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Kerry Michael Gray

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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR
SCHOOLS' CLIMATE, DISCIPLINE ISSUES, AND THE PREVENTIVE
MEASURES USED TO COMBAT DISCIPLINE ISSUES IN
SECONDARY PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN METRO
JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

By

Kerry Michael Gray

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Elementary, Middle, and Secondary School Administration
in the Department of Leadership and Foundations

Mississippi State, Mississippi

April 2011

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By

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Pages in Study: 90

Candidate for Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The purpose of this study was to compare middle and high school teachers' perceptions of the discipline methods used in public schools in Jackson, Mississippi. Specifically, this study examined teachers' perceptions of their schools' climate, discipline issues, and the preventive measures used to combat discipline issues. Out of a target population of 430, only 239 teachers participated.

The survey consisted of 4 parts. Part I was designed to collect demographic data and to determine participation in violence prevention programs. Part II was designed to collect data related to school climate. Part III was designed to collect data related to discipline issues that existed, and Part IV was designed to collect data related to discipline preventive measures. The research design was descriptive and comparative. Descriptive statistics and a Mann Whitney U were the statistical tests utilized to analyze the data and answer the research questions.

After the data were collected and analyzed, the researcher determined that there were significant differences in middle and high school teachers' perceptions of their

school's climate impact on their ability to implement effective discipline strategies. The respondents indicated that some of their students participated in violence prevention programs (29% middle and 27% high), and approximately half (42% middle and 53% high) of the teachers participated in violence prevention programs. High school teachers' responses revealed that student tardies, students cutting classes, theft, vandalism, student alcohol/drug use, possession of weapons, verbal/physical abuse of teachers by students, and gangs were discipline issues that had an impact on their ability to implement effective discipline strategies; whereas middle school teachers indicated that these items had less of an impact on their ability to implement effective discipline strategies.

Conclusions based on the findings in this study indicated that approximately half of high school teachers (58%) and even fewer middle school teachers (42%) participated in school-based programs aimed at curtailing school violence. Since teachers are the single most important factor in creating a well managed classroom, it is the responsibility of the school principal to ensure that teachers are active participants in school-based efforts that are both proactive and preventive in nature.

DEDICATION

I give thanks to God without whom this great opportunity would not be possible. This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother (Jessie L. Craig) and my mother (Jacqueline Y. Hogan) who have sacrificed so much to help me earn the Ph.D. degree. Their constant support, love, guidance, prayers, and unconditional giving have been the bright light in the dark corridors of my life. In addition, I share this moment with my grandfathers Emmett Craig and Junius Gray, both of whom inspired and guided me to this point in my life.

Finally, I thank my son Dorian Michael Gray for his support, patience, and understanding during the entire doctoral process.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the age of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), many schools and districts find themselves struggling to close the achievement gap that exists between groups of students in American schools. This issue is more prevalent in urban schools which serve the highest percentage of poor, minority, and special needs students (Lannie & McCurdy, 2007).

Urban schools are in a state of deterioration (Nogura, 2003). Lannie and McCurdy (2007) agreed and stated, “that although urban schools are typically defined by high concentrations of poverty, they are further distinguished by (a) high rates of student mobility, (b) difficulty in hiring qualified teachers, and (c) large numbers of classroom discipline problems” (p. 86). Teachers electing to teach in urban schools must come with an arsenal of pedagogy and behavior management strategies to effectively teach and deal with students (Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996).

There is a severe shortage of qualified teachers in the United States especially, in urban settings. The problem of finding and retaining qualified teachers is due to the lack of discipline in the classroom (Pedota, 2007). According to Walker, Ramsey, and Gresham (2004), urban school classrooms taught by poorly-prepared and novice teachers with little or no city school experience place students at risk for engaging in chronic patterns of antisocial behavior and misconduct. When teachers are poorly prepared, they over-rely on reactive and aversive strategies in the absence of planned, effective,

preventive approaches to address classroom discipline problems. Therefore, public urban schools are under increased scrutiny to improve student, classroom, school, and district outcomes in order to attract and retain teachers (Gros, Lyons, & Griffin, 2008).

Preventing and managing discipline problems in the context of a classroom's swiftly occurring and often unpredictable events is a complicated phenomenon, especially for an ill-prepared or novice teacher, who is just beginning to develop the skills to monitor student engagement while executing an effective lesson (Zuckerman, 2007). Bullock and Brown (as cited in Wilhite, Braaten, Frey, and Wilder, 2007) surveyed teachers and asked them to list the top 10 behavior problems they faced in the classroom. The authors found that the most frequent challenges reported were (a) acting out, (b) aggression, (c) hyperactivity, (e) poor social relationships, (f) inadequate self-control, and (g) defiance of authority. Wilhite et al. noted that as teachers brainstormed a list of the most frequent behavior problems occurring in the classroom, the list had not varied significantly.

Educators who work in urban settings frequently face the challenge of striving to increase desirable behaviors while simultaneously attempting to decrease undesirable behaviors. To increase desirable behaviors and the overall strength of instruction, a school must have (a) effective time management procedures, such as quick-paced and well-planned transitions; (b) effective implementation of instruction, such as guided practice and review; and (c) effective continuous academic monitoring (Ryan, Sanders, Katsiyannis, & Yell, 2007).

Engagement in interesting instructional activities often minimizes classroom disruptions (Ryan et al., 2007). Therefore, teachers must establish, explain, review, and modify rules so that students clearly understand the expectations for classroom

procedures, thus enabling the teacher to efficiently handle the day to day activities of the classroom as well as unexpected interruptions that may occur (Marshall, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

Implementation and utilization of effective discipline strategies and procedures have been and continue to be vital concerns for urban schools and districts seeking to find ways to improve student achievement. Under the premise of NCLB, schools were increasingly held accountable for their efforts to improve the academic and social behavior of their students despite diminishing resources (Eber, Sugai, Smith, & Scott, 2002).

As school districts in Mississippi continue to seek effective discipline strategies and techniques that can be utilized in the classroom, there is very little current research that links teachers' perceptions of effective discipline strategies used in urban settings. Teachers' perceptions and utilization of effective classroom discipline strategies is a vital aspect of both effective teaching and continuous academic improvement. Yet, despite its importance, there is a paucity of research on how teachers use and implement successful strategies for effective management of their classrooms (Garrahy, Cothran, & Kulinna, 2005).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to compare middle and high school teachers' perceptions and utilization of the discipline methods used in public schools in Jackson, Mississippi. Specifically, this study examined teachers' perceptions of their schools' climate, and the preventive measures used to combat discipline. In addition, this study

added to the paucity of research which currently existed on the implementation of disciplinary methods in secondary schools.

Research Questions

This study examined teachers' perceptions of their schools' climate, discipline issues, and the preventive measures used to combat discipline issues in a secondary public school district in Mississippi. This study answered the following research questions:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference in middle and high school teachers' perceptions of school climate's impact on their ability to implement effective discipline strategies as measured by the *Secondary School Discipline Survey*?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference in middle and high school teachers' perceptions of discipline issues' impact on their ability to implement effective discipline strategies as measured by the *Secondary School Discipline Survey*?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference in middle and high school teachers' utilization of discipline preventive measures as measured by the *Secondary School Discipline Survey*?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were used in this study:

Classroom Management deals with how things are done in the classroom from day-to-day and it entails structure, procedures, rituals, and routines (Marshall, 2005). It

also includes the arranging of the environment for learning, maintaining, and developing student-appropriate behavior and engagement in the content (Rink, 2002).

Discipline refers to appropriate behavior exhibited by the student as a result of a set of rules and regulations (Marshall, 2005).

Discipline Issues refer to the items measured on the survey (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, Farris, & Westat, 1996).

High School denotes the last phase of schooling for K-12 students where they have the opportunity to learn and master skills they did not grasp in the lower grades (Raynor, 2007). For this study, high schools will only refer to schools that house Grades 9-12.

Middle School is a phase of schooling that prepares students, socially, emotionally, and academically for high school (Hinebauch, 2002). For this study, middle schools will only refer to schools that house Grades 6-8.

Professional Development refers to activities or programs that are needs based, funded by the employer, collaboratively planned, and designed for a specific group of individuals in the school district. Professional development also has a very specific set of learning objectives and activities that are designed to extend, add, and improve immediate job-oriented skills, competencies, and knowledge (Zepeda, 1999).

School Climate describes the atmosphere of an organization that embraces a set of shared values, beliefs, and customs. These values, beliefs, and customs are often a set of internal characteristics that distinguish one school from another and influence the behaviors of each school's members (Hoy & Miskel, 2005).

Limitations

This study was limited to middle and high school teachers in a select urban school district in Mississippi. This study only examined the school climate, discipline issues, and discipline preventive measures that were addressed on the survey. Generalizations from the study should be limited to the population described and cannot be applied to any other group.

Delimitations

This study included two delimitations. First, this study was based on teachers' perceptions of their schools' (a) climate, (b) discipline issues, and (c) measures utilized to prevent discipline problems. Second, this study included participants who taught at randomly chosen middle and high schools in the urban Jackson, Mississippi School District selected during the 2009-2010 school year.

Justification of the Study

Many schools and school districts lack the expertise to define and use classroom management practices and systems that meet the needs of their students with both efficiency and effectiveness (Emmer & Stough, 2001). With the advent of legislation requiring more proactive strategies to identify and serve students with academic and social behavior concerns, secondary schools may be unprepared and ill-advised as to how to best implement such practices (Fairbanks, Sugai, Guardino, and Lathrop, 2007). This study assessed secondary teachers' perceptions of discipline issues they faced on a day-to-day basis and offered suggestions for the effective management of those issues.

Difficulty managing behavior in the classroom is frequently cited as a source of frustration for teachers and a common reason why new teachers leave the profession

(Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Being attentive to issues related to classroom management is critical to continuous improvement in academic performance. Paying close attention to classroom management issues at the middle and secondary education level is especially important, given that many of the strategies and methods of managing behavior in the elementary school years are perceived to become less effective with older populations of students (Malmgren, Trezek, & Paul, 2005).

This study was of value to the school district selected because it provided educators with information on how teachers perceived their schools' climate. This information was used to offer recommendations and suggestions for administrators to help further the professional growth of their teachers, as well as provide a venue to assist schools in improving the overall discipline strategies being utilized by secondary classroom teachers in Jackson, Mississippi.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The ability to manage discipline problems is what school principals and educational leaders focus on when assessing the effectiveness of teachers (Zuckerman, 2007). Yet, many teachers feel unprepared to deal with disruptive behavior and believe that this substantially interferes with their (a) teaching, (b) ability to be effective, and (c) ability to provide meaningful learning experiences so that all children can experience success.

Urban educators are faced with a myriad of issues in the classroom. Among those issues are (a) inadequate resources, (b) meeting the needs of diverse learners, and (c) effectively managing the classroom. The need for highly qualified educators who can effectively manage classrooms in urban settings has reached a critical level (Martella & Nelson, 2001). Therefore, this review of the literature focused on concepts related to characteristics of urban classrooms and effective classroom management strategies that could be utilized in urban settings. The chapter also describes (a) characteristics of urban middle and high schools, (b) characteristics of urban middle school students, (c) characteristics of urban high school students, (d) urban teacher preparation, (e) professional development, (f) urban school leadership, (g) effective discipline strategies, (h) classroom management models, (i) safe and orderly environments, and (j) teacher's perceptions about discipline.

Characteristics of Urban Middle and High Schools

Urban educators face a number of challenges while attempting to educate students in addition to the responsibility of effectively teaching the core academic subjects.

