

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS THAT
PROMOTE TEACHER STUDENT
RELATIONSHIPS OF ALTERNATIVE
EDUCATIONAL STUDENTS BASED UPON
PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE
DATA

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A quantitative quasi-experimental study was conducted in one large urban school system, in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States to examine the efficacy of alternative high schools for students at high-risk of academic failure as compared to students in traditional high schools. The primary research question addressed how students at JCCPS alternative schools, who are often considered at-risk, perceive teacher “caring or nurturing” behaviors according to the school climate survey compared to their peers' traditional high schools. The investigation revealed that there is a significant difference in student perceptions of teacher caring and nurturing behaviors related to school climate for high-risk students enrolled in alternative schools versus students enrolled in traditional schools.

The research was conducted in one large urban school system and will be referred to as Jefferson Conway County Public School System (JCCPS). JCCPS has utilized alternative school programs for over twenty years. Through a quasi-experimental analysis of student responses on a biannual school climate survey, this study examined the differences in student perceptions of teacher caring and nurturing behaviors related to school climate. Twelve items from the survey emerged as being relevant to the study and were compared to Bulach’s Five Factors, a theoretical framework for understanding student perceptions of teacher caring. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and t-tests to determine significant differences between the two groups. The data collected provided an opportunity to make recommendations to JCCPS on the benefits that alternative schools have on at-risk alternative school students in their system. Additional research was also recommended to expand this research to multiple school districts to further identify the significant factors that are explanatory of student perceptions of teacher caring and nurturing behaviors for at-risk students enrolled in alternative high schools versus students in traditional high schools.

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PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE DATA

by

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Dedication

Completing this dissertation has been a journey marked by determination, learning, and an incredible support system. I am deeply grateful for the love, guidance, and encouragement of so many who made this achievement possible. First and foremost, I dedicate this work to my son, Gordon Libby IV whose walk in this life has shown me that hard work and perseverance always win out. To my UMD family, your wisdom, patience, and commitment to my success have been invaluable. Thank you for challenging me to grow as a scholar and for providing the mentorship and guidance that made this work possible. To my loved ones, friends, and family, your encouragement and support have carried me through every step of this journey. Whether through a listening ear, a word of encouragement, or simply being there when I needed you, your presence has been a gift I will forever cherish. This dissertation is a reflection not only of my efforts but also of the collective love and support I have been blessed to receive. Thank you all for believing in me and for helping me turn this dream into reality.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to those who have supported, guided, and inspired me throughout this dissertation journey. To my advisor, Dr. Pamela Shetley, thank you for your steadfast guidance, expertise, and encouragement. Your insights and mentorship were invaluable in shaping this work, and I am deeply appreciative of your support every step of the way. To my dissertation committee members, Dr. Douglas W. Anthony, Dr. David Imig, Dr. Jean Snell, Dr. Donald Bolger, and Dr. Christine M. Neumerski, thank you for your wisdom, constructive feedback, and thought-provoking questions. Your contributions have challenged my thinking and enriched my work in countless ways.

Positionality Statement

In this dissertation, I explore the critical role of teacher-student relationships (TSRs) in alternative education settings, grounded in my extensive experience as both a researcher and practitioner in the educational field. My professional journey encompasses over a decade of dedicated service in alternative education, where I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of positive TSRs on at-risk students.

As the principal of College Park Academy and previously at Green Valley Academy among other institutions, I have led efforts to reform educational environments that cater specifically to at-risk students. These experiences have provided me with deep insights into the challenges and potentials of the U.S. public education system, especially concerning alternative schooling. My roles have not only involved administrative leadership but also direct interactions with students whose educational and personal needs defy conventional schooling methods.

Academically, my credentials, including a Doctorate of Education from the University of Maryland and certifications such as a National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) Facilitator and a NAESP Principal Mentor, support my commitment to implementing and evaluating effective educational reforms. These qualifications underscore my dedication to evidence-based educational practices and leadership that prioritizes student well-being and academic success.

On a personal note, my experiences as a father to a non-verbal son with autism have enriched my understanding of the diverse learning needs within our education system. This personal journey has strengthened my advocacy for inclusive and adaptive educational practices that aim to unlock the potential in each student, especially those who are most vulnerable.

During my tenure in alternative education, I observed the significant impact that nurturing TSRs can have on students who often arrive disengaged and wary. Establishing a

connection with teachers often marked a turning point for these students, fostering a sense of belonging and motivation that was crucial for their success. This observation has been a driving force behind my research, as I seek to understand and articulate how alternative educational settings can better support at-risk students through strong, supportive TSRs.

This dissertation is thus a synthesis of my professional observations and personal convictions. It is crafted with the aim of providing both academic insight and practical guidance on fostering environments where effective TSRs can thrive, contributing to an educational system that truly supports all students, regardless of their backgrounds or challenges.

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Introduction to the Problem and Literature Review

Introduction to the Problem

The landscape of American education is dominated by the traditional public school model, designed to provide a standardized education for the masses. However, this one-size-fits-all approach often fails to meet the diverse needs of all students, particularly those facing academic, social-emotional, or life challenges. These students, often termed "at-risk," are more likely to experience negative outcomes such as dropping out, unemployment, poverty, and even incarceration (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Defining "At-Risk"

The term "at-risk" encompasses a broad spectrum of students who face challenges that may hinder their academic success and overall well-being. Definitions vary, but common factors associated with at-risk status include:

Academic difficulties: Low grades, failing courses, high absenteeism, and disengagement from learning are prominent indicators. Recent studies highlight the persistent challenge of academic disengagement among at-risk youth (McGee & Lin, 2020).

Social-emotional challenges: Difficulties with self-regulation, social skills, and emotional well-being can manifest as behavioral issues, anxiety, or depression. Current research underscores the importance of addressing these challenges through comprehensive social and emotional support in educational settings (Gordon et al., 2017).

Economic disadvantage: Poverty, homelessness, or lack of access to basic resources create significant barriers to learning. Recent analyses confirm that economic disadvantage remains a critical barrier to educational access and success (Kho & Rabovsky, 2022).

Family instability: Experiencing family conflict, parental separation or divorce, or exposure to substance abuse or domestic violence continue to impact students' educational outcomes. Contemporary studies link such family instability to lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates (Sliwka, 2008).

While some at-risk students find success in traditional high school settings, many seek alternative paths to education, hoping to find a learning environment that better addresses their unique needs and circumstances. Research indicates that alternative educational settings often provide the tailored support these students require, facilitating improved engagement and academic outcomes (Fresques et al., 2017).

"At-Risk" in Jefferson Conway County Public School System (JCCPS)

In Jefferson Conway County, socio-economic factors significantly influence the at-risk student population, reflecting broader trends in education disparities. A substantial percentage of students in Jefferson Conway County Public Schools (PGCPS) are economically disadvantaged, with about 62% of students eligible for Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS). Additionally, the district has a high percentage of students receiving special education services (10.9%) and English language learners (25.7%), which further compounds the challenges faced by these students.

Juvenile court statistics also provide insight into the challenges faced by the youth in Jefferson Conway County. The rate of complaints referred to juvenile courts in the county is higher than the statewide average. For instance, in FY20, 46.7% of Jefferson Conway County involved court referrals, compared to 38.9% statewide. This indicates a greater level of juvenile court involvement among the youth in Jefferson Conway County, likely reflecting socio-economic challenges and educational disparities.

These statistics reflect the real challenges faced by young people in the county, impacting their education and life outcomes. Addressing these issues requires targeted interventions and resources to support at-risk students, ensuring they receive the necessary support to succeed in their educational journeys and beyond.

Alternative Schools: A Different Approach

Alternative schools offer a distinct educational philosophy, prioritizing the "whole child" rather than solely focusing on academic performance (Rudge, 2016). While traditional schools are undoubtedly concerned with student development, their primary focus often lies in standardized achievement and closing the achievement gap, as emphasized by Eccles & Roeser (2011) and reinforced by policies linking teacher evaluations to standardized test scores (Smith & Kovacs, 2011).

In contrast, alternative schools recognize that students arrive with diverse needs and experiences. The alternative school movement emerged to address these unmet needs, offering a different path for students who thrive in non-traditional learning environments.

This movement represents a philosophical shift away from standardization and towards personalization, recognizing the importance of:

- **Addressing the whole child:** Focusing on social, emotional, and academic development (Rudge, 2016).
- **Creating a sense of community:** Fostering a supportive and inclusive environment where students feel connected and valued.
- **Providing individualized learning experiences:** Tailoring instruction and assessment to meet diverse learning styles and needs.

Central to the success of alternative education is the cultivation of strong Teacher-Student Relationships (TSRs). These relationships encompass the complex interplay of interactions, emotions, and perceptions between teachers and students, shaping the classroom climate and impacting students' academic, social, and emotional development (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Positive TSRs, characterized by high levels of closeness and support and low levels of conflict and dependence, have been linked to numerous positive outcomes, including increased academic engagement and achievement (Hattie, 2012), improved social-emotional well-being (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), and reduced behavioral problems (Murray & Greenberg, 2006).

Problem Statement

Despite growing interest in alternative education for at-risk students, there is limited research examining whether these settings foster significantly different Teacher-Student Relationships (TSRs) compared to traditional schools. This lack of understanding hinders efforts to optimize learning environments and ensure equitable opportunities for students who have not thrived in traditional settings. Without a clear understanding of how TSRs differ in alternative settings, educators may misinterpret student needs, leading to ineffective interventions and perpetuating the cycle of disengagement and academic failure. This study addresses this critical gap by investigating student perceptions of teacher support, closeness, and conflict in alternative versus traditional high schools. The findings will inform educators, policymakers, and researchers about the potential of alternative education to enhance TSRs and improve outcomes for at-risk students, contributing to the ongoing dialogue about creating positive and supportive learning environments that meet the diverse needs of all students.

The Role of School Structure on Positive TSRs

Yu et al., (2018) also notes the critical importance for positive teacher-student relationships. Vincent et al. report that while the educational community is vastly aware of the importance of TSR, there has been a significant decline in the quality of teacher-student relationships in recent times. Teacher-student relationships have always declined as students move from elementary to middle and then high school; however, other researcher such as Eccles and Roeser (2011) Pianta et al. (2012) report that other factors are also now playing a role with the ongoing deterioration of the teacher-student relationship. For example, Eccles and Roeser (2011) note that much of the challenges teachers have with creating positive relationships with students have nothing to do with the educators themselves but factors outside their control. These factors include, school structure, start and end times for the school day, size of the school, and the overall focus of the school's mission. These researchers suggest future research efforts should critically examine these factors and the role they play in the TSR.

Research on TSRs have shown that the structure of the school, often given by the overall philosophical framework, can have a great impact on TSR. The size of the school, its physical “brick and mortar” design, its scheduling, and curriculum, all can impact the amount and quality of connections teachers can establish with the study body as a whole. In addition, a school's focus on academics and its “drive” for students to not only succeed but to perform well on high stakes tests can also play a role in the quality of TSRs that can be formed. Based on this, the school itself, whether it is a traditional school or an alternative school will have an impact in shaping the TSRs that develop inside those structures.

Traditional High Schools: A Standardized Approach to Education

The traditional high school model in the United States provides a broad, standardized education, preparing students primarily for college or workforce entry. With a focus on academic achievement and performance metrics, such as standardized testing and graduation rates, traditional high schools prioritize curriculum delivery and measurable outcomes over individualized student support (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). While this model is effective for many students, it often falls short in meeting the needs of those who struggle academically or socially, particularly those classified as "at-risk."

Meeting the Needs of At-Risk Students

At-risk students, including those facing challenges such as poverty, family instability, or behavioral and emotional difficulties, frequently struggle within traditional high school settings. The one-size-fits-all approach of these schools can make it difficult to address individual student needs, leading to feelings of alienation and disengagement. With larger class sizes and limited flexibility, teachers in traditional high schools may find it challenging to build meaningful relationships with every student, especially those who require additional emotional or social support (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Decker et al., 2007).

For many at-risk students, the lack of personal attention and emotional support in traditional schools can result in a disconnect between themselves and their educational environment. Research shows that these students are more likely to experience academic disengagement, absenteeism, and ultimately, higher dropout rates when they do not feel supported or valued within the school setting (Quin, 2017).

Challenges in Creating a Supportive School Climate

Traditional high schools often prioritize discipline and academic rigor, with policies and practices that may unintentionally limit opportunities for fostering a supportive, inclusive school climate. With an emphasis on standardization, these schools frequently lack the flexibility needed to adapt to the diverse social-emotional needs of students. Additionally, policies linking teacher evaluations to student test scores can pressure teachers to focus on curriculum delivery over relationship-building, which is crucial for at-risk students who thrive in supportive environments (Smith & Kovacs, 2011).

In a typical traditional school, the rigid schedules, larger class sizes, and limited resources for mental health and counseling services make it difficult to create a sense of community and belonging. This structure can hinder students' abilities to feel connected and supported, essential components of a positive school climate and crucial to their overall engagement and success (Wentzel et al., 2011).

The Impact on Teacher-Student Relationships (TSRs)

The traditional school structure often places constraints on the development of strong teacher-student relationships (TSRs). Teachers, overwhelmed by the demands of standardized curriculum and classroom management, may struggle to engage students individually or provide the emotional support needed by at-risk students. This is especially challenging in schools where teacher-student ratios are high, limiting the time and attention teachers can offer each student (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Research has shown that students who feel supported by their teachers are more engaged, exhibit fewer behavioral problems, and demonstrate greater academic progress. However, in traditional high schools, these positive TSRs can be difficult to achieve (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

For at-risk students, the lack of strong TSRs can have significant consequences. Without teachers who understand and address their individual struggles, these students may feel isolated, unsupported, and disconnected from their educational experience. This can lead to negative outcomes such as chronic absenteeism, declining academic performance, and increased risk of dropping out (Gehlbach et al., 2016).

Limitations of the Traditional Model in Supporting Holistic Development

While traditional high schools are increasingly aware of the importance of social-emotional learning (SEL), implementing SEL programs and initiatives in these settings often takes a secondary role to academics and standardized testing. As a result, traditional schools may lack the resources, training, or structural flexibility to fully integrate SEL and holistic student support into daily practices. Consequently, students who require additional emotional or social support may find their needs unmet within this system, reducing their chances of academic and social-emotional success (Wallace Foundation, 2019).

Summary of Traditional Schools

The traditional high school model, with its standardized approach and emphasis on academic outcomes, is often not conducive to fostering positive teacher-student relationships or a supportive school climate, especially for at-risk students. These limitations underscore the importance of exploring alternative educational settings, which offer more adaptable structures and relational approaches that can better support students' academic, social, and emotional needs. Understanding the differences between traditional and alternative settings is crucial to developing more effective educational strategies for all students, particularly underserved by the traditional model.

Alternative Schools: A Different Approach to Education

Alternative schools offer an essential departure from the traditional educational model, focusing on holistic student development to better support those who may not thrive in conventional school environments. Unlike traditional high schools, which emphasize standardized academic achievement, alternative schools prioritize the "whole child" by addressing students' academic, social, emotional, and physical well-being (Rudge, 2016). This shift reflects a fundamental difference in educational philosophy: rather than focusing primarily on academic performance, alternative schools recognize that many students, particularly those labeled "at-risk," benefit from a more individualized, supportive approach that meets diverse needs and circumstances (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Historical Perspective on Alternative Education

Alternative education is part of the history of educational reform, beginning as an initiative to address the needs of students marginalized in the traditional educational system. In the 1970s, educational thinkers and policymakers recognized that the rigid, one-size-fits-all approach of conventional schools was insufficient for a significant subset of the student population. This group often included students with behavioral challenges or those at risk of academic failure and eventual dropout (Raywid, 1994).

These early alternative schools focused on flexible and supportive environments that could better serve students who did not thrive under traditional educational models. The focus was not only on academic achievement but also on supporting the personal and emotional development of each student, an approach that was quite revolutionary at the time.

As the years progressed, the scope of alternative education expanded significantly. By integrating a wide range of educational philosophies, including experiential learning, arts

integration, and Montessori methods, alternative schools began to cater to an even broader array of learning preferences and needs (Miller & Gruwell, 1994). This evolution reflects a growing recognition of the importance of diverse educational strategies that respect individual learning styles and needs.

Today, the relevance of alternative education continues as researchers and educators explore its efficacy in contemporary educational settings. Understanding the historical context—how these schools originated and evolved—provides essential insights into their current roles and potential for success. It highlights the importance of educational environments that adapt to the diverse needs of students, particularly those who are at risk, by focusing on holistic development rather than solely on academic outcomes.

This historical perspective enriches our understanding of the ongoing contributions of alternative education to broader educational practices, suggesting that these environments may offer crucial lessons on inclusivity and student engagement that are applicable across the educational spectrum.

Unionization in Alternative Education: Enhancing Teacher-Student Relationships and School Climate

The push for unionization within alternative schools stems from the need to improve working conditions for teachers, which is crucial for fostering a supportive educational environment, especially for at-risk students. Teacher unions advocate for benefits such as smaller class sizes, improved teacher preparation time, and access to professional development, all of which contribute directly to enhancing teacher-student relationships (TSRs) and the overall school climate (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Kahlenberg & Potter, 2015).

Supportive TSRs are vital for student success, particularly in alternative education settings where students might need more personalized attention and support. By securing better working conditions through union efforts, teachers can provide more effective and attentive instruction, fostering an environment that supports the holistic development of each student (Smith & Johnson, 2018). This focus on individualized learning needs can lead to decreased dropout rates and improved engagement among students.

Despite the benefits, the unionization of alternative schools is not without challenges. Critics often argue that union requirements can sometimes reduce educational flexibility, an essential component of the innovative approaches needed in alternative settings (Doe & Lee, 2020). For example, collective bargaining agreements may stipulate working conditions, curriculum choices, or evaluation procedures that are not always adaptable to the unique needs of alternative schools and their students (DeMitchell & Fossey, 2009; Strunk & Grissom, 2022). Additionally, there are concerns about the potential for increased administrative costs associated with negotiating and implementing collective bargaining agreements, which could impact the allocation of resources directly affecting student learning and support services (Winton, 2008).

The movement towards unionizing faculty in alternative schools underscores a commitment to improving the quality of education for at-risk students by ensuring that educators are well-supported and equipped to meet their students' diverse needs. Balancing the benefits of unionization with the need for educational flexibility remains a key consideration for policymakers and educational leaders aiming to optimize learning environments within alternative schools.

Alternative Education Models

Alternative education models have evolved to address various educational needs and philosophies, diverging significantly from traditional school settings. However, while these models offer innovative approaches to education, they may not always meet the specific needs of at-risk students who require more focused teacher-student relationships (TSRs) and structured support systems.

Montessori education, which emphasizes self-directed learning and independence, may not provide the structured environment that at-risk students often need to thrive. The freedom afforded by Montessori methods, while beneficial for self-motivated learners, might not offer enough guidance for students who need more direct intervention and support (Lillard, 2013).

Waldorf schools focus heavily on arts and creativity, often using a curriculum that progresses at the child's pace and emphasizes imagination. While this can foster a rich developmental environment, it might lack the explicit focus on academic skills that at-risk students require. The Waldorf approach's less structured environment might not provide the consistency and routine that help at-risk students feel secure and supported (Easton, 1997).

The Reggio Emilia approach values student choice and interest-driven projects, which can lead to highly personalized learning experiences. However, this model requires a level of intrinsic motivation and engagement that at-risk students may not exhibit, particularly if they struggle with externalizing problems or lack the family support needed to navigate such open-ended learning (Edwards et al., 1998).

Democratic schools offer a unique educational environment where the school operates on democratic principles, with students having a say in many aspects of their education. This model

promotes responsibility and social engagement but may not provide the structured support at-risk students need to address academic deficiencies and behavioral issues (Greenberg, 1992).

Expeditionary Learning, with its emphasis on project-based learning and "learning by doing," can be an engaging approach to education. However, research suggests that its effectiveness may vary depending on students' prior achievement levels and foundational skills. For instance, a study of inquiry-based science instruction in urban middle schools found that the approach was "differentially effective with different students," with those having lower prior achievement and reading ability struggling more than their higher-achieving peers (Marx et al., 2004, p. 1077). This highlights the importance of considering the specific needs of at-risk students when implementing EL, potentially incorporating more structured support, explicit instruction, and frequent progress monitoring to ensure they can fully benefit from this experiential learning model." These alternative models, though innovative and effective for certain student populations, often lack the targeted support systems necessary for at-risk students. The need for stable, supportive, and direct teacher-student relationships is critical for these students. At-risk students benefit from explicit instruction, routine, and a structured learning environment that many of these alternative educational models do not always provide. Moreover, these students often require more than just academic support; they need emotional and behavioral interventions integrated into their education programs.

While alternative education models provide diverse and rich educational experiences, they are not suitable for at-risk students if not paired with additional supports. For students who are failing and in need of better TSRs, more traditional or structured alternative programs that blend academic rigor with strong support systems might be more effective. The challenge lies in

adapting these innovative educational models to meet the complex needs of all students, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

Meeting the Needs of At-Risk Students

At-risk students often face challenges that disrupt their educational progress, including academic struggles, emotional or behavioral difficulties, and socio-economic constraints. Alternative schools acknowledge these unique needs and offer structures and practices designed to cultivate a positive school climate and supportive teacher-student relationships (TSRs). For example, smaller class sizes in alternative schools facilitate personalized attention, allowing teachers to build meaningful relationships with students. This personal approach can foster trust and mutual respect, which are essential for positive TSRs and have been shown to enhance student engagement and motivation (Decker et al., 2007; Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

Creating a Supportive School Climate

The environment within alternative schools intentionally promotes a sense of community and belonging. Staff at these schools work collaboratively to establish a climate that is both nurturing and structured, using strategies such as flexible scheduling, non-traditional assessment practices, and social-emotional learning (SEL) initiatives. These strategies help address both academic and behavioral challenges, fostering a climate in which students feel cared for, understood, and valued (Wallace Foundation, 2019). This approach directly supports the development of positive TSRs, which are critical for at-risk students who may struggle to engage with educators in traditional settings.

