

SCHOOL DISTRICT CLIMATE AS A PREDICTOR TO TEACHER COMMITMENT

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ABSTRACT

This research study examined the relationship between district climate and teacher commitment. The study was conducted using a sample of 15 school districts in North and Central Alabama. The districts were composed of 110 schools, 51 secondary and 59 elementary. The respondents to the research study were 1,587 school teachers and 99 school administrators. The respondent sample was distributed among nine other researchers giving 283 school teachers and 99 principals represented in this study. To measure the two constructs, district climate and teacher commitment, the researcher used the District Climate Index (DCI) and the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ).

With the school as the unit of analysis, the DCI measured the teachers' and administrators' perception of the three subcomponents of district climate: integrated superintendent leadership, enabling district structures, and teamwork for student success (DiPaola & Smith, 2008). These three components were the independent variables used to measure the relationship to the dependent variable, teacher commitment. Socioeconomic status (SES), as measured by the district and school's level of students receiving free or reduced lunch, was used as a covariant.

Results of the study revealed that district climate does have a positive and significant relationship to teacher commitment. District climate as a predictor to teacher climate indicates that a more open and positive district climate creates a higher level of teacher commitment within the schools.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my amazing family. My wife Cathy, who believed in me and inspired me to be more than I could ever imagine. When I questioned if the journey was too difficult, you were there to encourage me every step along this shared path. I would not have completed this degree, nor any other significant endeavor without you. We did it! My children, Colten and Kara, you two are my heart and soul. All three of you have made sacrifices to allow me to pursue this goal and I hope to see each of you accomplish your life goals one day soon.

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CHAPTER I:
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

As school districts across America seek reform efforts to address federal and state accountability mandates, they have to do so with limited and sometimes inadequate funding. This may seem impossible by many boards of education or district superintendents, but according to Norton Grubb (2009), rethinking the funding and resource paradigm may provide a link to positive educational reform and provide the mind-shift from school level to that of the now accountable district level. Grubb list resources in four categories: simple, compound, complex, and abstract. First, simple resources are associated with the employment of incompetent teachers, week after-school/intervention programs, material and resources not vetted or used inappropriately, and ineffective professional development. The second resource described by Grubb is compound resources. These resources generally appear as expenditures for expensive and ineffective programs not associated with goals and objectives. Increasing teacher ratio in an attempt to fix inadequate teaching or classroom management issues, employing paraprofessionals without specified roles, and increasing vocational programs with costly equipment are examples of compound resources. Complex resources are the third type of resource and generally relate to the instructional aspect of education. District initiatives such as project-based learning and authentic learning are proven techniques but lack the innovativeness of the teacher to implement and support. These complex resources are not readily available and districts cannot buy their way into innovation. The use of complex resources is generally applied

through a collaborative and embedded model existing at the local school level. Finally, abstract resources such as “climate” are deemed significant and powerful practices associated with school reform (Grubb, 2009). A positive climate is free of harmful distractions where members are mutually committed, trusted, and supported. There is coherence in the strategic direction of the reform and buy-in from students, faculty, leadership, and community help to facilitate change. Climate is not a program leaders can purchase off a shelf and thus each organization becomes dependent upon their stakeholders to create their climate. Climate, as an abstract resource, cannot be bought or sold and the increase in funding the effort does not correlate to higher degrees of effective climate. Much like complex resources, climate, especially at the district level, is intertwined among the members of the organization and molded through a collective effort (Grubb, 2009). Climate contributes to the overall effectiveness of the district more so than high cost simple and compound resources.

Hoy and Miskel (2008) describe the external influence of resources on an organization’s environment as a resource-dependence perspective. Their view of allocated resources comes from the district’s ability to acquire necessary resources from the external environment to accomplish the goal and vision of educating students in an efficient and productive manner. Resources are typically grouped into four categories-fiscal, personnel, information and knowledge, and products and services. As schools within a given district develop needs that cannot be managed or appropriated at the local level, the dependency upon the district grows for support in resource allocations. Likewise, as districts evolve and change due to external forces such as increased migrant students or diminished ad valorem and sales tax, their need for support changes as well. A loss in local funding may shift the district’s dependency of revenues from the local to more state funding. This shift in dependency makes the district more susceptible to state

mandates and control, thus diminishing the influence from the local environment. The inverse effect may also occur when local economies grow from increased employment opportunities from various manufacturing, technology expansions, or infrastructure upgrades. In either case, district leadership must determine how the allocation of resources in the four categories (Hoy & Miskel, 2008) are distributed in an equitable manner to best meet the needs of the students, accomplish the district's goals (Anderson, 2003), and maintain or establish a positive climate that is affected by the outside environment. This external environment influences and affects all personnel within the district. As resources are in constant flux, the district's ability to stabilize, direct, and appropriate resources, in alignment with the district strategic plan, provides the necessary guidance to all stakeholders that the "ship" will remain on course (DiPaola & Smith, 2008).

Resources within a school district move from level to level in a process to best determine and meet the overall needs of the organization. This open system allows for federal, state, and local resources to flow from the district level to local schools. Fiscal, human, and social capital, as well as curricular resources are distributed to all departments and personnel to foster actions and efforts to assist the entire district reach its goals (DiPaola & Smith, 2008). This collective effort by all individuals within the school district is what DiPaola and Smith define as *district climate*.

DiPaola and Smith (2008) developed a conception and measure of climate with the unit of analysis being at the district level. They characterized district climate "as the barometer of the actions required in a successful reform effort: dynamic leadership of the superintendent, enabling organizational structures, and teamwork that supports student success" (p. 120). According to DiPaola and Smith, this barometer of district climate would greatly influence reform actions

concentrated at the local school level, if the reform efforts were fully supported and resourced by the district prior to implementation at the school.

This study examined the relationship of district climate and teacher commitment within the schools under the district authority.

Conceptual Framework

As a result of federal legislative acts, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2002) and the newly implemented Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), school districts are under extreme scrutiny as they carry out the federal and state demands of educational reform (Anderson, 2003; Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). Educational research studies (Brady, 2003; Shannon & Bylsma, 2007; Snipes, Dolittle, & Herlihy, 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003) conducted since the implementation of NCLB connects positive reform efforts with an effective role played by the school district. According to their research, superintendents, local school boards, and district instructional leaders must elevate their responsibilities and participation in the continuous improvement process. The strategic planning that initiates from the district level provides a vision, goal, mission, and direction for the entire school system. Resources, instructional supports, and curriculum development for sustainability of the district's strategic plan are allocated, distributed, and monitored by district level personnel (Anderson, 2003). Though there has been an increased emphasis on the role of the school district, scant research exists regarding the relationship of district climate as an abstract resource, especially its connection with teacher commitment among school teachers within the district's control.

Like any organization, the local school district has a climate. DiPaola and Smith (2008) define school district climate "as the collective efforts by all individuals within the organization that foster actions to help the organization efficiently reach its goal" (p.118). The instrument

used to measure this climate is the District Climate Index (DCI). The DCI evaluates the district climate related to the perceptions of its members at all levels regarding leadership personnel and school board policymakers on the success of schools under their leadership. According to DiPaola and Smith, the school district as a unit of study has three leading elements associated with district climate: (1) integrated superintendent leadership, (2) enabling district structures, and (3) teamwork for student success. These three components of district climate are embedded within the DCI as measures identified by members of the organization that influence and support the overall climate.

District climate, as developed by DiPaola and Smith (2008), falls upon a continuum from open to closed. Open district climates contain structures that encourage and promote trust, problem solve through collaboration, and encourage new ideas and critical thinking. Open districts also look to support personnel at each level, are resilient, allocate and share resources, and give way to expertise (Hoy, 2002). Conversely, closed district climates restrict, suppress, and prevent positive collegial interaction. Closed climates are crippling to the members of the organization (DiPaola & Smith, 2008; Halpin & Croft, 1963).

Organizational commitment is an individual's identification with the goals and values of an organization and a willingness to work toward the attainment of the shared vision while remaining dedicated in the organization (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Commitment to the organization develops over a substantial period of time while the individual assimilates to the values and goals of the organization (Mowday, Steers, and Porter, 1979).

The impact of teacher commitment is assumed to be obvious in its relation to the organizational climate (Reyes, 1992). An open district climate where human and social capital and fiscal resources support the strategic plan is inherent to establishing commitment of its

members. Teachers within the district who identify with the goals, vision, and beliefs of the district's strategic plan and embrace it as their own, foster a perception that they feel connected or a part of the organization and its direction (Tarter, Hoy, & Kottkamp, 1990). This connection will result in dedication and determination to achieve a desired result even through additional tasks and efforts (Tarter et al., 1990). At the local school level, committed teachers are self-motivated, endure tough challenges, and collaborate with peers to improve the teaching and learning process (Firestone & Pennell, 1993; Nordin, Darmawan, & Keeves, 2009). For the school districts and schools, they serve, employing committed teachers increases achievement, decreases teacher absenteeism, reduces teacher conflict, and promotes innovative teaching (Henkin & Holliman, 2009 & Nordin et al., 2009). Much like an individual being motivated to reach a particular goal, teacher commitment moves beyond the individual goal in their determination to see success for all of the students they serve (Nordin et al., 2009). Committed teachers establish a psychological attachment to their cause that affects their passion, course of action, and performance (Nordin et al., 2009).

Mowday et al. (1979) developed an instrument used to measure organizational commitment, the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). The OCQ is used to predict particular behaviors associated to commitment such as employee turnover, absenteeism, and job performance. The original OCQ used a 15-item Likert scale to measure the commitment level of participants in the organization. The method used for this study was the revised 9-item Likert scale OCQ (Tarter, Hoy, & Bliss, 1989).

Problem Statement

Research has not sufficiently accounted for the role of the local school district in influencing school's success through practices governed by superintendents, boards of education,

or district leadership groups (directors or supervisors within various departments at district offices) as they influence and affect the development of school climate within their district (DiPaola & Smith, 2008). While the interactions of school-site individuals, particularly school principals, have been established to enhance multiple school variables (achievement, commitment, trust, and effectiveness) (Anderson, 2003), district leadership practices also play a key role in influencing schools. According to Leithwood (2011), district leadership poses a significant effect on four dimensions of effective school districts: Core Process, Supporting Conditions, Leadership Development, and Relationship Fluidity. The development of policies and procedures, resource allocation, motivation, and instruction/curricular support gravitates downward to the local school level thereby influencing the environment of the school and its community (Bandura, 1984; Barth, 1988; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004).

Though there has been research connecting the influence of school climate to improved achievement associated with educational reform, the area specific to district level climate in association with its relationship to school outcomes has been grossly underserved (Anderson, 2003). In particular, the research connecting school climate to teacher commitment has shown promise in retaining quality teachers and improving achievement at the local school level when climate structures are in place that suggest a healthy or open school climate exists (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2011; Hoy & Hannum, 1997; John & Taylor, 1999). A better understanding of the district's impact on the system's overall climate and its relationship to teacher commitment may provide insight to how districts plan in their retention of quality teachers. Not only should additional district climate research be conducted to fill the gaps in the literature, but it is also needed to inform school superintendents and district level leaders of their relevance and impact in the teaching and learning process. DiPaola and Smith's measure of district climate using the

DCI provides a foundational concept that climate can be measured across three dimensions associated with school districts: integrated superintendent leadership, enabling district structures, and teamwork for student success. Further research is needed to examine the impact school districts have on the local school level as the shift in accountability moves from the school to the district level. This research study will use the DCI and the OCQ to test the relationship between district climate and teacher commitment.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical rationale for this research study is built upon the district's influence of the local schools they serve.

District Leadership

In 2011, researcher Kenneth Leithwood, provided a report identifying results from a mixed method study of crucial characteristics identified with successful and/or strong school districts. Based on the study, Leithwood defined strong school districts as districts that contributed significantly to improved student achievement above average means and reduced the achievement gaps of existing students.

As a result of the study (Leithwood, 2011), four general categories or dimensions were identified at the district level that fostered a strong school system: Core Processes, Supporting Conditions, Relationship Fluidity, and District Leadership. Within the four dimensions, characteristics existed describing effective practices as seen in highly effective school districts. Table 1 indicates these characteristics and their represented dimension.

Table 1

Dimensions and Characteristics of Strong Schools (Leithwood, 2011)

Core Processes	Supporting Conditions	Relationship Fluidity	District Leadership
Creating shared directions (mission, vision, goals)	Strategic planning and continuous improvement	District and School, School and District	Professional leadership from superintendent and district directors
Building curriculum and instruction aligned with system goals	Capacity building through differentiated professional learning	District wide and parents	Boards of Education provide leadership in accordance with direction driven policy and procedures
Evidence based progress-monitoring and data informed decision making	Alignment of policies, procedures, and resources	District wide and community stakeholders District and State Department of Education	

Results of the study indicated that the characteristics of Core Processes and Supporting Conditions provided the most significant relationship to student achievement in change score and annual standardized testing in math and literacy. The researcher noted that this was expected in that the two dimensions aligned closely with that of the school/students. Core Processes showed significant relationships in all three characteristics while Supporting Conditions indicated significant relationships in two, professional learning and alignment. Relationship Fluidity indicated that internal relationships significantly related to both math and literacy achievement but only in various grade levels while relationships with parents showed significance in three of the four areas of achievement scoring. Local community relationships were significantly related to portions of math achievement and relationships with state board of education displayed a very small significance (.05) on annual math achievement. The final dimension, District Leadership, indicated no direct, significant relationship for superintendent/directors or Boards of Education. According to Leithwood, these results are consistent with the conceptualization that District

Leadership imposes an indirect effect on student achievement based on the effects mediated by variables associated with the proximity to the students. Though District Leadership is shown to have an indirect impact on student achievement, it is worth noting, as indicated in Figure 1, that Leithwood's study indicated that District Leadership provided moderate to strong direct effects on the other three dimensions (Core Processes, Supporting Conditions, and Relationship Fluidity) as well as strong effects on the remaining 10 characteristics within each of the three dimensions. It is this linkage that provides the theoretical framework for this study. The four levels of effective school districts outlined by Leithwood begins with effective leadership at the top. Establishing direction, goals, accountability, and support contributes to the system's climate, which trickles down from the district level to departments, schools, and classrooms.