Lassen, Steele, and Sailor (2006) indicated that teachers must increasingly deal with the non-academic factors that influence the instruction they provide. According to Kourea, Cartledge, and Musti-Rao (2007), some of those non-academic factors that negatively influence instruction include (a) poverty, (b) abuse, and (c) neglect which also led to disruptive behavior in the classroom.

Traditionally, schools have addressed challenging behavior by increasing the number and intensity of punitive disciplinary tactics (Sugai & Horner, 2002). These strategies include (a) adopting zero tolerance policies, (b) hiring full and part-time security officers, (c) utilizing metal detectors, (d) expelling and suspending students, (e) conducting random searches, and (f) placing students in alternative educational facilities (Lassen et al., 2006).

According to McCurdy, Kunsch, and Reibstein (2007), school officials face the challenge of sustaining a full gamut of effective practices to promote the success of all students. In urban school settings, this challenge was exacerbated by multiple school and community-based factors, such as (a) poverty, (b) abuse, (c) neighborhood decay, (d) lack of fully credentialed teachers, (e) fewer school resources, and (f) more students with behavior problems (McCurdy et al., 2007). These challenges quickly lead to classrooms and schools that appear to be in disarray and the default mechanism becomes reactive rather than proactive, leading to an increased number of suspensions and expulsions.

Brown and Beckett (2006) suggested that student discipline disproportionately affected urban school districts with a large number of low income and minority students.

African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds were punished more often and more severely than other students (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson, 2002). Although African American students represent only 17% of the nation's population, they represented 34% of students who received out of school suspensions (Brown & Beckett, 2006).

Characteristics of Urban Middle School Students

Academically, middle school should be a time of preparation for high school, but academics usually take a back seat for most middle school students. These years are, primarily, a time for social and emotional preparation. The average middle school student is somewhere between dependence and independence. Middle school students are in need of caring adults who can catch a child who's not quite ready to go to high school, yet challenge a child who feels more than ready (Hinebauch, 2002).

Middle school students often suffer from both emotional and behavioral disorders which can lead to both academic and behavioral deficits (Sutherland & Snyder, 2007). These dual deficits make it impossible for educators to provide effective instruction. Virtue (2007) noted that it was the teachers' responsibility to create opportunities for students to learn, support, and evaluate the learning process as it unfolds, yet these dual deficits often inhibited teachers' attempts to provide effective instruction.

Children move about in a world far different from the world of previous generations. They have (a) more media, (b) wider roles for boys and girls, (c) more complex family dynamics, and (d) new and quickly advancing technology. Yet, the constant that educators always need to remember is that children continue to grow through the same developmental stages (Finks, 2002).

From Finks' (2002) research, seven characteristics of middle school students were identified. Finks indicated that middle school students

were a widely diverse group; were engaged in self-exploration and self-definition; were ready and eager to participate in their home, school, and community; needed and wanted positive relationships with both peers and adults; continued to need structure and clear limits; had a high level of energy; and needed opportunities to achieve competence and success. (p. 26)

According to Parker (2002), the best middle schools were places where children belonged rather than merely attended. The intricacies of the daily events in middle school are also designed to embrace the uniqueness of early adolescents and distinguish their school experience from the elementary years past and secondary years to come.

Characteristics of Urban High School Students

Fischer (2006) noted that hindered by poor performing public schools, most urban high school students drop out of school before earning a high school diploma. The factors preventing graduation are both practical and parochial. Most urban high school students are struggling with the notion of (a) child care, (b) work schedules, and (c) a possible commute from place to place (Fischer, 2006).

Raynor (2007) found that high schools were a last chance opportunity for public education to deliver the goods to students. The quality of education provided to them largely determines their success as productive citizens in society. Unlike elementary and middle school students, high school students immediately become our next generation of adults.

Sinclair, Christenson, and Thurlow (2005) noted that the risk of school failure and high incidences of negative post-school outcomes were vital concerns for educators who worked with urban high school students. A disproportionate number of these students (a) drop out of high school, (b) are incarcerated, (c) face unemployment, and (d) have children before they are married.

According to Wasonga, Christman, and Kilmer (2003), urban high schools educate the majority of students who are at risk for school failure. Many of these students are disregarded while others suffer from labels such as (a) emotionally disturbed, (b) learning disabled, (c) educationally deficient, or (d) culturally disadvantaged (Wang, 1996).

With the stakes raised even higher, due to NCLB, Wasonga et al. (2003) indicated that urban schools faced more challenges to enable high school students to succeed. High school educators have to help students become resilient learners who assume responsibility for acquiring knowledge and skills to sustain patterns of self-directed lifelong learning.

Urban high schools are places where one often finds low test scores, dropouts, and a high number of discipline referrals. Most of the problems urban high schools face are the result of being located in impoverished areas with few or limited resources. As a result of location, urban high school students were more likely to be exposed to violence, sometimes on a daily basis, than their suburban or rural counterparts (Wasonga et al., 2003).

Urban Teacher Preparation

Educating urban students can be a challenging, yet rewarding task. However, attracting and retaining qualified teachers to carry out this task can be challenging due to the critical teacher shortage school districts in the United States face on a daily basis (Smith & Smith, 2006). Stanton (2001) indicated that 30 to 50% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years, but in urban areas, the numbers were even higher.

Teacher shortage in distressed urban areas becomes cyclical because positions are filled with unqualified, naïve teachers who are overwhelmed by the problems associated with urban teaching (Smith & Smith, 2006). Most urban teachers start their careers (a) in disadvantaged schools with high turnovers, (b) teaching the neediest students, (c) with the most demanding teaching loads and extra duties, and (d) with the fewest curricula materials (Aaronson, 1999).

Although teacher preparation programs have always operated under the shadow of legislation and politics, they still are in dire need of ongoing effective assessment systems that can better pre-service teachers for the realities of the classroom (Kirkpatrick, Lincoln, & Morrow, 2006). Research on the effectiveness of teacher preparation has yielded a direct relationship between its quality and student learning (Darling-Hammond & Young, 2002). NCLB challenged traditional concepts of teacher preparation by emphasizing content mastery and verbal ability and downplaying the importance of pedagogy and classroom management (NCLB, 2001).

Blanton (2004) noted that since pedagogy and management were less powerful determinants of student achievement than content mastery, policymakers proposed alternatives to traditional teacher preparation programs. Thus, NCLB encouraged states to develop routes that moved teachers into classrooms on a fast-track basis and included in

its definition of highly qualified teachers individuals enrolled in such alternative routes (NCLB, 2001).

Brownell, Ross, Colon, and McCallum (2005) indicated that the development of alternative routes came at a time when teacher education was under fire for its perceived inability to prepare quality teachers. Critics argued that teacher education programs (a) made no contribution to K–12 student achievement, (b) were not intellectually challenging, (c) did not adequately prepare teachers to deal with the demands of the classroom, and (d) acted as deterrents to bright, young people interested in entering the classroom (Finn & Kanstroom, 2000).

Teacher education advocates proclaimed that positive correlations existed between teacher certification status and student achievement (Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002). For example, Darling-Hammond (2000) reported that states with the highest proportions of certified teachers tended to have the highest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores. Additionally, it was revealed in a study controlling for student socioeconomic status and school characteristics that students taught by certified teachers performed significantly better on standardized tests of reading and language arts than those taught by non-certified teachers (Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002).

Professional Development

Petty (2007) indicated that school districts in the United States are faced with a great challenge because urban teachers are leaving the profession at a startling rate, and qualified college graduates are not entering the profession. Currently, about one-third of all newly hired urban teachers will leave the profession if professional development

programs and activities are not geared toward helping the individual teacher (Petty, 2007).

Howard (2007) concluded that because we live in a diverse society, we must transform ourselves and our schools to serve all students. To do this effectively, professional development activities and programs must adhere to five phases. Those phases include (a) building trust among the participants, (b) engaging personal culture, (c) confronting issues of social dominance and justice, (d) transforming instructional practices, and (e) engaging the entire school community.

According to Hur and Hara (2007), teachers face multiple challenges. New content area standards change expectations about the school learning experience, and technologically savvy students ask teachers to utilize new technology in various ways (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). As a way to overcome the challenges, teachers are expected to be life-long learners through participation in teacher professional development programs.

Existing teacher professional development programs have not met teachers' professional needs (Sugar, 2005). No follow-up support was provided after one-time workshops; and trainings were often disconnected from actual classroom practice. Teachers were expected to teach more content in a deep and meaningful manner without sufficient support. To compound the situation, once teachers were in the field, the education system had no proven innovative mechanisms to systematically improve teaching in the classroom (Hur & Hara, 2007).

Innovative professional development concepts are plentiful, but few are implemented consistently across grades and among teachers. Therefore, there is not a need for more prescriptive, scripted curricula or instructions; but there are needs for

dedicated, knowledgeable school administrators who can help teachers develop precision in their teaching (Fisher & Frey, 2007).

Shroyer, Yahnke, and Heller (2007) suggested that professional development initiatives were among the most noteworthy educational reforms in the 21st century because these initiatives gave rise to innovative ways of thinking about how we educate educators. Hur and Hara (2007) noted that teachers face multiple challenges in the classroom and that new content area standards change expectations about school learning experiences. As a way to overcome the challenges, teachers are expected to be life-long learners through participation in teacher professional development programs.

Urban School Leadership

Amidst the many challenges urban educators face in the classroom, many urban school districts in the United States also face shortages of quality leadership personnel for their schools (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006). Due to the strict sanctions and accountability standards of NCLB, educational leaders around the country work diligently to find (a) the right recipe of research-based instructional practices, (b) effective professional development programs, and (c) successful school improvement processes in hopes of increasing test scores (Marino, 2007).

Since the beginnings of the principalship in American Education, educators have struggled to define a distinctive role for this position (Lashway, 2003). After focusing for years on the effective management of schools, the focus moved to leadership of teaching and learning. In the past, educational leaders were judged on their effectiveness in managing fiscal, organizational, and political conditions in their schools (Robinson, 2006).

Urban school leaders must impact teaching and learning in their schools. Gurr, Drysdale, and Mulford (2006) mentioned that there has been considerable research on successful school leadership. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) provided a comprehensive review of knowledge about successful school leadership based upon many quantitative research studies, multiple case studies, and systematic single case studies.

In times of heightened concern for student learning, school leaders are being held accountable for how well teachers teach and for how much students learn. In essence, school leaders are defined as those people who (a) occupied various roles in the school, (b) provided direction, and (c) exerted influence in order to achieve the school's goals (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). From their research, Leithwood and Riehl (2003)

summarized effective school leadership according to five claims. Those claims included

- (1) having significant effects on student learning, second only to curriculum and instruction;
- (2) providing the most leadership in the school, but recognizing that other potential sources of leadership exist;
- (3) having a core set of leadership practices that are valuable in almost all educational contexts;
- (4) responding productively to challenges and opportunities created by accountability-oriented policies; and
- (5) responding productively to opportunities and challenges of educating diverse groups of students. (p. 9)

Effective Discipline Strategies

Rink (2002) defined classroom management as the arranging of the environment for learning, maintaining, and developing student-appropriate behavior and engagement in the content. Marshall (2005) wrote that classroom management dealt with how things

were done and that it entailed structure, procedures, and routines to the point of becoming rituals.

Educators see management as the primary factor by which quality instruction and student learning occur (Garrahy et al., 2005). Discussions of management frequently focus on student behavior and control which is a vital component of classroom management.

In contrast to classroom management, discipline is the responsibility of the student and its focus is appropriate student behavior (Marshall, 2005). Marshall (2005) added that although it was incumbent upon the teacher to maintain a classroom that was conducive to learning, a student was responsible for his or her own behavior.