A Shift Toward Relationship-Based Education

Research has shown that TSRs are crucial for improving educational outcomes, especially for at-risk students who benefit from stable, caring relationships with educators

(Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). By fostering positive relationships characterized by trust, respect, and empathy, alternative schools create a foundation for student growth and resilience. These relationships help students feel valued and supported, making them more likely to engage academically and socially, a connection essential to breaking cycles of academic disengagement and failure (Gehlbach et al., 2016; Quin, 2017).

The Potential of Alternative Schools to Enhance TSRs

There are unique opportunities for alternative schools to enhance TSRs due to their smaller, more adaptable settings and their commitment to individualized support. Teachers in these settings often have the flexibility to develop relationships with students over extended periods, allowing them to understand each student's unique background, strengths, and challenges (Rudge, 2016). As such, alternative schools provide an environment that may be more conducive to strong TSRs than traditional high schools, where the larger class sizes and focus on standardized outcomes can limit opportunities for meaningful connection (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).

This study seeks to examine whether students in alternative settings perceive stronger TSRs compared to their peers in traditional high schools. By analyzing student perceptions of TSRs within alternative schools, this research aims to illuminate the ways in which alternative educational settings may better support at-risk students' academic and social-emotional needs. Findings from this study could inform strategies for improving TSRs across diverse educational contexts, ultimately contributing to more supportive, equitable learning environments for all students.

JCCPS Alternative Schools

JCCPS provided the data for the study. There are currently six programs that serve as an alternative to the regular high school experience for students who are failing academically in the regular school environment. These students have a history of failure and have shown a lack of motivation to do well in school. Students may enroll in alternative programs after remaining in a single grade for multiple years, demonstrating an attendance problem, or having behavior problems in school. There are currently three ways students access the alternative programs in this district JCCPS. First, their current school of attendance (“base school”) can refer them because of retention, poor grades, attendance, and behavior problems (“school-referred”). Second, JCCPS students expelled because of a violation of the Students Rights and Responsibilities code, which defines the consequences for students violating the discipline policies of the JCCPS. Third, the juvenile court judge of can refer students to the alternative school (“court-referred”). School-referred students attend an intake orientation to hear about the program and decide with their parents whether they would like to attend. Expelled students may not attend any school in JCCPS the district except for the four alternative schools, which accept expelled students. For expelled students, placement decisions depend on grade level and geography. Students with court referrals do not have the choice of attending their base school. In this study, the researcher will focus on the students and teachers in the four JCCPS alternative schools.

The Importance of TSRs for At-Risk Students

The TSR is important for all students no matter what type of school environment. However, it is increasingly important for at-risk students. TSR is a crucial part of education that influences cognitive, mental, academic, and social growth. TSRs are a major factor for enhancing student learning and academic outcomes. Teachers play a major role in education by

encouraging students to accomplish their aims (Agyekum, 2019). Improving students' relationships with teachers has important, positive and long-lasting implications for both students' academic and social development. Solely improving students' relationships with their teachers will not produce gains in achievement and social-emotional development. However, those students who have close, positive and supportive relationships with their teachers will attain higher levels of achievement than those students with more conflict in their relationships (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2011). The consistency of a relationship between teachers and students is a powerful factor within the learning atmosphere and hence plays a major role in the growth and experience of a student (Matthews & Dai, 2014; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015).

There has also been repeated evidence of the strong correlation between teacher-student relationships and the social and emotional well-being of students. Whereas it is a direct result, positive relationships between teachers and students could indirectly increase the mental well-being of the students as teachers are affected by how the students perceive one another. Good relationships among teachers and students are necessary to preserve student interests and academic involvement (Joyce, 2018).

Effective high school completion is essential to successful teacher support. Quality education is an important factor in any person's life. Teachers spend a lot of time with their students during the year, so it is a teacher's role to inspire a desire to learn (Yu et al., 2018). Therefore, good relationships between students and teachers are related to work commitment and inspiration in classrooms, social skills, and academic achievement (Sanders et al., 2018). Other factors such as sex, race, socioeconomic status, or academic capacity can affect the TSRs (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). Thus, interactions can be considered essential because of the

forces associated with and of the psychology of all partners participating in interpersonal processes (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Yu et al., 2018).

Positive Teacher Student Relationships (TSRs) Affect Achievement for At-Risk Students

In addition to evidence highlighting the persistent nature of achievement gaps and the limitations of solely test-driven interventions in addressing them, research indicates that positive relationships between students and teachers directly influence academic outcomes and overall well-being, particularly for at-risk students. For example, Gehlbach et al. (2016) found that students who perceived similarities between themselves and their teachers were more engaged in learning and demonstrated greater academic progress. The researchers reported that simply highlighting similarities between teachers and students led to significant improvements in student outcomes. This is relevant to the present study because it indicates the positive effect of TSRs, which depend on a sense of mutual trust and familiarity between teachers and students.

In a systematic review of 46 published studies, Quin (2017) found that positive TSRs were associated with better outcomes in terms of psychological engagement, academic grades, school attendance, disruptive behaviors, suspension, and dropout. These associations persist across longitudinal studies and when controlling for individual factors that could influence the outcomes (Quin, 2017). Similarly, Huang et al. (2018) found that depression, concentration problems, emotional regulation problems, and behavioral engagement were improved among students with positive TSRs. Therefore, positive TSRs are important, not just to academic outcomes, but also to a range of student behavioral and engagement factors.

Positive TSRs are effective at improving academic achievement in part because they improve student self-efficacy and promote more effective cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies, even when controlling for demographic factors like socioeconomic status (Ma et al.,

2018). Regarding behavioral outcomes, the benefit of positive TSRs is also robust to academic risk status (Fulcher, 2016). Therefore, students can reap the benefits of positive TSRs despite having low socioeconomic status or other risk factors.

National Efforts Promoting TSRs with At-Risk Students?

In the United States, educators and policymakers increasingly foster the importance of truly learning how to encourage social and emotional growth for good student achievement. It is difficult to face barriers to stop children from leaving school and time. Keeping at-risk students in school requires resources, and commitment. The intervention techniques include several approaches, such as being there with the child, consistency in teaching, involvement of students in exciting things that make them understandable, one-on-one education, official programs, using coaches or community counseling courses, and a school environment in which aid is often available. The intervention strategies include awareness, preventive and treatment services also provide opportunities for students to take a constructive approach in fighting school and life failures. These courses allow students to achieve a healthier, more active lifestyle. Enhancing the awareness of child development by teachers and parents is important for them to make effective use of children's expertise to encourage greater engagement and growth. In a developmentally informed framework, where teachers and parents collaborate, there are significant benefits to children. An example of this approach is the School Development Program (SDP). SDP data indicates that it tends to minimize absenteeism and suspension, enhances the learning atmosphere and school connections with students and teachers, enhances student autonomy and self-concept and enhances efficiency (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Components of the SDP include My Teaching Partner-Secondary, Establish-Maintain-Restore, profession development efforts, the Pennsylvania Student Assistance Program, materials developed by the

Los Angeles County Education Board, tailored aid to build skills, positive behavior interventions and support, and the ARCH program. Descriptions of each component follow.

My Teaching Partner-Secondary is a nationally renowned learning tool, that helps to increase student performance and enhance equality in the secondary school environment. However, this initiative requires resource-intensive instruction and a holistic approach to improving teacher experiences above and beyond partnerships.

Establish-Maintain-Restore (EMR) is an initiative focused on proof of student-teacher relationships on a short-term basis and is feasible in real-life high schools. Teachers train in collective processes that promote strong relationships in three phases: establish, maintain, and restore. After training based on heuristic and strategic EMR teachers engage in their school with procedures to promote free, truthful partnerships and reflection, in professional learning communities. During the professional learning communities, teachers determine each student's connection to each of their classrooms and then create an action plan to connect with individual students in the following months, so that these students can reach a more constructive process of relationships (Gaias et al., 2020).

Under the Professional Development Training Model, schools including public or private, supply coaches, administrators, and teachers with serious consideration given to the improper interaction with students, the forms of professional development required to train them for their future (Zarra III, 2016).

The Pennsylvania Student Assistant Program contends that “beginning early intervention leads to the avoidance of high-risk, self-destructive activity in children and young people”.

The Los Angeles County Education Board developed a manual of three checklists explaining learning environment features, a comprehensive checklist that describes high-risk

pupils, and a single student checklist detailing factors related to the non-school, school, and family (Dobizl, 2002).

Case management, mentoring, encouragement support, attendance services, and tailored aid build skills in the lower performing student, tutoring and peer tutoring, extra or out-of-school service, and opportunities for at-risk students, disengaged students' project-based learning, creative arts-based student activities are student-focused strategies (Lamb & Rice, 2008). Many programs, like mini schools, minimize social alienation for students and improve connections with students, parents, teachers, and the local community. Mini-schools, counselors, reduced class sizes, peer tutoring, community service, additional or out-of-school programming, and case management for pupils are the relevant methods (Lamb & Rice, 2008).

Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) as a school-wide strategy towards non-punitive and trauma-informed behavioral treatment. Most states provide support for teachers to provide PBIS instruction and coaching and how every state-funded campus has on-site a PBIS committee to encourage the organized practice and culture of facilities (Read et al., 2019).

The ARCH program (social and emotional aid) was created because teachers became worried about the increasing lack of attendance, an increasing number of dropouts, and the disengaged pupils. Through this program, positive relationships emerged between teacher and pupil.

The Role of Principals in TSR

Principals and other school leaders play an important role in addressing achievement gaps and implementing policies and interventions to strengthen TSRs. In reporting on a school reform effort in Chicago, Bryk et al. (2010) extracted five essential supports for improving school

systems at the local level, and the first of these was “leadership as the driver for change” (p. 45).

Bryk et al. wrote:

Principals [are] catalytic agents for systemic improvement. These school-based leaders build agency for change at the community level, nurture the leadership of others through a shared vision for local reform, and provide the necessary guidance over time to sustain a coherent program of schoolwide development. (p. 45-46)

This point of view came out of a longitudinal analysis of a system-wide reform program in Chicago, whereby schools had more local authority to guide the educational strategies and practices used to improve academic and behavioral performance among students. Bryk’s framework is important to the proposed study because it highlights the importance of leadership and student-centered education in successful reform programs in inner-city school districts with at-risk student populations.

Garza has been a part of several important research projects on the topic of educational leadership in developing school reform. Ramalho et al. (2010) examined the roles of principals in inner-city urban schools that had managed to address achievement gaps and sustain high student achievement despite risk factors like low socioeconomic status and primarily Hispanic student bodies. The researchers found that the principals played key roles in setting expectations regarding high-stakes testing, allowing teachers to focus on students’ specific realities and address their needs, breaking free from the one-size-fits all approach often seen in response to academic performance mandates and test-driven policy.

Garza et al. (2014), drawing on the same research data, examined four successful principals using a case study method. They found that principals sustained school success in several ways. First, they adopted clear viewpoints on education and set core values and

directions for their schools. Second, they focused on professional development for teachers and leadership among teachers. Third, they exhibited leadership qualities, including commitment, resilience, and motivation. Finally, successful principals cultivated community, both within schools and in their broader communities (Garza et al., 2014). These findings suggest that principals play a key role in setting the stage for interventions and strategies that can improve relationships schoolwide and improve student academic achievement.

The importance of principal leadership has been borne out in empirical research related to TSRs. Wentzel et al. (2011) reported on the importance of socially supportive classrooms to student achievement, arguing that “adolescents’ perceptions that teachers are emotionally supportive, and caring are related to positive aspects of academic engagement, including the pursuit of goals to learn and to behave prosocially and responsibly, academic interest, educational aspirations and values, and positive self-concept” (p. 197). They connected this broad relationship to four categories of student perceived positive TSR; students must perceive that teachers care, that teachers expect them to perform well academically and behaviorally, that help is available if they need it, and that they are safe in the classroom environment (Wentzel et al., 2011). These are all important elements of positive TSRs, supporting the importance of the present study, which focuses especially on the role of student-perceived caring behaviors. Lastly, districts use the Professional Standards for Education Leaders to evaluate principals as the frame to gauge leader efficacy. While the standards focus on students, outlining the principles of leadership that direct the practice of educational leadership to increase student learning, they ensure educators are ready to meet the challenges of their job. More specifically, PSEL Standard 5, creating a Community of Care and Support for Students, is at the heart of this research. Standard 5 states that “effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive

school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student”.

Components A and B of Standard 5 include the word “care” and signify the importance of care in schools: “A) build and maintain a safe, caring, and healthy school environment that meets the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of each student. B) Create and sustain a school environment in which each student is known, accepted and valued, trusted and respected, cared for, and encouraged to be an active and responsible member of the school community”. Also, Substandard D puts a focus on the teacher-student relationship reflecting its importance, d) Promote adult-student, student-peer, and school-community relationships that value and support academic learning and positive social and emotional development.

While the standard and its components are clear, what is not clear is how a district goes about creating positive TSRs. One of the first acts a district would have to implement is to evaluate or assess exactly where TSRs are in each of its buildings. Most likely this evaluation would involve a stakeholder-based initiative that assesses perceptions of teachers, students, staff, and parents to determine where TSRs were at and what aspects, if any, need improvement. Next, professional development and training would have to take place to train teachers and staff to address deficiencies in knowledge about TSRs, caring, and how to go about successfully fostering these relationships.

Bulach’s Five Factors

There have been numerous studies that support the position that teacher-student relationships are important. In Bulach et al’s study, “Behaviors that Create a Caring Learning Community,” he developed a scale (Appendix A) that would measure behaviors that helped to create a caring classroom and school. The purpose of his research was to determine those

behaviors used by teachers that created a caring classroom. A secondary purpose of his study was to determine the usage frequency of these behaviors by teachers in their classrooms.

According to Bulach et al. (1998), caring behaviors fall into five factors as follows: (1) ability to reduce anxiety, (2) willingness to listen, (3) rewarding good behavior, (4) being a friend, and (5) appropriate use of criticism. There is an overall score for caring.

Bulach et al. (1998) developed the scale to measure characteristics of caring behaviors pertaining to TSRs. He derived the questions from patterns reflected in previous literature and existing measures. A panel of five experts in the areas of research, inclusive education, and leadership examined the validity of the instrument. Bulach et al. (1998) tested the instrument's reliability for internal consistency of the scales using the Cronbach alpha statistic. According to Bulach et al. (1998), the Cronbach's alpha reliability estimate of the original measure was around .77. The opinions of 116 practicing teachers and administrators determined that the instrument had construct validity.

Other studies use and modify Bulach's survey to measure caring behaviors in other research studies. King (2011) reworded the questions from Bulach's study to better examine the characteristics of caring behaviors of teachers generally, rather than caring behaviors of a specific teacher. King grouped questions into subthemes to create new dimensions of interpretation. The instrument includes 24 items grouped in four subthemes: Classroom Management (items 1-5), Academic Support (items 6-12), Interpersonal Relationships (items 13-17), and Sense of Respect and Trust (items 18-22).

Bulach et al. (1998) believed if teachers and administrators practice the five categories of behavior a "caring learning community" should be present in that school. Administrators could support and encourage the teachers to use the behaviors. Administrators could develop policies

and procedures around these behaviors. Also, professional development training could teach the teacher how to implement these caring behaviors in the classroom. Bulach et al. (1998) concluded that the survey instrument had great possibilities for use in correlational or causal comparative research studies focused on issues such as the effect or relationship of caring behaviors on school climate, achievement, absenteeism, discipline referrals, grade point average, and failure rates. Consequently, it is important that teachers and administrators become aware of behaviors that create a "caring learning community."

The following logic model shows the five factors of Bulach's Caring Behaviors and how he defined those behaviors in his study. Alongside his framework, the researcher has juxtaposed categories assigned to assess culture in JCCPS in order to demonstrate alignment of his theory of caring behaviors in relation to JCCPS' Positive and Nurturing Environment questions from the School Climate Survey and aligned them to each of Bulach's caring behaviors. As a final step, the researcher has identified missing elements from Bulach's factors and constructed a Logic Model of the five factors.

Table 1*Logic Model*

| Factor | How this is defined Bulach | Behavior | School Climate Survey | What this definition is missing | Libby Theory of 5 Factors |
|-----------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Anxiety | Ability to reduce anxiety | Creating an environment where students feel safe; teaching at their ability level; enforcing the same rules for all students; being positive; reinforcing good behavior; maintaining an orderly classroom; cueing them when they don't understand; greeting them as they enter the classroom; calling them by name, and maintaining eye contact | I like going to school here. | How would a teacher create a safe environment? How are rules established? | Building Rapport and Establishing a Safe Environment |
| Listening | Willingness to listen | letting students make decisions; asking students for their opinion; make time for them before and after school; and taking a personal interest outside the classroom | I believe my teachers care about me as a person. I believe the principal cares about all the students in his school. If I had a problem, I know there is at least one adult in the school who would help me. | What is the process for student decision making? How do we respect everyone's opinions? How do I not cross a line when taking a personal interest in my student? | Building student's self-esteem |

Table 1*Logic Model (cont.)*

| Factor | How this is defined Bulach | Behavior | School Climate Survey | What this definition is missing | Libby Theory of 5 Factors |
|------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Reward | Rewarding good behavior | display student work; provide treats and goodies; let students help in the classroom; and inform parents about student progress. | My teachers often say positive things to me. | How do I recognize and reward behavior? Are there guidelines? | Recognizing and rewarding desired behavior |
| Friendship | Being a friend | let students have fun at my expense; eat lunch with them; return work promptly; and intervene when they are being picked on. | Students in this school get along with each other. Teachers treat students with respect. Students show respect for the teachers in this school. The principal takes time to talk to students when he/she sees them in the hallways. | What is acceptable when building a friendship with my students? | Show your students you care about them |

Table 1

Logic Model(cont.)

| | | | | | |
|-----------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Criticism | Appropriate use of criticism | use sarcasm with students; use negative criticism with students; recognize them for extra-curricular achievement; and recognize them for academic achievement | Students in this school are rewarded or recognized publicly for good behavior. Students in high school are rewarded and recognized publicly for academic success. | How do I stay positive under stressful times in the CR? How do I build my own recognition program? | Build respect with your students through interactions and recognition |
|-----------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|

Social-Emotional Learning and School Climate: A Foundation for Student Success

The educational landscape is undergoing a significant shift, with growing recognition of the importance of social-emotional learning (SEL) in fostering student success. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is “the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2013). A confluence of factors, including increased awareness of the limitations of solely academic-focused approaches, mounting evidence of the positive impact of SEL on student outcomes, and the urgent need to address the social and emotional needs of students in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic drove this shift.

The Wallace Foundation, a leading philanthropy focused on improving learning and enrichment for young people, emphasizes the critical role of SEL in fostering equity and well-being (Wallace Foundation, 2019). Their research highlights the growing number of schools implementing SEL programs and initiatives to cultivate students' social and emotional competencies. These competencies, as defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), include skills such as managing emotions, building relationships, showing empathy, and making responsible decisions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the importance of SEL. As schools transitioned to virtual learning, students faced unprecedented challenges, including social isolation, stress, and trauma. This has amplified the need for educators to prioritize students' social and emotional well-being alongside their academic learning (Aspen Institute, 2020).

Connecting SEL to Bulach's Five Factors and TSRs

SEL and school climate aligns closely with the theoretical framework of this study, particularly Bulach's Five Factors and the concept of Teacher-Student Relationships (TSRs). Bulach's Five Factors is a framework that identifies five key teacher behaviors that contribute to positive student perceptions and outcomes: affection, enthusiasm, fairness, positive communication, and participatory management. These behaviors directly foster a supportive school climate and promote students' social and emotional development. For example, teachers who demonstrate affection and positive communication create a sense of safety and belonging, while those who practice fairness and participatory management empower students and foster their social responsibility.

Strong TSRs, characterized by trust, respect, and mutual understanding, are essential for creating a positive school climate (Osher & Berg, 2018). When teachers embody the caring and nurturing behaviors described in the Wallace Foundation report and enact the principles of Bulach's Five Factors, they contribute to the development of strong TSRs. These positive relationships, in turn, foster a sense of connection and provide a foundation for students to thrive academically and socially-emotionally.

In essence, SEL, school climate, Bulach's Five Factors, and TSRs are interconnected elements that contribute to a holistic and supportive learning environment. This study examines the interplay of these elements within the context of alternative education, recognizing the potential of these settings to foster strong TSRs and promote positive student outcomes.

A Focus on Academics, Not the Whole Child

Federal and state education policies mandate that schools improve academic achievement for all students, as measured through national, state, and local assessments. These policies aim to

narrow achievement gaps and promote equity in educational outcomes, enabling students to reach their potential regardless of demographic factors (Reardon et al., 2013). By holding schools accountable for measurable progress, these initiatives ensure that all students, including those from historically marginalized communities, have access to high-quality education and the opportunity to succeed academically.

From a theoretical perspective, several scholars argue about the society-wide urgency of addressing achievement gaps and improving education in the United States. Critics like Alhadeff and Goodlad (2008) note that simply raising test scores does not fulfill the broader purposes of education, which include fostering civic engagement and nurturing the well-rounded development of students. This narrow focus on academic achievement overlooks the critical aspects of educating the "whole person" for a responsible, productive, and satisfying life—a core component of a robust democracy.

Echoing these concerns, Levin (1988) discussed the ramifications of neglecting the broader needs of at-risk students, warning that without early and effective intervention, these students are likely to become disadvantaged adults, leading to a cascade of social and economic issues. Levin's foresight emphasized the need for educational models that not only focus on academic achievement but also address the social and emotional needs of students to prevent these dire outcomes. Because Levin (1988) provided such a precise and prescient view of the problem of educational achievement gaps, I quote the text at length:

A rising population of disadvantaged adults also has dire consequences for the economy. This phenomenon will lead to a serious deterioration in the labor force... This economic impact will jeopardize especially the competitive position of those states and regions with large concentrations of disadvantaged populations, but it will also affect the nation. At

the same time, there will be increasing pressure to expand public services... The middle class will resist paying for these services as their own incomes deteriorate in an economy that will be suffering from an ill-prepared workforce. (p. 2)

Levin concluded with this stirring statement: “It is obvious that the emerging crisis can only be avoided or alleviated by the development of a highly successful intervention that will substantially improve the educational performance of the disadvantaged” (p. 2). He suggested different models to help achieve this goal. One of the alternative models, James Comer’s School Development Program focused on the mental health of the students in addition to the academic program.

