns. All students in need of mental health services are easily referred and connected. Partnerships with community mental health providers allow for delivery of on-campus services, as well as off-campus services for students and their families. All referral procedures are clearly and regularly communicated to all staff, students, and parents.

Target A5 - Threat Assessment & Violence Prevention

Threat Assessment Teams and Training

0 = There is no dedicated threat assessment team in place or no specific training for staff on how to assess threats available.

1 = There is a threat assessment team in place, but membership is fluid and the team does not meet unless a threat is posed to the school community. Training on specific roles and responsibilities, as well as the threat assessment process is absent or minimal.

2 = There is a dedicated threat assessment team that includes various staff and faculty. Specific
A5A responsibilities are identified for each member and the team meets multiple times throughout the year and as needed to assess reported threats. Training consists primarily of procedural review or through the use of supplemental resources disseminated during meetings or throughout the year.

3 = Our school has a designated multidisciplinary threat assessment team that meets no less than monthly and as needed to assess reported threats. Team roles include both mental health and law enforcement professionals. The threat assessment team members have received rigorous training for their specific role and all facets of the process. Training also includes a regular review of procedures, as well as previously assessed threats.

A5B | **Threat Assessment Policy & Procedures**

A5C	0 = There is no formal policy regarding threat assessment or written procedures for the assessment of threats reported to school officials. 1 = There is a threat assessment policy in place that includes procedures for assessing reported threats. However, these procedures are not part of a comprehensive evidence-based approach or best practice and do not extend beyond the assessment of and response to the threat. 2 = There is a threat assessment policy in place that includes such elements as procedures for assessing and responding to threats, the roles and duties of threat team members, and available resources. However, these procedures are not part of a comprehensive evidence-based approach or best practice. 3 = Our school has a comprehensive threat assessment policy in place that includes universal prevention strategies, the roles and duties of threat team members, specific steps for conducting and documenting assessed threats, differentiating levels of threat and responses to each, connections to services (to include mental health), follow-up monitoring, and staff training requirements. Procedures are part of an evidence-based approach or recommended best practice.
	Reporting and Violence Prevention 0 = There are no anonymous or other formal reporting systems in place for dangerous or threatening behavior outside of reporting to a trusted adult. No coordinated school wide programs or interventions specific to violence prevention are utilized and there is a zero tolerance approach to acts of violence or aggression. 1 = There are anonymous "drop-boxes" used for reporting dangerous or threatening behavior, in addition to reporting to a trusted adult. There are few signs of reporting procedures or awareness campaigns visible throughout the school. Violence prevention instruction is limited to individual classroom lessons and not part of a comprehensive program or curriculum. 2 = There are digital and anonymous systems for reporting dangerous or threatening behavior. Procedures for reporting are clearly communicated to students and staff and are posted in multiple locations throughout the school. Violence prevention in embedded into the curricula of a single course that most or all students take once. 3 = Our school incorporates a wide platform of violence prevention strategies that include a digital and anonymous reporting system, staff and student training on reporting, conflict resolution strategies, and awareness campaigns led by students and embedded visibly throughout the school. An evidence-based school wide curriculum encompassing violence prevention is used across all grade levels and evidence-based early interventions are used with students who exhibit aggressive or violent behaviors.

Domain A - Safety & Order	**Total Points**

Target	**Domain B - Physical Environment & Security**	Score
	Target B1 - Emergency Preparedness & Response	
B1A	**Emergency Operations Plan** **The Standard** - Our school has a comprehensive, emergency operations plan that was developed in partnership with our district and school planning teams. The plan includes the roles and responsibilities of staff before, during, and after an emergency, as well as the coordination with and roles of responding agencies. The plan also accounts for drills and training, information necessary for carrying out all elements of the plan, and specific courses of action for evacuation, lockdown, shelter-in-place, communications, accounting for all persons, family reunification, continuity of operations, recovery, and security. The plan includes accommodations for those with special needs and considerations and is continually reviewed and revised, so that no part is ever more than two years old.	

0 = There is no emergency operations plan in place.

1 = There is a plan in place, but it contains few (less than half) of the criteria presented in the standard.

2 = There is a plan in place and it contains most of the criteria presented in the standard.

3 = Our school utilizes an Emergency Operations Plan that meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.

Safety Team

The Standard – Our school employs a multidisciplinary safety or crisis team that is responsible for the development and review of all emergency planning, stakeholder training, and risk assessment. The team meets regularly and draws from key stakeholder groups, with specific roles for school staff, district staff, community emergency response agencies, parents, and students.

0 = There is no team specifically responsible for safety or emergency planning.

1 = There is a safety or emergency planning team, but it is not responsible for developing the emergency response plan, or does not include representation from outside of school staff.

2 = There is a safety or emergency planning team, but it may not incorporate all elements of the plan presented in the standard or draw from all of the stakeholder groups listed.

3 = Our school has a safety or emergency planning team that meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.

B1B

Emergency Training, Drills, & Exercises

The Standard – Our school follows the number of state-required drills for fire, natural disasters, and active shooter situations, in cooperation with responding community agencies. Training includes a combination of tabletop exercises, school-wide drills, functional exercises, and full-scale exercises involving all responding agencies and stakeholder groups. Drills are conducted at varying times and days of the week and to the extent possible, under different weather conditions. After action reports are generated to identify gaps or issues with emergency response.

0 = There are no exercises to practice emergency response beyond the number of state-required drills.

1 = There are drills specifically for various crisis or emergency situations such as fire, natural disasters, or active shooters that sometimes involve community responding agencies.

2 = The platform of training for emergency response includes all state-required drills, tabletop exercises, and some functional exercises involving community responding agencies.

3 = Our school's platform of emergency training meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.

B1C

Safety Risk Assessment

The Standard - Our school uses a comprehensive site assessment instrument predicated on best practices that identifies and prioritizes risks and vulnerabilities associated with specific threats and hazards. The results of the assessment are used to establish specific goals and objectives for before, during, and after each threat or hazard included in the emergency plan. The assessment instrument also includes security staffing, operational procedures, physical security measures, and professional development needs for safety and security.

0 = There is no comprehensive risk assessment instrument used.

1 = There is a comprehensive risk assessment tool used, but it contains few (less than half) of the criteria presented in the standard.

2 = There is a comprehensive risk assessment tool used that contains most of the criteria presented in the standard.

3 = Our school utilizes a comprehensive risk assessment tool that meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.

Target B2 - Cleanliness and Order of Campus

B2A	**Physical Condition of the Grounds and Facilities** **The Standard** – Our school is clean and well maintained throughout all buildings, common areas, and restrooms. Broken windows, doors, temperature control, or other elements of the facility in need of repair are addressed immediately. Common areas and indoor hallways display visible signs of school pride, student achievement or recognition, and behavioral expectations and are not in need of cleaning or painting. The grounds of the school are kept free of trash, while lawns and landscaping are regularly maintained and manicured. To the extent possible, students have access to views of the outside world and outdoor spaces. 0 = The facilities and grounds of our school meet few or none of the criteria presented in the standard. 1 = The facilities and grounds of our school meet some of the criteria presented in the standard. 2 = The facilities and grounds of our school meet most (all but one or two) of the criteria presented in the standard. 3 = Our school facilities and grounds meet or exceed all criteria presented in the standard.
B2B	

Target B3 – Physical Security of Campus

B3A	**Single Point of Entry and Visitor Screening** **The Standard** – Our school has a single point of access from the outside for visitors and students arriving after the school day starts. All other exterior doors and classroom doors employ locking systems and protocol that is strictly followed. All vendors and visitors must sign in at the front office and undergo a security check, using photo identification. All visitors wear a badge with their photo while on campus and all students visibly wear or display their school ID while on school property. 0 = The visitor management system and security protocol meet few or none of the criteria presented in the standard. 1 = The visitor management system and security protocol meet some of the criteria presented in the standard 2 = The visitor management system and security protocol meet most (all but one or two) of the criteria presented in the standard. 3 = Our school's visitor management system and security protocol meet or exceed all criteria presented in the standard.
B3B	**Visible Security Measures** **The Standard** – Adequate surveillance around the school in the form of regularly monitored and operational security cameras, as well as school grounds that are naturally observable to neighbors and the surrounding community. School Resource Officers (not security personnel), who interact with students through instructional opportunities or student crime watch programs. 0 = The visible security measures do not include adequate surveillance cameras, SROs, or non-law enforcement security personnel. 1 = The visible security measures meet the criteria presented in the standard but include inoperable or ineffective cameras or non-law enforcement security personnel. 2 = The visible security measures largely meet the criteria presented in the standard but may include inoperable or ineffective cameras or SROs who serve in a strictly law enforcement capacity. 3 = Our school's visible security measures meet or exceed all criteria presented in the standard.
	Domain B – Physical Environment & Security **Total Points**

Domain C – Teaching and Learning

Target		Score

Target	Domain C – Teaching and Learning	Score

Target C1 – Intentional Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning

C1A

Universal Instruction of Social Skills

0 = SEL instruction is absent or found in isolated classrooms and lessons. There is little to no coordinated instruction on SEL competencies or focus on substance use, conflict resolution, or character education.

1 = There is instructional SEL programming used in at least one course or class that reaches all or most students. This instruction includes lessons on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making, but may not contain a specific focus on substance use prevention, conflict resolution, or character education.

2 = There is evidence-based SEL programming reaching all students in multiple grade levels that addresses the self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making of students. Within this programming are units of instruction dedicated specifically to substance use, conflict resolution, and character education found at various grade levels.

3 = Our school utilizes universal evidence-based SEL programming across all grade levels that addresses the self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making of students. The curriculum contains specific and developmentally appropriate instruction of substance use prevention, conflict resolution, and character education across all grades. Implementation fidelity of all SEL programs and activities is assessed through rubrics, observation checklists, data collection & analysis, or other formal means.

4

C1B

Extracurricular and whole-school SEL Activities

The Standard – Our school provides a coordinated platform of SEL strategies and activities that reinforce explicit classroom instruction with opportunities for students to practice and reflect on competencies throughout the day. School-wide supplemental strategies and activities may be a component of an evidence-based program or be locally designed to augment the curriculum.

0 = There are no schoolwide supplemental SEL activities and practices that are coordinated with explicit classroom instruction.

1 = There are school-wide SEL strategies and activities that meet some of the criteria presented in the standard.

2 = There are school-wide SEL strategies and activities that meet most of the criteria presented in the standard.

3 = Our school utilizes supplemental SEL activities that meet or exceed all criteria presented in the standard.

C1C

Instructional Practices and Strategies

0 = There are no specific instructional strategies promoted to deliver SEL curricula or lessons in our school.