Effective Teaching

Teachers are the single most important factor in creating a well managed classroom (Parris & Block, 2007). In a review of several studies, Pedota (2007) indicated that effective teachers were those teachers who (a) had fewer discipline problems in the classroom, (b) spent a good deal of time on planning, (c) took into consideration diversity factors and student's individual learning style, and (d) provided students with activities that kept them engaged from the beginning of the class to the end.

Teachers play various roles in a typical classroom, and the most critical is that of classroom manager. Marzano (2003) wrote,

The first high-profile, large-scale, systematic study of classroom management was done by Jacob Kounin in 1970. In his study, he analyzed videotapes of 49 first and second grade classrooms where he coded the behavior of the students and the teachers. As a result of his analysis, Kounin identified several critical dimensions

of effective classroom management. Those dimensions included: (1) “withitness” or a keen awareness of disruptive behavior or potentially disruptive behavior and immediate attention to that behavior, (2) smoothness and momentum during lesson presentations, (3) letting students know what behavior is expected of them, and (4) variety and challenge in seatwork. (p. 5)

Rules and Procedures for Classroom Management

Rules and procedures almost always set precedence in well managed classrooms. Although rules and procedures vary in different classrooms, all effectively managed classrooms have them (Emmer, Evertson, & Worsham, 2006). At the secondary level, most classroom rules and procedures include “(1) bringing materials to class, (2) being in an assigned seat when class started, (3) respecting others, (4) being recognized before speaking, and (5) respecting other people’s property” (Marzano, 2003. p. 19).

Rules and procedures refer to stated expectations regarding behavior. Some teachers involve their students in rule setting to promote student ownership and responsibility for their own behavior (Emmer et al., 2006). Rules and procedures should vary according to the task at hand. At the secondary level, it is important to have rules and procedures for “(1) the beginning and ending of the school day, (2) transitions and interruptions, (3) use of materials and equipment, (4) group work, and (5) seatwork and teacher-led activities” (Marzano, 2003, p. 19).

The manner in which the class begins or ends sets the tone for what happens next. At the secondary level, rules and procedures that pertain to the beginning and ending of class commonly address the following areas: “(1) taking attendance, (2) addressing students who have missed work because of absences, (3) dealing with students who are

tardy, and (4) clear expectations for the end of class and the next class period” (Marzano, 2003, p. 20).

At the secondary level, students have to leave and enter the classroom for a variety of reasons. Rules and procedures that pertain to transition and interruptions should address the following areas: “(1) leaving the room, (2) returning to the room, (3) fire and disaster drills, (4) announcements on the school intercom, and (e) the lunch period” (Marzano, 2003, p. 21).

Marzano (2003) also noted that the need for materials and equipment were critical to most secondary subject area teachers and a vital component of well managed classrooms. Rules and procedures that pertain to the use of materials and equipment should address the following areas: (a) distributing material, (b) collecting materials, and (c) storage of materials.

Classroom Management Models

Effective classroom management of disruptive behaviors in middle and high schools is a national concern. In light of this concern, schools often rely on punitive practices such as office referrals or suspensions/expulsions that frequently do little to create safer educational environments (Oswald, Safran, & Johanson, 2005).

Positive Behavior Supports

Schools face a number of challenges in educating students. However, a growing body of research demonstrates the utility of proactive and preventive approaches to dealing with challenging behavior in schools. One such approach is through Positive Behavior Supports (PBS; Lassen et al., 2006).

PBS is an approach to dealing with exigent behavior that includes a wide range of systematic and individualized strategies aimed at improving individual quality of life (Carr et al., 2002). The overarching intent of PBS is to create environments that support social and learning outcomes while preventing the occurrence of problem behaviors (Trussell, 2008).

PBS facilitates student success through a team-based approach and is increasingly being adopted as a school-wide, preventive strategy to manage problem behaviors (Oswald et al., 2005). Utilizing this approach, school-based PBS teams develop interventions that concentrate on any of four systems that address desired behaviors. Those systems include

(1) school-wide systems centered on the entire student body, (2) specific classroom interventions aimed at enforcing classroom rules, (3) individual student interventions which focus on behavior intervention plans targeted for at-risk students who require intensive support, and (4) non-classroom interventions that focus on the utilization of active supervision and teaching pro-social behaviors. (Oswald et al., 2005, p. 266)

Classroom Organization and Management Program

Another well-researched classroom management model is the Classroom Organization and Management Program (COMP). Marzano (2003) indicated that the COMP was developed by Evertson (1995) and her colleagues at Vanderbilt University. In addition to its strong emphasis on rules and procedures, the program addresses techniques for (a) organizing the classroom, (b) developing student accountability, (c) planning and organizing instruction, (d) conducting instruction and maintaining

momentum, and (e) getting off to a good start (Marzano, 2003). COMP was designed to be an inquiry-based approach to staff development for K-12 educators. During the 6-18 weeks of in-service training, teachers get the opportunity to (a) analyze their classroom practice using a series of checklists, (b) try out research-based strategies, and (c) examine the effectiveness of their efforts (Evertson, 1995).

Think Time

Think Time, another highly structured program model, has been shown to decrease disruptive behavior in students as well as increase student engagement (Nelson & Carr, 1999). The Think Time program model consists of three basic goals. Those goals are (a) to provide consistent consequences throughout the whole school when students exhibited disruptive behavior, (b) to provide students with feedback for their disruptive behavior and to allow for planning to avoid similar incidents, and (c) to enable teachers and students to cut off negative social exchanges and initiate positive ones. Utilizing this model, teachers employ specific procedures for addressing inappropriate behavior, while making every attempt to correct the behavior in the context of the regular classroom. If students cannot rectify the behavior in the regular classroom, they are sent to the Think Time classroom, where they are expected to analyze and think seriously about their behavior. Students do not return to the regular classroom until they demonstrate an awareness of their negative behavior and understand appropriate alternative behaviors (Marzano, 2003).

Assertive Discipline

Assertive Discipline, another widely used behavior modification approach is based on traditional behavior modification in which misbehavior results in specific

consequences (Canter & Canter, 1976). Implementation of the current version of Assertive Discipline involves five steps. The first step focuses on establishing an optimistic climate for discipline. This requires teachers to replace pessimistic expectations of students with optimistic ones. The second step requires teachers to learn about and practice assertive behavior. The third step is to establish limits and consequences. The fourth step is follow-through and the fifth step is implementation of a reward system for positive behavior (Marzano, 2003).

Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement

Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement (TESA), another behavior modification program, is based on the underlying principle that teachers should ensure that their behaviors are equal and equitable for all students; therefore creating an environment where all students feel accepted. This model focuses on 15 teacher behaviors that are organized into three strands (Marzano, 2003). Those strands include (a) the response opportunity strand which addresses equitable distribution of positive responses, (b) the feedback strand which addresses affirmation and praise for correct performances, and (c) the personal regard strand which addresses proximity, courtesy and personal interest.

Three-Tier Model

McCurdy et al., (2007) acknowledged that the best approach secondary educators in urban settings could implement to curtail behavior concerns, school-wide, was through the implementation of a three-tiered model. The first tier, the universal support system, is designed to improve student behavior across the system. Emphasis is placed on the development of school-wide expectations and procedures to teach the expectations to all

students. The second tier promotes the development of selected interventions to address the needs of specific students. The third tier is designed to assist those students who experience the most serious and chronic patterns of behavior.

The prevalence of re-occurring behavior issues affects teaching and creates barriers to learning. Regardless of the behavior program/model a school or district chooses to implement, students and teachers must feel safe and secure at school in order to attain and sustain academic success (Edmondson, Fetro, Drolet, & Ritzel, 2007).

Safe and Orderly Environments

Safe schools are supportive schools. All things being equal, safe, and supportive schools are likely to be high performing. Prevention and school safety are often seen as marginal activities unconnected to the core of schooling (Osher, Smerdon, Woodruff, & O'Day, 2003). According to Corby (2004) there are seven standards by which schools must operate for all students to be considered safe. Those standards include

- (1) students having a clear understanding of how they are to behave in school and why,
- (2) rules being enforced and consequences administered humanely, fairly and consistently,
- (3) balances between efforts to promote appropriate conduct, discourage misconduct, and effectively handle misconduct when and if it occurs,
- (4) students feeling valued and cared for,
- (5) school authorities anticipating and preparing for situations that could be disruptive and dangerous,
- (6) physical environment of the school designed to promote the safety and well-being of all students, and
- (7) parents and community members committed to efforts to create and maintain safe schools. (p. 91)

Between 1980 and 2000, a dramatic rise in school violence and aggression resulted in public concern and several legislative responses to these problems. The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act and the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 are two examples of these legislative responses (Van Acker, 2007). In addition, schools took action to curb the growth of (a) antisocial, (b) violent, and (c) aggressive behavior by adopting increased security measures, such as (a) security guards, (b) metal detectors, and (c) video surveillance of public areas. Schools adopted zero-tolerance policies and often punished target behaviors, such as (a) violence, (b) aggression, (c) truancy, and (d) substance abuse with harsh and punitive consequences like suspensions and expulsion. In 2001, Stephens noted that Mississippi was one of only 12 states that created legislation or directives to adopt and implement safety plans in schools.

To ensure safe school environments while continuing to provide a quality education to students who displayed (a) antisocial, (b) violent, and (c) aggressive behavior, some schools have turned to alternative school programs. These programs were designed to educate at-risk and challenging students in a setting that is typically removed from the general education population (Van Acker, 2007).

A supportive, safe, and orderly school environment is critical to the work and learning experiences of both teachers and students (Yoon & Gilchrist, 2003). Edmondson et al., (2007) suggested that administrative support was critical in providing safe school environments. According to the Association for Effective Schools (1996), for a school environment to be deemed safe, there was an orderly, purposeful, and businesslike atmosphere which was free from the threat of physical harm. Also, for the environment to be deemed safe, the school climate was conducive to teaching and learning and not oppressive.

Teacher's Perceptions About Discipline

Munn, Johnstone, and Sharp (2004) reported that it was important to remember that there have been concerns about the standards of pupil behavior for as long as there have been schools. The trends in teacher perceptions suggested an increasing number of teachers encountering a wide range of potentially disruptive behaviors in the classroom and around the school. The most marked increases were from secondary teachers.

Tan and Yuanshan (1999) reported that corporal punishment has long been abolished in many school districts in the United States. This move was prompted by the importance placed on self-discipline, the belief that the primary responsibility for behavior belongs to the student. When corporal punishment was first abolished in schools, many teachers felt inadequate handling classroom discipline because they believed that they no longer had a last resort. Many schools replaced the strap with in-school suspension or isolation rooms. Some schools developed a hierarchy of punishment ranging from a mild rebuke, to detention, to suspension and finally expulsion. Only in recent years have alternative methods been considered and explored in handling discipline problems (Tan & Yuanshan, 1999).

Tan and Yuanshan (1999) also mentioned that when teachers were asked to identify possible causes for some of the behavioral problems they encountered, some of the responses included (a) uncondusive home environments, (b) negative peer pressure, and (c) poor parenting. The lack of parental guidance/supervision was the most frequently cited reason. Tan and Yuanshan (1999) noted that it was felt that more often than not, teachers indicated that children were either left on their own (latchkey children) or left in the care of others. In addition, some teachers believed that some of the parents themselves were poor models.

Summary of the Review of Related Literature

School officials face the challenge of sustaining a full gamut of effective practices to promote the success of all students. In urban school settings, this challenge is exacerbated by multiple school and community-based factors, such as (a) poverty, (b) abuse, (c) neighborhood decay, (d) lack of fully credentialed teachers, (e) fewer school resources, and (f) more students with behavior problems (McCurdy et al., 2007).