In support of this holistic approach, James Comer’s School Development Program (SDP), initiated in 1968, has been pivotal in emphasizing the role of social and emotional development in promoting academic success. The SDP model fosters a collaborative, inclusive school environment that cultivates strong relationships among students, teachers, and families, which is crucial for the academic and personal success of students, especially those at risk (Comer, 1988, 2004; Cook et al., 1999). The program’s structured decision-making processes and emphasis on a no-fault culture prioritize student well-being alongside academic goals, showcasing the benefits of a holistic educational approach.

Recent studies reinforce the importance of integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) with academic instruction. Research by Jones et al. (2021) demonstrates that SEL not only improves academic outcomes but also enhances students’ social skills and emotional well-being, further supporting the need for educational policies that consider the whole child (Jones et al., 2021).

By focusing on positive teacher-student relationships (TSRs) and supportive school climates, this research seeks to understand how alternative school environments may better meet the needs of at-risk students compared to traditional settings. The goal is to provide evidence that a holistic, relationship-focused approach can effectively bridge the gaps within the traditional educational model, creating more equitable and supportive environments for all students.

Consequences for the Students when Teachers Ignore TSRs

The relationships within a school are fundamental to its culture. Positive relationships between teachers and students strengthen the school's atmosphere and are crucial to fostering a supportive educational environment (Murphy, 2005). Students who experience positive relationships with their teachers are less likely to drop out and more likely to feel engaged and motivated (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2011; Thompson & Lopez, 2022). A sense of belonging and identity within the school setting significantly contributes to the development of positive student motivation and behavior, which are predictive of educational success and can provide a protective buffer for students at high risk of educational failure (Lander, 2009).

However, the impact of teachers extends beyond individual student outcomes. In schools serving disadvantaged communities, the quality of teaching is often uneven, and such schools may struggle to attract and retain highly qualified teachers. To address this, policies are needed that improve teacher quality through targeted professional development, which ensures that teachers possess the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support at-risk students. This includes providing mentoring programs for novice teachers and developing educational strategies tailored to meet the needs of disadvantaged students (OECD, 2012; Gordon et al., 2017).

Schools with challenging learning environments, characterized by lower academic outcomes, require policies that focus specifically on enhancing the educational experience. This

may involve using data-driven strategies to identify and support students with learning difficulties, offering personalized advice and mentoring, and facilitating smoother transitions for students to continue their education. Additionally, structural changes such as modifying school schedules, reducing class sizes, and adapting the school year can strengthen teacher-student relationships and enhance learning outcomes (Gordon et al., 2017).

In sum, the failure to foster strong teacher-student relationships can lead to detrimental school culture, reduced student retention, and lower educational achievements. Effective relationships are not just a backdrop to education but are central to creating successful educational outcomes and a positive school environment.

What are the Consequences for Schools when Teachers do not Foster Relationships with Students?

The relationships inside a school building are at the core of school culture. Positive relationships with students in the building help to strengthen the atmosphere of the school. Relationships between teachers and school students are strongly important to the culture of schools (Murphy, 2005). Students with good teacher relationships are less likely to leave school (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2011). A feeling of identity contributes significantly to the growth of positive motivation and behaviors. Healthy relationships forecast school success and will help to protect students at high risk for inadequate education and growth (Lander, 2009).

While teachers have a significant impact on student achievement, disadvantaged schools do not necessarily have the highest quality teachers. Policies need to improve the quality of the teacher for distressed schools and students through the provision of targeted teacher education to ensure that teachers are provided with the necessary skills and knowledge for their schools with disadvantaged children; the provision of novice teacher mentoring programs, support to improve

teacher effectiveness and retention, and development of education. Disadvantaged schools with low-level results are at risk of fostering challenging learning conditions. Policies unique to those schools would concentrate more on the following than other schools. Encourage the use of school diagnosis data structures in the identity of troubled children and reasons for learning disorders; appropriate student advice, mentoring to help, and smoothing transfers of students to pursue their education. Moreover, these schools will benefit from alternative learning time organizations, comprising school week and year length and school sizes. In some cases, having smaller classrooms may be a policy for strengthening relationships between students and teachers and for improving learning strategies. To ensure teachers have the expertise and information needed for work in these areas, align teacher education with disadvantaged schools (OECD, 2012).

Consequences for Districts when Teachers do not Foster Relationship

Historically, the purpose of education in the United States has evolved according to the needs of society. From instructing youth in religious doctrine, preparing them to live in a democracy, assimilating immigrants into mainstream society, to preparing workers for the industrialized 20th century workplace, the goals of education have continually adapted. Now, as educators prepare young people for their futures in a rapidly changing world, the goals include creating adults who can compete in a global economy, become lifelong learners, and develop into emotionally healthy adults capable of engaging in meaningful relationships (Sloan, 2012). However, an important unresolved challenge remains: students leaving high school without a diploma. The percentage of students who genuinely drop out varies, but poor teacher-student relationships have been identified as a major contributing factor, especially among boys.

Conflicts with teachers are often cited as a primary reason students choose to leave before graduating (Agyekum, 2019; Williams-Baugh, 2016).

Recent research underscores that negative teacher-student relationships significantly contribute to increased dropout rates (Thompson & Lopez, 2022). In response, community-based initiatives have developed mentoring programs targeted at these vulnerable youths, emphasizing the prevention of abandonment and improvement of grades, behavior, and student attitudes (Williams-Baugh, 2016).

The failure of school districts to ensure that teachers foster positive relationships can lead to broader systemic issues. Schools lacking strong teacher-student relationships may experience higher dropout rates, reduced student engagement, and lower academic achievements. This, in turn, affects the district's ability to meet educational objectives and can lead to lower overall accountability ratings (Gordon et al., 2017).

To combat these issues, some districts have begun to implement strategies that place a greater emphasis on the importance of teacher-student relationships in their curriculum and professional development programs. These initiatives aim to transform the educational environment into one that prioritizes interpersonal connections as a fundamental component of academic success and personal development, thereby improving district-wide educational outcomes and reducing dropout rates.

Negative TSRs, Attendance, Grades, and Dropout Rates

For at-risk students, the absence or breakdown of teacher-student relationships (TSRs) can significantly impact their engagement, academic performance, and likelihood of staying in school. Disconnected or negative TSRs are associated with increased behavioral issues, lower academic achievement, and a higher risk of dropout. Research shows that students who share

close, trusting relationships with teachers are more productive, have clearer study expectations, and achieve higher grades (Thompson & Lopez, 2022). Positive TSRs contribute to better academic and social behaviors, such as increased study time, higher satisfaction with school, and more prosocial behavior (Newcomer, 2018).

Conversely, students with weak TSRs—particularly those identified as "at-risk"—often report feeling unsupported, misunderstood, and less engaged in their academic environment. These students may perceive school rules as vague and teachers as uninvolved, which can lead to increased frustration and conflicts with school authority (Newcomb et al., 2002). Such negative perceptions can result in lower grades, reduced attendance, and more frequent disciplinary referrals, strongly associated with school dropout (Modlin, 2008). Studies highlight that poor TSRs contribute to academic underperformance, poor self-regulation, and even social isolation, making it challenging for students to succeed academically and stay in school (Skipper & Douglas, 2015).

Moreover, the teacher's understanding of their relationship with students has a lasting influence on students' academic trajectories. Enhanced TSRs, particularly for at-risk students, are linked to improved school engagement, higher academic levels, and lower dropout rates. On the other hand, negative or nonexistent TSRs can lead to disengagement, lack of motivation, and an increased likelihood of school leaving, emphasizing the critical role strong TSRs play in determining whether at-risk students remain engaged in their educational journey or are pushed further toward dropout (Fortin et al., 2006; Woolley et al., 2009).

Recent studies confirm the transformative power of positive teacher-student interactions, showing that well-established, trust-based relationships are essential for at-risk students' success and retention in school (Thompson & Lopez, 2022). These relationships not only bolster

students' academic achievements but also enhance their overall well-being and school experience, thus reducing the risk factors associated with school dropout.

Consequences of Not Addressing the Problem

Failure to address the lack of understanding around how teacher-student relationships (TSRs) affect achievement among at-risk students carries significant short- and long-term consequences. As an Alternative School principal, I have often encountered stories from parents and students about the impact of feeling uncared for in previous school environments. Students describe negative relationships with teachers and administrators that they believe have directly impacted their academic performance, leading to poor grades, behavioral issues, and even suspension or expulsion. These experiences often lead students to disengage, miss school, and ultimately, in many cases, give up on education altogether.

Immediate Academic and Behavioral Consequences

When students perceive that no one cares about them, attendance, behavior, and academic outcomes suffer. Poor TSRs relate to increased absences, disciplinary referrals, and lower academic engagement (Rudasill et al., 2010). Students without positive TSRs are more likely to act out, feel alienated, and view school as a hostile or unwelcoming environment, exacerbating the challenges they already face. For at-risk students, who may rely on school as a stable support system, these negative experiences compound feelings of disconnection, further decreasing their academic success and motivation.

Long-Term Socioeconomic Implications

The long-term consequences of poor TSRs and subsequent school disengagement are significant. In Maryland, the Annie E. Casey Foundation estimates that an average of 9,500 students drop out of school each year, with dropout rates disproportionately high in certain

counties, such as Jefferson Conway County. Dropout rates reflect only one measure of disengagement; even students who graduate without strong TSRs often lack the academic foundation or social skills necessary for post-secondary success. According to *Connecting Youth to Opportunity* (2013), employment rates for dropouts fall to 57%, compared to 76% for high school graduates. Furthermore, the socioeconomic consequences include lower lifetime earnings, increased reliance on public assistance, and a greater likelihood of involvement in the criminal justice system.

Risk of Incarceration and Costs to Society

Research underscores the relationship between dropping out of school and increased likelihood of incarceration. In Maryland, 57.2% of adult offenders under age 25 are high school dropouts. A study of juvenile offenders concluded that dropouts are more likely to enter the adult criminal justice system (Aizer & Doyle, 2011), underscoring the importance of TSRs as a preventative factor in students' lives. Moreover, incarceration costs the state thousands of dollars annually, with expenses rising with each year of detention. By contrast, investing in positive TSRs for at-risk students could mitigate these costs by reducing dropout rates and promoting educational attainment.

Prior Interventions and Models for Positive TSRs

Addressing TSRs has been the focus of several intervention models. For instance, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) proposed a model of the prosocial classroom, emphasizing the social and emotional competencies of teachers to foster supportive TSRs and enhance classroom climates. Studies by Muller (2001) and Decker et al. (2007) found that positive TSRs improve engagement and behavioral outcomes, particularly for at-risk African American students. Programs such as SEL training, prosocial classroom modeling, and school-based interventions

focusing on teacher awareness of TSRs have shown promise in creating classroom environments conducive to learning and engagement.

Given the significant benefits of positive TSRs on both academic and socio-emotional outcomes, especially for at-risk students, this body of research underscores the importance of proactive interventions. Programs aimed at improving TSRs can address not only immediate academic concerns but also long-term socio-economic and behavioral outcomes. Such interventions have the potential to disrupt the cycle of disengagement and underachievement for at-risk students, fostering a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. This study will investigate the specific impact of TSRs in alternative education settings, contributing to a deeper understanding of how TSR-focused interventions can support at-risk students' educational and personal growth.

Prior Attempts in Maryland and JCCPS to Address the Problem

In Maryland, the state legislature largely limits efforts to improve teacher-student relationships (TSRs). The teacher evaluation model in Maryland incorporates the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2008), which includes a rubric for assessing multiple facets of teacher effectiveness, with TSRs forming one small component. As part of the Professional Practice portion of this evaluation, JCCPS uses this framework to provide a limited assessment of TSRs, viewing them as a factor in teacher effectiveness. However, no school-level initiatives have specifically focused on evaluating or strengthening TSRs, nor have there been structured efforts to investigate how TSRs contribute to student achievement in JCCPS.

Moreover, no research within JCCPS has systematically examined TSRs from the perspectives of students or teachers. Instead, assessments of TSRs rely on observations from teacher evaluators who may not capture the nuances of daily classroom interactions or

understand TSRs' direct impact on students. This reliance on an observer-only perspective risks overlooking critical insights into how TSRs influence student engagement, academic success, and social-emotional well-being.

This gap in research underscores the importance of this proposed study, which seeks to provide a more comprehensive view of TSRs within JCCPS by directly examining the perceptions of both students and teachers. Understanding these perspectives is essential for identifying effective TSR strategies that support at-risk students and foster a more inclusive and supportive school environment.

Caring an Aspect of TSR

Positive TSRs can have many dimensions. Among the most important aspects is that students must perceive that teachers care about them and that they are in a caring environment (Wentzel et al., 2011). Noddings has been one of the most prominent scholars on the importance of caring teachers. According to Noddings (2006), caring is one of the most important success factors in educational leadership, both at the level of teachers and at the administrative level. Like Alhadeff and Goodlad (2008) and Levin (1988), Noddings (1988) views education as a moral enterprise, describing “education for moral life” as the primary goal of traditional schooling in the United States.

Although Noddings does not specifically discuss TSRs, her view of caring aligns with the concept. Noddings (2013) has identified four components of moral education based on caring: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. She argued that teachers and students must spend quality time together to develop these skills; this is naturally a relational view of teaching that fits well with the theoretical framework of this proposed study. In her seminal book, she wrote, “It is easy to see that the essential elements of caring are located in the relation between the one-

caring and the cared-for” (p. 9). She argued that it is necessary to focus on both sides of the caring equation, a view that leads naturally to a relational, student-centered view of teaching.

Several scholars criticize Nodding’s view. For example, Hoagland (1990) argued that, by viewing teachers as caring individuals (the one-caring, in Nodding’s terminology), Nodding reinforces a unidirectional view of teaching that is not sufficiently student-centered and that risks becoming institutional and oppressive. This viewpoint emphasizes the importance of focusing on students’ perceptions of caring, rather than on teachers, in studying and analyzing the role of caring and of TSRs in general.

There is a strong body of evidence linking caring TSRs with student academic performance. Importantly, much of the existing research on caring focuses on student perceptions, which are important to evaluating TSRs. Student-perceived caring relates to academic learning and emotional learning (Teven & McCroskey, 1997).

For TSRs in general, associations between positive TSRs and student academic performance hold true equally for students who are at risk and those who are not, as mentioned above. When focusing specifically on the dimension of caring, however, at-risk students have found to benefit especially from caring relationships with their teachers. This was evident in a study conducted by Muller (2001), who found, using national longitudinal data, that students who perceived their teachers as caring were weakly associated with higher academic achievement in mathematics, apart from the risk category. However, when the researcher took the risk category into effect, the results were much stronger; having caring teachers was able to mitigate the negative impact on mathematics achievement of being in the at-risk category (Muller, 2001). This is an important study because of its strong statistical finding, its particular emphasis on caring, and its relevance to the present proposed study, which focuses on at-risk

students. Muller's research suggests that, among the dimensions of TSRs, caring is one of the most important.

Given that at-risk students attending high school in JCCPS are at a higher risk of dropping out of school, they may require a school setting that provides teachers and staff that care about their students and can create a caring community. As indicated earlier, the research on care and caring school communities shows that, if students feel cared for and a part of their school community, they will perform better academically (Noddings, 2006; Schussler & Collins, 2006), a finding with implications for PGPCS.

According to Muller (2001),

In general, students who are identified as being at risk of dropping out of school may give school less effort. The students' perception that teachers care may be especially important for these students because of the greater vulnerability of the students to negative teacher attitudes and poor academic performance. (p. 243)

The research on caring TSRs focused mainly on the relationship from the student perspective. Student perception is "both reality reflecting and reality creating" (Hughes, 2011, p. 42). Students must perceive their care from their teachers for there to be care. Tosolt (2009) states, "In schools, although many teachers say they care about their students, their care is functionally nonexistent unless it is perceived by their students as care" (p. 405). Therefore, to truly understand TSRs and their effects, it is necessary to gather data from the student perspective (Wentzel, 1997).

Critical Review and Analysis of the Research Literature

Research consistently shows that positive teacher-student relationships (TSRs) are a critical factor in student retention, engagement, and academic achievement, particularly for at-

risk students. Students are more likely to stay in school when they experience supportive social connections with teachers, a finding that holds even when accounting for students' backgrounds and school demographics (Burkham & Lee, 2000). Hallinan (2008) found that students' attachment to school strengthens when teachers meet their needs to feel valued and respected. This attachment is associated with greater student effort, persistence, and improved academic performance, particularly in classes taught by teachers they like and trust (Montalvo et al., 2007). Across grade levels, evidence indicates that positive TSRs contribute to better academic and behavioral outcomes.

Positive TSRs appear to reduce the likelihood of students disengaging from school, dropping out, or exhibiting problematic behaviors, while negative TSRs increase these risks, particularly among at-risk students (Decker et al., 2007). Klem and Connell (2004) found that students with positive TSRs demonstrate higher levels of class engagement, fewer absences, and improved grades. Teachers who report close relationships with students observe that their students tend to be more self-directed, cooperative, and engaged, behaviors that are crucial for at-risk students (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Klem & Connell, 2004). These findings emphasize the importance of cultivating TSRs as a tool to support academic success and school engagement, particularly in settings with high populations of at-risk students.

Much research on TSRs has focused on behavioral outcomes, which, while valuable, does not fully capture the potential of TSRs to enhance academic achievement. For example, Fulcher (2016) examined the relationship between positive TSRs and reduced misbehavior in a national sample of tenth graders, finding a significant association that held true across different risk levels. This suggests that TSR-focused interventions could benefit at-risk students just as much, if not more, as those not classified as at-risk.

In a study of 11,036 eighth graders, Ma et al. (2018) found that positive TSRs significantly impacted academic achievement for Chinese students. Their findings revealed that self-efficacy and learning strategies partially mediated this relationship, underscoring the importance of TSRs for both academic and motivational outcomes. Findings support the broader link between TSRs and academic success, reinforcing the need for further research into TSRs within diverse and at-risk student populations in the U.S.

While there is strong evidence supporting TSRs' impact on student outcomes, the components of effective TSRs remain open to interpretation. Positive TSRs often involve a teacher showing genuine interest in students' lives, building trust, and connecting with students on a personal level, whether through understanding their backgrounds or interests. These components form the foundation of a caring relationship, which is central to any strong TSR. By fostering a classroom environment where students feel respected and valued, teachers can enhance students' academic resilience and engagement, which are critical to preventing dropouts and promoting long-term academic success.

Evolution of Factors Impacting "At-Risk" Students (2019-2025)

The present study used data collected in 2017 and 2018. The period from 2019 to 2025 witnessed significant events that profoundly shaped the education landscape and the challenges faced by "at-risk" students. Various factors playing a role during this period highlight the evolving nature of education and its systemic inequalities, particularly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath.

The Landscape of American Education

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 forced schools to swiftly transition to remote learning. This unprecedented shift revealed deep inequalities in technology access,

particularly affecting low-income families, marginalized communities, and students with disabilities (Turner et al., 2022). This transition led to considerable learning loss, often referred to as the "COVID slide," alongside increased emotional challenges stemming from isolation, stress, and trauma (Kuhfeld et al., 2020).

As educational institutions adapted in the post-pandemic period, there's been a significant exploration and implementation of hybrid learning models that combine online and in-person education (Basham et al., 2021). These models aim to offer personalized learning opportunities but also pose challenges for students who struggle with self-regulation, independent learning, and consistent technological access (Lee et al., 2021). The pandemic also brought a heightened emphasis on student mental health, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive social-emotional learning (SEL) frameworks within schools (Racine et al., 2021). Mental health support implementation, however, has varied significantly across different districts because of fluctuating resources and priorities. School choice has continued to be on the rise, with more families opting to leave the public school system (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023).

Defining "At-Risk"

In the aftermath of the pandemic, the definition of "at-risk" expanded to include a broader spectrum of vulnerabilities. Issues such as trauma resulting from pandemic-induced loss, economic instability, or exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are increasingly recognized as contributing factors to a student's at-risk status (Prime et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the intertwining of diverse risk factors underscores how economic and social challenges can exacerbate academic difficulties. The pandemic highlighted the interconnectedness of these challenges, demonstrating that they often compound one another (Gassman-Pines et al., 2020). This recognition sparked renewed discussions surrounding equity

in education, acknowledging systemic factors like poverty, racism, and lack of access to healthcare as root causes of disparities faced by at-risk populations (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

Specific Factors Impacting At-Risk Students

During the pandemic, many students faced significant academic setbacks owing to disrupted learning environments and the challenges of remote learning (Engzell et al., 2021). The reliance on technology emerged as both a remedy and a barrier, especially for those lacking necessary devices or consistent internet access, which significantly impeded engagement in online classes (Schueler et al., 2022).

Mental health challenges surged during this period, with reports indicating increasing rates of anxiety, depression, and trauma among students (de Figueiredo et al., 2021). To address these escalating challenges, schools began adopting or expanding SEL and trauma-informed practices, aiming to build resilience and create supportive learning environments (Aspen Institute, 2020).

Economic Disadvantage and Family Instability

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified existing economic disparities. Low-income families were particularly affected by job loss, housing insecurity, and food insecurity, all of which further impacted students' academic engagement and performance (Patel et al., 2021). The digital divide became increasingly evident as remote learning revealed significant inequities in access to educational resources (Vogels et al., 2020), while inflation placed additional financial burdens on already struggling families, compounding stresses within the home environment and decreasing students' capacity to focus on their education (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

The strains resulting from increased caregiver burdens during school closures hindered the support systems necessary for at-risk students, as many parents grappled with balancing

work, childcare, and educational needs (Fontanesi et al., 2020). The heightened demand for mental health services during and after the pandemic accentuated these challenges, presenting barriers such as cost and availability that disproportionately affected lower-income families (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020).