1 = SEL curricula and lessons incorporate multiple strategies, but do not necessarily include all tenets of sequenced, active, focused, and explicit (SAFE) instruction. SEL lessons are not intentionally integrated into multiple subject areas or classrooms.

2 = SEL instruction is sequenced, active, focused, and explicit (SAFE), incorporating a variety of instructional strategies, including didactic instruction, discussions, role-plays, videos and guest speakers, readings, writing exercises, and group projects. However, most subject areas and classrooms do not intentionally integrate SEL lessons into their instruction.

3 = Our school uses SEL instruction that is sequenced, active, focused, and explicit, incorporating a variety of instructional strategies, including didactic instruction, discussions, role-plays, videos and

guest speakers, readings, writing exercises, and group projects. SEL lessons are integrated into multiple subject areas and classrooms (to include academics, music, art, and physical education) and delivered by teachers, and support staff, counselors, or outside organizations.

Classroom Management

The Standard – Our school places a priority on classroom management by providing a continuum of training and professional development for teachers. Evidence-based training on classroom management strategies and techniques is provided for all new instructional staff and our school also utilizes an evidence-based program to provide continuing professional development for all staff, as a component of our school-wide effort. Classroom management is included in teacher evaluations and interventions for low-implementing staff are provided.

C1D

0 = There is no school-wide focus on classroom management training or professional development, although courses are available for teachers who want it.

1 = There is a school-wide focus on classroom management training and professional development that meet some of the criteria presented in the standard.

2 = There is a school-wide focus on classroom management training and professional development that meet most of the criteria presented in the standard.

3 = Our school utilizes a continuum of classroom management practices that meet or exceed all criteria presented in the standard.

Target C2 – Academic Support and Excellence

Academic Assistance and Interventions

0 = Academic assistance is limited to individual teacher assistance through instructional practices or extra help. Academic intervention services are used for students not proficient in reading and math.

1 = Academic assistance includes differentiated instruction in many classrooms and tutoring for students is available in most academic subject areas. Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions are used for all students not proficient in reading or math.

C2A

2 = Academic assistance includes differentiated instructional practices to meet individual learning needs in all classrooms and tutoring programs for all academic subject areas. Evidence-based Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions are used for all students not proficient in reading or math. Limited credit recovery or remediation programs are available for students who experience academic failure.

3 = Our school has a platform of academic assistance and intervention programs in place, which include differentiated instructional practices that are observed in all classrooms, adult and peer tutoring opportunities in all academic subject areas, evidence-based Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions for math and reading that are implemented as part of a school-wide problem-solving process, and credit recovery or remediation programs for all students who experience academic failure.

High Academic Expectations

The Standard – Our school ensures all instructional staff communicate to students and parents a clear understanding of the work needed for grades through the use of class web pages, syllabi, or other means. High expectations are further conveyed through the use of challenging assignments, positive encouragement, goal-setting, a focus on growth mindset (the belief that intelligence can be developed through hard work and strategies) in all academic courses, and a school-wide academic honor code.

C2B

0 = There is no mandate for instructional staff to communicate expectations through web pages, syllabi, or other means. Teachers are not provided with training specific to establishing high expectations and there is no school-wide focus on academic excellence.

1 = There is a school-wide focus on establishing and conveying high expectations that meet some of the criteria presented in the standard.

	2 = There is a school-wide focus on establishing and conveying high expectations that meet most of the criteria presented in the standard. 3 = Our school intentionally establishes and conveys high expectations to our students that meet or exceed all criteria presented in the standard.
C3A	**Access to Rigorous and Advanced Courses** 0 = There are limited opportunities for students to enroll in advanced courses, with only the highest achieving students having access. Professional development is available for teachers who wish to increase the academic rigor of their classrooms. 1 = There are some challenging courses available, such as Advanced Placement (AP) International Baccalaureate (IB), gifted, talented, and enrichment programs, or technical and career courses. However, enrollment is based on strict criteria, with only the highest achieving students having access. Professional development is provided for teachers who wish to increase the academic rigor of their classrooms. 2 = There are several challenging courses available, such as Advanced Placement (AP) International Baccalaureate (IB), gifted, talented, and enrichment programs, or high-demand technical and career courses. However, enrollment opportunities are limited and programs do not seek to connect traditionally underserved students or added support for those enrolled. A standards-aligned curriculum is used in all academic courses and professional development is provided to all instructional staff to integrate strategies for increasing rigor. 3 = Our school offers equitable access to an array of challenging courses, such as Advanced Placement (AP) International Baccalaureate (IB), gifted, talented, and enrichment programs, or high-demand technical and career courses. Programs are accessible to all interested students or access is based on multiple diverse measures, with particular support provided for traditionally underserved students. All instructional and leadership staff is provided high-quality professional development on effective strategies to integrate rigorous academic content and high-quality instructional materials with a standards-aligned curriculum.
C3B	**Academic Motivation** **The Standard** – Our school intentionally creates opportunities for all students to succeed by attending to multiple learning strengths and utilizing varied formative and summative assessments. All teachers incorporate project, experiential learning, or other hands-on learning that have meaningful real-world applications and are culturally responsive. Student success (academic and otherwise) is recognized and shared with the whole school through announcements, awards and ceremonies, posting student data or examples of student work. 0 = There few practices and activities that are intentionally used to increase student academic motivation and meet the criteria presented in the standard. 1 = There are a limited number of practices and activities to increase student academic motivation that meet some of the criteria presented in the standard. 2 = There are a number of practices and activities to increase student academic motivation that meet most of the criteria presented in the standard. 3 = Our school incorporates a number of practices and activities to increase student academic motivation that meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.
Domain C – Teaching and Learning	**Total Points**

Target	Domain D – *Trusting* Relationships	Score

Target D1 – Adult-to-Adult

D1A

Collaborative and Cooperative Spirit of Staff

0 = There is an expectation that all staff adhere to the standards of professional conduct, which we seek to instill in students. There are few purposeful opportunities for staff collaboration or cooperative engagement.

1 = There are expectations for modeling appropriate behavior that are communicated to all staff. Many staff participate in small cooperative groups or Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), which helps to promote team-building and trust. Opportunities for social interaction by staff are limited and outside of school events are usually not well-attended.

2 = There are expectations for modeling appropriate behavior that are communicated and adhered to by staff. Most staff participate in small cooperative groups or Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and professional development is provided to promote team and relationship building. There are opportunities for social interaction found within the school day and there is usually more than one activity or event outside school each year.

3 = Our school places a priority on establishing and maintaining positive adult relationships that model the positive interactions we seek to instill in students. Opportunities for collaboration include peer coaching, mentoring, team teaching, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and professional networking, and all staff are provided with high-quality professional development to promote relationship and team building through a school-wide evidence-based approach. Opportunities for meaningful social interactions among staff are intentionally embedded in daily or regular school functions and outside of school. All new teachers are matched with at least one mentor teacher and receive support throughout their first year to assist them and indoctrinate them into the culture of our school.

Target D2 - Adult-to-Student

D2A

Conveying an Ethos of Care

0 = Professional development is available to staff who wish to cultivate more positive relationships with students. Teachers are also available to help their students with academic and non-academic issues on an individual basis.

1 = Professional development is provided to help instructional staff cultivate positive relationships with students. Teachers are encouraged by administration to get to know their students beyond their academic needs and strengths. School counselors are sometimes available to assist students with social, emotional, or relational issues, but have many other responsibilities.

2 = There is high-quality professional development provided to all staff that seeks to develop positive relationships with students. There are few students who are not known by at least one caring adult and most are greeted each day as they arrive to school. There is assistance available from counselors or other school support personnel for students who may need help with social, emotional, or relational issues.

3 = Our school has established a community of caring, providing high-quality professional development for all staff on how to develop positive relationships with students through a school-wide evidence-based approach. Every student is known by at least one caring adult and students are greeted each day as they arrive at school and in class. Safe places or Student Assistance Programming is available and accessible for all students who may need help with social, emotional, or relational issues.

D2B

Student Mentoring Activities

0 = There are no school-based student mentoring programs in place.

1 = There is a student mentoring program in place that connects students in need with mentors supplied by a community-based organization.

2 = There are student mentoring programs in place that proactively connects diverse groups of students with caring teachers and staff, as well as adults from the community. Additional mentoring is provided as an intervention for students with greater needs.

3 = All students are paired with at least one adult staff through an evidence-based school-wide mentoring program or approach. All staff are provided with professional development on facilitating mentoring sessions and meet with each student at least once a week through advisories or individual meetings outside of class. Additional mentoring is provided for students with greater needs through the MTSS process and involves both staff and adults from the community or community-based organizations.

Target D3 – Student-to-Student

Peer Mentoring and Support

0 = There are no formal peer mentoring or support programs in place.

1 = Peer mentoring and support programs exist within individual classrooms, clubs, or other student groups, but are not part of a comprehensive school-wide approach. Peer tutoring opportunities are available through informal processes established by classroom teachers or other staff.

2 = Peer mentoring and support programs exist for students struggling with academics or personal issues. Students are connected with helping peers through an organized program within the school. Peer tutoring is also available in most subject areas for students who wish to seek it out.

3 = Our school utilizes a school-wide evidence-based program or approach that matches new, younger, or struggling students with peer mentors. High-quality training is provided to student mentors to assist their peers through one-on-one meetings, small groups, or peer support groups that assist students struggling with common issues. Students struggling in any academic subject are proactively referred to peer tutoring opportunities before or after school.

D3A

Peer Mediation and Restorative Practices

0 = There are no formal peer mediation, conflict resolution, or restorative practices in place.

1 = There is a peer mediation process in place that is facilitated by adults and involves no formal training or curriculum for students.

2 = There is a peer mediation program in place that utilizes a formal training curriculum for students mediating conflicts and is connected to the school's discipline process. Restorative practices are used in some classrooms, but are not part of a school-wide system.

3 = Our school utilizes an evidence-based program or approach to prevent and resolve peer conflict amongst students. Training is provided to students mediating conflicts, as well as school-wide instruction for all students on conflict resolution strategies. Restorative practices are embedded into all classrooms and are formally connected to the school's disciplinary process.

D3B

Domain D – Interpersonal Relationships

Total Points

Target	Domain E – Leadership	Score
	Target E1 – Support and Motivation	

Staff Mental and Physical Wellbeing

E1A

The Standard – Our school actively promotes wellness programming that is tailored to fit the needs and interests of our staff and faculty. Our coordinated school health programming targets multiple components of wellness to include physical health, mindfulness and stress reduction, positive behavior change, and health & nutrition education. The programming integrates staff,

student, family, and community wellness strategies and supports, when possible, to promote overall well-being in the school setting. Staff is encouraged to participate by incorporating strategies into the work day, offering low-cost or no-cost strategies and programs, and incentives for reaching personal or school-level goals.