Educating urban students can be rewarding, yet challenging. Attracting and retaining qualified teachers to carry out this task can be exigent due to the critical teacher shortages that school districts in the U.S. faced on a daily basis (Smith & Smith, 2006). Most urban teachers start their careers in disadvantaged schools with high turnovers and teaching the neediest students (Aaronson, 1999). About one-third of all newly hired urban teachers leave the profession if professional development programs and activities are not geared toward helping them manage their classrooms (Petty, 2007).

Educators view classroom management as the primary factor by which quality instruction and student learning occur. Discussions of classroom management focus on student behavior and control, which are considered vital components of this concept (Garrahy et al., 2005). Several models for effective classroom management are available. However, good classroom management is based on students' understanding of the behaviors expected of them. Although rules and procedures will vary from classroom to classroom, Emmer et al. (2006) agreed that all effectively managed classrooms have them. Safe and orderly school environments are critical to the work and learning experiences of both teachers and students. These types of environments usually exist where student misbehavior is not tolerated (Yoon & Gilchrist, 2003).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to compare middle school and high school teachers' perceptions of the discipline methods used in public schools in Jackson, Mississippi. Specifically, this study examined teachers' perceptions of their schools' climate and discipline issues. In addition, this study added to the paucity of research which currently existed on the implementation of disciplinary preventive methods in secondary schools.

This chapter described the methodology and procedures used to conduct this study. This chapter includes the following sections: research design, variables of the study, population, instrumentation, pilot study, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Design

The design of this research was descriptive and comparative. Descriptive research was appropriate for this study since answers were being sought about teachers' perceptions and utilization of classroom management strategies. Comparative research was also appropriate for this study because this type of research is used to determine differences in the behavior of groups of individuals. According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006), descriptive research determines and describes the way things are and

may also be used to compare how sub-groups view issues and topics, and comparative research is used to determine differences between groups.

Population

The target population for this study consisted of 430 middle and high school teachers from a select urban school district in Mississippi. At the time of the study, the district had 10 middle and 8 high schools. According to Gay et al. (2006), when conducting statistical research, participants should be randomly selected from the population. Participants for this study were randomly selected from the middle and high schools that were selected to participate in this study. The names of individual teachers were obtained from the school principal. Each school selected had an average staff size of approximately 40 teachers. Each staff member's name was placed on a list in no specific order. Of those 40 staff members, every second name was selected and invited to participate in this study.

Since the total target population size was approximately 430 teachers, the total number of respondents (239) was a little more than half. Each teacher selected to participate worked at least one year at his or her current school location. Each teacher selected was given a participant letter which explained the purpose of the study, the methods and procedures, and the risks, benefits and confidentiality of the study (see Appendix A).

Instrumentation

A survey instrument consisting of four parts entitled *Secondary School Discipline Survey* was used in this study (see Appendix B). Part I of the survey was designed to collect demographic information about the participants (e.g. gender, years of teaching

experience, and school classification). This information was collected to note the characteristics of participants. Part I consisted of two questions about the number of students who will or had participated in violence prevention programs and if the teacher was directly involved in programs designed to prevent violence. Part II of the survey was designed to gather information to determine teachers' perceptions about the climate at their schools. Part III of the survey was designed to gather information to determine teachers' perceptions about the discipline issues that existed at their schools, and Part IV of the survey was designed to gather information to determine teachers' perceptions about discipline preventive measures utilized in their schools.

The *Secondary School Discipline Survey* was developed by Heaviside et al. (1996). The survey was administered in the 1993-94 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data (CCD) Public School Universe File under contract with Westat, using the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Fast Response Survey System (FRSS). All FRSS survey questionnaires are public domain, and therefore may be used in whole or part to gather information and report data. The researcher modified the survey to exclude items related to police/law enforcement being called, because teachers may not have that information. The item on racial tension was also deleted, since the district being used was predominantly African American.

Part I of the instrument was designed to collect demographic information such as gender, years of teaching experience, and school classification. This information was used for descriptive data analysis only. Questions four and five on the survey were designed to collect participants' estimation of the percentage of students who participated in violence prevention programs and if they participated in violence prevention programs at their school.

Part II of the survey consisted of six items that were related to school climate. Each item in Part II was measured using a Likert-type scale.

Part III of the survey consisted of 18 items. The items in Part III were related to discipline issues that existed in secondary urban schools. Participants had to determine to what extent those issues existed in their schools. Part IV of the survey consisted of 15 items. The items in Part IV were related to discipline preventive measures, utilized to combat discipline issues in secondary schools. Participants needed approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the instrument.

Validity and Reliability of the “Discipline Problems in US Public Schools” Survey

Heaviside et al. (1996) reported that “the sample of public schools for the FRSS Survey on School Discipline was selected from the 1993-94 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data (CCD) Public School Universe File” (p. 26). Over 84,000 public schools were contained in the CCD Universe File, of which almost “79,000 (49,000 regular elementary schools, 14,000 regular middle schools, and 15,801 regular secondary) schools in the 50 states and the District of Columbia met the eligibility criteria for the original study” (p. 26).

During the design of the survey and the survey pretest, Heaviside et al. (1996) noted, “An effort was made to check for consistency of interpretation of questions and to eliminate ambiguous items” (p. 30). The questionnaire and instructions were “extensively reviewed by the National Center for Education Statistics” (p. 30). Heaviside et al. (1996) reported, “Manual and machine editing of the questionnaire responses were conducted to check the data for validity and reliability. Cases with missing or inconsistent items were re-contacted by telephone; data were keyed with 100 percent verification” (p. 30).

In addition, estimates of standard errors were computed. The standard error is a measure of the variability of estimates due to sampling. It indicates the variability of a sample estimate that would be obtained from all possible samples of a given design and size. Heaviside et al. (1996) noted,

Standard errors are used as a measure of the precision expected from a particular sample. Estimates of standard errors for this report were computed using a technique known as a jackknife replication method. All specific statements of comparison made were tested for statistical significance through *t* tests adjusted for multiple comparisons using the Bonferroni adjustment, and they are significant at the 95 percent confidence level or better. (p. 30)

Pilot Study

A pilot study is conducted to “field test aspects” (Gay et al., 2006, p. 91) of the survey. Gay et al. (2006) described a pilot study as a “small-scale trial of a study before the full-scale study” or a “dress rehearsal” (p. 91). The purpose of the pilot study was to identify areas of the survey that needed revision before conducting the actual study.

Sixteen middle and high school teachers were randomly selected from the 430 teachers in the total population. These 16 teachers, who were not included in the actual study, were contacted via U.S. ground mail and asked to participate in the pilot study (see Appendix C). In addition, pilot study participants were asked to make comments about any item that seemed unclear and to make comments/suggestions for improvement of the survey instrument.

The instrument entitled *Secondary School Discipline Survey* was sent to 16 teachers. The participants needed approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the

instrument. The participants were asked to complete and return the survey in a self-addressed stamped envelope. After the participants returned the surveys, the data were analyzed in an effort to make improvements on the instrument. Based on the results of the pilot study, the researcher did not have to make revisions to the instrument.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a questionnaire for secondary school teachers entitled *Secondary School Discipline Survey*. Prior to distribution, the proposal was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Mississippi State University for approval to conduct the study and approval was also obtained from the Jackson Public Schools Research Committee (See Appendix D and E). Principals at each school chosen were given letters detailing timelines and specific instructions about return of the surveys (see Appendix F). The principals of the middle and high schools selected provided the names of staff members at their schools. Of those staff members identified, only half at each school were randomly selected to participate in the study. The names of those staff members were placed on a list, and every second name was chosen to participate. The researcher went to the eight middle and five high schools and surveyed those teachers chosen during a staff meeting. Approximately 430 teachers were asked to complete the survey. However, only 239 of the surveys were returned.

Research participants were given (a) a letter describing the purpose of the research study, (b) a memorandum of support for the study from the Jackson Public School district's Office of Accountability and Support, and (c) a copy of the four-part survey *Secondary School Discipline Survey*. The participants needed approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the survey. Respondents were asked to return the survey in the

envelope provided to the researcher. Since at least 50% of the participants selected responded, no follow-up sequence was used.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS) 15.0. Descriptive statistical analysis using frequency and percentages distributions were generated to describe the demographic data for each item in part I of survey.

Sections II and III on the survey were analyzed using a Mann-Whitney U test. A Mann-Whitney U test is the appropriate test to use to determine whether two sets of ranked scores are representative of the same population at a selected probability level (Sprinthall, 2000). The probability or alpha level was .05. After calculating the Mann-Whitney U , all items, or sections from the survey, with a p value less than or equal to .05 revealed that there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores. All items with a p value greater than .05 revealed that no statistically significant differences existed between the mean scores. Section IV was analyzed using frequencies and percentages.

To calculate the U , the data must be in rank form; therefore the categories for each item were given a rank score. For Section II on the survey, the rank scores were as follows: strongly agree–5, agree–4, neutral–3, disagree–2, and strongly disagree–1.

For Section III on the survey, the rank scores were as follows: not a problem–4, minor–3, moderate–2, and serious–1. For Section IV on the survey, the data were in nominal form. The nominal data were coded as follows: yes–2 and no–1. According to the coding for the nominal data on the original survey, participants could receive up to 16

points on Section IV. Each item in sections III and IV were analyzed individually. In their analysis of the data collected in the original survey, Heaviside et al., (1996) analyzed individual items by computing the percentages of occurrence.

Table 3.1 shows each research questions’ independent variable, the variable level, and the statistical procedure used to answer each question in the study. Utilizing the total rank score, Mann-Whitney *U* tests were calculated to establish whether statistically significant differences could be detected between middle and high school teachers in a select Jackson Public School District in Mississippi, on school climate and discipline issues. Utilizing the nominal information, frequency/percent distributions were generated to establish the number of occurrences between middle and high school teachers’ perceptions of discipline preventive measures in the urban school district selected.

Table 3.1 Summary of Statistical Treatment of Data

Question	Independent Variable	Level	Procedure
1	School Climate	Ordinal	<i>U</i> Test/Descriptive
2	Discipline Issue	Ordinal	<i>U</i> Test/Descriptive
3	Discipline Preventive Measures	Nominal	Frequency/Percent Distribution/Descriptive

Research Question One

Research question one: Is there a statistically significant difference in middle and high school teachers’ perceptions of school climate’s impact on their ability to implement effective discipline strategies as measured by the *Secondary School Discipline Survey*? To answer research question one, the researcher calculated a Mann-Whitney *U* to analyze survey items 1-6 to determine if a difference existed between middle and high school teachers on the ordinal variable school climate. A Mann-Whitney *U* test is appropriate

when determining whether two sets of ranked data are significantly different at a selected probability level (Sprinthall, 2000).

Research Question Two

Research question two: Is there a statistically significant difference in middle and high school teachers' perceptions of discipline issues' impact on their ability to implement effective discipline strategies as measured by the *Secondary School Discipline Survey*? To answer research question two, the researcher calculated a Mann-Whitney *U* to analyze survey items 7-24 to determine if a difference existed between middle and high school teachers on the ordinal variable discipline issues. A Mann-Whitney *U* test was appropriate when determining whether two sets of ranked data were significantly different at a selected probability level (Sprinthall, 2000).