Conclusion

The 2019-2025 period saw profound transformations in education, predominantly driven by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic fluctuations, and increased social awareness. The compounded challenges for "at-risk" students necessitate a comprehensive approach focused on individual and systemic supports, along with targeted interventions to address learning loss, mental health, and the ongoing effects of economic instability. Despite an increasing recognition of these issues and a push for equitable solutions, disparities in resources and support persist, continuing to shape the educational experiences of at-risk students.

Summary

This section introduced the research problem and reviewed literature surrounding teacher-student relationships (TSRs) within alternative educational settings, especially as they pertain to at-risk students. Traditional public schools, with their standardized approaches, often struggle to meet the needs of students facing academic, social-emotional, or life challenges. Alternative schools, by contrast, offer a more personalized approach, focusing on the "whole child" and creating environments where positive TSRs can flourish. Positive TSRs, characterized by support, trust, and emotional connection, are essential for improving student engagement, academic achievement, and social-emotional well-being, particularly for students underserved by traditional models.

The section also explores the critical importance of TSRs for fostering a positive school climate and supporting at-risk students who may be more susceptible to academic disengagement, absenteeism, and dropout. Research consistently demonstrates that TSRs play a crucial role in student success, particularly for those with high levels of risk. Positive TSRs have been shown to improve academic engagement, attendance, and prosocial behaviors, while poor TSRs contribute to negative outcomes such as lower grades, behavioral issues, and increased dropout rates. This dissertation aims to address the gap in understanding of how TSRs are perceived by students in alternative settings and how these relationships contribute to their academic and social-emotional development.

Additionally, this section reviews existing programs and strategies that emphasize TSRs as a means to support at-risk students, including frameworks such as the Danielson Framework for Teaching, which partially incorporates TSRs in teacher evaluations. However, little research has been conducted within JCCPS to examine TSRs from both student and teacher perspectives. The findings from this study will contribute to the understanding of TSRs in alternative educational environments and provide actionable insights for fostering supportive relationships that can enhance outcomes for at-risk students.

Method

This section describes the purpose of the study, including research questions, design and methods, participants, data collection, and proposed analyses.

Rationale

In the current era of school reform, there is a significant focus on teacher effectiveness, often measured primarily by student academic performance. While instructional quality is undoubtedly crucial, this approach frequently overlooks the equally vital role of teacher-student relationships (TSRs) in fostering student success. Positive TSRs—characterized by trust, respect, and caring—can significantly motivate students, especially those at risk, to stay engaged, persevere academically, and remain in school (Rich, 2006). This study fills a gap in the literature by examining how students’ perceptions of TSRs vary between alternative and traditional high school settings, focusing specifically on at-risk students who may benefit most from supportive school environments.

Although research has established the benefits of positive TSRs on student outcomes, especially for academic engagement and retention, little empirical work compares how different school types—alternative versus traditional high schools—impact TSRs. This limitation is particularly significant when considering the needs of at-risk students, who often face challenges that extend beyond academics, including social-emotional and behavioral difficulties. Traditional high schools, with their emphasis on standardized metrics, larger class sizes, and a one-size-fits-all approach, may struggle to provide the individualized attention that at-risk students need to thrive. By contrast, alternative schools address the unique needs of these students, offering smaller class sizes, flexible structures, and a focus on holistic support, which may be more conducive to fostering positive TSRs.

The primary research question guiding this study is: Do students in alternative schools report a higher quality of TSRs compared to students in traditional schools? This inquiry is essential because, although both traditional and alternative schools aim to support student achievement, they differ fundamentally in structure, philosophy, and approach. Alternative

schools often prioritize the “whole child,” addressing not only academic skills but also social and emotional needs, which may lead to stronger TSRs (Rudge, 2016). In contrast, traditional schools, constrained by standardized policies and larger class sizes, may find it challenging to provide this level of individualized support, which could impact TSRs, especially for at-risk students (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).

This study’s findings contribute to the broader understanding of TSRs by examining how educational environments influence students’ perceptions of support, engagement, and caring behaviors from teachers. With a focus on at-risk students, the study provides empirical evidence regarding the impact of school type on TSRs, addressing a critical gap in the literature. Moreover, these findings have practical implications. By identifying the environments most conducive to positive TSRs, the study can inform educational practices and policy decisions, guiding strategies that prioritize supportive, inclusive climates in both alternative and traditional school settings.

Ultimately, this research underscores the potential of alternative education settings to offer at-risk students a relational, supportive framework that may enhance engagement and academic success. As education systems strive for equity and excellence, understanding the nuances of TSRs across different school environments becomes essential for meeting the diverse needs of all students, particularly those who are most vulnerable to academic and social challenges.

Research Question 1: Is there a significant difference in student perceptions of TSR between those attending alternative schools versus those students who attend traditional schools?

Hypothesis: Students who attend an alternative schools will report significantly high degrees of TSR than students who attend a traditional school setting.

H1₀: There will be no significant difference between students who attend an alternative school and those who attend a traditional school and the perceived understanding of TSR in the building.

H1_A: There will be a significant difference between students who attend an alternative school and those who attend a traditional school and their perceived understanding of TSR in the building. Students at alternative schools will perceive better TSR than students at traditional schools.

Study Design

The study utilizes a non-experimental, ex post facto (causal-comparative) design to investigate differences in student perceptions of teacher-student relationships (TSRs) between alternative and traditional high schools. Recognized within social and behavioral sciences as essential for examining naturally occurring groups where experimental manipulation is not feasible, a causal-comparative approach provides an ethical and practical framework for this study (Franklin & Osborne, 1971; Johnson, 1977; Selltiz et al., 1976). Unlike experimental designs common in clinical and laboratory research, which involve controlled manipulation and random assignment, non-experimental designs are suited to field-based inquiries where the researcher cannot influence conditions directly (Gay et al., 2009). In this context, examining distinct school environments without imposing experimental constraints allows for a more realistic understanding of TSRs in real-world educational settings.

Non-experimental designs are essential in educational and social research, particularly when examining factors that researchers cannot manipulate directly, such as whether students attend a traditional or alternative school. This causal-comparative design aligns with the study's aim to assess naturally occurring groups (students in alternative vs. traditional schools) to

identify potential differences in TSR perceptions without experimental intervention. Given the nature of the research question and the setting, an experimental design with random assignment is neither feasible nor ethically appropriate, particularly with vulnerable at-risk students. Instead, the chosen approach enables an exploration of how different school environments may contribute to varying student experiences, a critical factor when studying TSRs among at-risk populations (Johnson, 1977; Selltiz et al., 1976).

This causal-comparative design is well-aligned with the primary research question: “Do students in alternative schools report higher degrees of TSR compared to students in traditional buildings?” By structuring the study around naturally occurring school types, this design allows for comparisons that directly address the research question. The findings can provide valuable empirical evidence on the role of school settings in shaping TSRs, particularly in supporting at-risk students who may benefit from a more individualized and nurturing environment.

Procedure and Sample Selection

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the sponsoring institution and the target public school district, data collection proceeded with permission from district executive leadership. The district granted access to a student performance database that included responses from the school climate survey, which provided insights into students' perceptions of TSRs. The dataset contained 18,994 records spanning 20 traditional high schools and three alternative schools over five years. Due to missing data (i.e., students who did not complete the campus climate survey), the final sample consisted of 7477 students from traditional schools and 119 students from alternative schools. Individual analyses differ in terms of sample sizes due to missing data on individual items.

To understand the sample in the context of the school populations, in AY2017-2018, the school district enrolled 38593 high school students in 37 schools. Only four of the 37 schools (10.8%) were alternative schools. However, there were only 302 enrolled alternative school students, 0.8% of the total district high school enrollment.

Addressing Sample Size Discrepancy

The large disparity in sample sizes between the traditional and alternative school groups presents potential issues for statistical analyses, particularly for ANOVA and t-tests. In particular, imbalanced group sizes exacerbate Type I error rates (i.e., false positive results). While these tests do not require equal sample sizes, discrepancies can lead to violations of the homogeneity of variance assumption, potentially influencing the validity of the results (Blanca et al., 2018a, 2018b).

To address this issue, I implemented the following steps:

1. **Levene's Test for Equality of Variances:** Before conducting ANOVA or t-tests, Levene's test assessed the homogeneity of variance assumption. In instances where Levene's test indicated unequal variances, the study applied the "equal variances not assumed" option in SPSS to ensure robust statistical estimates (Field, 2009). This adjustment minimizes the risk of Type I or Type II errors due to heterogeneity of variance across sample groups.
2. **Effect Size Calculations:** Effect sizes (e.g., Cohen's d , partial η^2) complemented the significance testing and provide insights into the practical implications of the findings (Cohen, 1988). Reporting effect sizes is especially important given the large sample size, as it provides an understanding of the magnitude of the observed differences, independent of sample size.

Data Analysis Plan

The primary analysis compared TSR perceptions between students in alternative and traditional schools. ANOVA and independent t-tests evaluated mean differences in TSR scores between the two groups. In cases of significant variance heterogeneity, analyses used the “equal variances not assumed” approach. Additionally, the study reported both *p*-values and effect sizes to contextualize the practical significance of any detected differences.

Implications for Study Validity

These methodological adjustments allow the study to account for the sample size discrepancy and maintain the validity of the findings. By implementing techniques such as heterogeneity adjustments and effect size calculations, the study minimized biases arising from sample imbalances.

Instrumentation and Scaling

In this study, the dependent variable, Teacher-Student Relationship (TSR), is a continuous variable measured by items related to a Positive and Nurturing Environment, using data from the School Climate Survey developed specifically for the target school district. A team of measurement experts designed the measure to assess various aspects of school climate, including constructs like Effective Instructional Leadership, Sense of Shared Mission, Sense of Teaching, and Positive and Nurturing Environment. The Positive and Nurturing Environment construct most closely aligns with the study’s focus on TSR.

To capture TSR, the study used 12 survey items focused on Positive and Nurturing Environments. These items include statements such as “I believe my teachers care about me as a person” and “I like going to school here.” These items reflect the core qualities that define positive TSRs, as they assess students’ perceptions of support, care, and belonging.

The reliability of the Positive and Nurturing Environment subscale is strong, as indicated by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .94. This high reliability confirms that the items consistently measure related aspects of TSR.

This approach allows us to focus specifically on TSR as perceived by students, ensuring that our analysis directly aligns with the study's goal of exploring how different school environments, traditional and alternative, might influence these critical relationships.

The questions chosen for inclusion fell into three broad categories; caring environment; school engagement; and school belonging. Items not selected for inclusion focused on academic success skills, school resources, personal and site safety, and bullying. The choice to include the 12 specific items stems from the study's specific goals, to student how students perceive student-teacher relationships.

Excluded items focused on issues that are not closely related to TSRs. For example, items focusing on academics and school resources are not related to directly to TSRs. Additionally, alternative schools may be at a disadvantage in categories such as academics as the schools serve many students who have had to repeated grades for academic reasons. Similarly, school and site safety concerns may be more pronounced as alternative schools students who have been expelled for behavior reasons and students that are court mandated to attend. Alternative schools may also be at an advantage with regards to school resources as smaller class sizes reduce overall funding.

Alignment of School Climate Items with Bulach's Framework

Bulach's framework categorizes TSR into five areas, three of which appeared in the instrument:

1. **Teacher Support:** This area focuses on how much students feel their teachers encourage and believe in them. Items such as "My teacher treats me with respect" fit into this category.
2. **Teacher Closeness:** This reflects the emotional connection students feel with their teachers. The item "I believe my teachers care about me as a person" captures this sense of closeness.
3. **Teacher Dependence:** This area assesses whether students feel they have reliable support within the school. The item "If I had a problem, I know there is at least one adult in this school who would help me" focuses on dependence.

Two other areas from Bulach's framework, Teacher Conflict and Teacher Intrusiveness, do not appear in the instrument, as the focus here is on the positive aspects of TSR. This alignment ensures that the survey captures a well-rounded view of the supportive and caring relationships central to TSR.

The 12 questions cover a range of aspects related to school climate and, importantly, touch upon several dimensions relevant to teacher-student relationships (TSRs). Below is a discussion of each item.

Teacher-Student Relationship (TSR) Focused

The question asking "I believe my teachers care about me as a person" focuses on care/support and emotional safety. This is a direct measure of perceived teacher caring, a core component of positive TSRs. It's particularly relevant to at-risk students who need to feel valued

and supported. "My teachers often say positive things to me" focuses on care/support and communication. This addresses positive reinforcement and communication, suggesting a supportive and encouraging teacher-student dynamic. "Teachers treat students with respect" focuses on respect. This assesses a fundamental aspect of TSRs. It's important for all students, but especially crucial for at-risk students who may have experienced disrespect in past educational settings. "Students show respect for the teachers in this school" also addresses respect. This gauges the reciprocal nature of respect within the TSR. It suggests a healthy classroom environment where both students and teachers value each other. "If I had a problem, I know there is at least one adult in this school who would help me" addresses care/support, trust, and emotional safety. While not exclusively about teachers, it strongly implies a supportive TSR where students feel they can rely on teachers (or other adults) for help. This is vital for at-risk students who may need extra support.

Principal-Student Relationship Focused (Indirectly related to TSRs)

"I believe the principal cares about all the students in the school" focuses on school climate. While not directly a TSR question, the principal's perceived caring sets the tone for the entire school's climate. A caring principal likely fosters an environment where positive TSRs can flourish. "The principal takes time to talk to students when he/she sees them in the hallways" addresses school climate and visibility. Similar to the previous question, this suggests a principal who is engaged and visible, contributing to a positive school climate that indirectly supports TSRs.

Overall School Climate (Indirectly related to TSRs)

"I like going to school here" addresses sense of belonging and general affect. This is a broad measure of students' overall feelings about the school. A positive response likely correlates

with positive TSRs, especially for at-risk students who need to feel they belong. "I feel like I am an important part of the school community" addresses sense of belonging. This directly addresses students' sense of belonging, which is strongly influenced by their relationships with teachers and peers. It is particularly relevant for at-risk students' engagement and retention. "The students in this school get along with each other" focuses on peer relationships. While not a TSR question, positive peer relationships contribute to a healthy school climate, which can indirectly support positive TSRs.

School Practices (Indirectly related to TSRs)

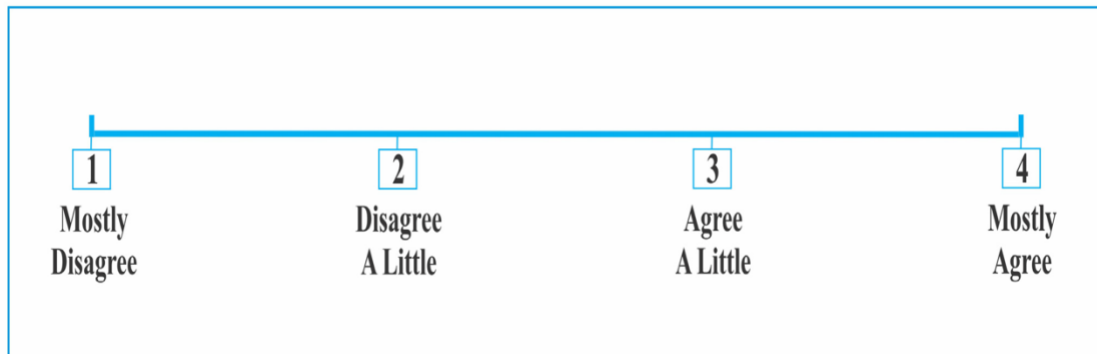
"Students in this school are rewarded or recognized publicly for good behavior" addresses school culture and positive reinforcement. This indicates a school culture that values positive behavior, which can contribute to a more positive environment for TSRs to develop.

"Students in this school are rewarded or recognized publicly for academic success" focuses on school culture and achievement orientation. This suggests an emphasis on academic achievement. While not directly related to TSRs, it can interact with TSR quality. For example, in a school with strong TSRs, academic recognition might be particularly motivating.

Despite some limitations, this 12-question survey provides valuable data for exploring the research question. It covers key dimensions of TSRs and school climate that are likely to differ between alternative and traditional schools and are particularly important for at-risk students. The findings from this survey, combined with other data and analysis, can contribute to a better understanding of how different school environments impact TSRs and, consequently, student outcomes.

Figure 1

Schematic Representation of Likert-type Response Scale



Each item uses a four-point Likert scale, as illustrated in Figure 1, ranging from 1 (*Mostly Disagree*) to 4 (*Mostly Agree*). The composite TSR score sums and averages these 12 items. This score serves as the primary continuous dependent variable, representing the overall perception of TSR for each student. Additional analyses address scores on the individual items.

The resulting composite scores range from 1 to 4, with higher scores indicating more positive perceptions of TSR. This transformation to a quasi-interval scale enables more refined statistical analysis by treating the data as having interval-like properties (Ferguson, 1951; Thorndike, 1982). Summed Likert-type scales can provide reliable and sensitive measures for quantitative analysis (Babbie, 1973; Johnson, 1977; Winborne, 1992).

By structuring TSR measurement through these carefully aligned items and scaling techniques, this study ensures a reliable and valid assessment of TSR, focused on the supportive aspects that are most relevant to understanding the impact of different school environments on student relationships with teachers.

Analysis

The analysis approach for this study addressed whether students' perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationships (TSR) differ significantly between alternative and traditional school

settings. The primary statistical method employed was a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), with additional independent samples t-tests conducted on each of the twelve individual survey items to provide a more granular view of potential differences.

Analysis Techniques

The primary analysis used ANOVA to compare TSR perceptions between the two types of school settings (alternative and traditional). Here, the independent variable was school setting, with two levels (alternative and traditional), while the dependent variable was TSR, treated as a continuous measure. ANOVA assessed whether there were statistically significant differences in TSR scores between the two school types.

To gain insight into specific aspects of TSR, independent samples t-tests examined each of the twelve survey items. This allowed for a detailed examination of specific differences in TSR perceptions.

Assumptions Testing

Before conducting the analyses, key assumptions for ANOVA, analyses address homogeneity of variance. The Levene's test was employed to check for equal variances across groups. In cases where there were violations of the homogeneity of variance assumptions adjustments (e.g., the "equal variances not assumed" option in SPSS) ensured robustness of the findings (Blanca et al., 2018a; Field, 2009).

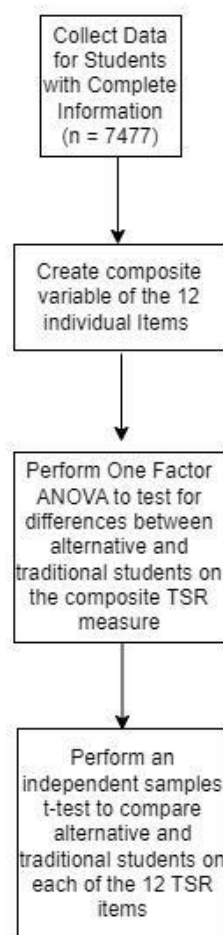
Statistical Software and Significance Threshold

All analyses used SPSS version 28.0. All tests used a p -value threshold of $< .05$ to determine statistical significance, a conventional standard in educational research, allowing us to interpret findings with confidence.

This approach provides a thorough examination of TSR differences, aligning with the study's goals to understand how different educational environments impact student-teacher relationships, particularly for at-risk students in alternative school settings. By utilizing ANOVA and item-level t-tests, this analysis captures both the overall TSR perception and specific relational elements, offering a comprehensive view of TSR across school types. Figure 2 summarizes the analysis strategy.

Figure 2

Analysis Strategy



Results

Demographics

Table 2 summarizes demographic differences across the two school types. Of note, it appears that alternative schools serve a far larger proportion of older Black males than traditional schools. The initial sample included only those students who provided complete data on the 12 TSR questions.

Table 2

Student Demographics by School Type

| Variable | Traditional | | Alternative | |
|----------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| Gender | <i>N</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % |
| Male | 3514 | 49.2 | 78 | 61.4 |
| Female | 3629 | 50.8 | 49 | 38.6 |
| Race/Ethnicity | | | | |
| AI or AN | 20 | 0.3 | 1 | 0.8 |
| Asian | 231 | 3.2 | 1 | 0.8 |
| Black/AA | 4520 | 63.3 | 82 | 63.6 |
| Hispanic | 2062 | 28.9 | 40 | 31.0 |
| More than one | 106 | 1.5 | 4 | 3.1 |
| NH/OPI | 16 | 0.2 | 0 | 0.0 |
| White | 188 | 2.6 | 1 | 0.8 |
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Age | 15.94 | 1.11 | 16.78 | 2.36 |

Analyses examined differences in how students perceived relationships with teachers in traditional versus alternative high school settings. This study focused on whether alternative education environments, designed to support at-risk students holistically, promote stronger teacher-student relationships (TSRs) compared to traditional high schools. Previous research suggests that positive TSRs relate to increased student engagement, better academic performance, and lower dropout rates, particularly for students facing social, emotional, and academic challenges. However, little empirical work has directly compared TSR perceptions

across school types, making this research significant for understanding the influence of school environment on students' relational experiences with teachers.

To investigate these differences, I used a one-factor, between-subjects Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to analyze TSR perceptions among students in both school types. Here, the independent variable, or grouping factor, is school type, categorized into two levels: traditional and alternative high schools. The dependent variable is the TSR perception score, derived from a continuous or interval measure. The ANOVA is appropriate here as it allows us to compare means between the two groups and determine whether students in alternative settings indeed perceive a higher level of support and engagement from their teachers.