0 = There is no coordinated wellness services for staff.

1 = There is a staff wellness program that meets some of the criteria presented in the standard.

2 = There is a staff wellness program that meets most of the criteria presented in the standard.

3 = Our school offers a staff wellness program that meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.

E1B

Staff Involvement in Decision-making

The Standard - Our school involves staff in decision-making through the purposeful creation of distributed leadership opportunities across all school functions. Formal systems and processes are used to solicit and incorporate staff ideas, to encourage and support creative or innovative approaches, and to integrate diverse voices into school policy-making, program adoption, and the establishment of a shared vision.

0 = All decisions are made by the school administrative teams with input from formal leadership structure (department heads, lead teachers, etc…), with no formal systems for shared decision-making or staff input.

1 = There is a system and process for shared-decision-making that meets some of the criteria presented in the standard.

2 = There is a system and process for shared-decision-making that meets most of the criteria presented in the standard.

3 = Our school uses a formal system and process for shared-decision-making that meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.

E1C

Evaluations and Feedback

The Standard - Our school uses a high-quality evaluation system that is built on evidence-based standards and is underpinned with a philosophy of growth and improvement, rather than punitive consequences. Teacher evaluations include explicit focus on instructional practices that impact student SEL competencies. School leadership provides meaningful feedback to staff and has embedded processes for receiving feedback from all members of the school community on their own performance.

0 = There is an evaluation system used for teachers, but meets few criteria presented in the standard. No formal process for feedback from staff is used.

1 = There is an evaluation system used for teachers that meets some of the criteria presented in the standard.

2 = There is a formal evaluation system used for all staff that meets most of the criteria presented in the standard.

3 = Our school uses a formal evaluation system used for all staff that meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.

E1D

Communication and Accessibility

The Standard - Our school uses several platforms of written, audio, visual, and digital communication to regularly connect leadership with all members of the school community. Opportunities for interaction with school leadership are purposefully created to increase accessibility for staff, students, and all school community members. School leadership is highly visible throughout the campus through strategic duty assignments and in all classrooms.

0 = There is a limited communications platform that may not reach all members of the school community and access to school leadership can be difficult.

1 = The communication from and access to school leadership meets some of the criteria presented in the standard.

	2 = The communication from and access to school leadership meets most of the criteria presented in the standard. 3 = Our school's leadership communication platform and accessibility meet or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.

	Target E2 - Professional Development (PD)
E2A	**Staff Involvement and Participation in PD** **The Standard –** All instructional staff in our school are required to participate in self-directed learning that contributes to their professional growth and explicit goals, as well as participate in all school-wide PD offerings. Adequate time for PD is built into staff schedules, while access to high-quality online or other outside training options is also provided. Staff are involved in the selection and delivery of PD 0 = There is no requirement for staff to participate in PD and little time is available for PD during the school day or school year. 1 = PD requirements and allotted time for PD meet some of the criteria presented in the standard. 2 = PD requirements and allotted time for PD meet most of the criteria presented in the standard. 3 = Our school's PD requirements and allotted time for PD meet or exceed all criteria presented in the standard.
E2B	**Well-rounded PD Activities that Support all School Improvement Efforts** **The Standard –** Our school utilizes a coordinated platform of evidence-based professional development that addresses content area instruction, instructional & assessment strategies, cultural relevancy and responsiveness, managing student behavior, improving relationships and teamwork, and the effective implementation of all school-wide programs and curricula. Evaluations of PD are used to assess their effectiveness, usefulness, and connection to school-wide goals. Targeted PD or coaching based on classroom-level data or observations is provided for teachers in need of additional supports. 0 = There is a limited platform of Professional Development that is not coordinated with school-wide improvement goals. 1 = There is a platform of Professional Development that meets some of the criteria presented in the standard. 2 = There is a platform of Professional Development that meets most of the criteria presented in the standard. 3 = Our school's platform of Professional Development meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.

	Target E3 – Allocation of Resources
E3A	**Adequate Resources Are Dedicated to All Academic and Non-Academic Functions** **The Standard –** Our school ensures an adequate supply of equipment, materials, supplies, technology and funding to meet the needs of all staff and students. Access to resources is maximized through scheduling and sharing, when necessary. Sufficient staffing exists to support school-wide programming and initiatives and leadership leverages staff talent and funding allocations to achieve established academic and non-academic goals. 0 = There is insufficient equipment, materials, supplies, technology, funding, or staff to achieve established academic and non-academic goals. 1 = The availability and allocation of resources meets some of the criteria presented in the standard. 2 = The availability and allocation of resources meets most of the criteria presented in the standard. 3 = Our school's availability and allocation of resources meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.

Time Dedicated to Non-Academic Pursuits

The Standard – Our school dedicates a portion if daily instructional time towards social and emotional learning and skill development for all students. Available instructional time is optimized by implementing an evidence-based universal SEL or prevention curriculum that addresses all non-academic school goals and priorities, rather than separate programs for each goal. Adequate time is dedicated during the school day or ongoing throughout the year through scheduling, common planning time, or faculty meetings to allow for teacher collaboration on non-academic learning and school-wide professional development activities.

E3B

0 = There is insufficient equipment, materials, supplies, technology, funding, or staff to achieve established academic and non-academic goals.

1 = The availability and allocation of resources meets some of the criteria presented in the standard.

2 = The availability and allocation of resources meets most of the criteria presented in the standard.

3 = Our school's availability and allocation of resources meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.

Target E4 – School Improvement Plan

Non-Academic Goals and Measurable Objectives

The Standard - Our School Improvement Plan contains multiple non-academic (social, emotional, behavioral, climate, or safety-related) improvement goals. Improvement goals are connected to measurable outcome objectives that are data driven. Each goal and objective is directly in-turn connected with school-wide programs, practices, and activities, so they may be attained in a timely and structured fashion.

E4A

0 = There are no non-academic goals in the school improvement plan.

1 = The school improvement plan meets some of the criteria presented in the standard.

2 = The school improvement plan meets most of the criteria presented in the standard.

3 = Our school's improvement plan meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.

Shared Vision and Oversight

The Standard – Our School Improvement Plan is developed with input from staff, students, parents, and the community. A representative leadership committee or team is designated to collect data, build support for the adoption of specific programs and activities, oversee implementation of programs and activities, and report outcomes for all non-academic goals.

E4B

0 = The school improvement plan is developed by the school leadership team with little outside input. No ownership from small committees or teams guides the adoption and implementation of non-academic programs and activities.

1 = The shared vision and oversight of the school improvement plan meets some of the criteria presented in the standard.

2 = The shared vision and oversight of the school improvement plan meets most of the criteria presented in the standard.

3 = Our school's improvement plan incorporates a shared vision and oversight of all non-academic programs and activities that meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.

Domain E – Leadership   **Total Score**

Domain F – Student Engagement & Connectedness

Target   **Score**

Target F1 – Extracurricular Opportunities

F1A	**An Array of Clubs, Sports, and Activities are Available for Students** **The Standard -** Our school offers a wide range of age-appropriate clubs, sports or competitive teams, music, arts, and other high-interest extracurricular activities to help promote a sense of connection and enjoyment for our students. Students are actively consulted on activities that might interest them and are able to establish clubs with the assistance of a staff sponsor. There is time dedicated during the school day on regular occasions to allow student participation in such activities. After-school programming is available to all students and contains both academic and non-academic activities, with transportation available to help encourage participation. School-wide traditions and rituals are used to build a sense of community and pride students have in the school. 0 = There are no clubs, sports, student government or leadership opportunities, or other high-interest extracurricular activities available to students before, during, or after the school day. 1 = There are extracurricular activities available to students that meet some of the criteria presented in the standard. 2 = There are extracurricular activities available to students that meet most of the criteria presented in the standard. 3 = Our school's platform of extracurricular activities available to students meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.	**4**

F1B	**Staff Involvement in Sponsoring and Supporting Extracurricular Activities** 0 = Staff are generally reluctant to sponsor or take on the responsibility of helping with extracurricular activities. 1 = Some staff in our school are involved with sponsoring or helping to lead at least one extracurricular activity in the school. 2 = Most staff in our school are involved with sponsoring or helping to lead at least one extracurricular activity in the school. 3 = Every member of our staff is involved with sponsoring or helping to lead at least one extracurricular activity in the school, with many of them involved in more than one.

Target F2 - Student Leadership & Voice

F2A	**Student Government and Leadership Opportunities** **The Standard** – Our school has a formal student government or other leadership body that allows student leaders to collaborate with staff to address important issues in the school or community. Student leadership is embedded within the school improvement team, to ensure their representation on major decisions impacting the school, as well as the adoption of school-wide goals, programs, and activities. There are meaningful and developmentally appropriate opportunities for all students to share their opinions, take on leadership roles, devise strategies for school improvement, and inform decision-making around issues that they prioritize. 0 = There are no student government, leadership opportunities, or other avenues for students to have a voice in school-wide rules or activities. 1 = There are student government or leadership opportunities that meet some of the criteria presented in the standard. 2 = There are student government or leadership opportunities that meet most of the criteria presented in the standard. 3 = Our school has student government or leadership opportunities that meet or exceed all criteria presented in the standard.

F2B	**Student Opportunities to Contribute their Voice** 0 = No formal system or process is used school-wide or in the classroom to provide a voice to all students. 1 = There is a formal process used to allow any student the opportunity to voice concerns or suggestions for improvement. School staff normally determine the types of events and electives

taught, based on what has traditionally been done, although student input is sometimes used to make changes. Many teachers also collaboratively build classroom rules with students and incorporate their input for class activities and assignments.

2 = There is a formal system or process for all students to contribute their voice regarding school-wide concerns and proposed solutions. Input from students is actively sought to the types of events or elective course offerings in the school. Teachers are encouraged to collaboratively build the rules and expectations with their students, as well as offer them choices in classroom activities and assignments.

3 = Our school provides regular outlets (eg. surveys, focus groups, suggestion boxes, school newspaper) for all students to voice concerns, identify problems, and propose solutions. Students are able to contribute to the rules, norms, and practices of school life to include the types of events or elective courses that are offered. All teachers intentionally seek-out student input to developing classroom rules and expectations and are encouraged to collaborate with students on choice of classroom activities and assignments as a component of our school-wide philosophy.

Target F3 – Creating Welcoming and Culturally Responsive Environments

F3A

Creating a Welcoming Environment for All Students

The Standard - Our school emphasizes the creation of a welcoming environment for all students through the use of student-developed programs and activities, clubs, or organizations. Student clubs or organizations exist to specifically promote diversity and acceptance of all students on campus. All new students throughout the year are connected to peers that assist them in acclimating to the school and specific initiatives are undertaken to assist students who may be socially isolated or marginalized.