Research Question Three

Research question three: Is there a difference in middle and high school teachers' utilization of discipline preventive measures as measured by the *Secondary School Discipline Survey*? To answer research question three, the researcher used frequencies and percentages to analyze survey items 25-39 to determine if differences existed between middle and high school teachers on the nominal variable discipline preventive measures.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

McCurdy et al. (2007) noted that school officials need to use a full gamut of effective classroom management practices to promote the success of all students. In urban school settings, the challenge of using these practices is exacerbated by multiple school and community-based factors, such as (a) poverty, (b) abuse, (c) neighborhood decay, (d) lack of fully credentialed teachers, (e) fewer school resources, and (f) more students with behavior problems (Kunsch & Reibstein, 2007; McCurdy et al. 2007). This challenge could quickly lead to disarray in the classrooms and schools.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to compare middle and high school teachers' perceptions and utilization of the discipline methods used in public schools in Jackson, Mississippi. Specifically, this study examined teachers' perceptions of their school's climate and discipline issues. In addition, this study added to the paucity of research which currently existed on the implementation of disciplinary preventive methods in secondary schools.

This chapter includes the description of the survey results and the analysis of the data in this study. The research design for this study was descriptive and comparative. Data collected from the results of the four part instrument, *Secondary School Discipline Survey* were utilized to answer research questions posed in the study.

A pilot study was conducted prior to conducting the actual research study. The following research questions were addressed in this study.

1. Is there a statistically significant difference in middle and high school teachers' perceptions of school climate's impact on their ability to implement effective discipline strategies as measured by the *Secondary School Discipline Survey*?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference in middle and high school teachers' perceptions of discipline issues' impact on their ability to implement effective discipline strategies as measured by the *Secondary School Discipline Survey*?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference in middle and high school teachers' utilization of discipline preventive measures as measured by the *Secondary School Discipline Survey*?

Data were collected from 239 (58%) participants from a population of 430 ($N=430$). Using SPSS 15.0, the researcher assessed the reliability of survey items by examining their internal consistency. Using the results from the pilot and the actual study, reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) of .84 and .95 were calculated respectively.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was completed prior to conducting the actual research study. Sixteen middle and high school teachers were randomly selected. These 16 teachers, who were not included in the actual study, were contacted via U.S. ground mail and asked to respond to the survey to make comments about any items that seemed unclear. Pilot participants were given a survey evaluation form (Appendix C) and were asked to make

comments/suggestions for improvement of the survey. Based on the results of the pilot study, the researcher did not have to make changes to the survey instrument.

Demographic Data

Demographic data were obtained from Part I of the survey. Frequency distributions and percentages were used to describe the demographic information for respondents in this study. The descriptive statistics for the demographic data collected is presented in tables 4.1 through 4.6. The population in this study consisted of 430 middle and high school teachers in a select urban school district in Mississippi. Of the surveys distributed, 239 were returned with a response rate of 58%.

Sex of the Respondents

Table 4.1 shows the summarized the sex of the respondents. The majority (72%) of the respondents were female.

Table 4.1 Sex of the Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	67	28
Female	172	72
Total	239	100

Years of Teaching Experience of the Respondents

Table 4.2 summarizes the years of teaching experience of the respondents. The majority (48%) of the respondents were novice teachers (0-07 years of teaching).

Table 4.2 Years of Teaching Experience of the Respondents

Years	Frequency	Percentage
0-07	116	48
08-14	42	18
15-21	30	13
21 or more	51	21
Total	239	100

Classification of Respondents' School

Table 4.3 shows the classification of the respondents' school. More than half (58%) of the respondents were high school teachers.

Table 4.3 Classification of Respondents' School

Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Middle	100	42
High	139	58
Total	239	100

Respondents' Students Participating in Violence Prevention Programs

For the next question of the demographic section, respondents were to indicate how many of their students participated in violence prevention programs. Table 4.4 shows that of the respondents, only 67 (28%) indicated that 21 or more of their students participated in violence prevention programs.

Respondents Who Participated in Violence Prevention Programs

For the last question in the demographic section, respondents were to indicate whether or not they participated in violence prevention programs. Table 4.5 shows that a little more than half (52%) of the respondents indicated that they did not participate in violence prevention programs.

Table 4.4 Number of Respondents' Students Participating in Violence Prevention

Number of Students	Frequency	Percentage
0-05	114	48
06-10	30	12
11-15	12	05
16-20	16	07
21 or more	67	28
Total	239	100

Table 4.5 Number of Respondents Who Participated in Violence Prevention Programs

Number of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Participated	116	48
Non-Participation	123	52
Total	239	100

Research Questions Analysis

Research Question One

Research question one: Is there a statistically significant difference in middle and high school teachers' perceptions of school climate's impact on their ability to implement effective discipline strategies as measured by the *Secondary School Discipline Survey*?

To answer this research question, data were collected and analyzed using responses from survey questions 1 through 6 pertaining to school climate.

Of the six-sub items under the school climate section, only items 1, 3, and 5 which referred to rules, behavior, and the environment indicated findings that showed statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) (see Table 4.6). The researcher used the scale: 5–strongly agree, 4–agree, 3–neutral, 2–disagree, and 1–strongly disagree to help calculate the Mann-Whitney U and the mean rank. The mean of the ranks for each group was computed to see if there was a statistically significant difference in the mean rank for each group.

Statistically significant differences were found for three of the six sub-items under the school climate section. Item number one stated that school rules and regulations affecting student discipline are reasonable. A statistically significant difference was found between the perceptions of middle and high school teachers regarding item one ($U=5571.00, p<.05$). High school teachers had higher rates of agreement with item one ($m=129.92$) than middle school teachers ($m=106.21$).

Item number three stated that students are held accountable for their behavior. A statistically significant difference was found between the perceptions of middle and high school teachers regarding item three ($U=5155.00, p<.05$). High school teachers had higher rates of agreement with item three ($m=132.91$) than middle school teachers ($m=102.06$).

Item number five stated that the school environment is conducive to learning. A statistically significant difference was found between the perceptions of middle and high school teachers regarding item five ($U=5741.00, p<.05$). High school teachers had higher rates of agreement with item four ($m=128.70$) than middle school teachers ($m=107.91$).

The other three sub-items, item two, school rules and expectations concerning discipline are clearly explained to all students ($U=6122.00$); item four ($U=6133.00$), the school provides students and teachers with a safe and orderly environment; and item six ($U=6810.50$), the school has a requirement that all visitors sign or check in before entering the building, did not reveal statistically significant differences ($p>.05$). The rates of agreement between middle and high school teachers on these items were similar.

Table 4.6 School Climate

	Rules		Behavior		Environment	
	M	H	M	H	M	H
N	100	139	100	139	100	139
Mean Rank	106.21	129.92	102.06	132.91	107.91	128.70
U	5571.00		5155.00		5741.00	
<i>p</i>	.00*		.00*		.01*	

**p* value of < .05 is statistically significant

**M-Middle School Group

***H-High School Group

Research Question Two

Research question two: Is there a statistically significant difference in middle and high school teachers' perceptions of discipline issues' impact on their ability to implement effective discipline strategies as measured by the *Secondary School Discipline Survey*? The researcher used the scale: 4—not a problem, 3—minor, 2—moderate, and 1—serious to help calculate the Mann-Whitney *U* and the mean rank.

Of the 18 sub-items under the discipline issues section, 13 sub-items, numbers 7-9 and 11-20, showed significant differences ($p < .05$) (see Tables 4.7-4.10). For this section on the survey, teachers had to indicate whether they perceived that these items existed in their schools. Item 7 was student tardiness. In Table 4.7, it is revealed that a statistically significant difference was found between the perceptions of middle and high school teachers regarding item 7 ($U=4643.00, p<.05$). Middle school teachers had higher rates of agreement that item 7 was less of a problem ($m=143.07$) than high school teachers ($m=103.40$).

Item 8 was student absenteeism. In Table 4.7, it is revealed that a statistically significant difference was found between the perceptions of middle and high school teachers regarding item 8 ($U=4184.00, p<.05$). Middle school teachers had higher rates

of agreement that item 8 was less of a problem ($m=147.66$) than high school teachers ($m=100.10$).

Item 9 was students cutting class. In Table 4.7, it is revealed that a statistically significant difference was found between the perceptions of middle and high school teachers regarding item 9 ($U=4318.50, p<.05$). Middle school teachers had higher rates of agreement that item 9 was less of a problem ($m=146.32$) than high school teachers ($m=101.07$).

Item 11 was robbery of items over \$10.00. In Table 4.7, it is revealed that a statistically significant difference was found between the perceptions of middle and high school teachers regarding item 11 ($U=5258.00, p<.05$). Middle school teachers had higher rates of agreement that item 11 was less of a problem ($m=136.92$) than high school teachers ($m=107.83$).

Item 12 was theft of items over \$10.00. In Table 4.8, it is revealed that a statistically significant difference was found between the perceptions of middle and high school teachers regarding item 12 ($U=5149.00, p<.05$). Middle school teachers had higher rates of agreement that item 12 was less of a problem ($m=138.01$) than high school teachers ($m=107.04$).

Table 4.7 Discipline Issues (Tardies, Student Absentees, Cutting Class, and Robbery)

	Tardies		Absentees		Cutting Class		Robbery	
	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H
N	100	139	100	139	100	139	100	139
Mean Rank	143.07	103.40	147.66	100.10	146.32	101.07	136.92	107.83
U	4643.00		4184.00		4318.50		5258.00	
<i>p</i>	.00*		.00*		.00*		.00*	

**p* value of < .05 is statistically significant

**M-Middle School Group

***H-High School Group

Item 13 was vandalism of school property of items over \$10.00. In Table 4.8, it is revealed that a statistically significant difference was found between the perceptions of middle and high school teachers regarding item 13 ($U=5149.00, p<.05$). Middle school teachers had higher rates of agreement that item 13 was less of a problem ($m=138.01$) than high school teachers ($m=107.04$).

Item 14 was student alcohol use. Table 4.8 reveals that a statistically significant difference was found between the perceptions of middle and high school teachers regarding item 14 ($U=4002.50, p<.05$). Middle school teachers had higher rates of agreement that item 14 was less of a problem ($m=149.48$) than high school teachers ($m=98.79$).

Item 15 was student drug use. Table 4.8 reveals that a statistically significant difference was found between the perceptions of middle and high school teachers regarding item 15 ($U=3945.00, p<.05$). Middle school teachers had higher rates of agreement that item 15 was less of a problem ($m=150.05$) than high school teachers ($m=98.38$).

Table 4.8 Discipline Issues (Theft, Vandalism, Student Alcohol Use, and Drug Use)

	Theft		Vandalism		Student Alcohol		Student Drug	
	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H
N	100	139	100	139	100	139	100	139
Mean Rank	138.01	107.04	134.45	109.60	149.48	98.79	150.05	98.38
U	5149.00		5505.00		4002.50		3945.00	
<i>p</i>	.00*		.00*		.00*		.00*	

**p* value of < .05 is statistically significant

**M-Middle School Group

***H-High School Group

Table 4.9 Discipline Issue (Sale of Drugs on School Grounds)

	M	H
N	100	139
Mean Rank	138.01	107.04
U	4494.50	
<i>p</i>	.00*	

**p* value of < .05 is statistically significant

**M-Middle School Group

***H-High School Group

Item 16 was the sale of drugs on school grounds. In Table 4.9, it is revealed that a statistically significant difference was found between the perceptions of middle and high school teachers regarding item 16 ($U=5149.00, p<.05$). Middle school teachers had higher rates of agreement that item 16 was less of a problem ($m=138.01$) than high school teachers ($m=107.04$).

Item 17 was student possession of weapons. Table 4.10 reveals that a statistically significant difference was found between the perceptions of middle and high school teachers regarding item 17 ($U=5016.00, p<.05$). Middle school teachers had higher rates of agreement that item 17 was less of a problem ($m=139.34$) than high school teachers ($m=106.09$).

Item 18 was verbal abuse of teachers by student. In Table 4.10, it is revealed that a statistically significant difference was found between the perceptions of middle and high school teachers regarding item 18 ($U=5821.50, p<.05$). Middle school teachers had higher rates of agreement that item 18 was less of a problem ($m=131.29$) than high school teachers ($m=111.88$).