The analysis, shown in Tables 3 and 4, began with testing the homogeneity of variance assumption, a key requirement for ANOVA. We verified that the variance ratio between the groups met this assumption, meaning the data were suitable for analysis without violating ANOVA requirements (Tabachnick et al., 2019). Results from the ANOVA showed a significant difference between the two groups, indicating that students in alternative high schools reported stronger TSR perceptions compared to those in traditional settings, $F(1, 7474) = 5.57, p = .018, \eta^2 = .001$. Though the effect size for this difference was small, it still underscores that the alternative school environment positively influences students' relational experiences with their teachers. Using a homogeneity adjusted test produces nearly identical results, $F(1, 197.3) = 5.57, p = .019, \eta^2 = .001$.

Table 3*Descriptive Statistics: School Type by TSR*

| School Type | <i>n</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|----------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Traditional HS | 7357 | 2.81 | 0.51 |
| Alternative HS | 119 | 2.92 | 0.68 |
| Total | 7476 | 2.81 | 0.51 |

Table 4*Results of ANOVA*

| | <i>SS</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>MS</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | η^2 |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Between Groups | 1.456 | 1 | 1.45 | 5.57 | .018* | .001 |
| Within Groups | 1951.5 | 7474 | 0.26 | | | |
| Total | 1952.9 | 7475 | | | | |

Note. * $p < .05$. Alternatively, this analysis could have used an independent samples t-test. That analysis produces $t(7474) = 2.60$, $p = .018$, $d = 0.18$ as with two factor levels, $F = t^2$.

Since the overall school climate score significantly differed using the ANOVA, and alternative students had a higher perception of TSR, additional analyses examined the 12 individual items from the School Climate Survey to determine exactly where the two school models deviated. This analysis involved a series of independent samples *t* tests. The independent variable was school type with two levels: general education high school versus alternative high school. The dependent variables were the 12 individual items on the School Climate Survey. Examination of Table 5 provides an overview of the descriptive results.

Table 5*Descriptive Statistics for School Type of Individual School Climate Items*

| | | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| My teachers care about me | Traditional | 7199 | 2.72 | 1.01 |
| | Alternative | 114 | 2.81 | 0.99 |
| Principal cares about the students | Traditional | 7143 | 2.77 | 1.08 |
| | Alternative | 114 | 2.82 | 1.07 |
| Students get along with each other | Traditional | 7195 | 2.15 | 0.98 |
| | Alternative | 114 | 2.71 | 1.01 |
| I like going to school here | Traditional | 7199 | 2.57 | 1.06 |
| | Alternative | 116 | 2.80 | 1.07 |
| If I had a problem, there is at least one adult in school who would help | Traditional | 7220 | 3.04 | 1.04 |
| | Alternative | 116 | 3.05 | 1.04 |
| Teachers treat students with respect | Traditional | 7187 | 2.74 | 0.96 |
| | Alternative | 115 | 2.93 | 1.08 |
| Students show respect for the teachers | Traditional | 7163 | 2.22 | 0.94 |
| | Alternative | 113 | 2.74 | 1.10 |
| My teachers often say positive things to me | Traditional | 7074 | 2.99 | 0.88 |
| | Alternative | 113 | 3.03 | 0.97 |
| Students are recognized publicly for good behavior | Traditional | 7178 | 2.51 | 1.02 |
| | Alternative | 117 | 2.77 | 1.04 |
| Students are recognized publicly for academic success. | Traditional | 7166 | 3.01 | 0.95 |
| | Alternative | 117 | 2.9 | 1.00 |
| The principal takes time to talk to students in the hallways. | Traditional | 7162 | 2.41 | 1.07 |
| | Alternative | 116 | 2.78 | 1.07 |
| I feel like I am an important part of the school community. | Traditional | 7124 | 2.33 | 1.03 |
| | Alternative | 115 | 2.69 | 1.04 |

Note. *Ns* differ due to missing data on some items.

Table 6 revealed six items on the School Climate Survey to be significant. For each of the analyses, Levene's test examined the homogeneity of variance assumption. Adjusted degrees of freedom (termed "equal variances not assumed" in SPSS) addressed the violation. Those tests presented with reduced *df* (i.e., roughly 700 rather than 7000) in the table represent application of

the adjustment. The independent samples *t*-test (and one factor ANOVA) are appropriate for comparing two groups comprised of different individuals.

The item “The students in this school get along with each other” was significant ($p < .001$) whereby those students in alternative high school agreed more with this statement ($M = 2.71, SD = 1.01$) than their counterparts in traditional high school ($M = 2.15, SD = .978$). Similarly, the item “I like going to school here” was significant ($p = .018$), whereby students in alternative setting had higher agreement with this statement ($M = 2.80, SD = 1.07$) compared to students in traditional high school ($M = 2.57, SD = 1.06$). The item “students show respect for teachers in this school” was also statistically significant ($p < .001$). As before, students in the alternative setting reported higher agreement with this statement ($M = 2.74, SD = 1.100$) compared to traditional ($M = 2.22, SD = .939$). In addition, the item “students in this school are rewarded or recognized publicly for good behavior” students in alternative schools reported higher agreement with this statement ($M = 2.77, SD = 1.04$) versus those in traditional settings ($M = 2.51, SD = 1.02$). Students in alternative schools also reported higher agreement that the “principal takes time to talk to students when he/she sees them in the hallway” ($M = 2.78, SD = 1.07$) compared to traditional ($M = 2.41, SD = 1.07$). Lastly, students in alternative settings agreed more that they feel they are an important part of the school community ($M = 2.69, SD = 1.04$) compared to traditional students ($M = 2.33, SD = 1.03$). Cohen’s *d* for effect size for these significant findings ranged from 0.05 to 0.14, indicating small statistical effects.

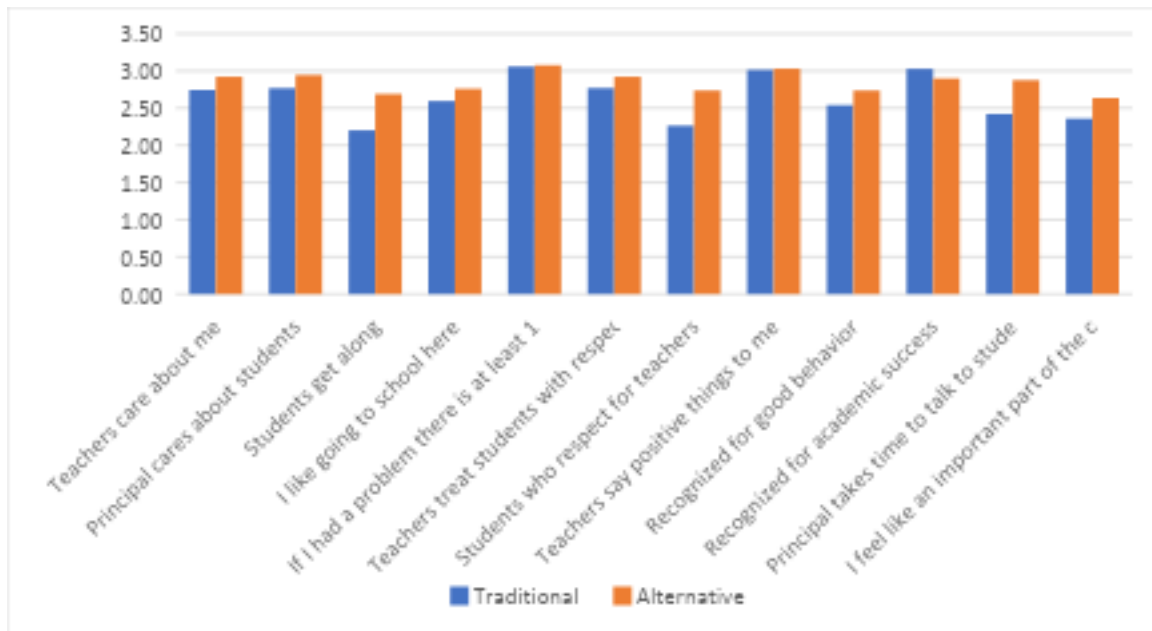
Table 6*Results from Independent Samples t-test*

| | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>d</i> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|
| I believe my teachers care about me as a person | -0.93 | 7310 | .350 | -0.02 |
| I believe the principal cares about all the students in the school. | -0.72 | 728 | .474 | -0.02 |
| The students in this school get along with each other. | -6.10 | 7307 | <.001* | -0.14 |
| I like going to school here. | -2.36 | 7313 | .018* | -0.06 |
| If I had a problem, I know there is at least one adult in this school who would help me. | -0.12 | 7334 | .901 | 0.00 |
| Teachers treat students with respect. | -2.12 | 730 | .034 | -0.05 |
| Students show respect for the teachers in this school. | -5.84 | 727 | <.001 | -0.14 |
| My teachers often say positive things to me. | -0.42 | 719 | .676 | -0.01 |
| Students in this school are rewarded or recognized publicly for good behavior. | -2.76 | 7293 | .006* | -0.06 |
| Students in this school are rewarded or recognized publicly for academic success. | 1.28 | 728 | .199 | 0.03 |
| The principal takes time to talk to students when he/she sees them in the hallways. | -3.67 | 728 | <.001* | -0.09 |
| I feel like I am an important part of the school community. | -3.70 | 724 | <.001* | -0.09 |

Figure 3 shows the difference between the means for students in alternative settings versus those in traditional for agreeing with each item on the School Climate Survey.

Figure 3

Means by Item and School Type



Key Findings on Specific Survey Items

Six items from the School Climate Survey showed significant differences between the two groups:

1. Peer Relationships: Students in alternative settings agreed more with the statement, "The students in this school get along with each other," indicating a stronger sense of community among peers in alternative schools, ($M = 2.71, SD = 1.01$) compared to traditional ($M = 2.15, SD = 0.98$), $t(7307) = -6.10, p < .001$.
2. Enjoyment of School: Alternative school students also reported higher agreement with "I like going to school here," suggesting that they find their school experience more positive, ($M = 2.80, SD = 1.07$) versus traditional students ($M = 2.57, SD = 1.06$), $t(7313) = -2.36, p = .018$.

3. Respect for Teachers: The item "students show respect for the teachers in this school" was significantly higher among alternative students ($M = 2.74, SD = 1.10$) compared to those in traditional schools ($M = 2.22, SD = 0.94$), $t(727) = -5.84, p < .001$, pointing to a more respectful student-teacher dynamic in alternative settings.
4. Recognition of Good Behavior: Students in alternative schools felt they were more publicly recognized for good behavior, with higher agreement on "Students in this school are rewarded or recognized publicly for good behavior" ($M = 2.77, SD = 1.04$) than students in traditional settings ($M = 2.51, SD = 1.02$), $t(7293) = -2.76, p = .006$.
5. Principal-Student Interaction: The item "The principal takes time to talk to students when he/she sees them in the hallways" was another area where alternative school students reported higher satisfaction ($M = 2.78, SD = 1.07$) than their traditional peers ($M = 2.41, SD = 1.07$), $t(728) = -3.67, p < .001$.
6. Sense of Belonging: Finally, students in alternative schools felt more like they were an important part of the school community, with higher scores on "I feel like I am an important part of the school community" ($M = 2.69, SD = 1.04$) versus traditional school students ($M = 2.33, SD = 1.03$), $t(724) = -3.70, p < .001$.

These findings suggest that alternative schools foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for students, where respectful interactions, recognition, and a greater sense of belonging reinforce TSRs.

This analysis provides empirical support for the hypothesis that alternative educational settings offer a relational advantage for at-risk students, fostering stronger TSRs than traditional high schools. These results emphasize the role of a supportive school climate in promoting student well-being and highlight the potential for alternative schools to serve as a model for

relational practices that can benefit all students. This study contributes valuable insights into educational practices and underscores the importance of implementing relational strategies that prioritize students' social and emotional needs in educational policy and school design.

Additional Analysis 1: Examining the Influence of School Year

These analyses initially set out to use ANCOVA to compare traditional and alternative schools while controlling for year in school. However, for several analyses, year in school interacted with school type. ANCOVA requires no interaction effect. For this reason, further analyses conceptualized school type as a factor using a two factor ANOVA.

Table 7 shows the two factor ANOVA examining the overall scale scores and individual item scores by school type, year in school, and their interaction. Broadly the results are consistent with the initial analyses with one important difference. School type effects remained statistically significant following the inclusion of grade level. However, in several cases, an interaction emerged between school type and grade level. Figures 4-16 highlight the pattern of the interactions. Where interactions were present, effects generally indicated that for traditional skills ratings for the 9th and 11th graders was stable. However, importantly for alternative schools, for several variables, 11th grade ratings were higher than 9th grade ratings. Figures 4-

Table 7*Results from Two Factor ANOVA*

| | <i>Type</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>Type*Year</i> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Overall score | $F(1,7268) = 8.65, p = .003,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ | $F(1,7268) = 10.10, p = .001,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ | $F(1,7268) = 18.21, p < .001,$ $\eta^2_p = .002$ |
| I believe my teachers care about me as a person | $F(1,7268) = 4.44, p = .035,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ | $F(1,7268) = 1.24, p = .265,$ $\eta^2_p = .000$ | $F(1,7268) = 1.28, p = .258,$ $\eta^2_p = .000$ |
| I believe the principal cares about all the students in the school. | $F(1,7268) = 5.05, p = .025,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ | $F(1,7268) = 2.22, p = .137,$ $\eta^2_p = .000$ | $F(1,7268) = 7.65, p = .006,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ |
| The students in this school get along with each other. | $F(1,7268) = 32.29, p < .001,$ $\eta^2_p = .004$ | $F(1,7268) = 4.23, p = .040,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ | $F(1,7268) = 4.15, p = .042,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ |
| I like going to school here. | $F(1,7268) = 5.40, p = .020,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ | $F(1,7268) = 4.80, p = .029,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ | $F(1,7268) = 15.99, p < .001,$ $\eta^2_p = .002$ |
| If I had a problem, I know there is at least one adult in this school who would help me. | $F(1,7268) = 0.09, p = .763,$ $\eta^2_p = .000$ | $F(1,7268) = 3.65, p = .056,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ | $F(1,7268) = 1.80, p = .180,$ $\eta^2_p = .000$ |
| Teachers treat students with respect. | $F(1,7268) = 4.52, p = .033,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ | $F(1,7268) = 4.56, p = .033,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ | $F(1,7268) = 7.51, p = .006,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ |
| Students show respect for the teachers in this school. | $F(1,7268) = 33.39, p < .001,$ $\eta^2_p = .005$ | $F(1,7268) = 2.41, p = .120,$ $\eta^2_p = .000$ | $F(1,7268) = 4.45, p = .035,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ |
| My teachers often say positive things to me. | $F(1,7268) = 0.20, p = .654,$ $\eta^2_p = .000$ | $F(1,7268) = 8.23, p = .040,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ | $F(1,7268) = 5.76, p = .016,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ |
| Students in this school are rewarded or recognized publicly for good behavior. | $F(1,7268) = 6.52, p = .011,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ | $F(1,7268) = 5.63, p = .018,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ | $F(1,7268) = 9.66, p = .002,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ |
| Students in this school are rewarded or recognized publicly for academic success. | $F(1,7268) = 1.61, p = .204,$ $\eta^2_p = .000$ | $F(1,7268) = 7.24, p = .007,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ | $F(1,7268) = 5.85, p = .016,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ |
| The principal takes time to talk to students when he/she sees them in the hallways. | $F(1,7268) = 24.44, p < .001,$ $\eta^2_p = .003$ | $F(1,7268) = 6.36, p = .012,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ | $F(1,7268) = 4.35, p = .037,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ |
| I feel like I am an important part of the school community. | $F(1,7268) = 10.43, p = .001,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ | $F(1,7268) = 8.33, p = .004,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ | $F(1,7268) = 5.98, p = .014,$ $\eta^2_p = .001$ |