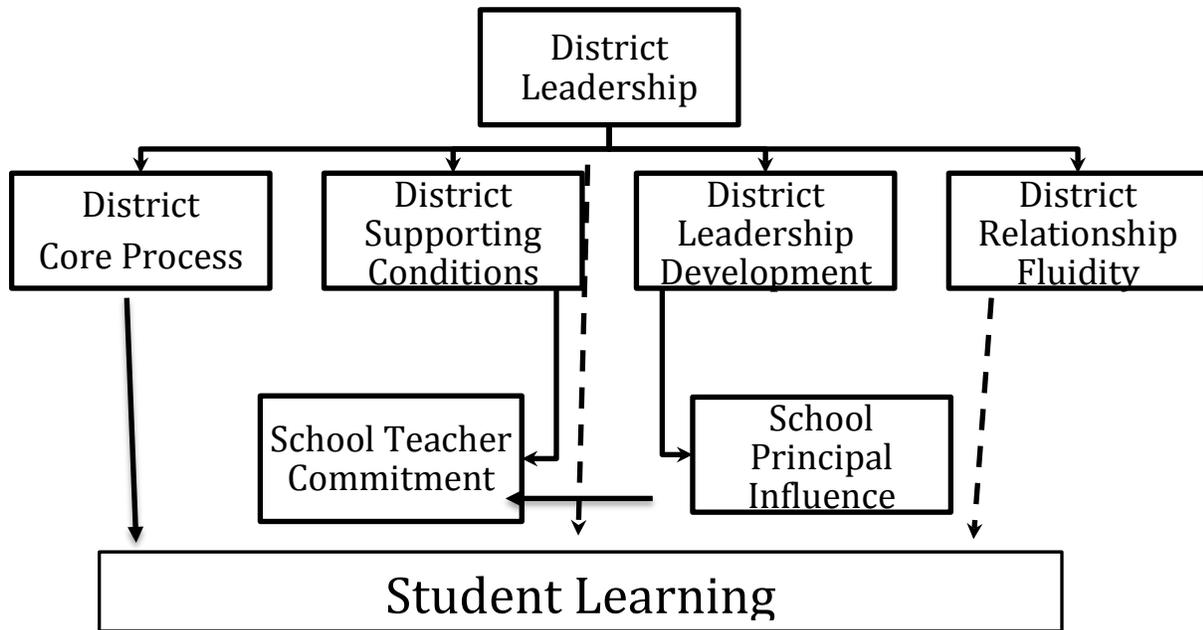


Figure 1. Framework depicting the influence of district leadership in both direct and indirect actions.

District Climate

Schools are seen as the vehicle to transfer skills and knowledge to students; however, schools do not exist in isolation and rarely develop curricular and instructional strategies without guidance from the district level. Schools do not create policies, nor do they function without governance from a higher authority. Schools only exist under the jurisdiction and support of their local school district and boards of education. When examining the definition of organizational climate composed by George Litwin and Robert Stringer in 1968, it is astonishing that climate, when associated with the educational setting, was not actually derived at the district level, but rather at the school level. Litwin and Stringer (1968) defined organizational climate as “a set of measurable properties of the work environment, based on the collective perceptions of the people

who live and work in the environment and demonstrated to influence their behavior” (p.1). Fifty years later, DiPaola and Smith’s (2008) definition of school district climate relates well to that of Litwin and Stringer (1968). DiPaola and Smith define school district climate as “the collective efforts by all individuals within the organization that foster actions to help the organization efficiently reach its goals” (p.118). The terms collective, all, people, live-work, and environment provide a conceptual idea that the climate of a district must be viewed in a holistic fashion to incorporate each entity that comprises a school district and not the single school itself.

School districts, like other organizations, are made up of people. Superintendents, board members, students, teachers, custodians, parents, administrators, parent organizations, cafeteria workers, secretaries, and many others make up the internal members of the school district. Because the school district is peopled, the organization takes on the “personality” or “feel” of its members and thus develops a particular climate that is unique and distinguishable (Halpin & Croft, 1963). DiPaola and Smith (2008) developed a relatively new construct of district climate where they examine the perceptions of relationships connected to district leadership properties, connectedness of members working in collaboration to meet its mission with a focus on continuous improvement, and where as all members commit to creating an environment prioritizing “learning” that is supported and reinforced by all. DiPaola and Smith expand upon the use of organizational climate measures in their development of an instrument to measure these perceptions of teachers and school administrators to three district-level categories: (1) leadership of the superintendent, (2) enabling district structures, and (3) teamwork for student success. The District Climate Index (DCI) uses a 30-item, Likert -type questionnaire to derive the level of climate associated with the school district. The DCI establishes the climate along a continuum from open to closed. Hoy and Sabo, (1998) describe the open climate as supportive,

authentic, and most likely to initiate productive change. Members working in an open climate feel connected and appreciated, thus they are more likely to work harder to accomplish the mission of the organization.

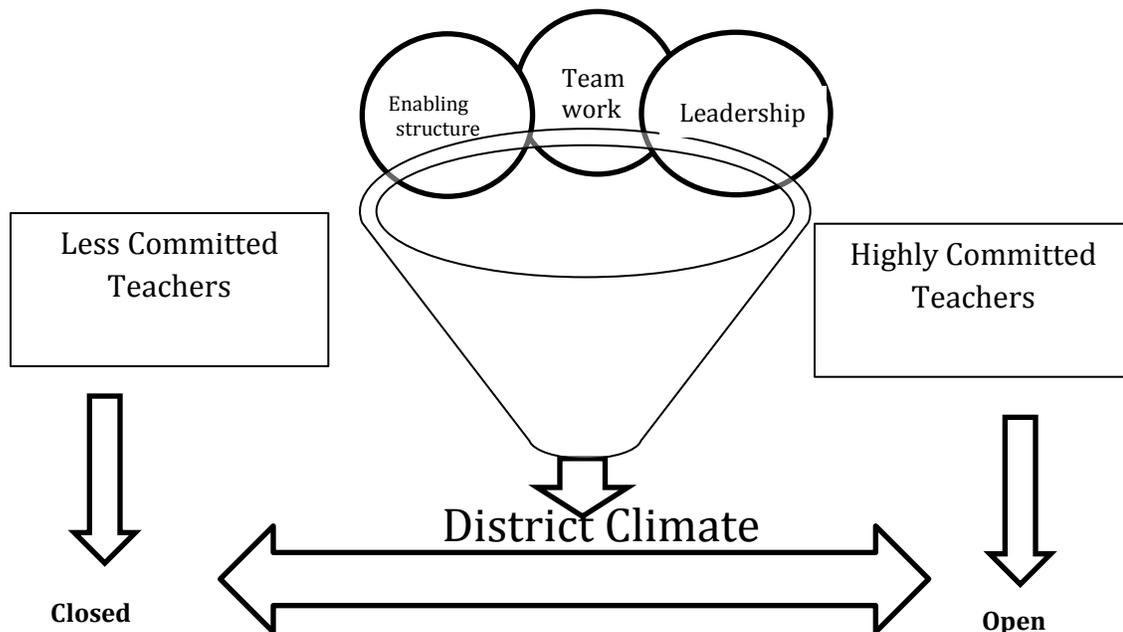


Figure 2. Hypothesis for the study (a positive relationship exist between district climate and teacher commitment).

Commitment

Mowday et al. (1979) defined organizational commitment as the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization. Mowday et al. (1982) also characterized commitment as consisting of three components: belief in and acceptance of organizational goals and values (identification), a willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization (involvement), and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization (loyalty). The components of identification, involvement, and loyalty have been critical to the success of teacher commitment. Without a shared expectation and vision, school teachers work in isolation failing to connect with the organization (Hulpia & Devos, 2010).

Purpose of Study

The intent of this study is to examine the relationship between the organizational climate of the school district and teacher commitment within schools under the district's leadership. The rationale for this study is to determine whether the three components of district climate (integrated superintendent leadership, enabling district structures, and teamwork for student success) impact teacher commitment within the school district. Additionally, this study will examine the relationship between the overall district climate (combination of the three subtests) to teacher commitment at the two levels of schools: elementary and secondary. Although there has been theoretical and empirical research on the relationship of organizational climate and teacher commitment, primarily concentrated at the school level, this study will expand the research to encompass the broader effects the school district climate has on teacher commitment. Finally, this study will attempt to provide a practical resource tool for implementing an abstract resource, such as district climate, to the organizational construct of teacher commitment. Therefore, allowing school district leadership to progress monitor climate as they seek to retain quality teachers to promote high quality achievement efforts within their school system/district.

Definition of Terms

District Climate--The collective efforts by all individuals within the organization that foster actions to help the organization efficiently reach its goal.

Integrated superintendent leadership--The superintendent whose behavior is nuanced; that is the superintendent integrates change-oriented, task-oriented, and people-oriented leadership in one successful style.

Enabling district structure--Structures associated with the school district that provide for the effective achievement of goals. Such structures have clear expectations, high achievement

goals, necessary resources, accountability and monitoring processes, and clear and open lines of communication.

Teamwork for student success--Refers to the climate in which there is a serious learning environment, cooperation among professionals, collegial respect and support, and a commitment to the success of all students.

District Climate Index (DCI)--The DCI is a 30-item questionnaire instrument used to measure the three components of district climate: integrated superintendent leadership, enabling district structures, and teamwork for student success. The DCI is conducted with teachers and administrators within the district's leadership. The items are scored using a 5-item Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*never*) through 5 (*very frequent*). The alpha coefficients for each subtest demonstrated high reliability with an alpha = .9 or higher for each subtest.

Organizational commitment--Organizational commitment/teacher commitment is defined as the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization. The commitment is characterized by three components: belief in and acceptance of organizational goals and values (identification), a willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization (involvement), and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization (loyalty).

Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ)--The OCQ for this study is a 9-item questionnaire used to measure the commitment level of the teacher to the organization. The item is scored using a 5-item Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) through 5 (*strongly agree*).

Social Capital--Social capital is an abstract resource (Grubb, 2010) that facilitates the collaboration and cooperation, increased efficiency, and promotion of knowledge transfer among

members of the organization, thereby increasing the overall performance of the organization. It is the concept that the collective group as a social norm is greater than the sum capacity of the individuals' social connection to the organization (Holme & Rangel, 2011).

Research Questions

The data for this study were used to analyze the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between district climate, and its subtests, to teacher commitment?
2. Does the DCI predict teacher commitment within schools under the district's authority?
3. Do the perceptions of district climate vary from secondary to elementary teachers?
4. Do the perceptions of district climate vary from administrator and teacher?

Research Hypothesis

H1: District climate will be positively related to teacher commitment.

Limitations

This study incorporated a convenience sample of 15 public school districts comprised of 51 secondary and 59 elementary schools. The respondents making up the sample for this study were teachers and administrators actively employed in elementary and secondary schools in Alabama. Elementary schools were identified as schools containing Grades Kindergarten through 6, while secondary schools are identified as Grades 7 through 12. Participants in the research study were asked to complete the District Climate Index (DCI) and the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ).

Because the sample was not a random sample, the external validity of the study was a concern. The sample concentrated to schools primarily in the northern and central portion of

Alabama limiting the population geographically. The generalization of the results to other states or populations should be conducted with caution.

The researcher assumes that all teachers and administrators answered each survey with honesty; however, bias among the population may exist impacting the internal validity of the study. Additionally, even though the school and district sample encompassed 1,587 teacher respondents, the participants were divided among nine researchers within a cohort with various research instruments. Therefore, the size of the sample, specifically the variation between responses by school, created additional limitations. Because the number of teacher and administrator responses varied by school, I needed to aggregate the data in order to have equal participants by school. Therefore, some variance within schools was lost. Finally, it should be noted that a hierarchical linear model would be an ideal design for comparing differences between districts. However, either the number of cases within each district would have needed to be greater than the existing sample, or the number of districts would have to be greater to keep the number of cases the same (Pituch & Stevens, 2016).

Summary

Multiple climate surveys have been used to examine school/organizational climate concentrated on teachers' perceptions of the school leadership without accounting for the influence of the local school district. "The school district, after all, is the organizational structure that provides direction and support, which are critical in helping schools become successful. As an organization, the district, like the individual schools within them, has a climate" (DiPaola & Smith, 2008, p.118). DiPaola and Smith constructed the District Climate Index (DCI) in 2008. This instrument measures the relationship of district level leadership and policy personnel to that of local school members (administrators and teachers) under the same district organization.

Three sub-tests were immersed within the DCI: (1) integrated superintendent leadership, (2) enabling district structures, and (3) teamwork for student success. Gaining a greater knowledge of how these three factors play a role in influencing the district climate and subsequently attributing to teacher commitment are crucial to establishing educational reform.

Teacher commitment, as associated with schools, has long been connected with high levels of involvement and dedication of teachers connected to the local school (Mowday, Porter, & Dubin, 1974). Teacher commitment will be measured using the revised 9-item Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) (Tarter et al., 1989).

While all school districts bring about variance in their ability to allocate resources (simple, compound, complex, abstract) or teach students from particular socioeconomic backgrounds, they all have the abstract resource of climate that stems from the collective perceptions of its members associated with the district's ability to be successful (Grubb, 2010). Being able to identify and modify the district contributors to their particular climate, educational reform practitioners will gain an understanding of the district effects on local school teacher commitment.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review is organized into sections. The first section will provide a historical perspective of climate and commitment as concepts. Then, a theoretical framework will be presented to explain how the concepts work together. Finally, a rationale and hypothesis testing the framework will be presented.

Conceptual Framework

In the review of literature of school administration, climate is generally a school-level variable with its own distinct research history. District-level climate, a relatively new concept, is an extension of the general idea of climate but obviously will differ from the school-level notion.

School Climate

Organizational climate in the educational environment has evolved over the past 60 years since its inception by Halpin and Croft (1963). Their depiction of elementary school climate, based on teachers' perception of peers and administration, placed school climate along a continuum from open to closed. Open school climates generally indicate positive behaviors between teachers and administrators that are authentic, professional, and honest. Each member values and respects one another with minimum preoccupation for outcomes or self-fulfillment, they simply happen as a result of the open climate (Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002). The Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ), Halpin and Croft's original climate

measure, expanded throughout the next couple of decades to include measures for middle and high schools. In contrast to Halpin and Croft's "*open to closed*" description of organizational climate, Hoy and Feldman (1987) developed the Organizational Health Index (OHI) to describe the organization's climate as "*healthy or unhealthy*." The OHI expanded the overall view of school climate as it not only encompassed the perceptions of the interrelationships of teachers-teachers (technical) and teachers-administration (managerial), but also added the relationship between the school and the community (institutional) (Hoy & Miskell, 2008). A healthy school climate is one where positive relationships exist among all stakeholders and high expectations are supported by community and administration (Hoy & Feldman, 1987).