Item 19 was physical abuse of teachers by student. In Table 4.10, it is revealed that a statistically significant difference was found between the perceptions of middle and high school teachers regarding item 19 ($U=5077.50, p<.05$). Middle school teachers had

higher rates of agreement that item 19 was less of a problem ($m=138.73$) than high school teachers ($m=106.53$).

Item 20 was gangs. In Table 4.10, it is revealed that a statistically significant difference was found between the perceptions of middle and high school teachers regarding item 20 ($U=4774.00, p<.05$). Middle school teachers had higher rates of agreement that item 20 was less of a problem ($m=141.76$) than high school teachers ($m=104.35$).

Table 4.10 Discipline Issues (Possession of Weapons, Verbal Abuse by Students, Physical Abuse by Students, and Gangs)

	Weapons		Verbal Abuse		Physical Abuse		Gangs	
	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H
N	100	139	100	139	100	139	100	139
Mean Rank	139.34	106.09	131.29	111.88	138.73	106.53	141.76	104.35
U	5016.00		5821.00		5077.50		4774.00	
<i>p</i>	.00*		.02*		.00*		.00*	

**p* value of $< .05$ is statistically significant

**M-Middle School Group

***H-High School Group

The other five sub-items, item 10 and items 21-24, revealed findings that showed no statistically significant differences ($p>.05$) between middle and high school teachers' perceptions about discipline issues that existed at their schools (item 10-physical conflicts among students ($p=.09$), 21-teacher absenteeism ($p=.13$), 22-teacher alcohol use ($p=.06$), 23-teacher drug use ($p=.29$), and 24-inappropriate student behavior interrupting classroom instruction ($p=.20$). The rates of agreement between middle and high school teachers on these items were similar.

Research Question Three

Research question three: Is there a difference in middle and high school teachers' utilization of discipline preventive measures as measured by the *Secondary School Discipline Survey*? Section IV consisted of 15 sub-items. Participants could respond by indicating yes or no as to whether or not the items listed were present at their schools. Table 4.11 reveals the frequency and percentage of preventive measures that respondents indicated were present in their schools.

Table 4.11 Frequency and Percentage of Discipline Preventive Measures Indicated by Respondents

Group	Frequency/Percentage Middle		Frequency/Percentage High	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
School Grounds	55/55%	45/45%	105/76%	34/24%
School Building	91/91%	09/9%	122/88%	17/12%
Metal Detectors	89/89%	11/11%	89/64%	50/36%
Random Searches	67/67%	33/33%	95/68%	44/32%
Zero Weapons	93/93%	7/7%	132/95%	7/5%
Zero Drugs	97/97%	3/3%	129/93%	10/7%
Zero Alcohol	96/96%	4/4%	122/88%	17/12%
Uniform Policy	97/97%	3/3%	45/32%	94/68%
Mentor-Mentee	79/79%	21/21%	101/73%	38/27%
Character Ed	86/86%	14/14%	108/78%	31/22%
Peer Mediation	51/51%	49/49%	70/50%	69/50%
Counseling	84/84%	16/16%	116/84%	23/16%
Classroom Manage	87/87%	13/13%	124/89%	15/11%
Review Discipline	71/71%	29/29%	119/86%	20/14%
Parent/Community	53/53%	47/47%	93/67%	46/33%

A higher percentage of middle school teachers indicated that the following items were present/being utilized at their schools than high school teachers: item 26- controlled access to the school building (*M*-91%, *H*-88%); item 27- metal detectors (*M*-89%, *H*-64%); item 30- zero tolerance policy for drugs (*M*-97%, *H*-93%); item 31- zero tolerance policy for alcohol (*M*-96%, *H*-88%); item 32- uniform policy (*M*-97%, *H*-32%); item 33- mentor-mentee program (*M*-79%, *H*-73%); item 34- character education curriculum (*M*-86%, *H*-78%); and item 35- peer mediation teams (*M*-51%, *H*-50%). However, a higher percentage of high school teachers indicated that the following items were present/being utilized at their schools; item 25- controlled access to school grounds (*M*-55%, *H*-76%); item 28- random searches (*M*-67%, *H*-68%); zero tolerance for weapons (*M*-93%, *H*-95%); professional development on classroom management (*M*-87%, *H*-89%); regular review of discipline practices (*M*-71%, *H*-86%); community/parent involvement (*M*-53%, *H*-67%).

The next several sections refer to specific questions on the survey as they relate to discipline preventive measures. The information for each section was obtained from Table 4.11. In addition, descriptive statistics for the discipline preventive measures included on the survey are listed in table 4.12.

Discipline Preventive Measures

Controlled Access

Questions 25 and 26 under Section IV are written to obtain information about whether or not there is controlled access to the school grounds and building. Most (76%) of high school teachers and approximately half (55%) of middle school teachers indicated that there was controlled access to school grounds. Most (91%) percent of middle school

teachers and 88% of high school teachers indicated that there was controlled access to their school buildings. Middle and high school teachers' responses were similar in that there was only a 3% difference in their responses.

Table 4.12 Mode, Mean, Standard Deviation, and Median for Discipline Preventive Measures

Item	N	Mode	Mean	S.D.	Median
Grounds	239	2.00	1.69	.52	2.00
Building	239	2.00	1.91	.36	2.00
Metal Detectors	239	2.00	1.76	.47	2.00
Random Searches	239	2.00	1.69	.50	2.00
Zero Weapons	239	2.00	1.95	.28	2.00
Zero Drugs	239	2.00	1.95	.24	2.00
Zero Alcohol	239	2.00	1.91	.28	2.00
Uniform Policy	239	2.00	1.59	.49	2.00
Mentor-Mentee	239	2.00	1.75	.43	2.00
Character Ed	239	2.00	1.81	.39	2.00
Peer Mediation	239	2.00	1.51	.50	2.00
Counseling	239	2.00	1.84	.37	2.00
Classroom Manage	239	2.00	1.88	.32	2.00
Review Discipline	239	2.00	1.80	.40	2.00
Parent/Community	239	2.00	1.61	.49	2.00

Metal Detectors

Section IV, statement 27 of the survey, requested teachers to respond whether their schools used metal detectors and required students to pass through them. According

to the survey results, 89% of middle school and 63% of high school teachers indicated that there is a metal detector in their schools. This statistic indicated a difference of 26%. More middle school teachers indicated that they have metal detectors in their schools.

Random Searches

Section IV, statement 28 of the survey, requested teachers to respond whether or not their school conducts random searches. Their responses were very similar: 68% of high school teachers and 67% of middle school teachers indicated that their schools conduct random searches.

Zero Tolerance Policies

Section IV, statements 29-31 of the survey, requested teachers to respond whether or not their schools have zero tolerance policies for firearms/weapons, drugs, and alcohol. The responses for middle and high school teachers were similar for questions 29-31. For each sub-item, a little less than 100% of both middle and high school teachers agreed that there were zero tolerance policies for (a) weapons (middle school teachers 93% and high school teachers 95%), (b) drugs (middle school teachers 97% and high school teachers 93%), and (c) alcohol (middle school teachers 96% and high school teachers 88%).

Uniform Policy

Section IV, statement 32 of the survey, requested teachers to respond whether their schools had a uniform policy for students. The majority (97%) of middle school teachers indicated that their schools had uniform policies for students while only 32% of high school teachers indicated that their schools had a uniform policy. There was a big difference in the responses to this question: 67% more middle than high school teachers indicated that their schools had a uniform policy.

Mentor-Mentee Program

Section IV, statement 33 of the survey, requested teachers to respond whether their schools had a mentor-mentee program for students. The responses for this item were similar. Most (73%) of high school and 79% of middle school teachers indicated that their schools did have a mentor-mentee program for students.

Character Education

Section IV, statement 34 of the survey, requested teachers to respond whether their schools had a character education program for students. There was a slight difference of 8% on this question. More middle school teachers indicated that their schools had character education programs. Most (86%) of middle school teachers indicated that their schools had character education while only 78% of high school teachers indicated that their schools had character education programs.

Peer Mediation Teams

Section IV, statement 35 of the survey, requested teachers to respond whether peer mediation teams existed in their schools. The responses on this item were similar. Approximately half of middle (51%) and half of high school teachers (50%) indicated that their schools had peer mediation teams.

Counseling for At-Risk Students

Section IV, statement 36 of the survey, requested teachers to respond whether their schools had counseling for at-risk students. There was little or no difference on this item. Eighty-four percent (84%) of middle and 83% of high school teachers indicated that counseling was available for at-risk students.

Classroom Management Professional Development

Section IV, statement 37 of the survey, requested teachers to respond whether there was professional development on classroom management for teachers. There was very little difference in the responses on this item. Most (87%) of middle school and 89% of high school teachers indicated that professional development was available for teachers.

Section IV, statement 38 of the survey, requested teachers to respond whether their schools had a regular review of school-wide discipline practices. There was a slightly moderate difference (15%) in the responses on this item. Most (86%) of high school teachers indicated that there was regular review/revision of school-wide discipline practices, while only 71% of middle school teachers indicated that school-wide discipline practices were regularly reviewed.

The last statement, number 39, in section IV, requested teachers to respond whether community/parents were involved in school-wide violence prevention programs. There was a slightly moderate difference (14%) on this item. More than half (67%) of high school teachers indicated that the community/parents participated in school-wide discipline prevention programs and only 53% of middle school teachers indicated that the community/parents participate at their schools.

Students/Teachers Participating in Violence Prevention Programs

The last section under demographics consisted of two questions. Question one stated, "How many students in your classes participated in (or will participate in) programs designed to prevent or reduce school violence?" The responses on this item were similar. Table 4.13 indicates that 29% of middle and 27% of high school teachers stated that 21 or more of their students participated in violence prevention programs.

Table 4.13 Number of Students Participating in Violence Prevention Programs

Group	0-05	06-10	11-15	16-20	21+
Middle	48% (48)	09% (09)	05% (05)	09% (09)	29% (29)
High	47% (66)	15% (21)	05% (07)	05% (07)	27% (38)

Question two stated, “As a teacher, were you directly involved in programs or efforts designed to prevent or reduce school violence?” There was a slight difference in the responses (9%) to this item. Table 4.14 indicates that 53% of high school teachers stated that they participated in programs designed to reduce violence and only 42% of middle school teachers indicated that they participated.

Table 4.14 Number of Teachers Participating in Violence Prevention Programs

Group	N	Frequency		Percentage	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
Middle	100	42	58	42	58
High	139	74	65	53	47

Additional Comments from the Survey

In addition to the questions listed on the survey, participants could write additional comments. Listed below are the comments from the middle school participants:

1. The greatest challenges in discipline in our school are consistence and fairness.
2. As a school, we have maximum preparation to handle cases of violence or drug abuse on our premises.
3. I feel that if you are blessed with a principal who has strong and effective leadership skills, there will be few discipline problems.

4. My school promotes community and parent involvement in all school issues; I don't know of a specifically violence prevention program.
5. We have an advisor program.
6. More could be done, however, it is expected that teachers will address discipline actions.
7. The teachers, security, custodians, parents, and administrators collaborate to insure a harmonious, conducive atmosphere.
8. We have rules, but they are not strongly enforced; repeat offenders get too many chances.

The comments from the high school participants were:

1. Our school, like almost any other high school, encounters day to day behavioral, social, academic, and safety issues.
2. The idea of student achievement is encouraged through grades as well as character. I feel we try to produce quality citizens, not just grades.
3. If a school environment is not conducive to learning, it is very hard for teachers to be effective.
4. Problems reported as minor may have happened, but not on a regular basis.