0 = There are no student-led school-wide practices, activities, or approaches to creating a welcoming environment for all students.

1 = There are student-led school-wide practices, activities, or approaches to creating a welcoming environment that meet some of the criteria presented in the standard.

2 = There are student-led school-wide practices, activities, or approaches to creating a welcoming environment that meet most of the criteria presented in the standard.

3 = Our school incorporates student-led school-wide practices, activities, and approaches to creating a welcoming environment that meet or exceed all criteria presented in the standard.

F3B

Respect for Diversity

0 = There are no intentional efforts to embed a respect for diversity in the curriculum, extracurricular activities, school-sponsored social events, or school-wide celebrations.

1 = There are visible messages of respect for diversity found posted in the school and classrooms. There are some special school-wide events or celebrations that help to embrace the diversity found within the school.

2 = There are visible messages of respect for diversity found posted throughout the school and in classrooms. The diversity of students is a consideration for the extracurricular activities, events, and celebrations conducted throughout the school year. Some teachers or courses deliver specific lessons regarding tolerance and respecting differences.

3 = Our school's curriculum, extracurricular activities, school-sponsored events, and school-wide celebrations all intentionally reflect the diversity found within our school. Students are taught specific lessons regarding tolerance and respecting differences using an evidence-based curriculum or program and messages of respect for diversity are visibly posted throughout the school and in classrooms. All staff are provided with high-quality professional development that addresses bias, culturally responsive approaches, and the prevention of harassment and bullying.

Domain F – Student Engagement   **Total Score**

Target	Domain G – Family & Community Engagement	Score

Target G1 – Opportunities for Parent & Family Involvement

G1A

Parent and Family Engagement Opportunities

0 = There are no intentional school-wide activities or strategies that are designed to assist with engaging student families or parents.

1 = There are several intentional strategies used to increase parent engagement, however they are not part of a school-wide comprehensive plan. General volunteering opportunities are promoted to parents through a variety of ways.

2 = There are several school-wide and classroom strategies and activities to increase parent engagement that are rooted in best practices and part of a comprehensive plan. Volunteer opportunities are purposefully created for parents to connect them to classrooms and school-wide events and parent visitation during the school day is actively encouraged. There are annual back to school nights or open houses, as well as social events that welcome parent participation, in order to help connect parents and families who are unavailable during the school day.

3 = Our school utilizes an evidence-based program or platform of best practices to optimize parent and family engagement as part of a comprehensive plan. Strategies used include greeting all parents and families by school leadership in the student drop-off areas each morning, having annual back to school nights or open house events, school-wide social events that include parents, parent-student-teacher conferences, and assignments that regularly include parent opportunities for participation. Volunteer opportunities are purposefully created for parents to connect them to classrooms and school-wide events, with specific strategies used to increase participation. Visitation is actively encouraged for all parents and families and all staff are provided with protocol to ensure parents and visitors feel welcome. High-interest workshops, supports, or services are provided that may center on language acquisition, continuing parent education, or connections with health care, mental health resources, and other social services.

4

G1B

Parent Participation in School Improvement Efforts

0 = There is little to no formal opportunity for parents to contribute to developing the school improvement plan.

1 = There is an opportunity for the parents serving on our School Advisory Council, PTA, PTO, or other parent group to review the school improvement plan and offer their input.

2 = Parents serving on our School Advisory Council, PTA, PTO, or other parent group are able to actively contribute to the development of the school improvement plan and may volunteer to serve on committees that help to establish the vision, goals, and activities for improvement.

3 = Our school actively recruits diverse representation on our School Advisory Council, PTA, PTO, or other group that is responsible for developing the school improvement plan. Parents are embedded on committees responsible for establishing the vision, goals, and activities necessary to carry out the improvement plan and all parents are afforded an opportunity to offer feedback regarding the improvement plan.

Target G2 – Parent Communication

G2A

Communication with Parents and Guardians

0 = There is no comprehensive communications plan in place for connecting with stakeholders and all parent contact is done as needed via several possible means.

1 = There is an informal communications plan in place for connecting with stakeholders that includes parent contact regarding school-wide news, activities, and other critical information, using

a variety of different platforms. Individual parents are contacted as necessary regarding concerns with their child by teachers, support staff, or school administration.

2 = There is a comprehensive communications plan in place that addresses all school-wide aspects of parent communication, including activities, news, policies, alerts, and other critical information. Individual parents are contacted as early as possible regarding any concerns for their child's behavior, attendance, or academic progress. The academic progress of each student is communicated to their parent at regular intervals throughout the year.

3 = Our school uses a comprehensive parent communication plan to convey all school-wide activities, news, policies, alerts, and other critical information, through the use of phone calls, newsletters, websites, emails, social media, or other digital means. All communication takes into consideration barriers that may exist with language, disabilities, and technology access in order to help ensure all parents are communicated with effectively. The communications plan contains explicit procedures for contacting individual parents regarding disciplinary incidents, unreported absences, and academic concerns with the purpose of early intervention and partnership in resolving the issue. The academic progress of each student is communicated to their parent continuously through parent website portals and all teachers are encouraged to make positive contact with parents in order to share successes.

G2B	**Opportunities for Feedback and Parent Input** 0 = Opportunities for parent feedback and input are generally limited to those who serve on formal school advisory councils, PTAs, PTOs' or other parent organizations. 1 = In addition to participating in formal parent organizations, there are opportunities for all parents to provide feedback or input regarding any school-related issue they might have through our open door policy and contact information that is clearly provided for all staff. 2 = There are opportunities for all parents to provide feedback and input through the use of surveys, focus groups, or other formal means regarding school climate issues or satisfaction with the school. 3 = Our school actively solicits parent feedback through the use of surveys, focus groups, or other formal means. Feedback is sought specifically for assessing school climate, school satisfaction (to include quality of instruction and curriculum), and to help determine the types of school-wide supports, services, or activities to be conducted in order to increase opportunities for their meaningful participation. The results of all surveys or other feedback, as well as any school-wide goals, objectives, or action plans developed as a result of the feedback are communicated to all stakeholders.

Target G3 – Civic Engagement & Community Partnerships

G3A	**Student Opportunities for Civic Engagement** 0 = There are few or no opportunities for students to extend their classroom learning into the community or to address real issues in the school through project learning. Community volunteering for students is generally not facilitated by the school. 1 = There may be community volunteer opportunities facilitated by school programs, clubs or classrooms. Students are also able to participate in service projects through a school-wide, club, or classroom initiative that assist with school or community issues. 2 = There are formal partnerships between community organizations and classrooms, service clubs, or other programs that allow for multiple volunteer opportunities in the community. Students also participate in a wide range of service projects to address real world issues in the school or community. 3 = Our school facilitates several opportunities for students to engage their school and community in meaningful ways. Volunteer opportunities are facilitated through formal partnerships between community organizations and classrooms, service clubs, or other program on campus. Service learning projects are embedded into courses that provide an opportunity for students to work

collaboratively to set goals, apply knowledge and skills to improve their school or community, and reflect on their efforts. All students have the opportunity for civic engagement through at least one major school-wide service project conducted annually. Citizenship and community service are publicly recognized and rewarded within the school.

G3B

Community Partnerships to Enhance Services & Educational Experience
0 = There are few formal community partnerships to provide additional revenue streams or services to our school. We welcome all community volunteers and always have meaningful activities for them to assist with.
1 = There multiple partnerships with community agencies and service providers to augment the services we are able to provide to students. Partnerships with the business community are generally made through the parents of our students and are fluid from year to year. Several volunteer opportunities are created and communicated to the community in order to help increase participation.
2 = There are several community partnerships with local businesses, community organizations and agencies, service providers, and volunteers. These partnerships are able to bridge some gaps with funding or services provided to students to enhance their overall experience. Volunteers from partner organizations and individual community members are actively recruited by staff or leadership to tutor, mentor, or serve as guest speakers in classrooms.
3 = Our school enjoys multiple community partnerships with local businesses, community organizations and agencies, service providers, and volunteers to create a holistic net of support for students and families. Partnerships provide additional revenue streams for the purchase of equipment or materials or opportunities to enhance student learning experiences. Additional services are provided on and off campus to students that address identified gaps in their social, emotional, or academic learning, as well as the health and wellbeing of students and their families. Volunteers from the community engage students in tutoring, mentoring, and speaking to them about important or high-interest topics through formal events and programs. Our school recognizes and honors community partners and volunteers in meaningful ways.

G3C

Community Participation in School Improvement Efforts
0 = There is little to no community representation in the school improvement process.
1 = There are opportunities for representatives from any community partner organization or individuals who reside in the surrounding community to join our school advisory or improvement teams.
2 = There are formal avenues of input and feedback created for partnering organizations and individual community members. Community representatives are actively recruited to serve on school advisory or improvement teams to help ensure they have a voice in the vision, goals, and activities necessary to carry out the improvement plan.
3 = Our school intentionally creates opportunities for community stakeholder input through surveys, focus groups, community events, and formal school committees. The results of all surveys or other feedback, as well as any school-wide goals, objectives, or action plans developed as a result of feedback and input are communicated to all stakeholders. We actively recruit diverse representation from local business and community leaders, and embed roles on school improvement committees responsible for establishing the vision, goals, and activities necessary to carry out the improvement plan.

Domain G – Family & Community Support   **Total Score**

Domain H – Data Collection & Analysis

Target		Score

Target H1 – Discipline Data

H1A

Collection and Analysis of Discipline, Attendance, & Behavioral Data
The Standard – Our school enters all school discipline data (to include discipline referral numbers, incident types, location, time, referring staff, administrative actions and length of action, and a narrative description of the incident) and attendance data (to include number of days or periods, types of absences, and parent contact notes) into a secure digital student information system that is accessible to students, parents, and school staff. All data is disaggregated by grade, sex, race, disability, language proficiency, and other demographic characteristics to identify disproportional representation of student subgroups. All data is assembled into easy-to-understand formats for analysis by school leadership or MTSS teams and public reporting, while protected from the unintentional or unauthorized release of personally identifiable information.
0 = There is either no collection of discipline, attendance, and behavior data, or no analysis of the data.
1 = The collection and analysis of discipline, attendance, and behavior data meets some of the criteria presented in the standard.
2 = The collection and analysis of discipline, attendance, and behavior data meets most of the criteria presented in the standard.
3 = Our school's collection and analysis of discipline, attendance, and behavior data meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.