In regard to the climate continuum metaphors, open and healthy, though different in their measures, both actually correlate. Open systems tend to be healthy while healthy systems tend to be open (Hoy et al., 2002). In an effort to merge the two constructs (openness and healthy) of evaluating the climate of schools, Hoy et al. (2002) developed the Organizational Climate Index (OCI). The OCI combined elements from both the OCDQ and the OHI. This measure captures the relationship between the school and community (Environmental Press), the openness of the principal's leadership (Collegial Leadership), the openness of the teacher-peer relationship (Teacher Professionalism), and the relationship between the school and the students (Academic Press). According to Hoy et al. (2001), the OHI brings together the general concepts of both openness and health in the examination of climate. The OHI also gives vertical connections from students, to teachers, to administration as well as horizontal connections from teachers to teachers (Hoy et al., 2002).

Despite the metaphor (open or closed, healthy or unhealthy) used to describe school climate or the grade level associated with the school, the impact of organizational climate in

schools is simply undeniable (DiPaola & Smith, 2008; Hoy & Miskell, 2008; Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991). During the evolution journey of climate, multiple researchers have associated climate to other variables within schools that impact the overall outcomes and daily nuances of the schools such as bullying (Smith & Hoy, 2004), commitment (John & Taylor, 1999), and school effectiveness (Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1990). These are just a few from an exhausting list of past research on school climate that directly connect the importance of climate to the day-to-day processes of education.

District Climate

Following the metaphors of organizational personality and organizational health, district climate is an aspect of pervasive culture in a school district. In their review of literature on school district reform and effectiveness, DiPaola and Smith (2008) discovered that the culture within the school district is characterized by superintendent leadership, enabling district structures, and teamwork for student success. However, theirs is not the only analysis of district influence on schools.

Research connecting the impact of the school district to educational reform efforts have emerged (Brady, 2003; Snipes, Dolittle, & Herlihy, 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003) as higher accountability standards are implemented through state and federal mandates (NCLB, 2002; ESSA, 2015). This recent research provides evidence that districts must assume a larger role in the reform efforts in order to achieve and sustain increased outcomes. Proven reform efforts concentrating on improving schools indicate that when school districts apply a particular course of action toward the reform, improvement occurs. These actions are as follows:

- District members possess the capacity to diagnose problems schools cannot solve.
- A strategic plan outlining a shared vision with action steps, goals, and monitoring steps embraced by the all stakeholders.
- District level departments and personnel equipped and trained to support the reform.
- Policies and procedures provided by the board are not hindering to the cause.
- Alignment and allocation of district resources
- Identifying new resources to support system goals (Hopkins, 2001; Snipes et al., 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003)

The actions and strategies implemented in successful district reform efforts were investigated and researched by DiPaola and Smith (2008) during their construction of a district climate measurement. They identified the school district as the organizational structure from which policies, curricula, instructional support, and allocation of resources originate. The school district, like any other organization, possesses a climate that is distinct to that organization. DiPaola and Smith define district climate as the “collective efforts by all the individuals within the organization that foster actions to help the organization efficiently reach its goal” (p.118). According to them, “district climate is a barometer of the actions required in a successful reform effort: dynamic leadership of the superintendent, enabling organizational structures, and teamwork that supports student success” (p.120).

In their conceptualization of district climate, DiPaola and Smith (2008) indicate that individual members of the schools, classrooms, departments, offices, parent-teacher organizations, and even local communities and townships were only subsets of the overall composition of the macro-level called the school district. These entities, both internal and external contributors, are made up of people, thus creating social networks within the

organization (Forsyth & Adams, 2004). This conglomeration of members within the school district produces the organization's social capital. According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), social capital is an abstract resource (Grubb, 2010) that facilitates the collaboration and cooperation, increased efficiency, and promotion of knowledge transfer among members of the organization, thereby influencing the overall performance of the organization. It is the concept that the collective group as a social norm is greater than the sum capacity of the individuals' social connection to the organization (Holme & Rangel, 2011).

The three identified elements of district climate--integrated superintendent leadership, enabling district structures, and teamwork for student success--directly and or indirectly affect the social networks of the organization (Fullan, 2001). It is therefore relevant that the perceptions of the collective group determine the overall climate of the district. The district climate reasonably contributes to the organizational social capital in a shared vision of success, policies and procedures to support goal attainment, capacity building of its members, collaboration of teams, fiscal and human resource allocation, and constant progress monitoring relating to success of the district (DiPaola & Smith, 2008).

The literature on school district reform and effectiveness was examined to provide a basis for the generation of specific items to measure district climate (DiPaola & Smith, 2008). Commonalities of successful reform were enhanced by the district's superintendent that possessed effective interpersonal skill, out of the box thinking to solve problems, and the ability to forge a clear path for others to follow. Additionally, successful reform was categorized by the enabling structures put in place based on high expectations, goal and resource alignment, progress monitoring, and accountability. Finally, a successful reform effort involves a created environment where student learning is paramount and all members are committed, collaborative,

and supportive to one another in their quest for higher achievement. It is these three categories; integrated superintendent, enabling district structures, and teamwork for student success that DiPaola and Smith used to operationalize their district climate measure.

Integrated Superintendent Leadership

Superintendents and district instructional leaders hold the responsibility of implementing agendas, policies, curricular, and budgetary programs that directly impact the district, local schools, and classrooms (Fullan, Rolheiser, Mascall, & Edge, 2005). From the onset of the new millennium, academic achievement in public schools has created new challenges for district leaders in that public education systems are charged with closing the gaps between what students know, and what they should know to be successful in a rapidly changing world (Anderson, 2003). At the forefront of acceptance of these challenges lies the district superintendent. McFarlane (2010) implies that the superintendent of education at the local district level holds the most powerful position in public education. It is after all the first place where blame is associated when school systems fail or perform poorly. Marzono and Waters (2009) indicated that the quality of administration at the district level influences the quality of education that students receive throughout the district. Thus low performance in a school system is generally characterized by poor governance, which leads to blame, excuses, and oftentimes the termination of the superintendent. Unfortunately, this action has led to high turnover rates that hinder reform efforts prior to seeing long-term growth because of the “immediate” need to see results (Johnston, 2000).

Giving the challenges that superintendents face in this high accountability era, superintendents must become aware of, and accept the potential prosecution by the public as they enact change within their given community. The role as chief instructional leader implores them

to lead effectively in order to transform schools by closing the gaps among all subgroups, meeting public expectations of its stakeholders, and competing at a high level against parochial and private schools as well as newly evolving virtual and charter schooling (McFarlane, 2010). District leadership at the top level of the school system, primarily the district superintendent, promotes the climate and culture among its members by influencing the values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009).

Creating a district climate that promotes its members to envision the educational crisis as an opportunity for great triumph takes an amalgamated and transformational leader. DiPaola and Smith (2008) described this type of chief instructional leader as an “integrated superintendent.” As one of three general dimensions (integrated superintendent, enabling district structures, and teamwork for student success) comprising DiPaola and Smith’s operational construct of district climate, integrated superintendent leadership is identified as one who encompasses and integrates a conceptual process for change through innovative techniques, is task-oriented, and people-centric in their approach to leading the organization. This combination of leadership qualities is thought to promote the maximization of the member’s potential that make up the organization. Kouzes and Posner (2002) noted that effective district leaders must have the attitude and desire to break away from the status quo by making something happen, establishing effective change, and creating something no one has done before in the organization.

Correlating with DiPaola and Smith’s (2008) description of an integrated superintendent is Kouzes and Posner’s (1987, 1995, 2002) idea of an exemplary leader. Kouzes and Posner (1987, 1995, 2002) developed a model of leadership effectiveness based on the idea that exemplary leaders engage in several practices and behaviors that allow them to do extraordinary things in organizations. Based on years of research involving in-depth interviews and case

studies from written responses identifying member's experiences associated with great leadership experiences, Kouzes and Posner's created the conceptual framework of an exemplary leadership model. Kouzes and Posner establish five practices that characterize effective leaders: challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart. Table 2 provides a framework of the five leadership practices and their connection with "best-leadership" practices.

To operationalize their concept, The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) was generated to measure the effectiveness of the organization's leader against the five established characteristics of exemplary leadership. The LPI is a 30-item questionnaire containing five subscales for each of the five practices of exemplary leadership. Each subscale contains six questions, with a 10-point Likert response scale ranging from (1) *Almost never do what is described in the statement*; (2) *Rarely*; (3) *Seldom*; (4) *Once in a while*; (5) *Occasionally*; (6) *Sometimes*; (7) *Fairly Often*; (8) *Usually*; (9) *Very frequently*; and, (10) *Almost always do what is described in the statement*. A higher value represents more frequent use of a leadership behavior. The instrument exists in a "self" and "observer" rating version. Leaders complete the "self," rating themselves on the frequency with which they think they engage in each of the 30 behaviors. Five to ten other people, typically selected by the leaders, complete the "observer" questionnaire, rating the leaders on the frequency with which they think they engage in each behavior. Respondents can indicate their relationship to the leader, co-worker or peer, direct report, or other observer. Items in the LPI are highly correlated within each scale and test-retest reliability is high. Internal reliability, as measured by Cronbach's Alpha, is strong, with all scales above the .75 level. Empirical tests of differences between leaders (using the LPI-Self form) and their constituents (using the Observer form) reveal no statistically significant differences (at the

.001 level of probability) between these two groups on Challenging and Modeling. While statistically significant, the mean differences between these two groups on Inspiring, Enabling, and Encouraging have little practical significance, except to note that leaders view themselves as engaging slightly less in Inspiring and Encouraging, and slightly more in Enabling, than do their constituents. These results provide continued empirical support for these various leadership behaviors to be conceptualized within five practices (challenging, inspiring, enabling, modeling, and encouraging). Scores relating to the LPI are consistent with other leadership qualities (Posner & Kouzes, 2002).

Table 2

Posner and Kouzes's Five Exemplary Leadership Practices

Exemplary Leadership	Commitments for practice of leaders
Challenge the process	Search for challenging opportunities to change, grow, innovate, and improve. Take risk to improve the organization.
Inspire a shared vision	Leaders must not only have visions, but must be able to inspire others to embrace, own, and attain the vision. Enlist others by appealing to their interests, hopes, values, and dreams.
Enable others to act	Leaders' value and use collaboration and empowerment to motivate their subordinates. Share and open communication between levels.
Model the way	Effective leaders set the example by establishing and displaying values, standards, and actions that their followers must emulate. Build capacity.
Encourage the heart	Effective leaders recognize, encourage, and appreciate their subordinates and constituents. Encourage team celebration even with small victories.

Effective educational reform efforts are in large part determined to be successful based on the increase and sustainability of student achievement. Though the outcome of student achievement may be the end result in declaring effective system reform; monitoring, planning, and supporting the productivity of the reform effort is concentrated on district leadership (Leithwood, Aitken, & Jantzi, 2000). Leadership effectiveness will be reflected in the abilities of school superintendents to facilitate and foster performance and growth, preparedness to face

challenges, employees' commitment and satisfaction, and overall administration and policy determination that outline a process for continued success of the system (Perizade & Sulaiman, 2005, p. 331). Leithwood et al. (2000) describe transformational leadership as a leader's ability to support local and district restructuring by providing a vision and inspiration, exemplifying desired behaviors, fostering growth of and support of members, increasing mental and emotional growth, staying committed to the process, goals, and vision, and recognizing and celebrating good work and growth of the organization.

Waters and Marzano (2009) identified a positive correlation between district-level leadership and student achievement when superintendents/district leaders uphold certain leadership practices and behaviors or responsibilities. They identified five district-level leadership responsibilities with statistically significant correlations to student achievement: collaborative goal-setting, non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction, board alignment and support of school district goals, monitoring goals for achievement and instruction, and resources to support achievement and instruction goals. Their meta-analysis examined 14 empirical studies conducted in American schools over a course of time between 1970 and 2005. The correlation between district leadership and student achievement resulted in a positive correlation of .24. This finding was significant at .05. The study revealed that effective reform efforts associated with district level leadership practices contributes to the educational attainment of the students under the district's leadership. Additional findings within the study provided evidence to student achievement and superintendent tenure with the school district (Marzano & Waters, 2009).

According to King (2002), 21st Century education climates are characterized by strong orientation toward reform that has caused superintendents, as well as other educational leaders to

develop new and innovative leadership styles. King (2002) believes that current educational leaders, unlike their predecessors focus on system collaboration, empowering its members, ongoing and continuous professional learning, the teaching and learning connection, informed decision making, and the efficient use of and alignment of resources.

It appears evident from the literature that an integrated superintendent influences or shapes the teaching and learning process of the central office staff, schools under the district's leadership, and the community affiliated with the school district. This influence is seen in the district's abilities to support all members of the organization by allocating and aligning resources and empowering members to be a part of and embrace the overall mission, vision, and beliefs of the district.

Enabling District Structures

Schools and school districts, like any other organization, are bureaucratic systems made up of the formalization of rules, standard operating procedures, and instructions which establish a hierarchy of authority and specialization of its members (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001).

Organizational structures are rooted in the description of Max Weber. According to Hoy and Miskel (2008), Weber's 1947 organizational influence involved specific alignment of employees with a chain of command monitoring outputs and imposing rules and consequences to achieve desired results. Weber's model emphasized a division of labor or specialization that promoted efficiency in expertise, effectiveness, and professional competence coupled with impersonal orientation designed to extract emotions from job performance. This concept, though not realistic, was thought to be ideal in the workplace as it would be solely based on fact and not feelings, ensuring equity in decisions, a hierarchy of authority distributing consequences based on compliance and under designated authority, and rules and regulations governing all equally.

Weber's ideology of organizational structures in which employees and superiors work in the absence of feelings using rules, regulation, specialization, and a system of hierarchy creates increased performance is somewhat fictitious; however, these same ideas are often portrayed in other organizations of today (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Weber's theory fails to adequately address possible and probable actions by workers who show apathy, boredom, lack of morale, failed lines of communication, and issues resulting in seniority versus job performance (Hoy & Miskel, 1996). Additionally, Hoy and Forsyth (1986), as well as Gouldner (1954), pointed out that Weber's model did not account for the informal structures which arise from the formal organization. This informal structure becomes its own organization with unrelated beliefs, goals, and mission capable of decision making, influence, and distribution of authority.