Figure 4

Overall Climate Score by School Type and Grade Level

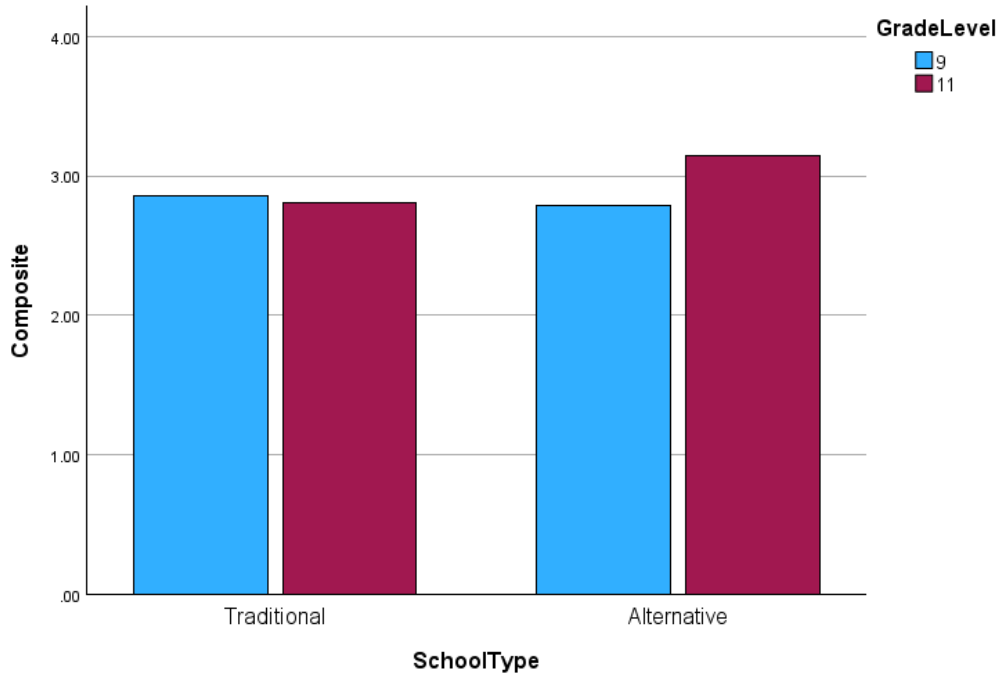


Figure 5

Teachers Care About me by School Type and Grade Level

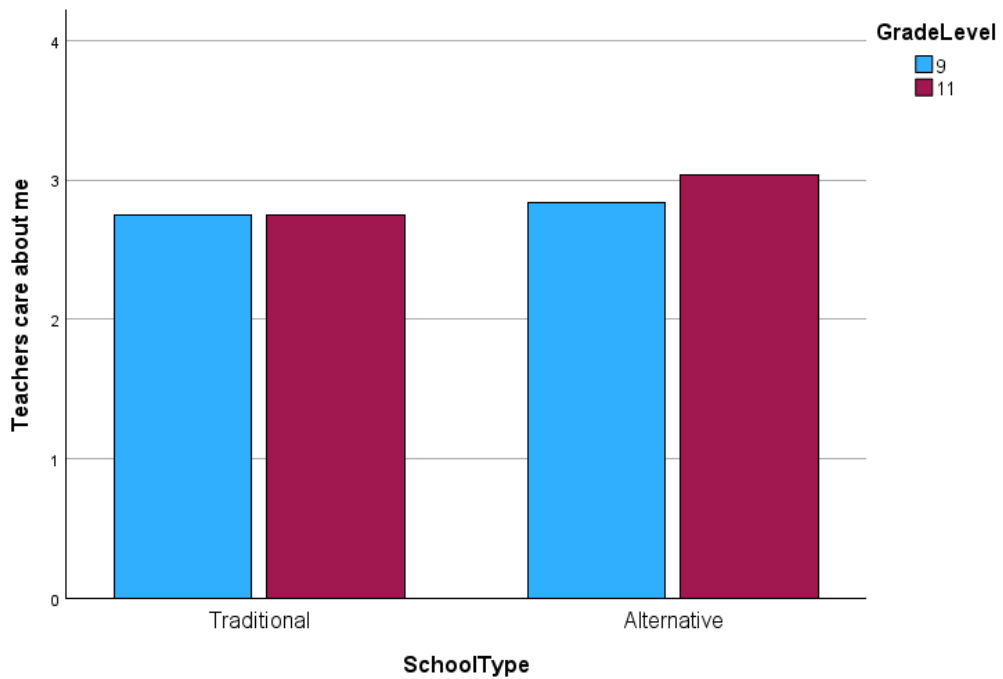


Figure 6

Principal Cares About Students by School Type and Grade Level

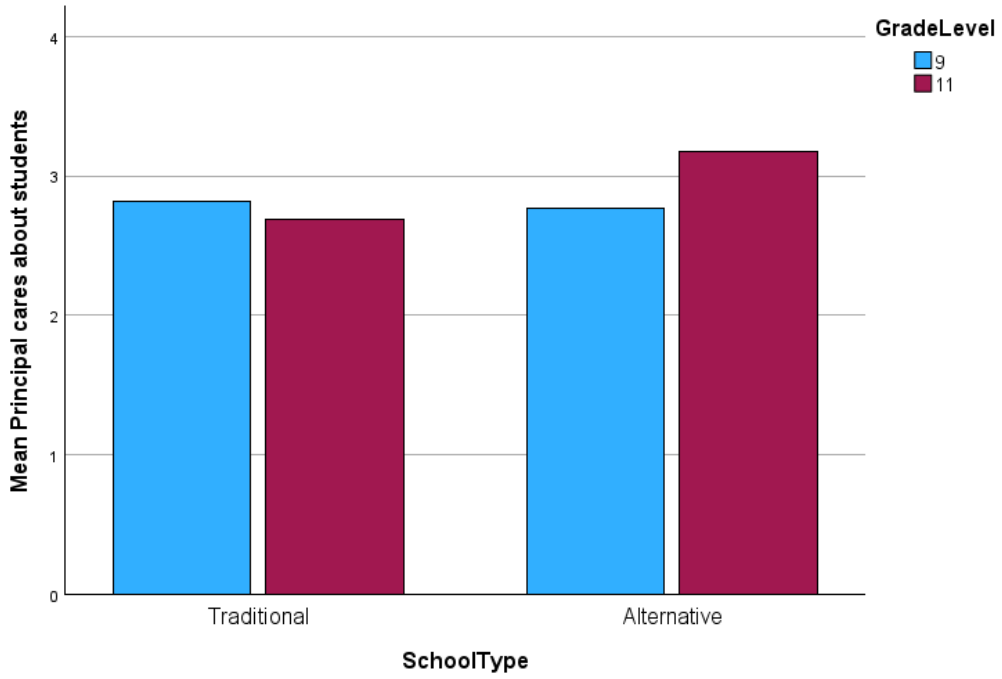


Figure 7

Students Get Along by School Type and Grade Level

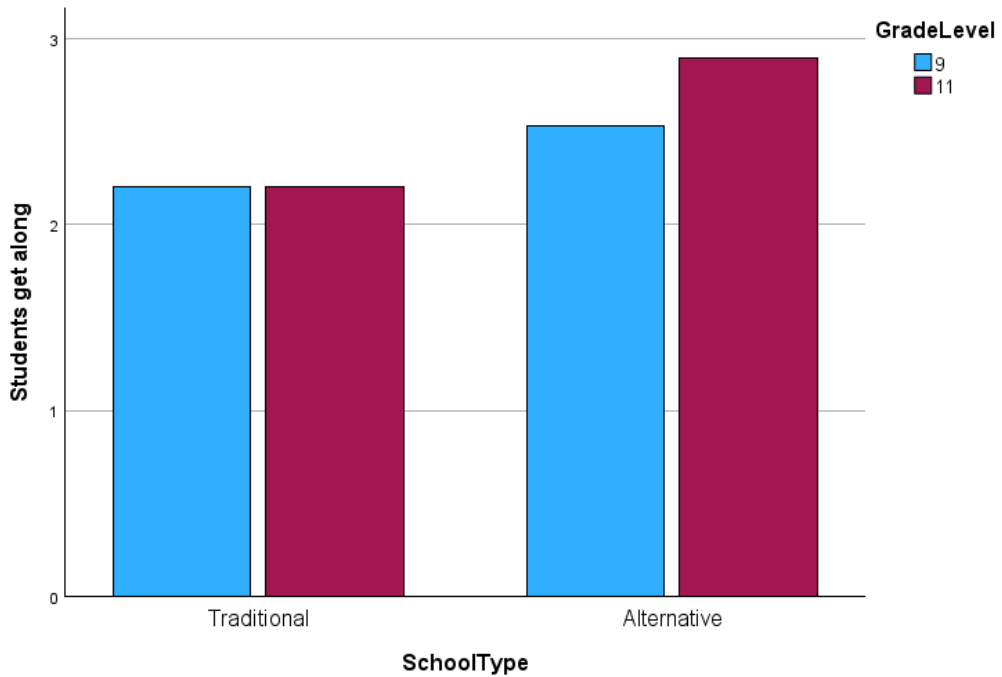


Figure 8

I like Going to School Here by School Type and Grade Level

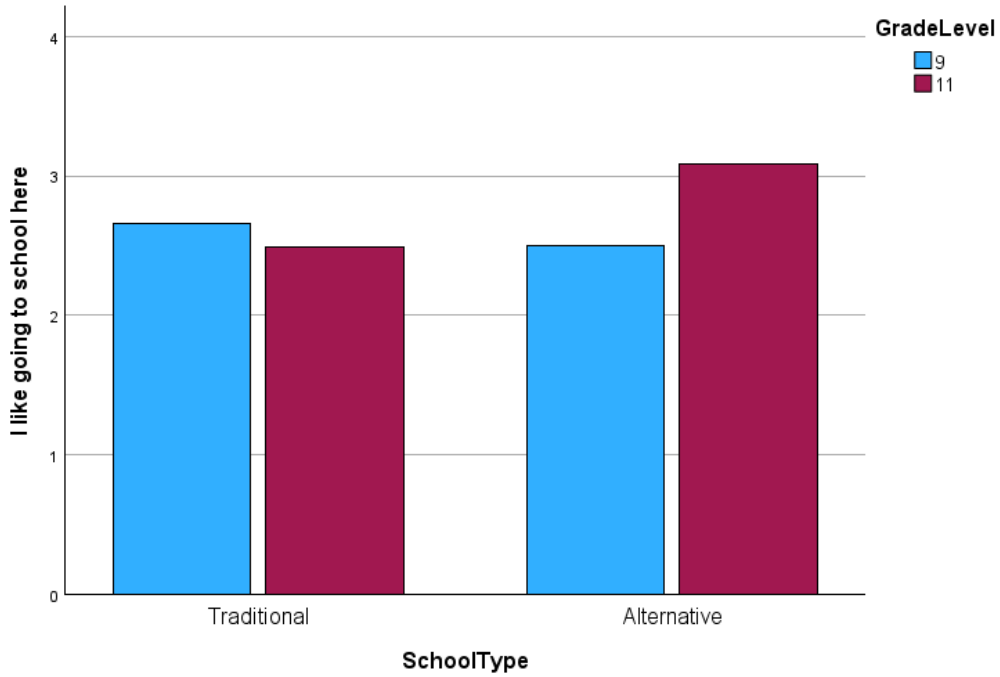


Figure 9

If I had a Problem There is an Adult at School I Could go to by School Type and Grade Level

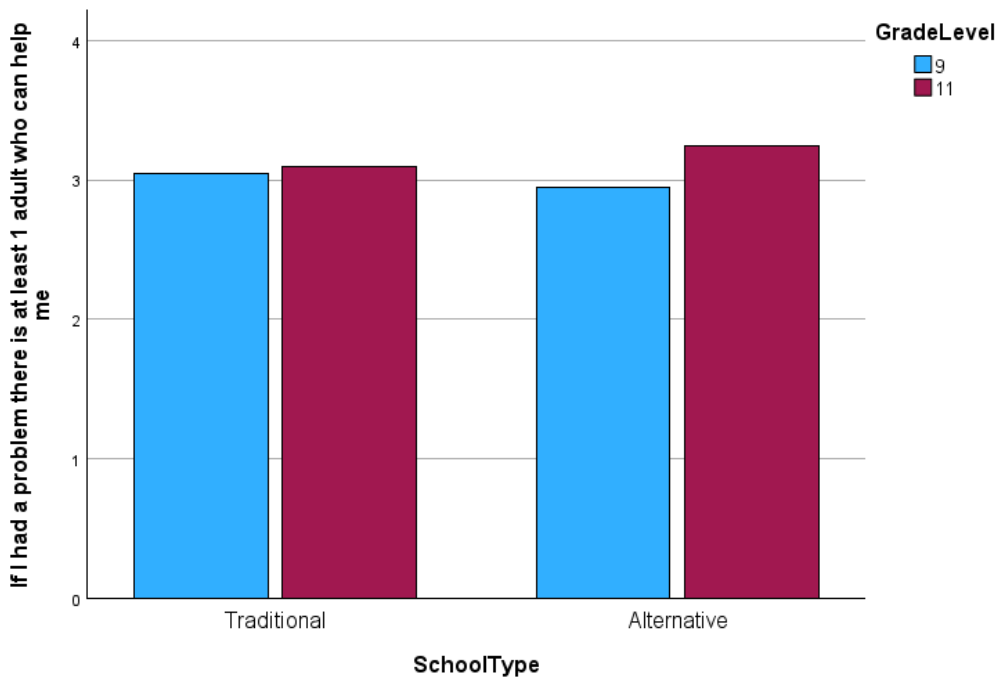


Figure 10

Teachers Treat Students With Respect by School Type and Grade Level

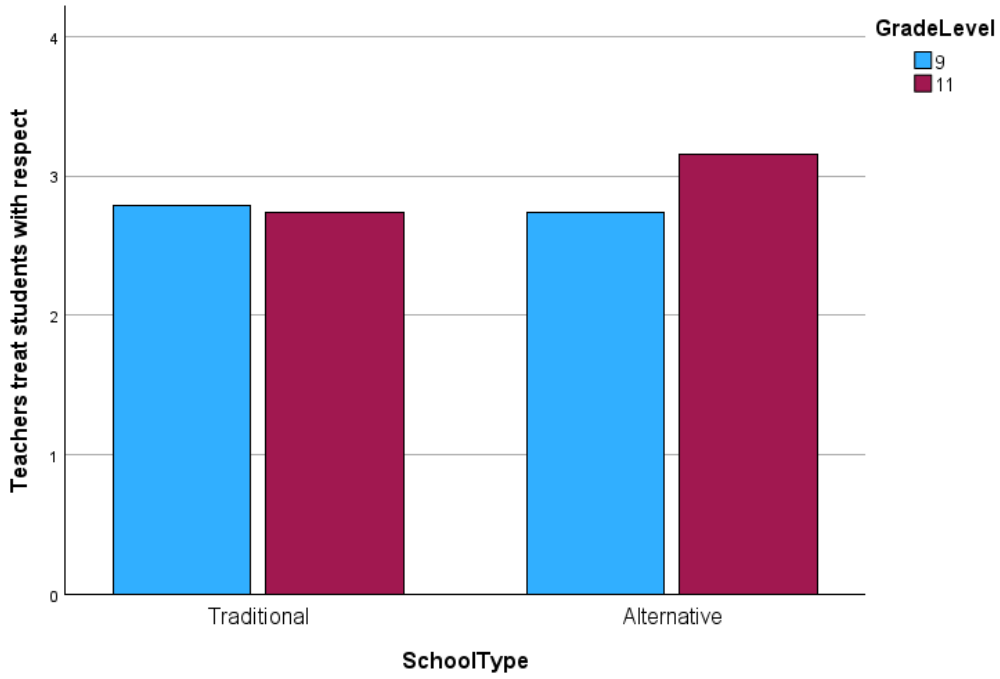


Figure 11

Students Treat Teachers with Respect by School Type and Grade Level

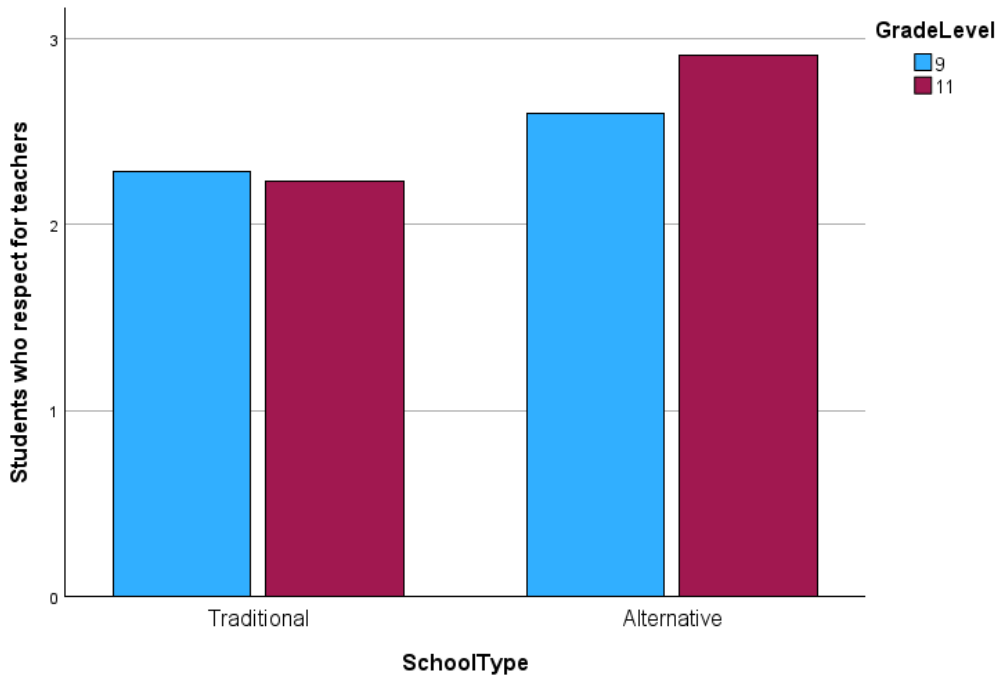


Figure 12

Teachers Say Positive Things to me by School Type and Grade Level

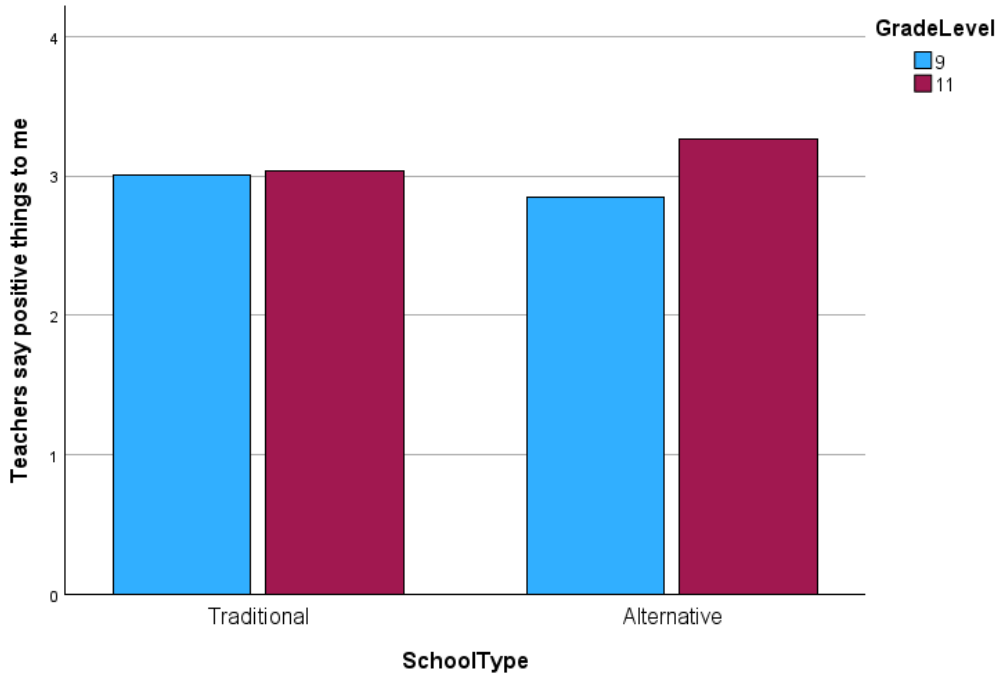


Figure 13

Recognized for Good Behavior by School Type and Grade Level

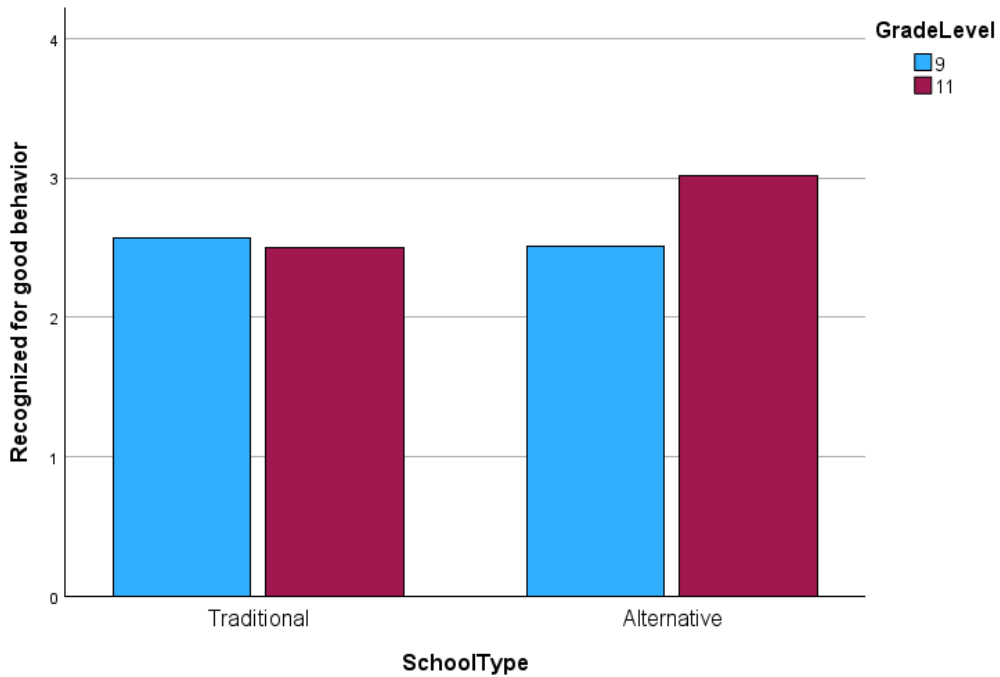


Figure 14

Recognized for Academic Success by School Type and Grade Level

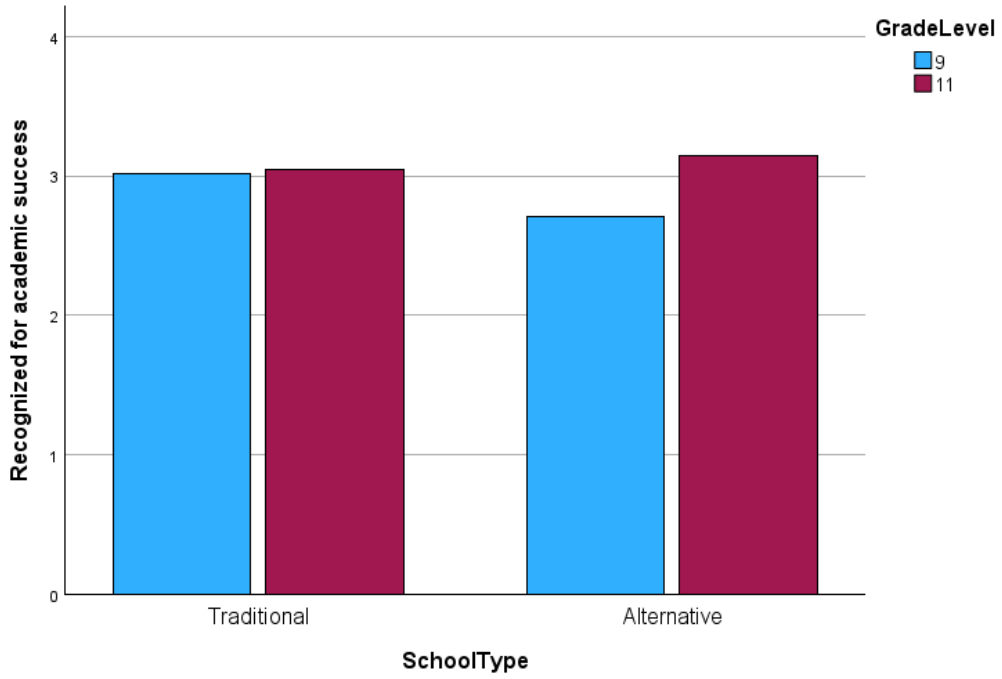


Figure 15

Principal Takes Time to Talk to Students by School Type and Grade Level

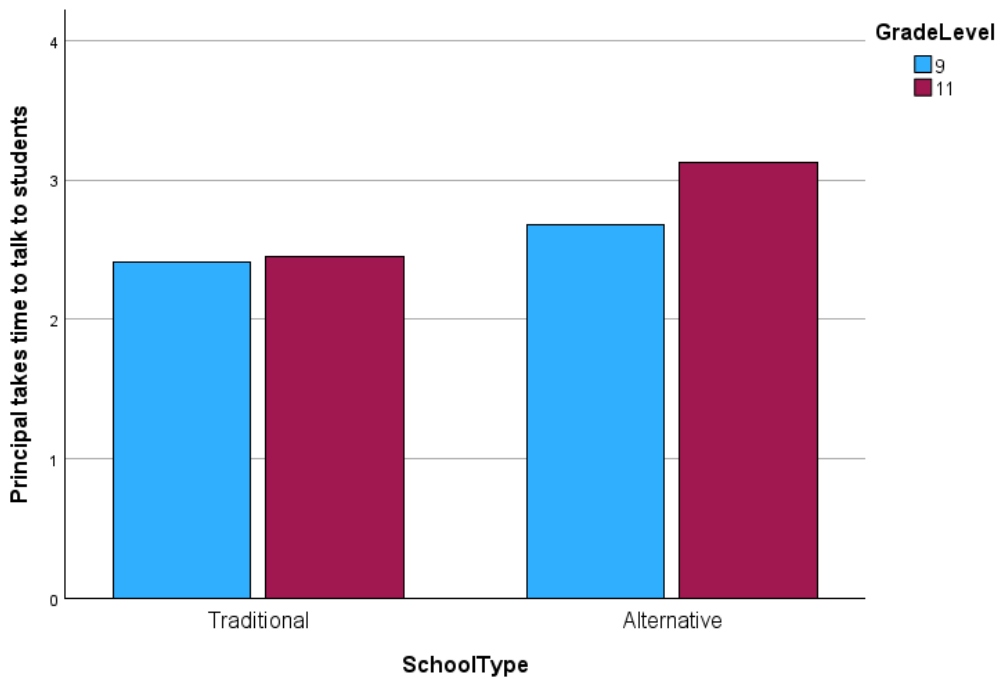
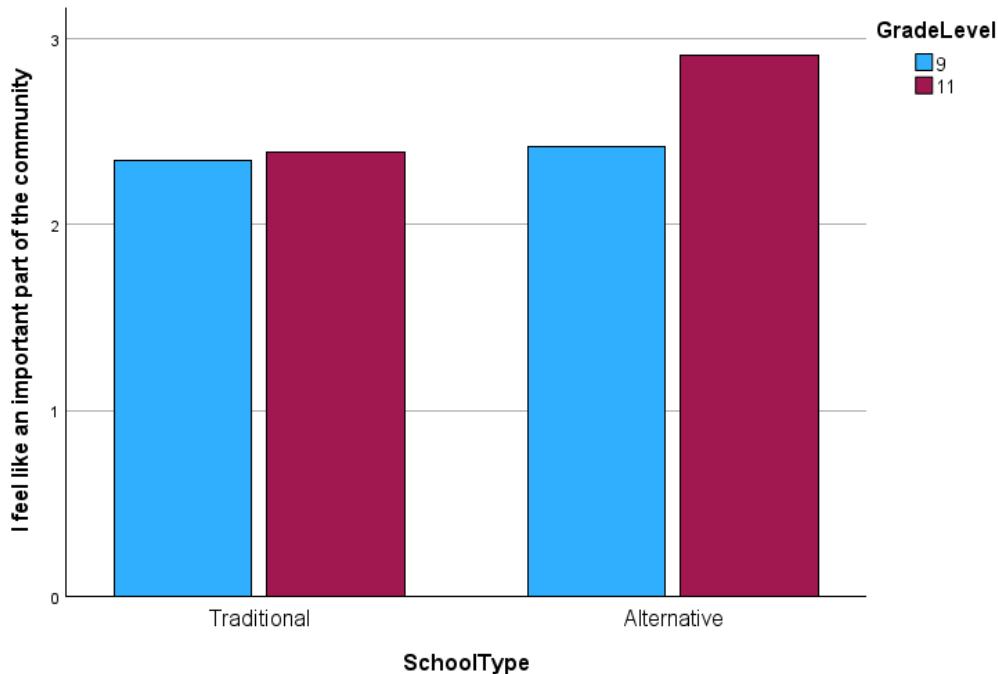


Figure 16

I Feel Like an Important Part of the Community by School Type and Grade Level



Additional Analysis 2: Age, Gender, and Ethnicity as Covariates

Given the small sample sizes for several categories, analyses of ethnicity/race categorize as Black/AA, Hispanic, and Other. As there are very small samples in several of the categories, this is the only meaningful analysis possible.