Summary of Results

This chapter has presented the statistical results obtained from the study.

Descriptive statistics and Mann Whitney *U* were the statistical tests utilized to analyze the data and answer the research questions posed in the study.

The results of this study indicated that the majority (72%) of the respondents were females; a little less than half (48%) of the respondents were novice teachers (taught 0-07

years); and more than half of the respondents (58%) were high school teachers. The results from this study also indicated that nearly one-third (28%) of the teachers indicated that 21% or more of their students participated in violence prevention programs, and that approximately half (48%) of the teachers participated.

An analysis of research question one revealed that there were statistically significant differences between middle and high school teacher's perceptions of their school climate's impact on their ability to implement effective discipline strategies. For this question, high school teachers indicated rules being explained clearly, students being held accountable for their behavior, and the school environment being conducive to learning were all prevalent parts of the school climate. However, middle school teachers mean rank scores were lower for this item, meaning that they perceived these items to be less prevalent in their school climates.

An analysis of research question two revealed that there were statistically significant differences between middle and high school teachers' perceptions of discipline issues' impact on their ability to implement effective discipline strategies. For this question, middle school teachers indicated that student tardies, student absentees, students cutting class, robbery, theft, vandalism, student alcohol use, student drug use, the sale of drugs, possession of weapons, verbal abuse of teachers by students, physical abuse of teachers by students, and gangs were discipline issues that had less of an impact on their ability to implement effective discipline strategies than high school teachers.

An analysis of research question three revealed that there were differences in middle and high school teachers' utilization of discipline preventive measures. Data results indicated that more middle school teachers noted that metal detectors were in their schools. More middle school teachers indicated that there was a uniform policy at their

schools, and more middle school teachers indicated that they had character education programs at their schools. However, more high school teachers noted that parents/community involvement was a big part of the preventive measures used at their schools.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Urban schools are typically defined by high concentrations of poverty and are further distinguished by (a) high rates of student mobility, (b) difficulty in hiring qualified teachers, and (c) large numbers of classroom discipline problems (Lannie & McCurdy, 2007). Teachers electing to teach in urban schools must come with a cache of pedagogy and behavior management strategies to effectively teach and deal with students (Lippman et al., 1996). Educators who work in urban settings frequently face the challenge to increase desirable behaviors while simultaneously attempting to decrease undesirable behaviors (Ryan et al., 2007). Preventing and managing discipline problems in the context of a classroom's swiftly occurring and often unpredictable events is a complicated phenomenon, especially when administrators expect to see effective lessons that engage students and raise achievement (Zuckerman, 2007).

This study surveyed middle school and high school teachers to compare their perceptions of the discipline methods used in public schools in Jackson, Mississippi. Specifically, this study examined teachers' perceptions of their school's climate. Information and data were collected regarding selected variables (e.g. school climate, school discipline issues, school discipline preventive measures, and the number of students and teachers participating in programs aimed at preventing school violence) to

describe urban school teachers' perceptions of their school climates and discipline issues as well as the preventive measures utilized to combat discipline issues.

The research design for this study was descriptive and comparative. The researcher used comparative descriptive statistics to answer the three research questions posed in the study. A Mann Whitney *U* was calculated from the data collected in order to answer research questions 1 and 2, which dealt with teachers' perception of their school climate and the discipline issues they faced. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to answer research question 3 which addressed how discipline preventive measures were utilized. Part I of the survey was designed to collect demographic information about the participants (e.g. gender, years of teaching experience, and school classification). Part I consisted of 2 questions about the number of students and teachers who had or would participate (respectively) in violence prevention programs.

Part II of the survey was designed to gather information to determine teachers' perceptions about the climate at their school. Part III of the survey was designed to gather information to determine teachers' perceptions about the discipline issues that existed at their school, and Part IV of the survey was designed to gather information to determine teachers' perceptions about discipline preventive measures utilized in their school. Two hundred-thirty nine middle and high school teachers from Jackson, Mississippi, returned usable responses.

Discussion

The results of this study indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between middle and high school teachers' perceptions of their school climate's impact on their ability to implement effective discipline strategies. Of the six items under the school

climate section, only the items that referred to behavior, rules, and the environment indicated findings that showed statistically significant differences with $p < .05$; (behavior=.00; rules=.00; and environment=.01). As compared to middle school teachers, the responses from high school teachers revealed that they perceived that their students were held more accountable for their behavior, rules were explained more clearly, and the school environment was more conducive to learning. This difference was determined by the Mann Whitney U statistics of (5155.50=behavior; 5571.00=rules; and 5741.00=environment).

These findings agree with the previous findings of other researchers (Sutherland & Snyder, 2007; Virtue, 2007) who found that middle school students often suffered from both emotional and behavioral disorders which often lead to both academic and behavioral deficits. These dual deficits make it impossible for educators to provide effective instruction.

Statistical significant differences were also found for 13 of the 18 sub items under the discipline issues section ($p < .05$). Those items included student tardies ($p=0.00$, $U=4643$); student absentees ($p=0.00$, $U=4184$); cutting class ($p=0.00$, $U=4318.50$); robbery ($p=0.00$, $U=5258.00$); theft ($p=0.00$, $U=5149.00$); vandalism ($p=0.00$, $U=5505.00$); alcohol use ($p=0.00$, $U=4002.00$); drug use ($p=0.00$, $U=3945.00$); sale of drugs ($p=0.00$, $U=4494.50$); possession of weapon ($p=0.00$, $U=5016.00$); verbal abuse by students ($p=0.02$, $U=5821.50$); physical abuse by students ($p=0.00$, $U=5077.50$); and gangs ($p=0.00$, $U=4774.00$). In addition, the mean ranks for middle school teachers were much higher than the mean ranks for high school teachers on each of the twelve items; therefore, revealing that compared to high school teachers, middle

school teachers perceived that the discipline issues that occurred in their schools had less impact on their ability to implement effective discipline strategies.

Such findings were also supported by previous researchers (Wang, 1996; Wasonga et al., 2003) who suggested that urban high schools educate the majority of students who are at risk for school failure. Many of these students are disregarded while others suffer from labels such as (a) emotionally disturbed, (b) learning disabled, (c) educationally deficient, or (d) culturally disadvantaged.

With the stakes raised even higher, due to NCLB, Wasonga et al. (2003) indicated that urban schools faced more challenges to enable high school students to succeed. High school educators have to help students become resilient learners who assume responsibility for acquiring knowledge and skills to sustain patterns of self-directed lifelong learning.

In addition, participants had to indicate whether or not they or their schools utilized certain discipline preventive measures. Differences existed on the use of metal detectors. Eighty-nine percent (89%) of middle school teachers indicated that detectors were used, while only 63% of high school teachers indicated that they used them. Seventy-six percent (76%) of high school teachers indicated that there was controlled access to their schools' group, while only 55% of middle school teachers indicated this as being the case at their schools. Most (97%) of middle school teachers indicated that there was some type of uniform policy at their schools while only 32% of high school teachers indicated that there was a policy. Most (71%) of middle school teachers indicated that there was regular review of the school-wide discipline policy and 86% of high school teachers indicated that there was a regular review. Lastly, 53% of middle school teachers indicated that parents/community was involved in efforts to combat discipline, while 77%

of high school teachers indicated that there was parent/community involvement at their schools.

According to the data, more high school teachers indicated that these preventive measures were being utilized at their schools. On all of the other measures listed, middle and high school teachers' utilization were comparable. These data are supported by previous researchers (Martella & Nelson, 2001) who concluded that urban educators are faced with a myriad of issues in the classroom. Among those issues were (a) inadequate resources, (b) meeting the needs of diverse learners, and (c) effectively managing the classroom. The need for highly qualified educators who can effectively manage classrooms in urban settings has reached a critical level.

Participants indicated their perceptions of their authority and responsibility for school-wide discipline. It was revealed that only 29% of middle school teachers noted that 21% or more of their students were involved in programs to combat school violence, while 27% of high school teachers indicated that this was the case. Also, 53% of high school teachers indicated that they participated in violence prevention programs while only 42% of middle school teachers indicated that they participated.

Conclusions of the Study

School climate is defined as the shared beliefs, values and attitudes that shape interactions between the students, teachers, and administrators (Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010). These tacit rules define the parameters of acceptable behavior and norms for the school. Given the relationship between school climate and positive student outcomes, such as improved academic achievement and reduced discipline problems, school climate

is often a target of school improvement initiatives and programs aiming to promote positive outcomes for students and staff.

Much of the research on classroom management, a critical aspect in the effectiveness of school climates, focuses on helping teachers control students (Lippman et al., 1996; Marshall, 2005; Rink, 2002). Research offers numerous ways for teachers to secure students' cooperation and involvement in classroom activities in order to create an environment conducive for teaching and learning (Matus, 2001). Since many urban students have low self-esteem (Sinclair et al., 2005; Wang, 1996; Wasonga et al., 2003), effective urban classroom managers should help students feel good about themselves, both educationally and socially. Many urban students dislike school, and have poor academic skills. Effective urban classroom managers should help those students find success both personally and academically.

Urban school leaders must be able to impact teaching and learning in their schools. In times of heightened concern for student learning, school leaders are being held accountable for how well teachers teach and for how much students learn (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Urban schools face a number of challenges in educating students. However, a growing body of research demonstrates the utility of proactive and preventive approaches to dealing with challenging behavior in schools (Lassen et al., 2006).

Classroom management strategies generally fall into the categories of reactive and proactive (Wilks, 1996). Reactive strategies pursue a student's inappropriate behavior, provide consequences, and are basically remedial in nature. Proactive strategies are conceptualized as being preventive with strong antecedent-based components intended to reduce the possibility of a student demonstrating inappropriate behavior (Boulden, 2010).

According to the findings of the study, few high school and even fewer middle school teachers participate in school-based programs aimed at curtailing school violence. Since Parris and Block (2007) indicated that teachers were the single most important factor in creating a well managed classroom, it is the responsibility of the school principal to ensure that teachers are active participants in school-based efforts that are both proactive and preventive in nature.

School administrators are becoming gradually more frustrated with the impact of negative student behavior on their schools. More than ever, the public perception is that student behavior is out of control. Although isolated instances of violence (e.g., school shootings) contribute to this perception, people are most concerned with the lack of discipline and control in schools (Rose & Gallup, 2005). As a result, schools create policies that try to increase discipline and control, often by adopting "get tough" practices. Schools set strict rules about the types of student behavior that are unacceptable and assign rather severe consequences for students who do not abide by the rules. When the initial policies prove ineffective, schools often respond by "getting tougher." That is, they invest in other security (e.g., metal detectors) and punitive measures (e.g., "zero tolerance" policies that result in expulsion) that actually have little impact on student behavior (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Simultaneously, schools are trying to close an ever-widening achievement gap and ensure that all students, including students with diverse academic abilities, make AYP.

Given the multiple competing initiatives and demands, schools need to invest in proactive approaches to organizing and managing resources. Specifically, schools need to identify clear and measurable outcomes (e.g., decrease problem behavior, increase academic achievement); collect and use data to guide their decisions; implement relevant,

evidence-based practices; and invest in systems that will ensure that practices are implemented with fidelity and sustained over time (Simonsen et al., 2008).

Several models for effective classroom management are available. However, good classroom management is based on students' understanding of the behaviors expected of them. According to the findings in this study, more middle school students participated (29%) in prevention programs designed to teach expected/desired behaviors, while fewer high school students (27%) participated. Although rules and procedures will vary from classroom to classroom and from school to school, Emmer et al., (2006) agreed that all effectively managed classrooms and schools have them.

Safe and orderly school environments are critical to the work and learning experiences of both teachers and students. These types of environments usually exist where student misbehavior is not tolerated (Yoon & Gilchrist, 2003).