Gouldner's (1954) model of bureaucratic organizations recognized that the formalization structures (written rules and regulations), contained in the organization fell within two particular frameworks--punishment centered or representative. Punishment centered, as the name suggest, uses rules, policies, and regulations developed by superiors to punish or control its members when they deviate from the set of guidelines. Representative structures in contrast are developed jointly and are used to guide and prevent issues within the organization (Sinden, Hoy & Sweetland, 2004). Adler and Borys (1996) later built upon this premise identifying the two structures as coercive and enabling. Hoy and Sweetland (2000) used the coercive and enabling structures model to describe schools as related to their effectiveness and it is this model that is most applicable for this study.

Gouldner (1954) suggests, unlike the Weber model of bureaucracy, that unanticipated consequences will take place within the modes of bureaucratic functioning. The formalization of rules by their very nature creates a minimal standard that lowers efficiency and increases the

Coercive formalization refers to the policies and procedures that punish for non-compliance with no room for error or self-growth stemmed from “learning from mistake.” These coercive tactics have the potential to lead to poor production of the workers by increasing absences, apathy, and dissension of its workers. Hoy and Sweetland (2000) identify coercive formalization as compliance rather than engagement of its workers relating retaliation or punishment to workers who appear noncompliant. Organizations identified as containing coercive structures lose commitment to the organization through alienation of employees, top down communication, and inability to collectively address and overcome obstacles (Hoy & Sweetland, 2000). In schools, leadership that enforces this compliance oriented practice generally sees high turnover and low morale of the teachers leading to decrease production of achievement (Sinden et al. 2004).

Enabling structures on the other hand, promote flexible procedures that enable workers to problem solve and use best practices to guide their production (Alder & Borys, 1996). Superiors support and encourage workers and defer to expertise. Issues or problems that occur are dealt with looking at unique situations and used as areas for learning rather than one size fits all punishment mentality (Hoy & Sweetland, 2000). Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) defer to organizations with enabling structures as one that anticipates mistakes and seeks solutions from within, engages in open lines of communication, and have the flexibility to respond and overcome negative issues when they arise.

An additional bureaucratic structure described by Hoy and Sweetland (2000) relevant to this study is centralization. Centralization refers to the hierarchy or chain of command associated with the organization. The educational structure of public schools is pronounced in that all public school districts contain a board of education, superintendent, central office departments, principals/instructional leaders, teachers, and students. Centralization is also identified to the

extent of which employees are involved in the decision making process of the organization. Hoy and Sweetland (2000) describe a highly centralized organization as one where decisions are made at the top with little to no input from lower levels. In contrast, low centralization provides input from many stakeholders in the organization despite hierarchy level. High concentrated centralization promotes a top-down driven mentality where subordinates follow directions from above without question. Similar to coercive formalization, high centralization “hinders” rather than “enables” the production and operation of the organization (Sinden et al., 2004). Hindering centralization in schools is often times related to federal and state mandates pushed through local districts to enact mandates for increased achievement without regards to teachers’ professionalism or collaborative problem solving abilities. These outside pressures contribute to over-reach of administration where consequences of failure to comply, diminish creative thinking, increase turn-over, and lead to reduced achievement. Enabling centralization provides support structures that use a collaborative approach of all members to seeking and identify problems and creating professional learning opportunities to address concerns identified. Decision making is pushed outward and teachers feel a sense of empowerment (Hoy & Sweetland, 2000).

In Sinden et al.’s (2004) analysis of enabling structures, four themes emerged from the research of schools identified as enabling organizations: rules and procedures, structure and size, principal behaviors, and teacher behaviors. The six schools for the unit of analysis were selected from Hoy and Sweetland’s 2001 “100 Schools Study.” Select schools from this body of research were selected based on their identification of being an enabling organization. Qualitative interviews were conducted and results analyzed which determined the four major themes. Table 3 outlines these themes and their respected connection to enabling structures.

Table 3

Themes of Enabling Organizational Structures

Theme	Pattern of findings within enabling schools
1. Rules and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rules are malleable but enforceable ● Limited rules increase autonomy ● Shared rule making increases buy-in ● Informal procedures dominate
2. Structure and Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Smaller and flatter (less members in authority) ● Administration is available ● Decision making defers to expertise ● Informal structures and open communication ● Shared decision making
3. Principal behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Treats teachers professional and open/honest ● Provides support system for teachers ● Defers to professionalism and expertise of teachers ● Examines different views in decision making ● Situational in applying rules
4. Teacher behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Informal behaviors are preferred ● Trust administration and their position to lead ● Respects administration's expertise and knowledge ● Supports administration in their decisions and role

In reviewing the literature of enabling organizational structures, elements associated with “mindful structures” continued to surface. Organizational mindfulness, as identified in Hoy’s research (2002) is the organization’s preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify interpretations, sensitivity to operations, and commitment to resilience and deference to expertise. Hoy’s research outlined organizational mindfulness is a description of the collective mindfulness of the organization, not of the individual. According to Hoy, Gage, and Tarter (2006), “Just as individuals vary in their mindfulness, so too do organizations; that is,

mindfulness can be a collective property as well as an individual one. But a mindful organization is more than the sum of the mindful individuals (Hoy, 2003).” In comparing organizational mindfulness and collective mindfulness with that of enabling structures, Hoy (2002) concluded that an enabling structure aided in the development of organizational mindfulness but did not assure one to exist; enabling structures were necessary but insufficient condition for collective mindfulness; enabling structure aided in the creation of organizational mindfulness but did not guarantee it. The research also supported that collective mindfulness assured enabling structure and organizational mindfulness was both required and sufficient condition for an enabling structure and without enabling structure, organizational mindfulness failed to exist (Hoy, 2002).

Mindfulness associated with the structures of the school (Hoy, Gage, and Tarter, 2004), were derived from conceptual framework of organizational and collective mindfulness. Hoy et al. (2004) stated that school mindfulness rested on five properties; a focus on mistakes, reluctance to simplify, sensitivity to teaching and learning, commitment to resilience, and deference to expertise in problem solving. School mindfulness was operationalized with the development of the M-Scale designed to measure the mindfulness of the principal and mindfulness of the faculty.

In Sinden et al.’s (2004) research, teachers described principal’s open door policy as a means for them to vent, discuss issues, and give input to decisions affecting their job or environment. This act of allowing teachers to share concerns and offer advice is in-line with what Langer (1989) called mindfulness. The principal’s ability to gain multiple perspectives from teachers directly involved allows for a border scope in determining courses of actions. It further invites a reflective opportunity by the teacher to provide suggestions based on thought rather than impulse. Finally, the informal act of an open door line of communication allows the

individual perspective of the teachers to be collected to foster a collaborative view to the potential concerns. This constant viewing of potential problems by the front-line teachers, offers the principal opportunities to work in unison with his/her faculty and staff to solve problems prior to their occurrence or ability to disrupt the organization's mission (Sinden et al., 2004). Additional imprints of mindfulness existed in the literature of enabling structures in which management or administration displayed deference to expertise of their employees. Educational systems, to include school districts and the schools that comprise them, are viewed as departmental or specialized. Giving way or deferring to expertise based on knowledge rather than position along the hierarchy displays a willingness of the organization to value employee's input and build capacity in its members (Hoy 2002).

Based on the findings from Sinden et al. (2004), the themes associated with enabling school structures could be generalized to apply to the educational structure of the school district. The bureaucracy development of the school district at a macro level can be assumed to correlate with the micro level of the school, based on the formalization of rules and procedures are initiated at the district level.

Teamwork for Student Success

The final dimension of DiPaola and Smith's (2008) district climate is teamwork for student success. Teamwork for student success encompasses the social capital of the district, which includes the district's network of social structures and cognitive dispositions aligned to act as resources for members to work together to achieve success for their students (Forsyth & Adams, 2004). In public education, social capital refers to knowledge and skill sets of the collective group comprised of teachers, instructional leaders, and support staff that provide support for increased levels of learning for students. This conglomeration of members within the

school district produces the organization's social capital. According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (2000), social capital is an abstract resource (Grubb, 2010) that facilitates the collaboration and cooperation, increased efficiency, and promotion of knowledge transfer among members of the organization, thereby increasing the overall performance of the organization. It is the concept that the collective group as a social norm is greater than the sum capacity of the individuals' social connection to the organization (Holme & Rangel, 2011).

In applying this concept to the school district, social capital management refers to how an organization fosters and promotes growth and builds capacity to sustain the talent level over time. According to The Annenberg Institute's School Communities that Work Task Force (2002), the management of social capital may be one of the most underdeveloped practices of school districts. Organizations outside the educational field apply the concept of the accumulation of individual's intellect, experience, knowledge, competencies, and commitment that contributes to the achievement of an organization's vision and business objectives (Sigler & Kashyap, 2008). In education, teamwork for student success embraces the social structures and cognitive process through incorporating new teaching and learning strategies that best meets the core objective of increased student achievement (DiPaola & Smith, 2008). The support of best practices that promote continued growth of all members of the organization within the school is connected to the concept of teamwork for student success (Hoy, 2002; Hoy & Sweetland, 2000).

Capacity is not a product, program, or technology based intervention that can be purchased by a school district. Capacity is built through the exchange of information, support through productive struggles, and meaningful collaboration centered upon outcomes (Fullan 2008; & Harris 2014; Hoy, Forsyth, & Adams, 2011). A shift in the way school districts reform will require forethought as they move to a system of capacity builders of teachers,

administrators, school board members, students, and even the community members they serve (Sharrat & Fullan, 2009). A delicate balance must exist between too much centralized controls and too little. Tighten control stifles or threatens creativity and adaptive processes whereas too little control allows for unequal learning opportunities and unbalanced learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Honig & Hatch, 2004). This delicate balance involves a level of trust formulated at both the district level and the school level (Adams & Miskell, 2016).

Spillane and Thompson's (1997) research conducted on Michigan school districts revealed positive reform efforts of teamwork for student success was characterized by three dimensions of capacity; human capital, social capital, and financial resources. Much like DiPaola and Smith's (2008) research, a district's ability to gain new knowledge and ideas from external and internal sources and implement enabling structures within the district to move them efficiently among all levels was determined to increase capacity along established structures. The improvement of the district fell upon its ability to increase capacity at each level through acquired information, shared vision, collaboration, and support of the district's teaching and learning process. The district's most compelling reason for a strong role in human capital, social capital, and fiscal resource alignment is equity among stakeholders (Sigler & Kashyap, 2008). This goal may require systems to adopt changes ranging from prioritizing human capital, organization of the central office, and efforts to work with outside agencies. A successful district creates and distributes resources to fit the specific strengths and weaknesses of each school's students, staff, and community. A successful district should use these resources to ensure all students in the district are served and instructed well. Corbett and Wilson (1991) state:

Depending on which school a child attends and to which classrooms the child is assigned, the student will encounter a varied array of programs and activities. . . . From the students' perspectives, then, the quality of their educational experiences rests on the "luck of the draw." The central office instructional role is to remove this luck factor from the

instructional program, i.e., to ensure that idiosyncratic variations in programs, people, and policies do not result in systematic differences in the quality of education for children. (p. 46)

In Marzano and Water's (2009) research on successful school districts, they connect resource allocations (Grub, 2009) with positive outcomes. When district leaders support initiatives through fiscal, human resource, and curricular programming all in-line with the non-negotiable goals set-forth by the district, improvement within the initiative takes place. The researchers elaborated that aligning required resources in a timely manner for established non-negotiable goals is pertinent to the success of learning process. Districts that improve teaching and learning do so as a result of strategic planning needed to move resources to meet the needs of the students. District leaders provide, allocate, reallocate, and actively search for new resources for quality instruction (Appelbaum, 2002; Bergeson, 2004; MacIver & Farley-Ripple, 2008). Resource allocation and alignment at the district level must also include teachers, instructional partners, and instructional leaders' opportunities to professionally grow.

Professional learning for educators and administrators in successful school districts is ongoing and continuously monitored (Marzano & Waters, 2009). Professional development for all members of the district is moving from the one size fits all model to a more differentiated, reflective, and collaborative model that concentrates on areas of particular deficiencies or data identified through mutual dialogue with peers and superiors (Amzat & Valdez, 2017). Most current models of district reform focuses on accountability of student achievement and presenting the teaching and learning process in a differentiated method to raise all scores and reduce gaps in subgroups. For educators and leaders associated with school districts, this focus on accountability presents all members with the professional responsibility to learn and build individual and collective capacity within the district (Leana & Frits, 2014).

This individual capacity is noted as the learned experiences of the teacher/administrator. A teacher's experience, certification, knowledge and pedagogy skills are considered "human capital." The more targeted and professionally designed learning a district provides and supports, the more effective the teachers become (Leana & Frits, 2014). Social capital, in comparison, is not a characteristic of the individual educator but rather the collective relationship among teachers, administrators, and central office/district level members. The social capital as outlined by DiPaola and Smith encompasses all members of the district to include students, parents, and community stakeholders. This social capital network provides a framework of shared learning and growth in an ongoing effort to constantly improve.

Within the review of literature, multiple studies supported the need for continuous professional learning through a job-embedded and collaborative process (DuFour, 2004, 2007; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Hillman and Kachur's (2010) research within Illinois School District #61, noted that district level instructional leaders provided guidance and support through professional learning communities to improve and sustain reform. The PLC efforts began capacity building as they worked and learned in a collaborative process in coordination with district support, guidance, and resources. The PLC pathway provided the necessary delivery method to expand each member's knowledge and capacity as a collective group (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; DuFour, 2007). The shared knowledge moves then from human capital to social capital within the district.

The role of the school district, to include the superintendent, central office cabinet, and board is to meet the needs of all students through effective and productive instructional programs designed for improved achievement (Corbett & Wilson, 1991; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). The concentration of professional learning and capacity building must involve all members of the

organization and not simply the teachers to reach the goal of improved achievement. Research on successful school districts (McNeal & Oxholm, 2009; Togneri & Anderson, 2003) provide evidence that when a focus and commitment is on developing instructional leaders through sound practice, the district is more effective in reaching its goal. The act of developing sound instructional leaders is based on the development of administrators as instructional leaders and the development of teachers as leaders. Anderson (2003) stipulates that successful districts go beyond content teacher leaders and grade level leaders in an effort to create leaders of teaching and learning.