As shown in Table 8, analyses including covariates left only a few results statistically significant. Alternative schools still performed better than traditional on items indicating that students at the school got along, show respect for teachers, and the principal taking time to talk to students. However, traditional schools now performed better on the item addressing recognition of academic achievements.

There is one important caveat to these results. Covariate analyses serve to balance the groups compared. This means that the question addressed by the analyses is no longer, do alternative and traditional schools differ, rather these analyses address whether the two types of

schools would differ when equated in terms of race, gender, and age. As alternative schools serve an older population with more African American males than traditional schools, the present analyses wipe out important aspects relevant to differences between the two types of schools.

Table 8

Results from One Factor ANCOVA Controlling for Gender, Age, and Race/Ethnicity

| | <i>School Type</i> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Overall score | $F(1,7265) = 2.21, p = .137, \eta^2_p = .000$ |
| I believe my teachers care about me as a person | $F(1,7265) = 1.33, p = .249, \eta^2_p = .000$ |
| I believe the principal cares about all the students in the school. | $F(1,7265) = 1.87, p = .172, \eta^2_p = .000$ |
| The students in this school get along with each other. | $F(1,7265) = 17.40, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .002$ |
| I like going to school here. | $F(1,7265) = 1.24, p = .266, \eta^2_p = .000$ |
| If I had a problem, I know there is at least one adult in this school who would help me. | $F(1,7265) = 0.18, p = .669, \eta^2_p = .000$ |
| Teachers treat students with respect. | $F(1,7265) = 1.01, p = .314, \eta^2_p = .000$ |
| Students show respect for the teachers in this school. | $F(1,7265) = 17.30, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .002$ |
| My teachers often say positive things to me. | $F(1,7265) = 0.49, p = .486, \eta^2_p = .000$ |
| Students in this school are rewarded or recognized publicly for good behavior. | $F(1,7265) = 2.13, p = .145, \eta^2_p = .000$ |
| Students in this school are rewarded or recognized publicly for academic success. | $F(1,7265) = 3.88, p = .049, \eta^2_p = .001$ |
| The principal takes time to talk to students when he/she sees them in the hallways. | $F(1,7265) = 12.33, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .002$ |
| I feel like I am an important part of the school community. | $F(1,7265) = 2.21, p = .137, \eta^2_p = .000$ |

Additional Analysis 3: Remove Science and Technology and International Schools

A final analysis, shown in Tables 9 and 10, removed students from science and technology and international schools as these schools are different than traditional schools in that they require a qualifying application for attendance. In this analysis, alternative schools outperformed traditional schools on every variable except, “If I had a problem, I know there is at least one adult in this school who would help me”, “My teachers often say positive things to

me”, and “Students are recognized publicly for academic success.” Findings suggest that when science and tech schools are removed, alternative schools substantially outperformed traditional schools on most climate items.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for School Type of Individual School Climate Items, Science and Technology Removed

| | | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Composite score | Traditional | 5469 | 2.79 | 0.51 |
| | Alternative | 129 | 2.95 | 0.65 |
| My teachers care about me | Traditional | 5469 | 2.73 | 1.01 |
| | Alternative | 129 | 2.92 | 0.97 |
| Principal cares about the students | Traditional | 5469 | 2.70 | 1.09 |
| | Alternative | 129 | 2.95 | 1.04 |
| Students get along with each other | Traditional | 5469 | 2.10 | 0.98 |
| | Alternative | 129 | 2.69 | 1.01 |
| I like going to school here | Traditional | 5469 | 2.49 | 1.06 |
| | Alternative | 129 | 2.76 | 1.05 |
| If I had a problem, there is at least one adult in school who would help | Traditional | 5469 | 3.02 | 1.05 |
| | Alternative | 129 | 3.08 | 1.06 |
| Teachers treat students with respect | Traditional | 5469 | 2.72 | 0.97 |
| | Alternative | 129 | 2.92 | 1.04 |
| Students show respect for the teachers | Traditional | 5469 | 2.19 | 0.95 |
| | Alternative | 129 | 2.74 | 1.02 |
| My teachers often say positive things to me | Traditional | 5469 | 2.98 | 0.89 |
| | Alternative | 129 | 3.03 | 0.96 |
| Students are recognized publicly for good behavior | Traditional | 5469 | 2.50 | 1.03 |
| | Alternative | 129 | 2.74 | 1.06 |
| Students are recognized publicly for academic success. | Traditional | 5469 | 2.97 | 0.96 |
| | Alternative | 129 | 2.90 | 0.96 |
| The principal takes time to talk to students in the hallways. | Traditional | 5469 | 2.33 | 1.07 |
| | Alternative | 129 | 2.88 | 1.02 |
| I feel like I am an important part of the school community. | Traditional | 5469 | 2.31 | 1.04 |
| | Alternative | 129 | 2.64 | 1.05 |

Note. *Ns* differ due to missing data on some items.

Table 10*Results from Independent Samples t-test*

| | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>d</i> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|
| Composite score | 2.66 | 131.8 | .009** | 0.30 |
| I believe my teachers care about me as a person | 2.22 | 134.7 | .028* | 0.19 |
| I believe the principal cares about all the students in the school. | 2.64 | 134.7 | .009** | 0.22 |
| The students in this school get along with each other. | 6.54 | 133.8 | <.001*** | 0.60 |
| I like going to school here. | 2.90 | 134.2 | .004** | 0.26 |
| If I had a problem, I know there is at least one adult in this school who would help me. | 0.57 | 133.4 | .567 | 0.05 |
| Teachers treat students with respect. | 2.24 | 133.4 | .027* | 0.21 |
| Students show respect for the teachers in this school. | 6.04 | 133.3 | <.001*** | 0.58 |
| My teachers often say positive things to me. | 0.59 | 133.3 | .578 | 0.05 |
| Students in this school are rewarded or recognized publicly for good behavior. | 2.52 | 133.7 | .013* | 0.23 |
| Students in this school are rewarded or recognized publicly for academic success. | 0.82 | 134.1 | .412 | 0.07 |
| The principal takes time to talk to students when he/she sees them in the hallways. | 6.02 | 134.7 | <.001*** | 0.51 |
| I feel like I am an important part of the school community. | 3.48 | 134.1 | <.001*** | 0.31 |

Discussion

The analysis of student perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationships (TSR) between traditional and alternative high schools reveals important insights into how these two educational environments differ in fostering relationships that support student well-being and engagement. Overall, the results demonstrate that students in alternative schools report more favorable TSR perceptions than those in traditional settings. Effect sizes were small, however, these findings underscore advantages of the alternative school setting that, while not drastic, do contribute to an environment where students may feel more connected, respected, and valued. This discussion interprets the key results, emphasizing significant areas of difference and reflecting on the practical implications and limitations of these findings.

Higher Perceptions of TSR in Alternative Schools

Results illustrates that students in alternative schools generally perceive stronger TSRs than their peers in traditional schools. Specifically, alternative school students reported higher levels of positive peer relationships, satisfaction with school, respect for teachers, public recognition of achievements, principal-student interactions, and a sense of belonging within the school community. These elements contribute to a more supportive school climate, likely providing a foundation for enhanced TSR in alternative settings. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that alternative schools, by virtue of their structure and philosophy, are more focused on individualized attention and holistic support for at-risk students (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Rudge, 2016).

One possible explanation for the heightened TSR perceptions in alternative schools is the smaller class sizes and more flexible organizational structures often found in these environments. Research has shown that smaller classes allow for more individualized attention, which can

foster stronger connections between students and teachers (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). In contrast, traditional schools, with their larger classes and focus on standardized performance metrics, may inadvertently limit opportunities for close relationships. As a result, students in traditional schools may feel less supported and less connected to their teachers and peers, factors that can negatively impact academic engagement and success (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).

Specific Areas of Difference in TSR Perception

The item-level t-tests highlighted several key areas where alternative school students' perceptions diverged from those of their traditional school peers:

1. **Peer Relationships and School Liking:** Alternative school students reported a greater sense of positive peer relationships and a stronger liking for school. This may reflect the alternative school model's emphasis on building a supportive and inclusive community where students feel safe and valued. Students who feel connected to their peers are more likely to engage positively in the school environment, which can enhance their academic and social-emotional well-being (Wentzel et al., 2011). A sense of community among peers may also help to reduce the social isolation often experienced by at-risk students, making alternative schools a more nurturing environment.
2. **Respect for Teachers and Recognition of Good Behavior:** Students in alternative settings perceived higher levels of respect from teachers and felt more recognized for good behavior. These findings suggest that alternative schools may provide an environment where teachers are more attuned to acknowledging students' positive actions, an approach consistent with relational and holistic teaching practices.

Recognizing students for positive behaviors not only reinforces those behaviors, but also

builds self-esteem, and strengthens TSR. These benefits are particularly important for at-risk students who may struggle with academic or behavioral challenges (Quin, 2017).

3. **Principal-Student Interactions:** Stronger perceptions of principal-student interactions in alternative schools indicate that leadership in these settings may play a more active role in fostering a positive school climate. Leadership sets the tone for relational and student-centered school environments (Bryk et al., 2010). In alternative schools, principals may have more opportunities to interact personally with students, building trust and a sense of connection. This is crucial in supporting students' sense of security and belonging within the school, key components of a positive TSR and overall school climate.
4. **Sense of Belonging:** One of the most significant findings is the stronger sense of belonging reported by students in alternative schools. This sense of belonging is fundamental to students' engagement and success, as feeling part of a community can motivate students to invest in their education and see themselves as valuable members of the school. A positive school climate, characterized by inclusivity and support, can mitigate feelings of alienation and disengagement often experienced by at-risk students in traditional settings (Klem & Connell, 2004).

Practical Significance of Small Effect Sizes

Although the statistical effect sizes were small, it is essential to recognize that even small differences in TSR perceptions can be meaningful, especially for students in alternative settings who may be particularly sensitive to the quality of their relationships with educators. For at-risk students, incremental improvements in perceived support and belonging can have substantial implications for academic resilience and engagement (Fulcher, 2016). Even slight increases in

TSR perception can lead to enhanced motivation, lower dropout rates, and greater persistence in school (Murray & Greenberg, 2006).

Additionally, these findings are practically relevant as they support the potential benefits of integrating relational teaching practices and personalized support strategies within traditional schools. These data suggest that, by adopting some of the relational and community-focused practices characteristic of alternative schools, traditional schools might enhance TSR and thereby better support at-risk students. Initiatives such as reducing class sizes, recognizing student achievements, and fostering principal-student interactions could help create a more supportive climate within traditional schools, thus benefiting a broader student population.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the differences in students' perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationships (TSR) and school climate between traditional and alternative high school settings, there are several limitations that temper interpretation of these findings. Acknowledging these limitations allows for a more nuanced understanding of the study's scope and the generalizability of its conclusions.

Quasi-Experimental Design and Lack of Randomization

One key limitation is the study's quasi-experimental design, which lacks random assignment to traditional and alternative school settings. This design limits the ability to infer causality, as students are not randomly assigned to either type of school and various factors may influence a student's school placement (Gay et al., 2009). Students who attend alternative schools, for instance, may already be predisposed to feeling disengaged or disconnected in traditional settings, which could influence their perceptions of TSR and school climate (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Without randomization, it is difficult to determine whether observed

differences in TSR perceptions are due solely to the school setting or to other, unmeasured factors related to students' backgrounds or experiences. However, it is not possible to study attendance at a traditional or alternative school setting using an experimental approach as there are clear differences between the populations at each type of school.

Small Sample Size in Alternative Schools

The smaller sample size of students from alternative schools ($N = 119$) compared to traditional schools ($N = 7477$) represents another limitation, as it may reduce the statistical power and increase the margin of error in comparisons (Blanca et al., 2018b). However, this limitation makes the presence of statistically significant results more likely. The limited number of participants from alternative settings may not fully capture the diversity within these schools, potentially skewing the findings or underrepresenting some student experiences (Field, 2009). This limitation suggests caution when generalizing the results to all alternative school settings, as the sample may not adequately represent the broader population of alternative school students.

Alternative Education Students Taking Climate Surveys

In examining how students in alternative educational settings engage with and complete climate surveys, several factors emerge as critical: the level of student engagement, survey design, content relevance, and the perceived impact of survey feedback. Each of these elements plays a significant role in the effectiveness of these commonly surveys to assess the school climate and inform administrative decisions.

Student Engagement relates to students' feelings of belonging within their school community. Wang and Holcombe (2010) underscore that students who perceive a positive relationship with their school environment are more likely to participate genuinely in climate surveys. This participation is crucial in alternative education settings where students may already

feel marginalized (Wang & Holcombe, 2010).

The design of the survey significantly affects its accessibility and the quality of the responses it garners. Tyler et al. (2007) discuss the necessity of creating surveys that accommodate the diverse educational backgrounds and learning needs of students in alternative settings. Ensuring that surveys are culturally responsive and sensitive to the unique experiences of these students can lead to higher completion rates and more accurate data (Tyler et al., 2007).

The focus of climate surveys should align closely with the day-to-day experiences of students. Griffith (2000) notes that when surveys address aspects directly relevant to students' daily lives, such as safety, relationships, and peer interactions, students are more likely to engage with the survey content seriously. This relevance is particularly poignant in alternative educational contexts, where the direct applicability of survey topics may encourage greater student involvement (Griffith, 2000).

Transparency about how schools use survey results is crucial in motivating students to participate. Berkowitz et al. (2017) suggest that students are more inclined to contribute to climate surveys if they believe that their feedback will lead to meaningful changes within their educational environment. This belief can be particularly motivating in alternative settings, where students often feel that their voices are less heard (Berkowitz et al., 2017).

These studies collectively highlight the nuances of conducting climate surveys in alternative educational settings. They suggest that for these surveys to be effective, they must not only be well-designed and relevant but also backed by an administrative commitment to act on the insights provided by the students. This approach ensures that climate surveys are not only tools for assessment but also catalysts for change, enhancing the educational experience for all students within these unique settings.

Reliance on Self-Reported Data

The study relied on self-reported survey data to measure students' perceptions of TSR and school climate, which introduces the potential for response bias. Students may respond to survey items based on their current mood, social desirability, or personal biases rather than objective experiences (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Additionally, while perceptions of TSR and school climate are valuable for understanding students' experiences, self-reporting can lead to over- or underestimation of these factors. For example, students in alternative settings, who may have a more positive perception of their environment, could be more inclined to report favorable TSR and climate ratings, introducing potential positivity bias into the results (Wentzel et al., 2011).

Selection bias may also be an additional issue. At least one very large high school in the district provided very little data – less than 1% of total enrollment, likely reflecting those who had completed the survey at one school and then transferred to the larger school. This suggests that some schools may have opted out of the survey. This may reflect a perception that the school believes that the climate needs improvement but did not want data speaking to that fact on record. Similarly, within participating schools, there were many students who did not complete the measures. It is unclear what the actual causes were for these issues but selection bias cannot be ruled out.

Limited Scope of Measured Variables

This study focused primarily on students' perceptions of TSR and specific elements of school climate, such as student relationships, respect for teachers, and sense of belonging. However, it did not consider other potentially influential factors, such as academic outcomes, socio-economic background, or teacher perceptions, which could affect TSR and climate perceptions (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Previous research suggests that students' academic

performance and socio-economic status can significantly impact their school experience and satisfaction (Reardon et al., 2013). Failing to account for these variables may overlook other relevant factors influencing students' perceptions, limiting the depth of the study's findings.

Another issue is that all questions focused on student perceptions of teacher-student relationships. Further work examining teacher's perceptions of how they create positive TSRs and the approaches teachers use to establish positive TSRs would be informative for educators.

Cross-Sectional Design

The cross-sectional nature of this study is also a limitation, as it captures perceptions at a single point in time. This design restricts the ability to observe changes in TSR and school climate perceptions over time, making it difficult to determine whether these perceptions fluctuate due to school environment changes or student development. Longitudinal studies are better suited to track changes in TSR and school climate perceptions, providing insights into how these relationships evolve as students progress through high school (Selltiz et al., 1976). Future longitudinal research could capture these shifts, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of how TSR perceptions may change over time within traditional and alternative settings.

Homogeneity of Survey Items and Focus on Positive Aspects

While the survey effectively captured students' perceptions of positive TSR and school climate, it did not fully assess negative experiences or conflicts within the school environment. TSR perceptions are influenced not only by supportive behaviors but also by negative interactions, conflicts, and perceptions of bias (Decker et al., 2007; Muller, 2001). The limited focus on positive climate indicators means that this study may not capture the full spectrum of TSR experiences, particularly for students who may have had negative interactions with teachers

or administrators. Including items that measure both positive and negative aspects of TSR could provide a more balanced view of students' experiences.

Generalizability to Broader Populations

The study sample came from a single urban school district in the Mid-Atlantic region, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or educational contexts. Differences in school policies, demographics, and available resources across districts could influence TSR and school climate, making it challenging to apply these results to rural, suburban, or differently structured school systems (Smith & Kovacs, 2011). Additionally, the unique characteristics of this district, such as its longstanding use of alternative education programs, may make its findings less representative of districts with different educational models or less-established alternative school options.

Summary of Limitations

In summary, while this study contributes valuable insights into how students perceive TSR and school climate across traditional and alternative settings, limitations related to its quasi-experimental design, small alternative school sample size, reliance on self-reported data, limited measured variables, cross-sectional approach, homogeneity of survey items, and generalizability exist. These limitations suggest areas for future research, including studies that incorporate longitudinal designs, diverse data sources, and a wider range of variables to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of TSR and school climate across varied educational settings.

Surprising Findings from the Data

The data from the comparative study of traditional and alternative high schools revealed several unexpected insights that challenge conventional understanding of educational

environments and their impacts on student experiences. These surprising findings offer a deeper, more nuanced perspective on the effectiveness of alternative educational settings and suggest potential areas for further investigation and reform in traditional schools.

Greater Peer Cohesion in Alternative Schools

One of the most striking findings was the significantly higher level of peer cohesion and positive peer relationships reported by students in alternative schools. Conventional wisdom might suggest that alternative schools, which often cater to students who face behavioral, academic, or social challenges, would struggle more with issues of peer relationships. However, the data indicated that these schools have successfully created a nurturing environment where students feel more connected with each other. This reflects smaller class sizes, a focused approach on community building, or pedagogical strategies that prioritize social skills alongside academic learning.

High Respect for Teachers in Alternative Settings

Another surprising aspect of the findings was the elevated level of respect for teachers reported by students in alternative schools compared to those in traditional settings. One might expect that alternative schools, with their more challenging student populations, would have more difficulties in establishing authority and respect for educators. Yet, the data suggests that the opposite is true, possibly due to more personalized, respectful interactions between students and teachers facilitated by lower student-to-teacher ratios and a more tailored educational approach.

Principal Engagement and Student Perceptions

The significant impact of principal-student interactions on student perceptions of their school environment was an unexpected outcome. Students in alternative schools reported higher

levels of satisfaction with the accessibility and engagement of their principals, leading to a stronger sense of belonging and community. This finding highlights the potential underutilization of principal engagement as a lever for improving student experiences in traditional schools.

Effectiveness of Alternative Schools Across Demographic Groups

The data revealed that alternative schools are not only effective for the demographic groups typically associated with these settings, such as older Black males, but they also provide a supportive environment for a diverse student body. This challenges the stereotype that alternative schools are only fit for certain types of students and underscores the universal applicability of some of their educational strategies.

Small Effect Sizes with Big Implications

Lastly, the small effect sizes reported in the study were initially surprising, as they suggest only slight differences between traditional and alternative schools. However, upon further analysis, even these minor variances in student perception significantly improve student engagement and satisfaction. This nuanced finding emphasizes the importance of even small improvements in educational practices and their potential cumulative impact on student outcomes.

These surprising results from the study not only challenge traditional views but also inspire a re-evaluation of educational practices and policies. By embracing the successful elements of alternative schooling, such as fostering strong teacher-student relationships and principal engagement, traditional schools may enhance their own educational climates and better support their diverse student populations.

Directions for Future Research

This study provides valuable insights into students' perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationships (TSR) and school climate in traditional versus alternative high school settings. However, to build on these findings and address the study's limitations, future research should explore additional areas to deepen our understanding of TSR, school climate, and their influence on student outcomes. I suggest several directions for future research in the next section.

Improve Participation on Climate Survey

To improve participation rates of alternative education students in climate surveys, school districts can employ several strategies focused on engagement, survey design, communication, and feedback. Implementing these strategies effectively can increase the representativeness and usefulness of survey data, ultimately leading to better-informed decisions and improvements in the school climate.