Score: 4

H1B

Use of Discipline, Attendance, & Behavioral Data
The Standard – Our school uses discipline, attendance, and behavioral data to drive the goals, objectives, and activities, found in our school improvement plan. Discipline, attendance, and behavioral data is used to identify school-wide trends and the need for specific school-wide prevention and intervention programs, as well as individual students in need of additional supports and services. Data is also used to guide the implementation fidelity and progress monitoring of all individual student interventions. Disaggregated school-level discipline data that includes OSS, ISS, and incident type is publicly reported through school or district websites and communicated to stakeholders through newsletters, reports, or other means.
0 = Discipline, attendance, and behavior data is not used to inform decision regarding school-wide programs and activities or individual supports and services.
1 = The use of discipline, attendance, and behavior data meets some of the criteria presented in the standard.
2 = The use of discipline, attendance, and behavior data meets most of the criteria presented in the standard.
3 = Our school's use of discipline, attendance, and behavior data meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.

Target H2 - Academic Data

H2A

Collection and Analysis of Academic Data
The Standard – Our school enters student academic information (to include homework, class participation, projects, quiz and test scores, and standardized test scores) into a secure digital student information system that is accessible to students, parents, and school staff. All academic data is disaggregated by grade, sex, race, disability, language proficiency, and other demographic characteristics to monitor the academic progress and outcomes for each student subgroup, while protecting all personally identifiable information. Data is assembled into easy-to-understand formats for analysis by school leadership, instructional, and MTSS teams, and public reporting.
0 = The collection and analysis of academic data meets few of the criteria presented in the standard.

	1 = The collection and analysis of academic data meets some of the criteria presented in the standard. 2 = The collection and analysis of academic data meets most of the criteria presented in the standard. 3 = Our school's collection and analysis of academic data meets or exceed all criteria presented in the standard.
H2B	**Use of Academic Data** **The Standard** - Our school uses academic data to drive the goals, objectives, and activities, found in our school improvement plan. Academic data is used to identify school-wide trends and the need for specific school-wide intervention programs, as well as individual students in need of additional supports and services. Data is also used to guide the implementation fidelity and progress monitoring of all individual student interventions, including the development of digital learning programs that create more personalized learning experiences. Disaggregated school-level academic data that includes standardized test scores and at least one other academic measure (such as graduation rates), is publicly reported through school or district data dashboards and communicated to stakeholders directly through newsletters, reports, or other means. 0 = The use of academic data meets few of the criteria presented in the standard. 1 = The use of academic data meets some of the criteria presented in the standard. 2 = The use of academic data meets most of the criteria presented in the standard. 3 = Our school's use of academic data meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.
	Target H3 – School Climate & Safety Data
H3A	**School Climate Surveys** **The Standard** – Our school conducts evidence-based climate surveys with multiple stakeholder groups (to include staff, students, parents, and community) each year. Surveys are anonymous, but collect demographic information to allow for disaggregation by age or grade, sex, race, disability, language proficiency, and other demographic characteristics. The survey results are shared with all stakeholder groups and posted publicly on the school or district website. 0 = There is no school climate survey conducted in our school. 1 = There is a school climate survey conducted in our school that meets some of the criteria presented in the standard. 2 = There is a school climate survey conducted in our school that meets most of the criteria presented in the standard. 3 = Our school's climate survey meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.
H3B	**Analysis and Use of School Climate Data** **The Standard** - Our school uses climate data to drive the goals, objectives, and activities, found in our school improvement plan. School climate data is used to identify school-wide trends and the need for specific school-wide intervention programs. 0 = There is no school climate survey conducted in our school. 1 = The use of school climate survey data meets some of the criteria presented in the standard. 2 = The use of school climate survey data meets most of the criteria presented in the standard. 3 = Our school's use of school climate survey data meets or exceeds all criteria presented in the standard.
	Domain H – Data Collection & Analysis **Total Score**

Appendix B – Expert Feedback Data, Codes, Categories, and Themes

Page & Line	Comment	Code	Category	Theme(s)
1. What are your thoughts on using the activities and practices conducted in schools as the metric for assessing school climate and safety?				
1 - Line # 3	I think it is a thoughtful and excellent idea	Holds Promise	General	P
1 - Line # 5	but I must caution you that all the research I have read suggests that 3-4 hours to complete a questionnaire is way too long	Caution	Process	L
1 - Line # 8	I would suggest that you reflect on what you are trying to achieve. Burdened participants are likely to give up and you run the risk of not attaining all the data you need.	Burden	Process, Design	L
1 - Line # 8	I would suggest that you reflect on what you are trying to achieve. Burdened participants are likely to give up and you run the risk of not attaining all the data you need.	Suggestion	Process	L
1 - Line # 12	Yes, it certainly holds promise.	Holds Promise	General	P
1 - Line # 12	However, voices of all the stakeholders should be acknowledged (students, parents/guardians, teachers, administrators, community members, etc).	Stakeholders	Design	S
1 - Line # 15	This is extremely ambitious. Its strength and weakness is how thorough and comprehensive it is	Ambitious	Design	C
1 - Line # 15	Its strength and weakness is how thorough and comprehensive it is	Suggestion	Design	C
1 - Line # 18	concepts of school climate are often overly inclusive and amorphous, so that they go far beyond measuring school climate. You might call this the "kitchen sink" or "laundry list" approach to school climate.	Kitchen Sink	Design	C
1 - Line # 21	I think the elements of school climate should be meaningfully related to one another in a coherent model, much like the elements of meteorological climate (temperature, precipitation, barometric pressure, etc.)	Relationship	General, Design	
2. When viewed through the lens of practices and activities, do the 9 domains make sense?				
1 - Line # 30	overall, I am appreciative of the categories noted	Categories	Design	P
1 - Line # 34	I hope/suggest that this includes (1) to what extent rules are experienced as fair and consistent; and (2) focused on learning rather than punishment	Rules	Design	
1 - Line # 39	What does 'bullying and harassment' mean operationally?	Bullying	Design, General	
2 - Line # 6	There is a wide spectrum of experiences that undermine kids feeling safe: from normative moments of misunderstanding to micro aggressions to intentionally social-emotional acts (in person and via the net) of people being intentionally mean, to sexual harassment, date rape and rape to suicidal/homosocial and other (typically) severe expressions of psychiatric disorders	Safety	Design, General	
2 - Line # 11	My experience is that when educators are focused on 'bullying' it can – inadvertently – undermine their being attuned to and helpfully addressing this much wider range of mean, cruel and/or disrespectful behaviors.	Bullying	Design, General	
2 - Line # 15	This scale does not seem to differential physical, social and emotional safety. I suggest you do so	Safety	Design	
2 - Line # 15	This scale does not seem to differential physical, social and emotional safety. I suggest you do so	Suggestion	Design	

2 - Line # 18	Physical environment and safety: • What you have here makes great sense to me	Environment	Design	P
2 - Line # 21	Teaching and Learning: I would suggest that rather than "SEL instruction" you frame this as "intentional social emotional and academic learning"	SEAL	Design	
2 - Line # 21	Teaching and Learning: I would suggest that rather than "SEL instruction" you frame this as "intentional social emotional and academic learning"	Suggestion	Design	
2 - Line # 28	I think there are four major ways that we do teach SEAL informed lessons	SEAL	Design, General	
2 - Line # 36	There is a growing appreciation that this is one of the essential foundations for effective and sustainable SEL/school climate improvement efforts. (relating to SEAL)	SEAL	Design, General	
3 - Line # 1	Interpersonal relations: • What you have is good	Trust	Design	P
3 - Line # 3	What is not recognized here is educator-parent and educator-community member/leader	Stakeholders	Design	S
3 - Line # 3	What is not recognized here is educator-parent and educator-community member/leader	Suggestion	Design	S
3 - Line # 6	Leadership: • What you have is good.	Leadership	Design	P
3 - Line # 8	What is not recognized here is student leadership. I appreciate that this may be recognized in the student engagement section below	Voice	Design	S
3 - Line # 9	What I have learned is that supporting **student voice and inter-generational school improvement efforts is one of if not the most single most important strategic steps that school leaders can take**.	Voice	Design, General	S
3 - Line # 12	This is often – understandably – quite challenging for many Principals and Sups. (incorporating student voice)	Voice	General	S
3 - Line # 18	Given the understanding noted above, this feels too "thin." (regarding student voice)	Voice	Design	S
3 - Line # 18	I would urge you to consider strengthening this in the sense of recognizing the extraordinary power of including students – substantively – in virtually all aspects of the improvement process.	Voice	Design	S
3 - Line # 18	I would urge you to consider strengthening this in the sense of recognizing the extraordinary power of including students – substantively – in virtually all aspects of the improvement process.	Suggestion	Design	S
3 - Line # 23	Family and Community Support: I appreciate that these areas/dimensions that matter.	Family & Community	Design	P, S
3 - Line # 26	I would add more detail to community partnerships.	Family & Community	Design	S
3 - Line # 26	I would add more detail to community partnerships.	Suggestion	Design	S
3 - Line # 28	However, there are so many other ways (that some districts are focused on) that we can support meaningful and potentially, somewhat transformational ways of school-family-community partnerships.	Family & Community	Design, General	S
3 - Line # 33	I would also ask how the school/district is measuring school-family-community partnerships.	Partnership	Design	S
3 - Line # 33	I would also ask how the school/district is measuring school-family-community partnerships.	Suggestion	Design	S

3 - Line # 39	Data collection and analysis: I appreciate and support all that is here.	Data	Design	P
• Are there any domains that you feel could be eliminated or combined? • Are there any domains you feel may be missing?				
4 - Line # 1	What is missing, I think is: How is the community (colleagues, kids, parents/guardians and even community members/leaders being a part of the: data collection preparation phase.	Family & Community	Design	S
4 - Line # 1	What is missing, I think is: How is the community (colleagues, kids, parents/guardians and even community members/leaders being a part of the: data collection preparation phase.	Suggestion	Design	S
4 - Line # 12	how will the data be used to promote great engagement, learning and collaborative school improvement efforts?	Data	Design, General	S
4 - Line # 12	how will the data be used to promote great engagement, learning and collaborative school improvement efforts?	Suggestion	Design, General	S
4 - Line # 18	How will data collection and analysis potentially support a range of effective implementation efforts, including fidelity	Data	Design, Process	D
4 - Line # 18	How will data collection and analysis potentially support a range of effective implementation efforts, including fidelity	Suggestion	Design, Process	D
4 - Line # 20	It appears that what you have covers many existing domains of school climate	Domains	Design	P
4 - Line # 21	The 8 domains seem to mostly capture what the literature suggests the four main areas of school climate: a) safety; b) teaching and learning, c) relationships, and d) institutional environment	Domains	Design	P
4 - Line # 24	There is a fine distinction between the 'support' and 'engagement'. The 7th domain seems to be more like "Community and family engagement" versus "community and family support".	Family & Community	Design	
4 - Line # 24	There is a fine distinction between the 'support' and 'engagement'. The 7th domain seems to be more like "Community and family engagement" versus "community and family support".	Suggestion	Design	
4 - Line # 27	The inclusion of 8th domain ("data collection and analysis") is a bit confusing/out-of-place (in my opinion).	Data	Design	
4 - Line # 30	However, TASQ seems to be an instrument, and an instrument helps to collect data. So, it seems a little weird that it is kept here. What I mean to say is that "data collection and analysis" is already inherent in the scale. That is what the scale is supposed to do. And, how you use the data, how you analyze the data can be the next question on how the school climate improvement process looks like the for the school/system.	Data	Design	
5 - Line # 3	I would suggest you consider adding a 'text box' (or in a more structured manner questions) that reveal what is being done (a) instructionally, (b) systemically and (c) relationally to support current improvement efforts. Or, you can create an initial listing of what schools can do done (a) instructionally, (b) systemically and (c) relationally. (This is what the Council worked to do in the citation noted above.)	Improvement	Design	
5 - Line # 3	I would suggest you consider adding a 'text box' (or in a more structured manner questions) that reveal what is being done (a) instructionally, (b) systemically and (c) relationally to support current improvement efforts. Or, you can create an initial listing of what schools can do done (a) instructionally, (b) systemically and (c) relationally. (This is what the Council worked to do in the citation noted above.)	Suggestion	Design	