Building leadership capacity within others, creating human capital through professional learning opportunities, and collectively bringing about greater social capital within school district, establishes a “team” designed for student success (DiPaola & Smith, 2008). As the district team develops, a role of collective mindfulness occurs. At each level, members are preoccupied with failure, reluctant to simply interpretations, sensitive to operations, committed to resilience, and defer to expertise (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Members of the organization are constantly scanning for problems and developing solutions through a collaborative process. Issues are solved not by rank or grade, but by the skill set most needed to fix the problem. Effective communication is inherent with leaders and followers allowing for two-way communication and all members are supportive of the district goals. This collaborative network (classroom teachers, school instructional leaders, and district administrator) allows for the exploration of new topics, sharing of expertise, refining of skills, and networking among professionals (MacIver & Farley-Ripple, 2008; Knapp, Copland, & Talbert, 2003). Combining this “teamwork for student success” with integrated superintendent leadership, and enabling

district structures provides the core aspects of district climate as outlined by DiPaola and Smith (2008).

Organizational Commitment

The construct of organizational commitment has for many years been the topic of discussion in making organizations more functional and productive. While multiple organizational commitment inventories are available and used by various organizations, the most acceptable and widely used across the globe, is the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Mowday et al. (1979) (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). The OCQ has been translated into five different languages with consistency in reliability and validity across countries and organizations (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Kanning & Hill, 2013). According to Allen and Meyer (1990), three forms of organizational commitment can be distinguished: (1) affective, (2) normative, and (3) continuance.

Affective commitment expresses the emotional attachment of the employees. Those members that display a high degree of emotional commitment feel integrated into the organization and identify themselves with it (Allen & Myer, 1990; Mowday et al., 1979). There are three aspects that together constitute the affective commitment: (1) a strong belief in the goals and values of the organization and the employees' acceptance of these, (2) the readiness to lend one's support to the organization, and (3) a strong need of the employees to maintain their membership in the organization (Mowday et al., 1982).

Normative commitment, by contrast, does not correspond to any individually felt attachment of the organization members, but rather reflects their moral/ethical obligation toward the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Kanning & Hill, 2013). In this way, for instance, an individual's attachment arises from the fact that the employer regularly pays his wages or that in

economically difficult times, the employee cannot weaken his own company further by changing to a rival company.

Continuance commitment results from the motivation to avoid impending costs that would be associated with possible change of employer (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993). The commitment of the employees is higher the greater they perceive the costs of such a change to be (relocation, wage losses, loss of personal contacts to former colleagues). In this regard, the previous investments that an employee has made in the organization such as specialized training and the possible benefits gained through these, extra pay and side jobs, play an important role.

This research study will use affective commitment as it relates to organizational commitment of educational settings particularly that of the school district as the unit of analysis.

Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974), identified organizational commitment as one's identification with an organization where strong ties link the individual to the beliefs and vision of the organization and the strength of the connection is displayed through the involvement by the individual. A strong desire to remain with the organization is also a characteristic of organizational commitment. Mowday et al.'s (1974) research expanded the notion that commitment to an organization goes beyond causal relationship or simply being loyal to the organization. Truly being committed embodies embracing the organization and giving of one's time, energy, and effort, becoming one with the organization.

From the dawn of the industrial revolution, employers have sought direction from outside sources in ways to increase production. Research of organizations was long associated with productivity and outcomes related to efficiency and effectiveness of the workers (Steers, 1975). Job satisfaction emerged as a topic of interest relating to an unsatisfied worker seeking other

employment opportunities thus creating turn-over and start-up for respected organizations (Steers, 1975). Both can be associated with lower productivity. Beyond job satisfaction, Porter et al, (1974) recognized that commitment to an organization must be explored in relation to turn over among workers. They proposed that commitment was linked to the organization as a whole while job satisfaction was linked to a particular job or portion of the work performed on a day to day basis. Commitment develops over a period of time connecting the organization with meaning and beliefs associated with the worker while job satisfaction relates to the attitude towards the particular job which may change daily (Mowday et al., 1979).

To operationalize organizational commitment, Mowday et al. (1979) developed the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). The OCQ is a 15-item questionnaire used to measure the three factors associated with organizational commitment: acceptance of the organization's goals and values, a willingness to exert additional efforts to the cause of the organization, and a strong desire to remain in the organization. The OCQ used a 7 -point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 – *strongly disagree* to 7 – *strongly agree*. Results are then summed and divided by 15 to arrive at a summary indicator of employee commitment. Several items were negatively phrased and reverse scored in an effort to reduce response bias. It was intended that the scale items, when taken together, would provide a fairly consistent indicator of employee commitment levels for most working populations.

In order to examine the psychometric properties of the OCQ, Mowday et al. (1979) included the use of multiple and diverse samples. The team felt that if a general measure of commitment was to be achieved, it was necessary to collect validity and reliability data for various types of employees in different work environments. In order to provide such data, a series of empirical studies was initiated across various professions and included 2,563

employees. Professions associated with the study included employees from public services (custodial hospital, social services, budgetary, and licensing agencies), retail management, hospitals, telephone company, classified university employees, scientist and engineers. A variety of measures, not all distributed to each profession, was used to assess the predictive, convergent, and discriminant validity of the OCQ. In total, 12 measure, excluding the OCQ, were used in the study: sources of organizational attachment, job satisfaction, job involvement, career satisfaction, motivational force to perform, intrinsic motivation, central life interest, turnover, absenteeism, intent to leave and estimated tenure, job performance, and behavioral commitment rating. The results of the study indicated acceptable levels of convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity with an alpha coefficients ranging from .82 to .93 with a median of .90. The mean level of commitment ranged from 4.0 to 6.1, which resulted in being slightly higher than the midpoint of the Likert-type scale of 3.5.

Teacher Commitment

During the review of literature, research utilizing organizational commitment and school districts were not discovered; however, there was existing evidence from research studies that connected teacher commitment to that of the school environment.

The impact of organizational commitment is obvious in its relation to the school district and individual schools (Reyes, 1992). The optimal teacher is one who identifies with the goals, vision, and beliefs of the district's strategic plan and embraces them as their own. This will result in dedication and determination to achieve a desired result even through additional efforts (Tarter, Hoy, & Bliss, 1989). At the local school level, committed teachers are self-motivated, endure tough challenges, and collaborate with peers to improve the teaching and learning process (Firestone & Pennell, 1993; Nordin et al., 2009). For the school districts and schools, they serve,

employing committed teachers increases achievement, decreases teacher absenteeism, reduces teacher conflict, and promotes innovative teaching (Henkin & Holliman, 2009 & Nordin et al., 2009). Much like an individual being motivated to reach a particular goal, teacher commitment moves beyond the individual goal in their determination to see success for all students they serve (Nordin et al., 2009). Committed teachers establish a psychological attachment to their cause that affects their passion, course of action, and performance (Nordin et al., 2009).

According to Riehl and Sipple (1996), teacher commitment plays a significant part in a district's or school's ability to improve achievement. Committed teachers provide the spark and extra efforts that many students need to reach high levels. In Riehl and Sipple's (1996) research, they examined teacher commitment by examining the dependent variables of mission, time, and stayer. Mission is defined by the shared relationship of the goals, vision, and beliefs of the school. Time is outlined as the teacher's time allocated towards school task and activities. Stayer refers to those who remain with the school. The independent variables examined were teacher's personal characteristics and school demographics, teacher's task environment (number of classes, number of students, average achievement of students taught), and climate. The findings indicate that a relationship exist between teachers' attitude of income and class size and commitment. Teachers' committed to school's mission showed greater commitment to the school. School climate variables were the strongest predictors of teacher commitment. The connection of teacher commitment and school climate demonstrates that teachers who feel supported, connected with the goals of the school, protected from off task disruptions, and have available resources to perform their job are more likely to remain committed to the educational organization (Riehl & Sipple, 1996).

Hoy, Tarter, and Bliss (1989) used the OCQ to measure teacher commitment as one of the outcomes of effective schools. In a study conducted using 58 elementary schools and 872 teachers, the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) and the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire for secondary schools (OCDQ-RS) were used to examine the relationship of school climate as measured by the OCDQ-RS, the health of the schools measured by the OHI, and the level of commitment of the teachers from the OCQ. The results of the study were that the health variables from the OHI predicted teacher commitment and four of the five variables associated with school climate were predictors of teacher commitment. The research study provided evidence to support schools with committed teachers, also displayed positive climates, and high levels of health.

Tarter, Hoy, and Bliss (1989), in their studies using the OCQ, determined that the instructional leader of the school influences teacher commitment through their willingness to provide support, resources, consideration, and structure in a non-threatening manner. Additionally, the school leader's ability to create conditions that foster goal attainment for school success influenced teachers in that the teachers were able to remain committed to the goals and beliefs of successfully raising achievement for their students.

Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) researched the various qualities associated with educational organizations and their relationship to teacher commitment. The study examined 1,213 teachers in 78 elementary schools in the state of Tennessee. The researchers founded six organizational conditions within the school that affected the commitment of the teachers: (1) positive feedback in relation to the connection of teaching and learning (student outcomes), (2) task autonomy and teacher discretion (able to make decisions of core task based professional knowledge), (3) professional learning opportunities to expand and share knowledge, (4)

reactionary discipline. Process of how administration handles discipline/school management, (5) assignments of duties, interruptions, or other task that are non-instructional, and the most pronounced to contribute to teacher commitment, and (6) performance efficacy.

Effectiveness School/District

During the review of literature, a continual theme connecting each layer and educational construct continued to emerge, that is the term *effectiveness*. Regardless of the grade configuration, reform movement, school or district, the level of effectiveness plays an integral part of the educational and organizational measures. Effectiveness within the educational organization is “nested” in layers. Within these layers lies the classroom, school, feeder pattern, and local school district. To determine one layer as effective, assumes the other layers contributed to its effectiveness (Patterson, Purkey, & Parker, 1986). The manner in which the layers are measured or defined regarding effectiveness is as varied as the number of researchers conducting the studies.

Effectiveness, much like other components of educational research brings about multiple opinions, degrees of effectiveness, measures, and even what it truly is. Researchers generally lack consensus on a definition of effectiveness relating to educational organizations. It has been argued in multiple perspectives from a school’s input-output (Cheng, 1996; Lockheed and Hanushek, 1988); in the perspective of out-performing expectations based on demographics or environmental factors (Sammons, Hillman, & Mortimore, 1995); growth in student achievement (Willms, 1992); and, on a broader stance, a concentration of simply accomplishing defined goals (Rutter, 1983).

HM Inspectorate of Schools in Scotland (Drever, 1991) takes the view that effectiveness should be measured by a summative outcome and that the desired outcome of education is the

value added to a student, subject to what they have learned during their tenure as a student.

Mortimore's (1993) view of effective schools stipulates an extra value to its students' outcomes in comparison with other schools serving similar student demographics (Sammons, Hillman, & Mortimore, 1995). This concept of *value added* by the school resulted in a need to explicitly focus on student achievement in methodologies involving school effectiveness.

Hoy and Miskel (2001) reasoned that a school's effectiveness is determined by the extent their outcomes, associated with their activities, meet or exceed desired or established goals.

Relevant here is the view that an effective education organization is one that indorses high levels of student achievement for each student regardless of the intake or circumstances connected to the student (Murphy, 1990). It is no surprise, therefore that academic emphasis and frequent monitoring of student academic progress has been viewed as important correlates of an effective organization.

Organizational effectiveness, regardless of which educational layer is represented, is multidimensional in its measure. Miskel, Fevurly, and Stewart (1979) argue that organizations can range from effective to ineffective based on varying criteria. While one organization reaches its goal of budgetary efficiency, it falls short of student achievement and yet another system increases state accountability in achievement, but failed to reach a desired goal for student attendance. Adding to the complexity of defining effectiveness one must consider the political nature of educational organizations. Schreerens (2000) adds that school effectiveness is a difficult concept to define and once defined, is of a nature difficult to reason. Hence the concept of school effectiveness has various approaches and as Firestone (1991) noted, "Defining the effectiveness of a particular school always requires choices among competing values", which leads to "the criteria of effectiveness will be a subject of political debate" (p. 2). An example of

this political debate is the judging of public schools as “failing” through legislative acts and political agendas for the promotion of private and charter schools. Competing values of what others deem as effective.

Though various studies differ in the definition and the methods to measure organizational effectiveness within the multiple layers of educational organizations, many characteristics of “effectiveness” arise. Effective organizations are efficient, flexible, adaptable, and innovative. Establishing goals and setting a system of progress monitoring are characteristics of effectiveness that allow the organization to align resources, and make needed changes along the pathway to goal attainment. Additionally, effective educational organizations hold tight that student outcomes are important and the *value added* during the student’s educational experience must be of high quality and meaningful to the student’s future (Miskel, 2008 & Miskel et al., 1979).

Summary

The review of literature conducted for this study provided a connection between positive climates and greater teacher commitment to the organization. District climate as a relatively new organizational construct should contribute to the explanation of the levels of teacher commitment at the local school under the district. The components of district climate (integrated superintendent leadership, enabling district structures, and teamwork for student success) should impact teacher commitment based on the degree of openness the district climate exhibits.

Rationale and Hypothesis

The connection of the three components of district climate should show a positive relation to teacher commitment in that the higher the perception of the district’s leadership, enabling structures, and teamwork for student success, the greater the overlap of the teachers’

expectations for shared values, goals, support, and resources. Based on these assumptions, as stated earlier in Chapter I, the following hypothesis will be tested in the research study:

H1: District climate will be positively related to teacher commitment.

The ability for districts to recruit and retain excellent teachers has never been more important as our world experiences informational and technological change at a record pace. In addition to keeping up with the information and technology demands, our teachers are dealing with high numbers of diverse populations with low levels of academic experience and exposure needed to be successful in today classroom. Couple this with limited and sometimes absent resources; teachers, students, and instructional leaders are placed at unfair advantages to reach state and federal accountability demands. This current state or environment of education is concerning in that less teachers are entering the profession as more teachers are departing (NCTAF, 2011). A district's ability to predict teacher commitment based on the levels of district climate will hold valuable information in making decisions to create a more open and healthy district climate.

Creating this environment will take leadership to acquire necessary abstract and complex resources to establish a positive district climate conducive to reaching the desired goals and will aide in the recruitment and retaining of effective teachers. According to DiPaola and Smith (2008), creating this climate is associated with three categories relating to school district climate: integrated superintendent leadership, enabling district structures, and teamwork for student success.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The methodology chapter is subdivided into five distinctive portions; selection and description of the sample, measurement, data collection, data analysis, and summary. The first section of this chapter outlines details and a descriptions of the sample used along with a rationale for their selection. The procedures for data collection, to include locations and methods of data collection are contained in section two. A description outlining the instruments used for this study and the evidence to support their reliability and validity is contained in section three, measurement section. A brief explanation of the statistical analysis used to measure the researcher's hypothesis is provided in section four. Finally, a summary of the content of each section will be provided along with a position statement of the researcher.