Edmondson et al., (2007) suggested that administrative support was critical in creating this type of environment. According to the Association for Effective Schools (1996), for a school environment to be deemed safe, there is an orderly, purposeful, and businesslike atmosphere which was free from the threat of physical harm.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the results from this study, several recommendations are suggested for future research. These recommendations are listed below:

1. The results of this study revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between middle and high school teachers' perception of their schools' climate. Based on these results, a survey should be administered to middle school administrators and their teachers and high school

administrators and their teachers to see if there are differences in their perceptions of their school's climates.

2. The results of this study revealed that almost 100% of the high school teachers indicated that several kinds of discipline issues existed in their schools; however, less (27%) of them indicated that they participated in programs to help combat those issues. Therefore, it is recommended that a study be done to determine urban high school teachers' perceptions of their responsibility to help combat discipline issues in their schools.
3. Less than a third (29%) of middle and high school teachers (27%) who participated in this study indicated that 21% or more of their students participated in violence prevention programs. Therefore, it is recommended that a study be done in select middle and high schools that have high participation rates in their violence prevention programs to determine the effectiveness.
4. SWPBS is a proactive, systems-level classroom management approach that enables schools to effectively and efficiently support student and staff behavior. Since full implementation of this initiative is expected in all middle schools in Jackson for the fall of 2010, it is recommended that a study be created to explore the effectiveness of this initiative and the impact it will have on student achievement and discipline.
5. The findings of this study indicated that almost all of the middle school teachers noted that their students wear school uniforms. However, many behavior problems still exist. Based on these findings, a correlational

study should be done to determine if there is a relationship between school uniforms and positive behavior.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the results from this study, two recommendations are suggested for practice. These recommendations are listed below:

1. The results of this study revealed that almost 100% of the high school teachers indicated that several kinds of discipline issues existed in their schools. Therefore, it is recommended that school district offer teachers professional development opportunities on effective discipline strategies.
2. Less than a third (29%) of middle and high school teachers (27%) who participated in this study indicated that 21% or more of their students participated in violence prevention programs. Therefore, it is recommended that schools in the JPSD require all students to participate in the violence prevention programs offered at their school.

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APPENDIX A
LETTER TO RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Research Study Participants

15922 Midway Road
Terry, MS 39170

Name of Teacher
Address here
City, State, Zip

March 8, 2010

Dear Participant:

I am a doctoral candidate in the department of Leadership and Foundations at Mississippi State University. I am conducting a research study that is designed to compare discipline methods used in secondary public schools in Jackson, Mississippi. Specifically, this study will examine teachers' perceptions of their school's climate, discipline issues, and preventive measures used to combat discipline issues.

The population for this study will be approximately 180 teachers from the Jackson Public School District. Therefore, you are being invited to participate in this study. I realize that your professional duties and responsibilities are very demanding. The survey should take only 15 minutes to complete. Please note that your participation is strictly voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study, you may refuse to answer any question on the survey, and may withdraw from the study at any time. However, please know that your responses will be summarized with other teachers who respond to the survey and will be kept confidential. Code numbers will be written on the first page and will be used only for monitoring returns.

This study has been approved by the Jackson Public School District's Review Committee and by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Mississippi State University. If you have any questions about this study, you may contact me at 601/940-0183 or you may contact Dr. Linda Cornelious, the director of my dissertation at 662/325-2281. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects, please contact the Office of Regulatory Compliance at Mississippi State University at 662/325-3994.

When you complete the survey, please seal it in the envelope provided, and return it within a week to a locked drop-off box provided in the secretary's office. The researcher will personally collect the surveys from the locked drop-off box. I know that your time is valuable, but without your assistance, this research study cannot be completed.

Thanking you in advance for your cooperation. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Kerry Gray
Doctoral Candidate

MSU IRB
Approved: 4/15/10
Expires: / /

APPENDIX B
SECONDARY SCHOOL DISCIPLINE SURVEY

SECONDARY SCHOOL DISCIPLINE SURVEY

Notice to Participants: This survey is designed and administered for the purpose of gathering data to determine the effectiveness of discipline practices being utilized in secondary schools. Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. All information will be kept strictly confidential. Please do not put your name or any other identifying marks on your survey. **Thank you for your participation.**

Instructions: Place a check mark (✓) in the appropriate column. Please place only one check mark on each line and fill in other appropriate information as requested.

I. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Instructions: Please select one.

1. Gender

- A. () Male
B. () Female

2. Years of Teaching Experience

- A. () 0 - 07
B. () 08 - 14
C. () 15 - 21
D. () 22 or more

3. School Classification

- A. () Middle School
B. () High School

4. How many students in your classes participated in (or will participate in) programs designed to prevent or reduce school violence?

- A. (0-5) B. (6-10) C. (11-15) D. (16-20) E. (21 or more)

5. As a teacher, were you directly involved in programs or efforts designed to prevent or reduce school violence? A. Yes _____ B. No _____

II. SCHOOL CLIMATE

Please respond to the following statements about the climate at your school.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. School rules and regulations affecting student discipline are reasonable.					
2. School rules and expectations concerning discipline are clearly explained to all students.					
3. Students are held accountable for their behavior.					
4. The school provides students and teachers with a safe and orderly environment.					
5. The school environment is conducive to learning.					
6. The school has a requirement that all visitors sign or check in before entering the building.					

III. DISCIPLINE ISSUES

Please respond to the following statements about discipline issues that exist at your school.	Serious	Moderate	Minor	Not A Problem
7. Student tardiness				
8. Student absenteeism				
9. Students cutting class				
10. Physical conflicts among students				
11. Robbery of items over \$10				
12. Theft of items over \$10				
13. Vandalism of school property				
14. Student alcohol use				
15. Student drug use				
16. Sale of drugs on school grounds				
17. Student possession of weapons				
18. Verbal abuse of teachers by students				
19. Physical abuse of teachers by students				
20. Gangs				
21. Teacher absenteeism				
22. Teacher alcohol use				
23. Teacher drug use				
24. Inappropriate student behavior interrupting classroom instruction				

IV. DISCIPLINE PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Please respond to the following questions about the preventive measures that are used at your school to combat discipline issues. Does your school have:	Yes	No
25. Controlled access to school grounds (e.g. locked or monitored gates)?		
26. Controlled access to the school building (e.g. locked or monitored doors)?		
27. Metal detectors through which students must pass		
28. Random searches		
29. A zero tolerance policy for firearms/weapons		
30. A zero tolerance policy for drugs		
31. A zero tolerance policy for alcohol		
32. A school uniform policy for students		

2

IV. DISCIPLINE PREVENTIVE MEASURES CONTINUED:

Please respond to the following questions about the preventive measures that are used at	Yes	No
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APPENDIX C
PILOT STUDY LETTER

Letter to Pilot Study Participants

15922 Midway Road
Terry, MS 39170

Name of Teacher
Address here
City, State, Zip

March 8, 2010

Dear Participant:

I am a doctoral candidate in the department of Leadership and Foundations at Mississippi State University. I am conducting a research study that is designed to compare discipline methods used in secondary public schools in Jackson, Mississippi. Specifically, this study will examine teachers' perceptions of their school's climate, discipline issues, and preventive measures used to combat discipline issues.

The population for this study will be approximately 180 teachers from the Jackson Public School District. However, you are being invited to participate in a pilot study. I realize that your professional duties and responsibilities are very demanding. However, your participation in this pilot study will ensure that the survey instrument is clear and concise. The survey should take only 15 minutes to complete. Please note that participation in the pilot study is strictly voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this pilot study; you may refuse to answer any question on the survey, and may withdraw from the study at any time. However, please know that your responses will be summarized with other teachers who respond to the survey in the pilot study and will be kept confidential.

Please review the survey instrument attached for clarity, preciseness of instructions, and appropriateness of content. Please identify any unclear statements on the survey, and make suggestions and/or recommendations for any changes that you deem appropriate in the space provided.

This study has been approved by the Jackson Public School District's Review Committee and by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Mississippi State University. If you have any questions about this pilot study, you may contact me at 601/940-0183 or you may contact Dr. Linda Cornelious, the director of my dissertation at 662/325-2281. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects, please contact the Office of Regulatory Compliance at Mississippi State University at 662/325-3994.

I respectfully request that you complete the pilot survey to assist me in this research project. When you complete the survey, please seal it in the envelope provided and return it within a week to a locked drop-off box provided in the secretary's office. The researcher will personally collect the surveys from the locked drop-off box. I know that your time is valuable, but without your assistance, this research study cannot be completed.

Thanking you in advance for your cooperation. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Kerry Gray
Doctoral Candidate

MSU IRB
Approved: 4/15/10
Expires:

A Comparative Analysis of Teachers' Perceptions of Their School's Climate, Discipline Issues, and The Preventive Measures Used to Combat Discipline Issues in Secondary Public Schools in Metro Jackson, Mississippi

Survey Instrument Assessment Form
for Pilot Study

Directions: Please read the directions for each part of the survey instrument attached. If an error appears in the directions, please mark that error on the form. As you review the instrument, please read each statement for clarity, preciseness of instructions, and appropriateness of content. Statements that are unclear, vague, or ambiguous should be listed in the space provided. Please make suggestions and recommendations that would improve the survey instrument in the space entitled "Comments."

Part I-Demographic Information and Information on Violence Prevention Programs

Unclear

Statements: _____

Comments: _____

Part II-Survey of Teachers' Perception of their School's Climate

Unclear

Statements: _____

Comments: _____

Part III-Survey of Teachers' Perceptions of the Discipline Issues that exist at their schools

Unclear

Statements: _____

Comments: _____

Part IV- Survey of Teachers' Perceptions of Preventive Measures used to combat

Discipline

Unclear

Statements: _____

Comments: _____

APPENDIX D
MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY'S INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
(IRB) APPROVAL



MISSISSIPPI STATE

APPENDIX E
JACKSON PUBLIC SCHOOL'S INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
(IRB) APPROVAL



APPENDIX F
LETTER TO ADMINISTRATORS

15922 Midway Road
Terry, MS 39170

Name of Administrator
Address here
City, State, Zip

March 8, 2010

Dear Administrator:

I am a doctoral candidate in the department of Leadership and Foundations at Mississippi State University. I am conducting a research study that is designed to compare discipline methods used in secondary public schools in Jackson, Mississippi. Specifically, this study will examine teachers' perceptions of their school's climate, discipline issues, and preventive measures used to combat discipline issues.

This study has been approved by the Jackson Public School District's Review Committee and by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Mississippi State University. If you have any questions about this study, you may contact me at 601/940-0183 or you may contact Dr. Linda Cornelious, the director of my dissertation at 662/325-2281. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects, please contact the Office of Regulatory Compliance at Mississippi State University at 662/325-3994.

With your permission and assistance, I would like to survey the teachers at your school during the month of March. I realize that the professional duties and responsibilities of the faculty are very demanding. However, the survey should take only 15 minutes to complete. Please note that participation is strictly voluntary. Teachers may refuse to participate in this study, and may withdraw from the study at any time. Please know that the responses of teachers will be summarized with other teachers who respond to the survey and will be kept confidential. Code numbers will be written on the first page and will be used only for monitoring returns.

I respectfully request that you allow your teachers to participate in this study. When they complete the survey, they are to seal it in the envelope provided and return it within a week to a locked drop-off box provided in the secretary's office. The researcher will personally collect the surveys from the locked drop-off box. I know that your time is valuable and that of your faculty, but without your assistance, this research study cannot be completed.

Thanking you in advance for your cooperation. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Kerry Gray
Doctoral Candidate

MSU IRB
Approved: 4/15/10
Expires: / /