5 - Line # 9	As you know, this is a typical and reasonable strategy. Using self reports to collect data)	Self-report	Process	D
5 - Line # 10	From a scientific perspective using 'self-reports' alone is 'thin'	Self-report	Process	D
5 - Line # 10	One additional step to consider (if not for all schools that eventually use this but for some) is to ask school leaders to harvest artifacts or evidence that given instructional, school wide/systemic and/or relational efforts are actually happening.	Self-report	Process	D
5 - Line # 10	One additional step to consider (if not for all schools that eventually use this but for some) is to ask school leaders to harvest artifacts or evidence that given instructional, school wide/systemic and/or relational efforts are actually happening.	Suggestion	Process	D
5 - Line # 15	**They are comprehensive, thorough, and relevant. They cover what many other scholars cover in their assessment of school climate.**	Domains	Design	P
5 - Line # 15	**They are comprehensive, thorough, and relevant. They cover what many other scholars cover in their assessment of school climate.**	Domains	Design	P
3. **Does the breakdown of target areas under each domain make sense?** • **Are there any target areas that you feel could be eliminated or combined?**				
5 - Line # 19	Elimination or combination of domains should be guided in part on what you want to assess and in part by empirically what they measure.	Domains	Design, General	
5 - Line # 21	Statistically, what does a factor analysis tell you about the overlap among domains?	Target Areas	Design	L
5 - Line # 27	See Blaire Cholewa's recent article on ISS.	ISS	General	
• **Are there any target areas you feel may be missing?**				
5 - Line # 30	My concern is not what you are missing but how much you are including.	Ambitious	Design	L
• **Are there any target areas you feel should be placed under a different domain heading?**				
5 - Line # 33	This can be determined in part with data analysis	Target Area	Design	L
5 - Line # 34	I would place more emphasis on youth voice and inter-generational school improvement efforts.	Voice	Design	S
5 - Line # 34	I would place more emphasis on youth voice and inter-generational school improvement efforts.	Improvement	Design	S
5 - Line # 34	I would place more emphasis on youth voice and inter-generational school improvement efforts.	Suggestion	Design	S
5 - Line # 37	Three addental dimensions that I think are centrally important are intentionality and how school leaders are struggling (in the best sense of the word) to be strategic.	Strategic	Design	
6 - Line # 1	Deciding not only as a school leader, but ideally as a school community to intentionally focus on SEL/school climate is a meaningful intervention in and of itself.	Strategic	Design, General	
6 - Line # 3	Strategic: You know that school leaders can only focus on one or at most, three new initiatives at a time. Overlapping with important implementation science findings, I suggest you support people recognizing and articulating what strategic (instructional, systemic and/or relational) goals they are deciding to focus on now.	Strategic	Process	

6 - Line # 3	Strategic: You know that school leaders can only focus on one or at most, three new initiatives at a time. Overlapping with important implementation science findings, I suggest you support people recognizing and articulating what strategic (instructional, systemic and/or relational) goals they are deciding to focus on now.	Suggestion	Process	
4.	The first target area of the TASQ has been "completed" to provide an example of the question design. Do you find this design to be appropriate? Would it perhaps provide more clarity or consistency, if a gold standard or best practice were used for each question, then a more traditional Likert scale applied (such as 0=Not at all; 1= Agree very little; 2= Somewhat agree; 3= Agree; 4 Agree very much)?			
6 - Line # 14	I think I would appreciate even more the best practice model	Best Practice	Design	P
6 - Line # 14	I think I would appreciate even more the best practice model	Suggestion	Design	P
6 - Line # 19	but the "best practices" approach would seem to add to the ease of selecting a response and bring a sense of cohesiveness throughout the instrument.	Best Practice	Design	P
6 - Line # 22	Currently, it is looking like a rubric than a set of questions.	Question Design	Design	C
6 - Line # 24	As long as you are clear on that, looks good.	Question Design	Design	P
5.	Are there any critical questions you think need to be asked under any of the target areas that may be missing? As of now, only the basic topic of each question has been provided outside of the first target area.			
6 - Line # 28	I would suggest you consider harvesting artifacts with at least half of these 20 pilot schools, if not all.	Artifacts	Process	D
6 - Line # 28	I would suggest you consider harvesting artifacts with at least half of these 20 pilot schools, if not all.	Suggestion	Process	D
6 - Line # 33	**I think what you are developing will help the field of school climate and SEL and character education in meaningful ways.**	School Climate	General	P
6 - Line # 33	**I think what you are developing will help the field of school climate and SEL and character education in meaningful ways.**	Holds Promise	General	P
6 - Line # 34	**One of the many things that I admire about what you are doing is that it will -- practically -- support build and perhaps district leaders to understand 'where are we now?' and using this information to then develop 'next steps' in the iterative, continuous process of school improvement.**	Improvement	Process	P
6 - Line # 34	**One of the many things that I admire about what you are doing is that it will -- practically -- support build and perhaps district leaders to understand 'where are we now?' and using this information to then develop 'next steps' in the iterative, continuous process of school improvement.**	Holds Promise	Process	P
7 - Line # 4	AT: Two things I didn't see were: a) Respect for diversity b) Social media	Target Area	Design	S
7 - Line # 7	If you are planning to complete this instrument with one or more staff from a school, there are some measurement issues to consider. First, what about the bias and subjectivity of your raters?	Bias	Process	D, C
7 - Line # 9	Can they objectively assess their school?	Bias	Process	D
7 - Line # 10	Second, what about halo effects? It might be difficult to provide independent assessments of so many different components of a school?	Halo Effect	Process	D, C

7 - Line # 11	What about recency effects? After a particular incident or event at a school, ratings may be skewed. Is there agreement among raters about a school?	Recency Effect	Process	D
7 - Line # 19	There might be just an overall tendency to give similar global ratings that reflect individual preferences in how they assign ratings. Some raters tend to use the full range, but most raters stick to a narrow range near the top of a scale, providing too little meaningful variation.	Scoring	Design	C
7 - Line # 23	Ultimately you need to see whether ratings for a school really differentiate schools.	Scoring	General	
7 - Line # 23	Ultimately you need to see whether ratings for a school really differentiate schools.	Suggestion	General	

Categories

Design – Feedback that impacts the design of the TASQ, to include domains, target areas, questions and general comments regarding the construction of the instrument.

Process – Feedback that impacts how the TASQ should be conducted.

General – Feedback that neither impacted the design of the TASQ or process of assessment.

Emerging Themes and Patterns

1. The TASQ holds promise as an assessment instrument (P)
2. Length of assessment (the time it takes to complete) (T)
3. The comprehensiveness of the assessment (number of domains, target areas and questions). (C)
4. The need for documentation of responses (D)

Appendix C –Focus Group Questions

1. How intensive did you find the effort?
a) Was it too much work or did you find it appropriate for the task at hand?

2. How easy or difficult was it to match the answer choices on each question to the reality of the implementation level in your school?
a) Did the answer choices make sense to you?

3. Consider the two question formats used on the TASQ. Was either format easier or more difficult to respond to?
a) Did either question format take more or less time to complete?
b) Did either format provide a better or worse assessment of the implementation level for each item?

4. Do you believe the question items on the TASQ adequately capture the climate of your school?
a) Was anyone surprised by how well or poor your school scored?
b) Did anyone notice a bias against or towards their grade level?

5. Were any questions redundant or sought to measure the same facet of school climate as a previous question?
a) As you (and your team) completed the TASQ, did you ever feel like a question was already asked and answered?

6. Do you believe any questions or areas of assessment were unnecessary?
a) If so, check on any consensus and explore why.
b) Was any critical question or area missing, in your opinion?

7. Do you believe the TASQ has the ability to add or drive the implementation of additional evidence-based practices or approaches in your school, by highlighting the opportunities for improvement?
a) Did you easily recognize opportunities to conduct activities or practices on your campus that are within your capabilities and resources?
b) Could an instrument such as the TASQ assist your leadership team in setting (and reaching) annual school improvement goals?

8. Were there any questions which might be ambiguous, unclear, or otherwise poorly worded? If so, please identify which questions and if possible, what element(s) of the question are in need of improvement.
a) Have participants check notes, if available.

9. How difficult was it to collect supporting documentation? Do you have any suggestions on how we can best substantiate the responses on the TASQ?
a) Do you think it is important to substantiate responses on a local accountability instrument?
b) Do you believe that supporting documentation could become standardized and thus easier to collect for each ensuing year?