Sample

A convenience sample, which consisted of 110 public schools within 15 school districts located in Alabama, was used to test the research hypothesis. The respondents were teachers and principals from the selected schools. Elementary schools numbered 59 and were identified as schools containing Grades Kindergarten through 6, while 51 secondary schools participated and were identified as Grades 7 through 12. The total number of participants was 1,587. However, the participants were divided among other researchers within the cohort thus reducing the number for each researcher. The total number of respondents completing the District Climate Index (DCI) was 394

comprised of 100 administrators, 283 teachers, and 11 were unknown. The same 283 teachers completed the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ).

Data Collection

Prior to survey dissemination, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was granted and school system superintendents authorized permission and support for data collection for various schools within their systems. Additionally, each participating school's principal provided consent for the administration and data collection within their schools. The selection of the school systems was based on the proximity and accessibility to the researcher. Data were collected from 15 independent school systems in Alabama comprised of 51 secondary schools and 59 elementary schools.

A script explaining the survey instruments was read by the researcher or designee during a faculty meeting at each school. A faculty designee, in a non-administrative role, was used in the event the researcher was unavailable to conduct the faculty meeting. In each case, the researcher or the selected faculty member ensured the teachers' complete anonymity throughout the process.

The DCI and OCQ perception surveys were conducted during a designed faculty meeting where teachers completed the surveys on a voluntary basis. Administrators at each school completed survey data on a voluntary basis and not in the presence of their faculty. Teachers were not asked to sign the survey questionnaire and no identifying code was placed on the surveys. All survey data were completed and placed in a secure envelope without administrative access to assure there would be no retaliation or discrimination and to promote honest feedback from teachers.

Teachers from each school were systematically selected to complete one of five packets containing multiple surveys. The DCI and OCQ are contained within one particular packet suggesting that one in every five teachers completed the survey instruments. Other teachers within the faculty meeting completed survey information not pertinent to this research study. Each administrator's packet contained only the DCI survey instrument.

All survey data were collected by the researcher and placed in a coded envelope indicating the school and system code obtained by ALSDE webpage. Collection of survey data were then transported by researcher to The University of Alabama for input and disaggregation.

Though not a random sample, the schools comprising the 15 different systems were diverse in nature in regard to socioeconomic status and achievement. Data from the ALSDE website indicated that all but one system identified for survey data collection had at least one Title I school (50% or more student population qualifying for free or reduced lunch) and each system had a subgroup for achievement data present on the ALSDE webpage.

Measurement

The independent variables for the research study were the subtests used to determine district climate from the District Climate Index (DCI): integrated superintendent leadership, enabling district structure, and teamwork for student success. The dependent variable was teacher commitment as measured by the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ).

The District Climate Index is a 30-item descriptive questionnaire that measures a school district's climate using three general dimensions (integrated superintendent leadership, enabling district structure, and teamwork for success). According to DiPaola and Smith (2008), integrated superintendent leadership, enabling district structure, and teamwork for success are the primary components that comprise the district's climate. Integrated superintendent leadership refers to a

superintendent who embodies a leadership style that embraces a need for change, but is focused on the task with a people first mentality. Enabling district structure provides for obtainment of the district's goals and objectives. These structures set in place high expectations for all involved, allocate and align resources, establish supports for effective communication and collaboration, and provide a system of accountability and progress monitoring. Teamwork for student success refers to an environment where continuous learning is priority for students and teachers and all personnel work together with respect and support centered upon a commitment to make all students successful.

The respondents to the DCI questionnaire, teachers and administrators, reply to items along a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *never* occurs to *very frequently* occurs. In a previous study conducted by DiPaola and Smith (2008), the three components comprising the 30-item DCI explained 85.98% of the variance. The alpha coefficients of all three factors demonstrated the high reliability of each component measure alpha = .988 for superintendent leadership, .984 for enabling structure, and, .933 for teamwork for student success. The factors on this instrument have a reliability coefficient using Cronbach's Alpha between .83 and .95.

The Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) is a 15-item questionnaire used to measure the commitment of an individual to the organization and the degree of involvement within the organization. Mowday et al. (1979) in their development of the OCQ analyzed 2,563 participants in varied professions where employees responded to the 15-item questionnaire using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagrees* to 7 = *strongly agrees*. The research findings indicate internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and factorial reliability of the OCQ as well as the instruments predictive, convergent, and discriminant validity. The alpha coefficient achieved by the OCQ in the research findings by Mowday et al. (1979) ranged from .82 to .93

across the reported studies with a median alpha coefficient of .90. The present study used the revised 9-item OCQ with alpha coefficients ranging from .84 to .90 (Mowday et al., 1979). Additionally, Tarter et al. (1989) used the 9-item OCQ in a teacher commitment study where the alpha was .91. In the 9-item OCQ the Likert scale was reduced from 7 to 6 items ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*.

Socioeconomic Status

School level socioeconomic status (SES) was controlled for in this research study. The SES for schools participating in this study were determined based on the level of free or reduced lunch (FRL) obtained from the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) data dashboard on the state's website. The data presented for FRL on the ALSDE site is based on a percentage of students. To convert the FRL percentage, subtracted by 1 (1 - FRL%).

Data Analysis

The unit of analysis for this research study was initially the independent school district; however, based on the data sample, the unit of analysis was the school level. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the characteristics of the participants from the sample. Data collected were entered into Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) where the data was cleaned and descriptive statistics were calculated. Quantitative methodologies were applied to include inferential statistics such as correlation, multiple regression, paired-sample *t* test, and ANOVA. Furthermore, principal components analysis and Cronbach's alpha were also used to verify construct validity and reliability of instruments.

Consideration of HLM in this study. Given that the cases in this sample can be grouped or "nested" by school or by district, I explored the possibility of conducting a Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) analysis strategy. HLM is a useful analytical technique when participants or

cases can be clustered into groups due to some sort of shared context (e.g., teachers within a school, teachers and principals within a district). This shared context thus has some theoretical influence on all cases within a single group and researchers should account for this “shared” influence, known and non-independence. Because HLM accounts for the variance within groups and between groups, it would be an appropriate analysis strategy for this study (Pituch & Stevens, 2016). However, an unconditional one-level model revealed there was not significant intra-class correlation. Therefore, we can look at the entire sample, clustering the teacher and principal responses by school rather than creating a multi-level model where participants are grouped by district.

Aggregation of data. The researcher used an aggregated sample of the DCI (principal and teacher) and the OCQ to conduct a multiple regression to examine the predictive ability of the three subtests of the DCI (integrated superintendent leadership, enabling district structures, and teamwork for student success) on teacher commitment as measured by the OCQ while controlling for SES. The aggregated data was also used to conduct ANOVAs examining (1) the differences in OCQ score between grades of teachers, and (2) differences in DCI mean score between teachers and administrators. The reason for aggregation of the data is due to the variation in number of cases by school in the original data set. For example, one school had seven teachers and two administrators while many other schools had only one teacher and one principal. The result of the aggregation reduced the sample size of 98 cases. However, an a priori power analysis using G*Power indicated a sample size of 68 participants would have adequate power (.804). Thus, the reduced sample size is still adequate for the study.

Data Analysis

Given the disaggregated sample, data did not have significant intra-class correlation, which would allow for nesting schools within districts, and the aggregated data sample size provided adequate statistical power analysis, the unit of analysis for this research study was the school level. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the characteristics of the participants from the sample. Data collected were entered into Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 25 where the data was cleaned and descriptive statistics were calculated. Quantitative methodologies were applied to include inferential statistics such as correlation, regression, paired-sample *t* test, and ANOVA. Furthermore, principal components multiple analysis and Cronbach's alpha were also used to verify construct validity and reliability of instruments.

Position Statement

The researcher participated in this study as a superintendent of one of the districts providing data. The researcher did not influence the data collection and further provided a designee to distribute, collect, and mail all surveys to the collection site.

Summary

The methodology chapter described the sample, participants, data collection process, measurement instruments for testing independent and dependent variable, and statistical methods to test the relationship between district climate and teacher commitment. Additionally, a brief discussion of the validity and reliability of the measures were presented as well as the limitations of the data sample for HLM.

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the quantitative data analysis of the relationship between district climate and teacher commitment. The chapter is organized into four sections presenting the descriptive statistics, reliability and validity of the scales used to measure the independent and dependent variables, statistical tests and results used to test hypotheses, and a summary of the results addressing the stated research questions.

Descriptive Statistics

This section presents the descriptive statistics of the sample, the independent and dependent variables, and the demographic variables. The independent variables consisted of the three subtests of the DCI: integrated superintendent leadership (Leader), enabling district structures (Enabling), and teamwork for student success (Team) as well as the overall mean District Climate Index (DC) score. The dependent variable was teacher commitment (TC) as measured with the OCQ. The unit of analysis for this study is the school.

The data were collected from 15 school districts encompassing 110 schools, 63,669 students, and 3,739 certified teachers. Each school was allocated one principal per school. Of the 3,651 teachers, 1,597 responded to one of nine cohort survey packets. This research study accounts for 283 of the teachers or approximately 18% of the respondents. In addition to the teacher respondents, principals participated in the study for the DCI with a response rate of 87% (99 out of 110). The districts SES was calculated and used as a covariate in the statistical

analyses. The SES mean for school districts was .53%. Table 4 provides descriptive data for 15 school districts from the study.

Table 4

Summary of School District Demographic Data

District ID	N	# Elem Schools	# Secondary Schools	# Teacher	Enrollment	Mean SES
005-001	5	2	3	152	2597	0.56
017-002	7	4	3	178	2341	0.73
039-003	3	2	1	104	1972	0.41
042-004	14	8	6	591	10219	0.53
045-005	8	3	5	377	6858	0.37
058-006	9	5	4	220	4484	0.51
059-007	24	12	12	663	17016	0.4
107-008	7	5	2	239	2939	0.56
115-009	5	3	2	198	1755	0.69
141-010	7	4	3	272	4398	0.65
156-011	4	2	2	142	2232	0.25
176-012	6	4	2	209	2842	0.33
178-013	3	1	2	100	1492	0.43
192-014	4	2	2	83	1017	0.85
201-015	4	2	2	123	1507	0.55
15	11	59	51	3651	63669	0.53

Table 5 illustrates the descriptive statistics for the respondents from the sample of the 15 school districts in Alabama that completed the DCI and the OCQ. The DCI is the operational measure for district climate. The DCI is a 30-item Likert scale ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *very frequently*. The OCQ is the operational measure for teacher commitment. The OCQ is a 9-item Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*. The descriptive statistics for the OCQ revealed a mean score of 4.2071. This score was fairly high, which indicates the respondents were committed to their organization. The overall district climate score was also high with a mean score of 4.0966. Again, this high score represents a positive and open

district climate based on the DCI subtests (integrated superintendent leadership, mean = 3.9416, teamwork for student success, mean = 4.2731, and enabling district structures, mean = 4.0634).

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for OCQ and Total DCI

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Teacher Commitment	283	1.89	5.0	4.2071	.67364
District Climate	393	1.53	5.0	4.0966	.69118
Superintendent Leader	366	1.00	5.0	3.9416	.87892
Teamwork for Success	390	1.29	5.0	4.2731	.76053
Enabling Structures	388	1.14	5.0	4.0634	.71018

Reliability of Scales

The two instruments, DCI and OCQ, used for this research study were examined to test their reliability using Cronbach’s alpha method of evaluating internal consistency. Table 6 provides the results indicating that both the DCI and the OCQ revealed high levels of reliability with each score exceeding 0.7. Cronbach’s alpha was examined for all three subtests of the DCI in both teacher responses and principal responses which are reported separately in Table 6 and depicted by T for teacher and A for administrator.

Table 6

Cronbach’s Alpha Scores for Scaled Variables

Variable	Number Respondents	Number of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha
Teacher Commitment	281	9	.903
T-DCILeader	263	14	.960
T-DCIEnabling	253	9	.969
T-DCITeam	272	7	.947
A-DCILeader	98	14	.933
A-DCIEnabling	99	9	.938
A-DCITeam	99	7	.888

Principal Components Analysis of the District Climate Index

A principal components analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation and Kaiser Normalization was conducted to verify the three-factor structure of the DCI. As can be seen in Table 7, the items clustered together to create the three factors identified by DiPaola and Smith's (2008) original scale validation. A parallel analysis also confirmed the three-factor structure. Items 16,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26,27,28,29,30 loaded onto Enabling Structures factor, items 3,4,5,8,9,12,13,14,15 loaded onto Superintendent Leadership, and items 1,2,6,7,10,11,17 loaded onto Teamwork, as was expected based on the original validation study. It should also be noted that some items loaded onto more than one factor, suggesting that the factors may not be orthogonal.

Differences between this sample and the original validation results were found in the amount of variance explained by each subscale. DiPaola and Smith reported Superintendent as the primary factor (eigenvalue = 22.7, explaining 75.65% of the variance), followed by enabling structures (eigenvalue = 2.1) and teamwork (eigenvalue = 1.0). Results from this PCA showed that the majority of variance was explained by a single structure but Enabling Structures was the first factor, with an eigenvalue of 16.95, explaining 56.51% of the variance. Superintendent Leadership was the second factor with an eigenvalue of 2.380, explaining 7.93% of variance. Teamwork was the third factor with an eigenvalue of 2.08, explaining 6.94% of the variance. Factor loadings are depicted in Table 7.

Table 7

Summary of Principal Component Analysis Factor Loadings (N = 346)

DCI Item #	Factors		
	Enabling Structures	Superintendent Leadership	Teamwork
DCI_20	0.81		
DCI_21	0.78		
DCI_27	0.75		
DCI_22	0.75		
DCI_29	0.72		
DCI_28	0.72	0.42	
DCI_18	0.71		
DCI_24	0.68		
DCI_19	0.66		
DCI_23	0.65	0.43	
DCI_30	0.60	0.47	
DCI_16	0.59		
DCI_26	0.56	0.53	
DCI_14	0.46	0.67	
DCI_17	0.45		0.55
DCI_25	0.44		
DCI_13	0.42	0.65	
DCI_4		0.85	
DCI_9		0.82	
DCI_15		0.82	
DCI_5		0.82	
DCI_8		0.82	
DCI_3		0.79	
DCI_12		0.77	
DCI_2			0.86
DCI_1			0.85
DCI_7			0.81
DCI_11			0.79
DCI_6			0.79
DCI_10			0.69

Note. Loadings <.4 were omitted. The rotation converged in 6 iterations

Correlation Analysis

The proposed hypothesis for this research study was that there would be a positive relationship between district climate and teacher commitment. A Pearson correlation coefficient was conducted to test this hypothesis.