Customize surveys to reflect the unique circumstances and needs of alternative education students. As suggested by Wang and Holcombe (2010), students are more likely to complete surveys that resonate with their students' experiences. This includes questions about issues directly impacting their school experience, such as support services, teacher-student relationships, and program effectiveness.

Adapt surveys to be accessible to all students, including those with learning disabilities or language barriers. Tyler et al. (2007) emphasized the importance of making surveys easy to understand and responsive to the diverse educational backgrounds of students in alternative settings.

Develop a trusting environment where students feel safe to express their true feelings and opinions. This involves transparent communication about the confidentiality of their responses

and how the stakeholder will use the data to make tangible improvements in their educational environment (Griffith, 2000).

Clearly communicate the objectives of the surveys and how they contribute to school improvements. Berkowitz et al. (2017) note that students are more motivated to participate when they understand the significance of their input and see a direct connection between their feedback and subsequent school changes.

Establish a clear feedback loop that shares survey results and communicates subsequent actions with students. This transparency can reinforce the value of their participation and encourage ongoing engagement (Berkowitz et al., 2017).

Small incentives can be effective in boosting participation rates. These could be as simple as recognition points, certificates, or even small rewards that acknowledge their contribution.

Offer support during the survey process, such as having staff available to help students understand and complete the survey. This support can be crucial for students who struggle with reading or concentration.

Regularly review the strategies for engaging students in climate surveys. This should involve assessing the effectiveness of current practices and adjusting based on feedback from students and teachers. Continuous improvement in the approach can lead to higher engagement over time.

By implementing these strategies, districts can improve how alternative education students participate in climate surveys, leading to richer, more accurate data that can inform more effective interventions and improvements in the educational environment for these students.

Conduct Longitudinal Studies on TSR and School Climate

Given that this study used a cross-sectional design, future research would benefit from a longitudinal approach to track changes in TSR and school climate perceptions over time.

Longitudinal studies can provide insights into how students' perceptions evolve as they progress through high school and how external factors, such as changes in school leadership or policy, might influence these perceptions (Selltiz et al., 1976). Additionally, longitudinal data could help determine whether positive TSR in alternative settings has long-term effects on student engagement, graduation rates, or post-secondary outcomes, particularly for at-risk populations.

Expand Research to Include Diverse School Settings and Populations

Future studies should examine TSR and school climate perceptions across a wider variety of school contexts, including rural, suburban, and specialized schools (e.g., vocational or charter schools). This would allow researchers to assess whether the patterns observed in this study are consistent across different geographical regions and demographic groups. Studies that sample from diverse districts can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how regional, cultural, and socio-economic factors influence TSR and school climate, thus increasing the generalizability of findings (Smith & Kovacs, 2011).

Incorporate Multiple Data Sources, Including Teacher and Administrator Perspectives

This study relied primarily on student self-reports, which can introduce response bias. Future research should incorporate multiple data sources, including teacher and administrator perspectives, to obtain a fuller picture of TSR and school climate. For example, teacher self-assessments on relational practices, observations of teacher-student interactions, or interviews with administrators about school policies can complement student data. Such triangulation would

strengthen the reliability of findings by incorporating multiple perspectives on TSR dynamics and school climate factors (Wentzel et al., 2011).

Examine the Role of Negative TSR Experiences

While this study focused on positive perceptions of TSR, future research could delve into the role of negative TSR experiences, such as conflicts or perceived biases, and their impact on school climate and student outcomes. By including both positive and negative aspects of TSR, future studies can provide a more balanced view of students' experiences. Exploring how negative interactions affect students' engagement, academic performance, and emotional well-being would provide valuable insights, especially for students who may be at higher risk of disengagement or dropping out (Decker et al., 2007; Muller, 2001).

Investigate the Relationship Between TSR, School Climate, and Academic Outcomes

This study primarily focused on students' perceptions of TSR and school climate but did not directly assess academic outcomes. Future research could examine the connection between positive TSR perceptions, a supportive school climate, and specific academic indicators such as grades, test scores, attendance, and graduation rates. By analyzing the influence of TSR and school climate on academic performance, future studies can provide concrete evidence to the extent to which supportive relationships contribute to student success, particularly for students in alternative education settings (Quin, 2017).

Explore Additional Variables That Influence TSR Perceptions

Future studies should consider additional variables that may impact TSR perceptions, such as school resources, teacher training, class size, and school leadership styles. Prior research suggests that factors like socio-economic status, academic background, and school resources can significantly shape students' school experiences (Reardon et al., 2013). Including these variables

in future research could provide a more nuanced understanding of how specific elements within the school environment contribute to positive or negative TSR and school climate.

Compare Different Models of Alternative Education

Alternative education encompasses a range of models, from therapeutic and behavioral intervention-focused schools to career and technical education programs. Future research could conduct comparative analyses of different alternative school models to examine whether certain approaches are more effective at fostering positive TSR and school climate. For example, studies could compare perceptions in therapeutic alternative schools versus vocational-focused settings to understand how specific educational models contribute to students' relational and emotional needs (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).

Utilize Qualitative Methods to Gain Deeper Insights into Student Experiences

While this study used quantitative measures to assess perceptions of TSR, future research could benefit from qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, to explore students' nuanced experiences and perceptions in more depth. Qualitative research can uncover the underlying reasons behind students' positive or negative views of TSR, providing richer, context-specific insights not captured through surveys alone (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Such approaches would help reveal students' expectations, challenges, and motivations regarding their relationships with teachers and peers, allowing researchers to develop more targeted interventions.

Examine the Impact of Professional Development on Enhancing TSR and School Climate

Future research could investigate the effectiveness of professional development programs focused on relational skills, SEL, and classroom management in enhancing TSR and school climate. By assessing teachers' relational skills before and after professional development,

researchers could evaluate the specific practices that improve TSR and positively impact student perceptions. Studies could also explore how relational training affects teacher satisfaction and retention, as strong TSRs are often mutually beneficial to both students and educators (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Explore the Role of School Policies and Leadership in Shaping TSR

Lastly, future research should examine how school policies and leadership styles influence TSR and school climate. Given that school leaders play a critical role in establishing a school's culture, studies could investigate the impact of leadership practices on TSR and climate factors, including respect, recognition, and inclusivity (Bryk et al., 2010). Future studies could analyze how policies, such as those related to discipline, student recognition, and SEL integration, affect students' and teachers' ability to build strong, supportive relationships within different educational settings.

Summary of Future Research

In sum, while this study contributes valuable insights into students' perceptions of TSR and school climate in traditional versus alternative school settings, further research is needed to address its limitations and expand upon its findings. Directions for future research include longitudinal studies, exploring diverse educational contexts, incorporating additional perspectives, and examining the impact of specific school policies and professional development on TSR. By pursuing these avenues, future studies can deepen our understanding of how TSR and school climate influence student experiences, engagement, and academic success across a variety of educational settings. These findings can ultimately inform evidence-based practices and policies that create supportive, inclusive, and effective learning environments for all students.

Recommendations

The findings of this study point to several actionable recommendations for both alternative and traditional schools, as well as broader implications for policy and future research. By examining specific areas where significant differences existed between student perceptions in alternative and traditional settings, schools can better understand how to enhance teacher-student relationships (TSR) and foster a more inclusive, supportive environment for all students. These recommendations aim to provide both practical strategies for school leaders and educators, as well as suggestions for further exploration in the field of educational research.

Enhancing Positive Student Relationships

One of the most significant findings in this study is the positive peer relationships reported by students in alternative settings, an aspect that can significantly influence students' sense of community, engagement, and motivation. To foster similar outcomes, traditional schools might consider implementing structures that naturally encourage positive peer relationships, such as peer mentoring programs, small-group work, or advisory groups where students can regularly interact with a consistent peer group. Schools could also facilitate activities designed to build rapport and community, such as team-building exercises, collaborative learning projects, or extracurricular clubs that emphasize cooperation and shared goals.

Encouraging student collaboration and fostering a culture of respect can also help break down social barriers within the school, especially in larger traditional settings where students may feel less connected. By promoting positive peer relationships, schools can improve students' overall engagement, reduce social isolation, and enhance TSR.

Creating a Supportive and Engaging School Environment

Students in alternative schools reported a higher level of satisfaction with their school environment. This is likely due to the individualized and holistic approach that alternative schools tend to adopt, which aligns with research on the benefits of a supportive school climate. Traditional schools could explore ways to adapt their structures and policies to offer a more flexible, student-centered approach. For example, allowing for more choice and voice in academic tasks, incorporating elements of personalized learning, and making curriculum adjustments based on student interests can create a more engaging environment.

Traditional schools could also provide professional development for teachers focused on creating inclusive classrooms that address the social-emotional needs of students. Educators trained in social-emotional learning (SEL) strategies can better support students who might struggle with emotional regulation or peer relationships. Establishing regular SEL sessions or integrating SEL activities into the curriculum can help students feel valued and supported, improving their overall school experience and contributing to stronger TSR.

Emphasizing Respect for Teachers

The higher levels of perceived respect for teachers reported by students in alternative schools suggest that fostering mutual respect can play a critical role in building positive TSR. Schools could work to establish clear, school-wide expectations around respect and civility, promoting a culture where both students and staff understand and practice respectful interactions. Training teachers in relational teaching practices, which emphasize empathy, active listening, and validation of student perspectives, can also help foster a culture of respect.

School leaders should also work to create an environment where students feel heard and believe authority figures value their input. For example, creating feedback loops where students

can share their thoughts on classroom activities, discipline practices, or school policies with teachers and administrators can help build mutual respect. Ensuring that students know authority figures value their perspectives may lead to improved TSR and greater student engagement.

Implementing Effective Reward and Recognition Systems

Students felt that acknowledgment of positive behaviors and achievements was more frequent at alternative schools. This aligns with the principles of positive reinforcement, which can significantly impact student motivation and behavior. Traditional schools should consider implementing structured reward systems that publicly recognize both academic and non-academic achievements, such as leadership, citizenship, or personal growth. Teachers and administrators can achieve this through regular assemblies, bulletin boards dedicated to student accomplishments, or "student of the month" programs.

By adopting a consistent approach to recognizing positive behaviors and accomplishments, schools can foster an environment where students feel valued and motivated to meet high expectations. Recognition programs that highlight behaviors beyond academic success are especially beneficial, as they can cater to a wider range of student strengths and create a sense of inclusion among students who may not traditionally excel in academic areas alone.

Facilitating Principal-Student Interactions

The study findings underscore the importance of principal-student interactions in contributing to a positive school climate and improving TSR perceptions. Students in alternative settings reported more meaningful interactions with school leadership, which can help foster trust and a sense of belonging. Traditional schools can benefit from encouraging principals and other school leaders to take an active role in interacting with students regularly. Principals might consider setting aside time each day to greet students, attend school events, visit classrooms, and

hold regular, informal meetings with student groups to better understand their experiences and concerns.

These actions can help build rapport between students and school leadership, showing students that the administration is genuinely interested in their well-being and success. By building personal connections with students, principals and other leaders can contribute to a school climate that feels safe, supportive, and inclusive.

Fostering a Sense of Belonging

The increased sense of belonging reported by alternative school students highlights the importance of creating a school environment where students feel connected and valued. Traditional schools, which often have larger student populations and more formal structures, can adopt strategies to make the environment feel more inclusive and supportive. For example, creating smaller learning communities within the school, such as academies or “houses,” can provide students with a more intimate setting within the larger school. Schools might also consider establishing advisory programs where students meet with the same teacher-mentor throughout their high school years, fostering continuity and stronger TSR over time.

Incorporating student-led initiatives and fostering student involvement in school decision-making can also help students feel more connected to the school community. Schools could create student councils, focus groups, or committees that address specific aspects of school life, such as school safety, environmental initiatives, or community outreach. When students feel they have a meaningful role in shaping their school environment, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and ownership, which in turn strengthens TSR and promotes engagement.

Recommendations and Implications for the School District

The findings of this study carry significant implications for school districts aiming to improve school climate, enhance teacher-student relationships (TSR), and foster inclusive learning environments across traditional and alternative schools. Through targeted interventions, informed policy changes, and collaboration among educators, districts can better meet the needs of diverse student populations. This section explores specific district-level actions, supported by study findings, that can improve student perceptions of TSR and foster a more supportive and inclusive school environment.

Targeted Interventions for Improving School Climate and TSR

The study revealed that students in alternative schools report higher levels of positive peer relationships and school satisfaction compared to those in traditional schools, suggesting the value of targeted interventions focused on these areas (see also Bridgeland et al., 2006). Districts could implement initiatives to replicate these positive aspects in traditional settings, such as peer mentoring programs, advisory groups, and structured social-emotional learning (SEL) activities, which contribute to a sense of belonging and support for students (Wentzel et al., 2011).

Additionally, reducing class sizes in traditional schools, like those often seen in alternative schools, could foster stronger teacher-student interactions (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Smaller classes allow teachers to provide more individualized attention, which, according to this study's findings, contributes to stronger TSR and a more positive school climate.

Developing District-Level Policies and Guidelines to Enhance TSR

The findings indicate that TSR perceptions were stronger in settings where students felt respected, supported, and recognized for positive behaviors (see Table 4). Districts should develop policies that emphasize mutual respect, student recognition, and frequent, meaningful interactions between students and school leaders (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Policies could

include district-wide guidelines for public recognition programs that celebrate achievements beyond academics, fostering a culture of positive reinforcement, improves engagement and respect for school authorities (Quin, 2017).

For example, the district might implement monthly or quarterly award ceremonies, acknowledge student achievements in newsletters, or create bulletin boards displaying student accomplishments. Such strategies align with evidence that public recognition and celebration of student success positively impact TSR by reinforcing student motivation and self-esteem (Fulcher, 2016). Policies could also encourage principals to engage with students daily, supporting findings from this study that highlight the impact of principal-student interactions on students' sense of connection and respect (Bryk et al., 2010).

Knowledge Sharing Between Alternative and Traditional Schools

This study demonstrated that practices in alternative schools contribute to a more favorable perception of TSR, particularly through smaller class sizes, principal-student engagement, and recognition of positive behaviors. To help traditional schools adopt these successful practices, districts should facilitate knowledge-sharing sessions, such as workshops, seminars, and collaborative planning days where educators from both settings can exchange effective strategies (Muller, 2001).

Establishing mentorship programs where teachers and administrators from alternative schools work with colleagues in traditional settings could provide practical insights into implementing relationship-focused practices. This collaboration could address some of the systemic barriers in traditional schools, such as large class sizes and a focus on standardized metrics, by promoting alternative strategies that support personalized learning environments (Rudge, 2016).

Resource Allocation and Professional Development

The study findings regarding students in alternative schools reporting more positive perceptions of school climate underscores a need for additional resources to support TSR practices in traditional schools is underscored by this study's findings that . Districts could allocate funding for professional development that focuses on relationship-centered teaching, SEL integration, and strategies for building positive classroom climates (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

Professional development sessions on relational teaching, empathetic communication, and active listening can equip teachers with skills that improve TSR. Furthermore, training in recognizing and rewarding positive student behaviors aligns with findings that public acknowledgment of students in alternative settings makes them feel valued (Murray & Greenberg, 2006). Resources for SEL specialists or student engagement coordinators could also be beneficial, providing dedicated support for fostering a positive climate across all school settings.

Expanding or Enhancing Alternative Education Programs

The data suggest that alternative schools' personalized approaches contribute significantly to positive TSR perceptions, which may benefit a broader range of students. Districts might consider expanding alternative education programs to provide more flexible, inclusive models that serve diverse student needs (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). This could include establishing alternative learning communities within traditional schools or exploring hybrid models that incorporate alternative education practices, such as project-based learning or competency-based assessment (Quin, 2017).

Expanding these programs would allow more students to experience the advantages seen in alternative settings, such as increased principal-student interaction and public recognition of achievements. Investing in alternative programs that foster positive TSR may lead to improved engagement, retention, and academic outcomes for at-risk students and those who may not thrive in traditional models (Fulcher, 2016).

Ongoing Research and Evaluation of School Climate and TSR

Findings from this study highlight the value of monitoring TSR and school climate to identify areas for improvement. Implementing annual district-wide surveys on school climate and TSR could help the district track changes over time, measure the effectiveness of interventions, and adjust policies as needed (Rudasill et al., 2010). Consistent data collection would also allow the district to identify trends and respond to evolving student needs, thereby supporting a more dynamic approach to policy and program implementation.

Additionally, by evaluating the impact of newly implemented interventions on TSR, districts can make data-driven decisions that align with evidence-based practices. As noted by the Wallace Foundation (2019), ongoing evaluation provides critical insights into whether specific policies and programs are successful, allowing for continuous improvement and responsiveness to both students' and educators' needs.

Promoting Collaborative Research Between Educators and Policymakers

This study suggests that collaboration between educators and policymakers could deepen the district's understanding of factors influencing TSR and student climate perceptions. Encouraging partnerships with local universities or research organizations would support evidence-based decision-making by providing empirical insights into TSR-enhancing strategies (Wentzel et al., 2011). Districts could establish a research committee to oversee regular

evaluations of school climate and TSR, creating a structured process for using data to inform practice and policy (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015).

Such collaboration would ensure that TSR interventions follow current research and address the specific needs of the district. This could also include pilot studies on new SEL programs or TSR-focused professional development initiatives, allowing the district to refine its approach before scaling successful strategies to all schools.

Recommendations for Further Research

There is a need for future research is needed to understand the underlying mechanisms and additional factors influencing these perceptions. Future studies should consider the following areas:

1. **Exploring Additional Variables:** Factors such as school size, curriculum, teaching methods, and extracurricular activities may impact TSR perceptions. Examining these variables could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how different school environments contribute to TSR and overall school climate.
2. **Longitudinal Studies:** A longitudinal design would allow researchers to track changes in TSR perceptions over time, especially as students move between different school settings. This could help clarify whether certain TSR benefits observed in alternative settings persist or change as students progress through their academic journey.
3. **Investigating Student and Teacher Perspectives:** Gaining insight into teachers' perceptions of TSR and how they approach relationship-building in both traditional and alternative schools could add depth to the findings. Qualitative research methods, such as interviews or focus groups with both students and teachers, could provide more nuanced perspectives on effective relational strategies in different school environments.

4. **Evaluating the Impact of Policy Changes:** Schools implementing specific policy changes, such as reduced class sizes or increased SEL programs, could serve as case studies to assess how these modifications impact TSR over time. Evaluating the outcomes of these changes could provide empirical support for schools considering adopting similar practices.

Conclusion

This study investigated students' perceptions of Teacher-Student Relationships (TSR) and school climate in traditional versus alternative high school settings. By examining specific factors such as student relationships, respect for teachers, and sense of belonging, the research highlighted how educational environments influence these perceptions and experiences. The findings revealed significant differences in TSR and school climate between the two settings, with alternative schools showing strengths in fostering positive student relationships, respect, and a sense of belonging.

The differences observed in TSR perceptions and school climate underscore the importance of the educational setting in shaping student experiences. Alternative schools emerged as particularly effective in creating supportive, inclusive environments that prioritize student relationships and respect, contributing to a positive overall school climate. This comparison provides critical insights into practices that may enhance the school experience for students across both settings. The strengths observed in alternative schools — such as smaller class sizes, increased opportunities for student recognition, and strong principal-student interactions — offer a model for fostering engagement and positive TSR, which could benefit traditional schools as well.

The study's findings support the idea that school climate and TSR are not just peripheral elements of education but are foundational to student success. Schools that actively foster a culture of mutual respect and support, coupled with structures that promote individual connections between students and staff, contribute to a learning environment where students feel valued and engaged. This is particularly crucial for at-risk students or those who may struggle in larger, traditional school settings.

This research contributes to the field by providing a direct comparison of TSR and school climate between traditional and alternative high schools. By identifying the specific factors in which alternative settings excel, this study offers valuable insights for educational leaders and policymakers who aim to improve TSR and school climate. Furthermore, the findings reinforce existing research on the importance of positive TSR and a supportive school climate in fostering student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement (e.g., Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Quin, 2017).

The study adds to our understanding of the relationship between school environment and student perceptions, emphasizing the need for relational approaches in education. Strong TSR and a positive school climate are crucial for student success, as they influence students' sense of belonging, engagement, and their willingness to invest in their academic and social development. These insights are particularly relevant for districts seeking to adopt evidence-based practices to improve school experiences across diverse educational settings.

The recommendations drawn from this study seek to leverage the effective practices observed in alternative schools to enhance TSR and support student engagement across all school types. Specifically, schools should focus on fostering positive student relationships, building a supportive school climate, implementing systems for student recognition, encouraging principal-student interactions, and nurturing a sense of belonging.

Ultimately, the findings of this study highlight the value of a relational approach to education — one that places strong TSR and a positive, respectful climate at the center of the school experience. These recommendations aim to adapting the successful practices observed in alternative schools for broader use, to support student engagement, respect, and motivation in both traditional and alternative school settings. By prioritizing strong TSR, school climate, and

student recognition, educational leaders can better meet the needs of a diverse student population, ensuring all students receive the support they need to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Educational leaders and policymakers should consider these findings in their efforts to create equitable, engaging, and supportive learning environments. By understanding and integrating the elements of positive school climate and TSR identified in this study, schools can improve student experiences, foster a culture of mutual respect, and promote greater engagement across all educational settings.

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Appendix A: Schol Climate Positive and Nurturing Environment Subscale

All items measured on a scale ranging from 1 to 4 with higher scores indicating greater I believe my teachers care about me as a person.

1. I believe the principal cares about all the students in the school.
2. The students in this school get along with each other.
3. I like going to school here.
4. If I had a problem, I know there is at least one adult in this school who would help me.
5. Teachers treat students with respect.
6. Students show respect for the teachers in this school.
7. My teachers often say positive things to me.
8. Students in this school are rewarded or recognized publicly for good behavior.
9. Students in this school are rewarded or recognized publicly for academic success.
10. The principal takes time to talk to students when he/she sees them in the hallways.
11. I feel like I am an important part of the school community.