10. Do you have any other suggestions for improving this instrument, the process, or other thoughts regarding the TASQ?

Appendix D – Focus Group Interview Excerpts and Applied Codes

Excerpt Copy	Codes Applied Combined
I would say that it from a, uh, from the standpoint of how intensive it was, if you're going to be getting a group of stakeholders together, I see this about 45 minutes to an hour to work your way through and discuss the questions which I think is a very fair amount.	Intensity of Effort, Length of Time, For Questions Only, Worth it (In Vivo), Division of Effort, Team
Yeah, you know. Skip if I had to do this on my own. it obviously would have sucked, but, Uh, Yeah, I got. I got four other people and so we had a team of five and that really made a difference. I mean, it really did. It just simplified everything. It was equally dispersed. I don't know. Everybody had about 13-14 questions, just simplified the process so it was OK that way. Solo not good	Intensity of Effort, Adequate, Division of Effort, Team, Split
Yeah, you know. Skip if I had to do this on my own. it obviously would have sucked,	Essential Quotes
You know my team, we all went through each question together. We didn't split it up, so you know, in terms of intensive if we went one to five, I'd probably say it was pretty intensive. I'd give it a 3 for that. Not that it was a problem - we got through it, but like Jimmy Dean said, it took us about an hour get through them all.	Intensity of Effort, Length of Time, For Questions Only, Scale Score, Division of Effort, Team, Together
Solo I did it solo. It did about exactly what you said, skip it took me 5 to 6 hours to do 'cause I wanted to give it an honest effort when I submitted to you and I want to be consistent answers so, but do I think the information was useful. I do so it was a good effort and I believe the document I created can be shared with administration here to better improve the school.	Intensity of Effort, Length of Time, Entire TASQ, Worth it (In Vivo), Division of Effort, Solo (In Vivo), Perceived Benefit, School Improvement
But do I think the information was useful. I do so it was a good effort and I believe the document I created can be shared with administration here to better improve the school.	Essential Quotes
I did. I agree that it took me between like four to six hours. I really kinda dissected it and as a new school, I really had to think about what we are really doing instead of things that have been done. Obviously, the more stakeholders you have, the greater you know, the shared understanding or the more interest you have, which is important in and of itself, not just for completion. uh, but I was able to share out and anticipate, you know, if we were to use this moving forward, having done it, it allowed us to see what we have and what we can gain. Being able to share that out with the whole district would be huge. Uhm, so yeah, 5 six hours. It was. Uhm, it was awesome. It did not suck. It was awesome.	Intensity of Effort, Length of Time, Entire TASQ, Time Consuming, Worth it (In Vivo), Division of Effort, Solo (In Vivo), Perceived Benefit, Goal Setting, School Improvement, District Improvement, Shared Understanding
Obviously, the more stakeholders you have, the greater you know, the shared understanding or the more interest you have, which is important in and of itself, not just for completion.	Essential Quotes

Yeah, 5 six hours. It was. Uhm, it was awesome. It did not suck. It was awesome.	Essential Quotes
I agree with the both of them. I did it solo too. It took at least five hours to do, but well worth the time and I think that time allotment was appropriate for the amount of questions that we were answering. But I found it very useful. I found I was able to reflect back and see the holes that we have, so we need to go back and fill. So, yeah, a really, really good task but time consuming.	Intensity of Effort, Length of Time, Entire TASQ, Adequate, Worth it (In Vivo), Time Consuming, Division of Effort, Solo (In Vivo), Perceived Benefit, ID Gaps, Important Priorities
It took at least five hours to do, but well worth the time	Essential Quotes
ry useful. I found I was able to reflect back and see the holes that we have, so we need to go back and fill. So, yeah, a really, really good task but time consuming.	Essential Quotes
I would give it a four because you had to have the group of people involved to answer the questions and asking if I did to provide comprehensive information on the organization it was to be expected.	Intensity of Effort, Scale Score, Adequate, Division of Effort, Team, Time Consuming, Documentation
I'd give it a 3 1/2. I did it with my SSS but between the two of us took about 2 1/2 hours each. We split in half so…	Intensity of Effort, Length of Time, Entire TASQ, Division of Effort, Team, Split, Scale Score
I conversed with my colleague and like the rest of the people on your panel I'm about a 3 1/2 or four. It was definitely…we'd say more time consuming than intensive, but it may have been helpful if we kind of split it all up and maybe didn't do it all in one shot. Because by the end, it was like more of a laborious task in the beginning, so um, it became harder as the survey progress for us.	Intensity of Effort, Length of Time, Entire TASQ, Time Consuming, Division of Effort, Team, Split, Chunk, Scale Score
but it may have been helpful if we kind of split it all up and maybe didn't do it all in one shot.	Essential Quotes
OK I have a question. Is there a reason why you didn't do an option of NA?	Design, Applicability
Yes, with any Likert scale you're going to have variance just because of how individuals answer Likert scales...or rating scales regardless, but I'm I just wondering if there was a reason why you didn't put *name* in there as some of the questions pertaining maybe to elementary don't necessarily apply or are different for our school, so that's all.	Design, Applicability
some of the questions pertaining maybe to elementary don't necessarily apply or are different for our school	Essential Quotes
Hey Skip, I know that there's a spot later in your questions to talk about. Did it really capture our climate? And for that reason, because were in elementary school I felt like the survey just ended up becoming a little bit worse than we really are because	Design, Applicability

we're just elementary and we don't have a lot of those things like iss.	
I thought it was thorough in the way that it was set up, and I think the survey itself was able to capture school climate. So um again, it was just a couple of those questions, not just about ISS, but even about like school clubs. We have minimal school clubs and limited service opportunities at the elementary level, so some of those could have been a possible na, but overall, this survey encompassed the idea of school climate in my opinion.	Design, Thorough, Applicability
We have minimal school clubs and limited service opportunities at the elementary level, so some of those could have been a possible na	Essential Quotes
Um, you'll see on the one that I submitted to you for that number 2, that ISS question, I scored it and also put a slash NA, because again, I felt that that wasn't necessarily applicable for our situation. So I didn't know what you're looking for, so I gave it a score and also put an NA to the side. But I feel as far as, uh, the depiction to the climate of our school, I feel that it is a good instrument to use….to actually see your current state of affairs and where you're at, and again. Also you know, I would say if you're looking at, uh, some of those questions where there's practices that, um, are more prevalent on the secondary level. You know, maybe that's something where you have certain questions that are omitted if you do have elementary teams that are working on it. But as far as like school clubs, for our elementary I can name off the top my head, probably about four or five school clubs that we have where students also do community service and have leadership roles. So I mean it does paint an adequate picture and what I like about it is that it does actually give you an opportunity to itemize where the deficits are at the school and areas that we do need to help improve to make us better. So I feel that it's a very…it's a very accurate instrument.	Design, Applicability, Effective Assessment, Complete Picture (In Vivo), Perceived Effectiveness, Perceived Benefit, Assessment, ID Gaps, Goal Setting, Accuracy
far as like school clubs, for our elementary I can name off the top my head, probably about four or five school clubs that we have where students also do community service and have leadership roles.	Essential Quotes
I feel that it's a very…it's a very accurate instrument.	Essential Quotes
I think so. I think it jives very well with the secondary schools as I listened to the elementary representative speaking about it. For us. It covers so many areas it. I think it gave a complete picture of what we needed to see. And just like everybody else, you find pockets where you like fudge…didn't really think about that? Or didn't really see that?	Design, Appropriate, Perceived Effectiveness, Complete Picture (In Vivo), Effective Assessment, Perceived Benefit, ID Gaps
I think it gave a complete picture of what we needed to see	Essential Quotes

So there's some really easy questions but then there were some difficult questions that really made you think, and it was kind of like juggling between, you know, do I answer this as a 2? Do I answer this as a 3? Is it a one or is it a two? There are some tough questions and you really had to kind of pick your brain and there were a few just from my perspective where I actually had to go and say hey, let me pose something to you. Give me your feedback. What do we think here? So a little brainstorming between a couple of us and a deeper understanding of what we do. Yeah, I like it skip	Design, Difficult to Choose Best Answer, Perceived Benefit, Shared Understanding
So at the end of the day, do you think it accurately reflected or do you think… I do. No, no, I think I think it's good	Perceived Effectiveness, Effective Assessment, Accuracy
Well, I think that it did…with this tool it allows us to see what we do have in place. And obviously what we need. I think it's kind of difficult to really target the actual school climate or cultural, because these are more like the managerial systems that we have in place. Where do you go…you know, like for professional development or ISS - different things like that, like your discipline, procedures or protocols.	Perceived Effectiveness, Effective Assessment, Assessment, Goal Setting
think it's kind of difficult to really target the actual school climate or cultural, because these are more like the managerial systems that we have in place.	Essential Quotes
It doesn't necessarily capture like the feeling or even the student perspective of "do they know where to go when these things go wrong?" If that kind of makes sense. So, if I were to kind of…do I think it's accurate, the answer is yes. Do I think what could really kind of seal the deal…what could be incorporated to get the "feeling" would be, maybe, you know, asking the student, ask the leadership team or our safety teams just for their perspectives to kind of, you know, bridge the gap between this. [garbled]	Design, Stakeholder, Perceived Effectiveness, Accuracy
I think the design really did give us a good overall view of where we stand and a lot of the different things we're doing. I found a lot of the areas to overlap and kind of, you know, show how they connected. So I thought that was good, but I think it did.	Perceived Benefit, Assessment, Design, Overlap, Thorough
I would just say I found myself, you know, within a few of the domains as I went through the indicator saying see above because my answer was similar. Whether it was I'll just say A1A, A1B for instance. I would say you know maybe fine tooth combing it, you know, wordsmithing a little bit…possibly some of those indicators can be folded into one, per se.	Design, Overlap
I also look at it as a nice device though. If I am writing a SIP plan, certainly a domain or something like that, a school can choose to call from and then use those indicators to measure their level of success. I was thinking about it that way…piecing it apart.	Perceived Benefit, Goal Setting, Perceived Effectiveness, Effective Planning Instrument, Chunk

No, I think it. I think I did a good job capturing the climate at the school. I do believe you would want to do this like right now, for instance, at the end of the school year. So you can start planning adequately for the following school year. Again, finding where your holes are with your climate. And so I thought, I thought it was very well done. So like pre and post it. Yeah, like I like I'm going through there now. You know when I did this last week, when I was going through it, I'm thinking to myself "I need to really address these things now, before we start planning for next school year and uh, and see where at the end the next school year". But it's a great planning tool. I think you did a good job, skip it, didn't suck, skip.	Perceived Effectiveness, Effective Assessment, Effective Planning Instrument, Perceived Benefit, ID Gaps, Goal Setting, Pre-Post
Again, finding where your holes are with your climate. And so I thought, I thought it was very well done	Essential Quotes
when I was going through it, I'm thinking to myself "I need to really address these things now, before we start planning for next school year and uh, and see where at the end the next school year"	Essential Quotes
I think you did a good job, skip it, didn't suck,	Essential Quotes
I like to refer back to the standard	Design, Standard
I agree too. 'cause it shows….it clarifies the components needed to classify you as a 3 or 2 and I think that just seeing everything cut and dry, it's a menu of what you need.	Design, Standard
Yeah, that was a lot easier to do	Design, Standard
Not every domain lent themselves easier to a standard than others	Design, Standard, Exception to the Standard Format
ike it's been stated, lend itself to the standard and you were, uh, it was easy to use those differentiations to really hone in on where you should land. And then sometimes it was difficult because it was like…Oh it's kind of saying this and saying that, so it was weird. But I do prefer it [the standard] over not having it because I think it does kind of align everyone's 3. It aligns everyone's 2.	Design, Standard, Exception to the Standard Format
Because even though I think we feel that it is similar across schools…and it's not. The way we view in-school suspension is very different than maybe another school.	Design, Applicability
I'm gonna…it's kind of gonna get a little repetitive but again, it's going to be something that itemizes your areas in need of enhancement, and I see this as a tool that you can take to further kind of…OK these are the areas that we need to enhance. Maybe we can't get to all of them this year, but let's pick the top three priorities. An action plan from there, so it's a very good tool to identify those areas of need. Also and also your areas of strength, but mainly the areas that need enhancement that you can action plan from.	Perceived Benefit, ID Gaps, Goal Setting, Important Priorities, Perceived Effectiveness, Effective Planning Instrument, Chunk