Using the combined sample from each school, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated between the total score of the District Climate Index (DCI) and the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) total score. The results revealed the DCI was positively and significantly correlated to the OCQ ($r = .748, p < .01$) as illustrated in Table 8. Additionally, I examined the relationship between school enrollment, SES, and OCQ final mean score. As can be seen in Table 8, neither enrollment nor SES were significantly correlated to the OCQ final score.

Table 8

Pearson Correlation Table

	OCQ Final Score	DCI Final Score	Enrollment	SES
OCQ Final Score		.748**		
DCI Final Score	.748**			
Enrollment	.066			-.102
SES	-.102			

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 and * is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Regression Analysis

To further understand the nature of this relationship and address the second research question, a multiple regression was conducted to examine which factors were statistically significant predictors of organizational commitment by school. Principal and teacher DCI sub-score means (six variables) and SES were the predictor variables. The dependent variable was the OCQ final mean score.

Preliminary analyses were conducted to test statistical assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity. Results indicated the IVs Superintendent Leadership and Enabling Structures at the teacher level were highly correlated ($r > .7$, Tolerance $r < .3$). This violated the assumption of multicollinearity. Therefore, I chose to use the principal and teacher Overall DCI mean score as predictors of teacher OCQ final mean score. I ran the model, using Overall DCI mean scores of teachers, overall mean scores of principals, and SES as the predictor variables. Results indicated that teacher Overall DCI mean score was a significant predictor of teacher OCQ Final mean score but principal Overall DCI mean score and SES were not significant. Therefore, I removed the non-significant variable from the model and ran a second regression on the new model.

The new model indicated teacher Overall DCI mean score was a statistically significant, predictor of teacher OCQ mean score, $F(1,96) = 88.21, p < .001$, and explained 47.9% of the variance in the dependent variable. The unstandardized regression equation for predicting organizational commitment is $\hat{Y}_{OCQ} = 1.801 + .606X_{DCI_{TeacherDCI}}$. Higher teacher perceptions of district climate are associated with higher levels of organizational commitment.

Analyzing Differences between Grade Levels

To answer the third research question, a One-Way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effects of school grade type (elementary vs secondary) on teacher DCI overall mean score. The analysis was statistically significant $F(1, 75) = 6.01, p = .017, \eta^2 = .075$. Comparison of the two groups indicate elementary teachers ($n = 43, M = 4.287, SD = .071$) perceive district climate significantly more positively than secondary teachers ($n = 33, M = 4.023, SD = .081$), although, both group means have fairly high means (maximum overall DCI man score is 5.0). Figure 4

provides a visual perspective of this difference and confirms teachers have a relatively positive perception of district climate.

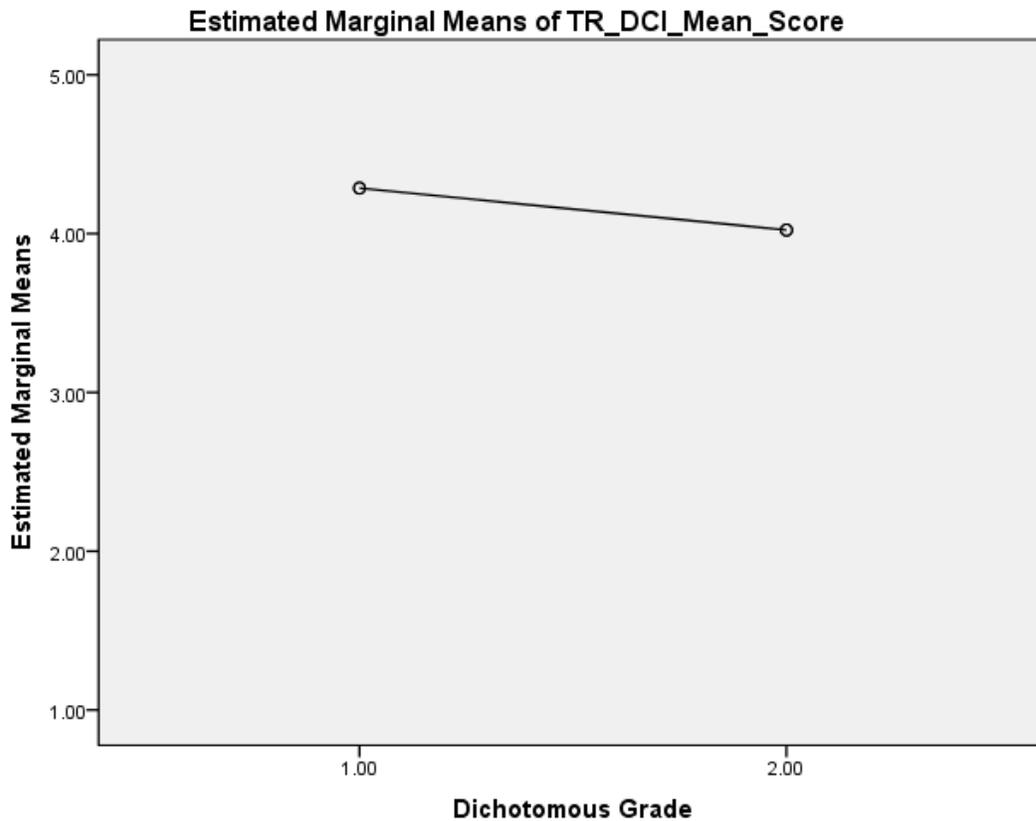


Figure 4. Grade configuration for perception of district climate to teacher commitment.

Analyzing Differences between Teachers and Principals

A paired-samples *t* test was conducted to examine the differences between teachers' and administrators' perceptions of district climate by school. There was not a statistically significant difference between administrator DCI overall mean scores ($M = 4.21$, $SD = .45$) and teacher DCI overall mean scores ($M = 4.17$, $SD = .48$), $t(75) = -0.630$, $p = .531$. Thus, both teachers and principals within a school have fairly similar perceptions of district climate.

Summary

The findings from the statistical analysis of the data were presented in this chapter. The statistical analysis included descriptive and inferential statistics as well as reliability and validity

metrics of instruments used in this study. The data supported the hypothesis that a positive relationship exists between perceptions of district climate and teacher commitment.

CHAPTER V:
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Chapter V presents the research findings as well as discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the results. Additionally, recommendations for future research is discussed and a final summary is presented.

Research Findings

Two organizational constructs were examined during this study, district climate and teacher commitment. The operational measures used to assess the constructs were District Climate Index (DCI) for district climate and the Organization Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) for teacher commitment.

The data for this study were used to analyze the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between district climate, and its subtests, to teacher commitment?

A Principal Component Analysis confirmed a three-factor model of the DCI. However, the majority of the variance is explained by the first factor suggesting the DCI overall mean score was an adequate measure of the perception of district climate. Results from the correlation analysis indicate there is a positive relationship between these two variables.

2. Does the DCI predict teacher commitment in schools within the district?

The final model indicated teacher overall DCI mean score was a statistically significant predictor of teacher OCQ mean score. Higher teacher perceptions of district climate are associated with higher levels of organizational commitment.

3. Do the perceptions of district climate vary from secondary to elementary teachers?

In this study, both elementary and secondary teachers had fairly high DCI means (maximum overall DCI mean score is 5.0). However, elementary teachers perceived district climate significantly more positively than secondary teachers.

4. Do the perceptions of district climate vary from administrator and teacher?

Both teachers and principals within a school have fairly similar perceptions of district climate.

In examining the research results, a few surprises were apparent based on my experience as a former principal and superintendent. One, school teachers and principals perceive district climate relatively the same. In my experience, I always felt principals perceived climate as more positive while teachers perceived it as more negative. This assumption was based on the connection that school principals have with central office and district leaders who create and stimulate the district climate, which resonates down to the local level where teachers within the school must assimilate to the existing or created climate. Based on this research study, both teachers and principals perceived the district climate as positive with little variation in the overall mean score. This is valuable information for school district leaders in that the perceived climate is shared among both stakeholders (teachers and principals) and perceived at the same level. While in this study, the climate was stated as more positive by both groups, a negative climate shared by both would also provide valuable information to leaders and further make the DCI a valuable tool to help extrapolate root causes from the district level.

Another interesting finding was that elementary school teachers perceived district climate more positively than those at the secondary level. While examining this result and reflecting on my time in both grade configurations, the perceptions of district climate being more positive at the elementary school level can be attributed to many existing factors. First, the students at the elementary level are generally more excited about school and feel a sense of connection with the teachers as more of an extended parent. Their needs, both physical and emotional, are met on a daily basis by the teacher thus giving the teacher and student a more positive relationship (Nichols & Zhang, 2011). Also with this level, teachers are able to foster better relationships with parents. Parents tend to be more involved with schools while students are in elementary school. As they age and progress upward in grade level, this relationship and involvement declines. Finally, elementary teachers may perceive district climate more positively because of the configuration or structure within the actual facility. Teachers are generally located among other grade level teachers with common planning, shared pacing of curriculum, and a team or “pod” concept. This idea facilitates a sense of community among teachers where they feel connected and a willingness to help one another succeed (social capacity) (Volker & Wall, 2006). At the secondary level, teachers many times lose the parent connection while students mature to find their way without parental or adult support/input. Secondary teachers also experience higher levels of threats and behavioral problems within the classroom. The most satisfied secondary school teachers felt they had more parental support and were less likely to have been threatened by students than the least satisfied secondary school teachers, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. The perceived positive district climate by elementary teachers contributes to the research in that district leaders should examine the environment of both grade configurations and possibly bring elements of the elementary

environment into the secondary classrooms. This might involve schedule changes, common planning of discipline/content areas, and additional parent involvement opportunities.

In an effort to further explain the similarities in the perceptions of school district climate among teachers and administrators, I examined the questions from the DCI to see if particular questions suggested, prompted, or encouraged a varied response from each demographic (teacher and principal). Because the questions were geared toward the “district climate,” and not associated with the individual school level, this explained the similarities in the results. It should be noted however that responses from the administrators, mean score of each subtest, were slightly higher, though not significant. Based on the results, it appears that the DCI solicits responses from both teachers and administrators to view the district climate without prejudice of position.

This research study adds to the limited research regarding the impact of the school district. Previous research using the DCI to measure levels of district climate have not been conducted to examine the relationship to teacher commitment. Previous research by DiPaola and Smith (2008) used the DCI to measure its relationship to district effectiveness associated with student achievement. Boman (2012) used the DCI to measure the district’s influence the development of professional learning communities (PLCs) within schools and the relationship of DCI’s influence on principal support for the PLCs. Each of these studies provided a framework for school districts to examine their own impact on the teaching and learning process through establishing, monitoring, and correcting shortfalls in their climate.

Theoretical Implications

The results of this study have theoretical implications for potential social change on the individual teacher, school, school district, and educational reform. The results of this study

support the hypothesis that a positive relationship exist between district climate and teacher commitment at the school level. This positive relationship was anticipated based on the theoretical framework set forth in Chapter II. Previous research provided by DiPaola and Smith (2008) and Leithwood (2012) provide a basis that effective districts, those that produce higher than average or expected outcomes, are influenced by district leadership, structures for continued growth and accountability, a shared mission, vision, and goals, and supportive networks concentrated on student growth and achievement within their individual schools. Successful or effective schools are nested within feeder patterns, communities, and school districts and are provided supports in various forms to assist the school in their continued success. Schools do not accomplish it alone and each school is influenced by that of the larger organization, the school district (Leithwood, 2012). These elements create a pervasive culture or district climate in which all stakeholders are affected either directly or indirectly. The indirect influence from the district provides opportunities to impact classrooms in a more profound manner to support learning where it takes place each day.

Like any organization, the local school district has a climate. DiPaola and Smith (2008) define school district climate “as the collective efforts by all individuals within the organization that foster actions to help the organization efficiently reach its goal” (p. 118). District climate, as developed by DiPaola and Smith (2008), falls upon a continuum from open to closed. Open district climates contain structures that encourage and promote trust, problem solve through collaboration, and encourage new ideas and critical thinking. Open districts also look to support personnel at each level, are resilient, allocate and share resources, and give way to expertise (Hoy, 2002). Conversely, closed district climates restrict, suppress, and prevent positive collegial interaction. Closed climates are crippling to the members of the organization (DiPaola & Smith,

2008: Halpin & Croft, 1963). The district climate is established by the three components of integrated superintendent leadership, enabling district structures, and teamwork for student success. The findings from this current this research study support that open climates impact district personnel in a positive manner as indicated by the high mean score (4.2079) on the teacher commitment survey and its relationship to a high mean score of the district climate index (4.0966).

Previous district climate research, conducted by Boman (2012), examined the relationship of district climate to the development of professional learning communities in schools. A multiple regression analysis of the three variables of district climate (integrated superintendent leadership, enabling district structures, and teamwork for student success) had a combined effect that explained 70% of the variance ($R^2=.704$) of the effect of professional learning communities. The results also indicated that the greater degree of superintendent leadership, the greater degree of professional learning community.

Practical Implications

The results of this study have practical implications for school districts and educational reform leaders. The conclusions drawn from this research study should provide an emphasis on establishing a positive district climate in an effort to retain quality teachers within the district.

One of the practical implications gained through this research study is the distributed leadership necessary to create a positive district climate. While leadership at any level is essential to an organization's success, understanding that associated leadership resonating from the district superintendent and board of education to district department chairs and school level principals are the core to positive outcomes. The leadership, provided by an integrated superintendent, impacts the school district in a direct or indirect fashion for the entire school

district to include schools under local authority (Leithwood, 2012). The implication to consider for local boards of education is the recruitment of transformational leaders at each level and most importantly at the superintendent position.

Another implication derived from this study for educational leaders to consider is the pathway for decision making in regard to resources (simple, compound, complex, and abstract) (Grubb, 2009). The shift to look at abstract resources such as climate, commitment, efficacy, and academic emphasis will enable leaders to concentrate their efforts on reform measures with low financial commitment toward proven measures to increase student outcomes. This will allow district leaders to then reallocate fiscal resources for necessary capital improvements, technology and infrastructure upgrades, and “necessary” unit allocations in critical subject areas.