D.H. Worm, How about you? Do you feel like you know that was the case for you guys as well? Like it highlighted opportunities for improvement that you can see yourself doing? Yes, absolutely Skip	Perceived Effectiveness, Effective Planning Instrument, Perceived Benefit, School Improvement
I'm gonna back up a little bit but one of your initial emails was about how this would help with the SIP plan, and you mentioned sip earlier and that's one of the reasons I jumped on it, was because I wanted to see you know where are the areas of need? What are we doing well? And it's just…it's like a monkey on our back that you know we've got some issues that we're trying to deal with. The specifically, I don't wanna take much more time, but just specifically with our students because high school, your kids drive, you know, just leaving campus has security questions bigtime…Bigtime Security questions. And we have areas, pockets and they need to be addressed, and I'm hoping the results of this document will shed some more light on the need that we really need to take this a little more seriously.	Perceived Benefit, Important Priorities, ID Gaps, Goal Setting, Effective Planning Instrument, Perceived Effectiveness, Essential Quotes
I actually, I agree with everybody it's definitely a starting point. And when we went through it, we definitely found areas that were really glaring to us. Uh, particular domains were like, OK, well, we need to focus this on this next year. So I've shared the response with the leadership team and hopefully it's a conversation as we begin the next school year.	Perceived Benefit, Enlightening, ID Gaps, Goal Setting, Shared Understanding
And when we went through it, we definitely found areas that were really glaring to us. Uh, particular domains were like, OK, well, we need to focus this on this next year.	Essential Quotes
Um, same. I was able to share with the team leads on just like kind of a reflective piece. Uh, we're starting strong and just looking forward to growing within certain domains.	Effective Assessment, Effective Planning Instrument
I thought I did an adequate job of highlighting. I thought it again, like many of the other folks have said it, some of the things glaringly would stand out. Like yeah, we need to improve in that area. So I'm gonna use it to craft our SIP this coming school year. I know I've seen this document before, skip somewhere…I don't know where in past years that the TASQ but I really like it, and although it was time consuming, I think if you break this up amongst team members at your school or part of your instructional leadership team, very doable document and we'llll definitely use it. So I thought it was an excellent tool.	Intensity of Effort, Time Consuming, Worth it (In Vivo), Perceived Benefit, Important Priorities, Goal Setting, ID Gaps, Chunk, Perceived Effectiveness, Effective Assessment, Effective Planning Instrument
So I'm gonna use it to craft our SIP this coming school year.	Essential Quotes
I think if you break this up amongst team members at your school or part of your instructional leadership team, very doable document and we'llll definitely use it. So I thought it was an excellent tool.	Essential Quotes

I think it's a really good tool. I think that it also aligns with the other type of tools that we use, so that's beneficial. You don't feel like you're just you know…are doing the same stuff. Plus for us it would align with our Title One surveys, the benchmarks of quality for PBS and and like it was stated, our SIP plan. And so I think it lines up with the other things you're doing.	Perceived Effectiveness, Effective Assessment, Intensity of Effort, Existing Documentation
I thought it meets or exceeds expectations. Is that OK? In that regard…for highlighting opportunities for improvement? Yeah,	Perceived Effectiveness, Effective Assessment, Perceived Benefit, School Improvement
I shared the same sentiments as everyone else. It definitely brought some things to our attention, things that we need to review and work on. Like Mr. Masiello said that things that we should be discussing now in preparation for the opening of next school year. So yes, definitely highlighted some things that we need to look at.	Perceived Benefit, Enlightening, ID Gaps, Goal Setting
kip, let me just let me just add real quick. I would just say I think the instrument in and of itself is probably too big. Too many domains for a school to tackle at one time, but I do like the theory of chunking it. An may be looking at one or two domains for specific school improvement and focusing there.	Intensity of Effort, Time Consuming, Chunk
If you did this as a pre and you had to action plan off of this, it's way too much.	Intensity of Effort, Time Consuming, Pre-Post
Yeah. I see if you have the previous instrument from the other from the from the other year to go off of and then you can document the areas where the deficits were what you did to address it, and then that's what justifies your new improved score. But also there's other components.	Intensity of Effort, Time Consuming, Documentation
I look in the domain B, which is your safety and security. Excuse me, your physical environment security. "There's other pieces here to where I would take this, and this would actually be a wish list for me to go in and provide to either our grounds [crew] or even up to our executive director because there are some pieces here that are out of the schools [ability] to control,…'cause I'll tell you one thing, it addresses security camera coverage. That's something that's been a wish list [item] and is something that we necessarily can't control, but we can put in request to say, hey, we've seen that this is inadequate here". So then my question is, if you communicated that need to the district, but it wasn't followed through due to budget, they didn't get to it this year. You're not on that list until two years from now. I think that with the fact that you addressed it, you recognize that you addressed it, but it was unable to be followed through with because it's not within your control. If that's something, OK, well. Is that skew the grading at all?	Design, Applicability
There's other pieces here to where I would take this, and this would actually be a wish list for me to go in, provide to either	Essential Quotes

our grounds or even up to our executive director because there are some pieces here that are out of the schools direct control	
I mean, I agree that the documentation was a lot. I will definitely say that when you told us we can just document what we would use verse actually compile it that I was. Oh, I was definitely pleased to hear that. To know that you would have had to gather all those things, it would have even for us as title one. We have so many documents we have to have already, you know. So uh accreditation, you gotta lot together so you have to gather things. But I understand the need for it. So if that was the case then so be it. But I think it would definitely change the idea from self-reflective to sort of an evaluative tool. If those documents were required to support your responses. So maybe like you say pre was self but post was, you know, evaluative.	Existing Documentation, Time Consuming, Pre-Post, Intensity of Effort, Documentation
It just helped sort of conceptualize for me what we do, where we are, and maybe where we wanna go.	Essential Quotes, Perceived Benefit, Assessment, Shared Understanding, Goal Setting, School Improvement
Sorry, I'm here. Think we talked about it, um? I think for an instrument like this, we probably need to break it up. Break it up by domain. Uhm, and it would probably be best done if it's done with the team of people instead of individually or with a small group of people. And the only thing that xxxx and I talked about was just…I think it would have been more powerful if we were able to break it up like we were going to do before this virus hit us.	Intensity of Effort, Chunk, Division of Effort, Team
I think that's critical because you know, we're aspiring leaders. We want to learn more about our schools in the managerial systems that take place. I think that I grew a lot as a leader, reflecting on the, you know, completing this within the program.	Essential Quotes, Perceived Benefit, Leadership Prep
And you mentioned kind of breaking up the domains with, you know, discipline to be covered by your Dean or your APs or whatnot, and then go into guidance having that person you know responsible for the document and kind of working with other you know experts on the campus really will help them grow to develop that community. I, that's just my thought.	Intensity of Effort, Chunk

APPENDIX E
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Exploring a New Path for School Climate and Safety Assessment

Principal Investigator(s): Verlin B. Wilhoit

<u>**Introduction:**</u>

- Please read this form. You may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document that choice.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

<u>**Why is this research study being done?**</u>

To advance the field of school climate and safety assessment and explore the use of new instrument to guide school climate and safety improvement. The name of the instrument is the Transformational Assessment of School Quality (TASQ).

<u>**Who will be in this study?**</u>

Volunteer participants from district schools that piloted the TASQ. Team leaders from select schools will be recruited by the researcher using personal and collegial contacts. Each leader will represent a small team of knowledgeable staff that previously conducted the pilot.

<u>**What will I be asked to do?**</u>

Team leaders from each school will be asked to convey the aggregate time their team took to complete the TASQ (hours and number of days), the number of participants on each team and what questions they were assigned, collect observational notes from each pilot participant, and take part in the follow-up focus group.

<u>**What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?**</u>

There are no known risks

<u>**What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?**</u>

There are no direct benefits to you for taking part in this study. However, your participation will help shape an assessment instrument that is being considered for district-wide adoption. The assessment of such a broad array of critical practices and activities that promote safe and positive school climates should also be considered a benefit. School leaders may use the results of the assessment to help establish improvement goals and identify opportunities for improvement.

What will it cost me?

There are no associated costs with participation in this study. However, this study will require an estimated 2-3 hours to complete.

How will my privacy be protected?

- Pseudonyms will be used in place of the names of all participants who submitted observational notes for the pilot study. If you are a team leader, your pseudonym will be used in place of your name on all transcripts of the focus group interview recording.
- All interview recordings from the study will be destroyed upon transcription and all identifying information will be removed from the transcript.
- All school names and the name of the district will be replaced by pseudonyms and no other identifiable information will be used in the study.
- All research records will be kept in the locked home office of the principal investigator.
- Only the researcher's advisor and the IRB Committee at the University of New England have the right to review the study data.

How will my data be kept confidential?

- The focus group(s) will be audio-recorded using a password protected mobile device and a backup digital recorder. The digital recording will be uploaded to a password-protected, computer immediately following the focus group interview.
- The audio recording will be transcribed using a confidential transcription service.
- All notes, recordings, and transcriptions will be kept in a locked and secure location which is only accessible to the principal researcher, the research committee, and the Institutional Research Board.
- All computer files will be kept on a password-protected computer, accessible only to the principal researcher, the research committee, and the Institutional Research Board.

What are my rights as a research participant?

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University.
- Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with the district or the researcher.
- You may refuse to answer any interview question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason.
- If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research.
- If you sustain an injury while participating in this study, your participation may be ended.

What other options do I have?

- You may choose not to participate.

Whom may I contact with questions?

- The principal researcher conducting this study is Verlin B. Wilhoit
- For more information regarding this study, please contact Verlin B. Wilhoit
- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Verlin B. Wilhoit
- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Mary Bachman DeSilva, Sc.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4567 or irb@une.edu.

Will I receive a copy of this consent form?

- You will be given a copy of this consent form.

_____

Participant's Statement

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

_____   _____
Participant's signature or   Date
Legally authorized representative

_____
Printed name
Researcher's Statement
The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

_____   _____
Researcher's signature   Date

Verlin B. Wilhoit_____
Printed name