Superintendents and local boards of education can do more to retain high quality teachers. The final implication of this study for consideration is the retainment of high quality teachers. In the state of Alabama, teachers are leaving the profession at alarming rates. High stake testing, increased demands to close gaps in subgroups, and reduced wages or lack of cost of living increases has created a gap in recruiting, retaining, and growing great teachers. Educational leaders at each level must look for ways to create a more conducive environment to bring back our most impactful resource, a quality teacher (Hattie, 2012). One way we can do this as leaders is to develop “teamwork for success” (DiPaola & Smith, 2008) whereby districts create leadership teams, PLCs, and networks for ongoing learning by teachers and leaders. Giving our teachers the tools, both mental and physical, will allow them to create connections to their school, profession, and most importantly, their students.

Recommendations for Future Research

The present research study lays a brick upon the existing foundation in the understanding of abstract resources such as district climate and the impact it has on teacher commitment. While the findings of this study give way to a positive relationship between district climate and teacher commitment, additional aspects surrounding both constructs provide tremendous opportunities for further investigation. The research implications are that further research is needed to expand the opportunities for educational reform through highly effective and low cost solutions to improved student outcomes. The following are possible research opportunities.

As stated in the methodology section of this research study, a limitation was presented in that the data collected from schools within the school district posed a problem in that the data was nested with the school. A Hierarchical Linear Model would be best suited to perform the statistical analysis but a larger sample size within schools was necessary to provide adequate power for assumptions. Therefore, further research is needed with a larger sample size to include more districts as well as more teacher and administrative survey input within the schools under the districts leadership.

An expanded study is needed to examine district climate with other abstract resources that impact either directly or indirectly student achievement. This study concentrated on teacher commitment based on the direct impact commitment has on student outcomes. Additional constructs such as teacher efficacy, teacher trust, and principal development should be examined to provide local school districts an opportunity to address the existing climate and use it as a barometer to gage conditions that impact all stakeholders and thus impact student outcomes.

Further, because district climate is composed of integrated superintendent leadership, enabling district structures, and teamwork for student success, additional research is needed to

expand upon each component to test their relationship with student outcomes. Each component is present in every school district and the more school leaders know about the impacts of each, the better than can progress monitor for increased climate. With the continued emphasis being placed on school districts for high stakes accountability measures, the importance grows on ways to increase achievement and low cost abstract resources provide solutions for all districts to consider.

The current study was the result of a sample from both elementary and secondary schools in 15 school districts in Alabama. Though a relatively small sample size, the methodology provided can be used to inform and provide a basis for continued research in district climate and teacher commitment.

Discussion

There is an urgent need to address our nation's teacher shortage. In Germany and France, less than 5% of teachers leave school within the first five years, while comparable rates from the United States and United Kingdom are 30-50% (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006). The Metlife Survey of the American Teacher, conducted every year from 1984 through 2012, showed that job satisfaction in the final year of the survey was the lowest in 25 years. Thirty-nine percent of a national sample of teachers said they were satisfied with their jobs, down from a 62% satisfaction rate only four years earlier. Teachers have a critical role in the development our youth, not only through academic advancement, but also their social and emotional wellbeing.

Many of the concerns associated with prospective teachers not entering the field or choosing to leave suddenly after entering the profession can be corrected and/or reduced. According to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT, 2012), this dissatisfaction of the profession stems from a myriad of concerns in the workplace: lack of professional growth,

feeling of isolation or loneliness, lack of input in decision making, conflict with administrators, lack of autonomy, and high levels of accountability based on standardized tests. These are just a few examples of the concerns public education faces as district leaders, principals, and teachers attempt to educate our students without having adequate teacher ratios. As an educator for 21 years, the last 10 as an administrator, I can personally attest to the struggles school districts are having with recruiting and retaining high quality teachers. This research demonstrates how district leaders can address many of the concerns by creating environments that look holistically at the district's effort that stimulate a positive district climate. Building a "team" concept through professional learning communities (PLCs) will promote capacity building of all involved and create connections from the classroom to the district support teams that engage with the PLC and school level collaboration (Boman, 2012). Fostering enabling structures, that give teachers a voice where they feel valued and are a part of the decision making process (that many times affect them directly) will create buy-in to the organization where the teachers feel connected because they share in the decisions that affect them personally. In order to recruit and retain our teachers, it is instrumental that our district leaders create climates that make teachers feel valued. If the teachers connect to the vision, mission, and goals, and the leadership provides support, guidance, and resources to accomplish them, teachers will be less likely to search for greener pastures at other districts or other professions.

Summary

This chapter provided the findings of the research study along with the theoretical and practical implications, and further research recommendations. District climate and teacher commitment have been established to have a positive and significant relationship. This study helps to fill gaps in the literature as well as provides educational researchers and practitioners

additional opportunities to expand educational reform through future studies involving district climate.

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APPENDIX A:
SUPERINTENDENT LETTER

3/27/17



To the Superintendent of Instruction:

Researchers from The University of Alabama are conducting research on the causes and consequences of school culture and school climate and the impact on academic performance of students and other desirable school outcomes. A school or schools (or enter number here) from your system have been selected along with approximately 60 schools in North and Central Alabama. We are hoping you will grant us permission to contact the principal(s) of the school(s) and make arrangement for data collection. We also ask that you provide us with your approval and any other approvals required at the district level to conduct our research. You have our sincere assurance that these procedures will not be disruptive or in any way cause the district or school embarrassment.

Since the study focuses on schools as the unit of analysis the only individual data that will be collected will be gender, ethnicity, and years of teaching experience of the participants completing the surveys. In fact, there will be no schools named or identified by specific location. Our interest is in the broad relationships between perceptions and characteristics of schools and student performance.

As you can see from the attached materials, we will collect data from the school principal and teachers. It will be made clear that participation is voluntary and that the most stringent protections of participant anonymity will be observed. Participants will be asked to read and keep for their records an informed consent form but they will not be required to turn in a signed consent form in order to protect their anonymity. There will be no publicized reports by school or district. It will be made clear to all participants that this research is being conducted by researchers from The University of Alabama who have received appropriate permissions to conduct the research in your school(s). Should you so desire an individualized report of our findings can be made available to you after the data have been analyzed.

In a few days, a member of our research team will be calling you to encourage your cooperation with this project. We look forward to working with members of your school community to better understand the importance of school culture and climate, as well as

College of Education
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Leadership, Policy, and
Technology Studies



their causes and consequences. Thank you in advance for your careful review and consideration of our request.
Sincerely,

Dr. Roxanne M. Mitchell
Associate Professor of
Administration
rmmitchell@ua.edu

Dr. C. John Tarter
Professor of Educational
Educational Administration
ctarter@ua.edu

Enclosures: District Permission Form
IRB Approval Letter
Consent Forms
Sample of surveys to be administered
List of schools and principals sampled from your district

APPENDIX B:
LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

College of Education

Department of Educational
Leadership, Policy, and
Technology Studies

3/27/17



Dear Principal _____:

Researchers from The University of Alabama are conducting research on the causes and consequences of school culture and climate, especially as related to academic performance of children. Your school has been randomly selected from the _____ public schools in North and Central Alabama. Your district has given us permission to approach you with our proposal to collect data in your school (see attached permission). You have our sincere assurance that these procedures will not be disruptive or in any way cause the school embarrassment. Ultimately, we are hoping for more than 60 schools to participate.

A brief description of the study, instruments, and approval of The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board are enclosed for your review. Since the study focuses on schools as the unit of analysis, the only individual data that will be collected is the gender, ethnicity, and years of teaching experience of teachers participating in the study. No individual data regarding your school will be analyzed or reported. In fact, there will be no schools named or identified by specific location. Our interest is in the broad relationships between perceptions and characteristics of schools and the effects on student performance.

As you can see we will collect data from the school principal and all teachers who are willing to participate in this project. It will be made clear that participation is voluntary and that the most stringent protections of participant anonymity will be observed. Participants will also be given an informed consent form to keep for their records but they will not be asked to sign a consent form in order to protect their anonymity. Their consent to participate will be given by their willingness to fill out the surveys. There will be no reports by school or district. It will be made clear to all participants that this research is being conducted by researchers from The University of Alabama who have received appropriate permissions to conduct the research in your school.

In a few days, a member of our research team will be calling you to encourage your cooperation with this project. We look forward to working with members of your school community to better understand the importance of school climate and school culture

301 James Olin
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Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35687-0300
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ALABAMA
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and its causes and consequences. Thank you in advance for your careful review and consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Dr. Roxanne M. Mitchell

Associate Professor of
Administration
rmmitchell@ua.edu

Dr. C. John Tarter

Professor of Educational
Educational Administration
ctarter@ua.edu

Enclosures: District Permission Form
IRB Approval Letter
Sample surveys

APPENDIX C:
TEACHER INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Teacher Informed Consent Form

You have been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about the effects of trust and efficacy on student academic performance and identification with school. This study will be conducted by Dr. Roxanne Mitchell – Assistant Professor – Department of Educational Leadership, Policy, and Technology Studies at The University of Alabama as a part of her continued research.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Complete a survey on various aspects of your schools climate and culture.

Participation in this study will involve approximately 15 minutes of your time to complete the questionnaire. There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research. Although you will receive no direct benefits, this research may help the investigator to understand the causes and consequences of school trustworthiness on student academic performance and identification with school.

Confidentiality of your research records will be strictly maintained. You will not be asked to record any identifying information on the survey forms. Surveys will be collected by the researcher or one of her colleagues at a staff meeting in the absence of the principal. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate simply by not completing the survey. If there is anything about this study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, or if you have questions or wish to report a research related problem, you may contact Dr. Roxanne Mitchell at 205-348-0348 or rmitchell@ua.edu or at The University of Alabama, P.O Box 870302, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 35487.

If you have questions about your rights as a person taking part in a research study, or if you would like to make suggestions or file complaints and concerns, you may call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University at (205)-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html. You may email us at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

Agreement to Participate

By completing the survey you are consenting to participate in this research study.

This is your copy of the consent document to keep for your own personal records.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 5/11/17
EXPIRATION DATE: 4/30/2018

APPENDIX D:
PRINCIPAL INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Principal Informed Consent Form

Dear Principal:

You have been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about the effects of trust and efficacy on student academic performance and identification with school. This study will be conducted by Dr. Roxanne Mitchell – Assistant Professor – Department of Educational Leadership, Policy, and Technology Studies at The University of Alabama as a part of her continued research.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Complete a survey on various aspects of your schools climate and culture.

Participation in this study will involve approximately 15 minutes of your time to complete the questionnaire. There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research. Although you will receive no direct benefits, this research may help the investigator to understand the causes and consequences of school trustworthiness on student academic performance and identification with school.

Confidentiality of your research records will be strictly maintained. You will not be asked to record any identifying information on the survey forms. Surveys will be collected by the researcher or one of her colleagues. You will place your survey in a sealed envelope. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate simply by not completing the survey. If there is anything about this study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, or if you have questions or wish to report a research related problem, you may contact Dr. Roxanne Mitchell at 205-348-0348 or rmitchell@bamaed.ua.edu or at The University of Alabama, P.O Box 870302, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 35487.

If you have questions about your rights as a person taking part in a research study, or if you would like to make suggestions or file complaints and concerns, you may call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University at (205)-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html. You may email us at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

Agreement to Participate

By completing the survey you are consenting to participate in this research study.

This is your copy of the consent document to keep for your own personal records.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 5/1/17
EXPIRATION DATE: 4/30/2018

APPENDIX E:
SCHOOL DISTRICT APPROVAL FORM

School District Approval Form

In keeping with the authority of my office and consistent with the policies of this school district, by my signature I hereby grant permission to researchers from The University of Alabama to conduct a study within the schools of this district, consistent with the human subject protections described in their approved proposal to The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board. The general nature and procedures of the research have been given and/or described to me and the researchers have volunteered to answer any questions I might have concerning the research.

Signature of District Representative

Title

Date

Print Name

Print Title

PLEASE RETURN:

At this Fax Number: 205-348-2161

Or mail to:

Roxanne M. Mitchell, Associate Professor Educational Administration

The University of Alabama

P.O. Box 870302

Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487

APPENDIX F:
TEACHER SURVEY SCRIPT

SCRIPT TO BE READ TO TEACHERS

The University of Alabama is conducting research on the causes and consequences of school climate and school culture especially as related to children's success in school. This important work can help improve public schools in Alabama. Your school has been selected as one of the schools in this study. Your school system and principal have given us permission to seek your cooperation and we genuinely need your help. Participation will take only a few moments of your time. Participation is on a voluntary basis. I will hand you a consent form with contact information of the researchers and university personnel to contact in case you have questions. You will not be required to sign the consent form as a way of protecting your confidentiality. No one at the school will be shown your responses. When you are finished I will place your survey in an envelope. Please do not put your name on the survey. Thank you, most sincerely, for your help. We know you share our belief that Alabama's schools should be the best they can be.

OCQ

Directions: Directions: Listed below are a series of statements that represent possible feelings that individuals might have about the school organization for which they work. With respect to your own feelings about the particular school organization for which you are now working,

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
2. I talk up this organization to my friends as a great school to work for.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
3. I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
4. I find that my values and the school's values are similar.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
5. I am proud to tell others that I am part of this school.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
6. This school really inspires the very best in me in the way of job	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
7. I am extremely glad that I chose this school to work for over others I was	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
8. I really care about the fate of this school.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
9. For me this is the best of all possible organizations for which to work.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥

APPENDIX G:
SCHOOL DISTRICT CLIMATE SURVEY

School District Climate

Please Check One Of the Following Under "Role" and "Level":
 Role: Teacher ___ Administrator ___ Level: E.S. ___ M.S. ___ H.S. ___

Directions: The following are statements about your school. Please indicate the extent to which each occurs, from Never (1) to Very Frequently (5).

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Frequently
1. The interactions between and among administrators are cooperative.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Administrators respect the professional competence of their colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The superintendent is responsive to the needs and concerns expressed by community members.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The superintendent is friendly and approachable.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The superintendent puts suggestions made by administrators into operation.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Administrators help and support each other.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Administrators are committed to helping students.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The superintendent explores all sides of topics and admits that other opinions exist.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The superintendent treats all Administrators as his or her equal.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Administrators provide strong social support for colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Principals create learning environments that are orderly and serious.	1	2	3	4	5
12. The superintendent is willing to make changes.	1	2	3	4	5
13. The superintendent lets administrators know what is expected of them.	1	2	3	4	5
14. The superintendent maintains definite standards of performance.	1	2	3	4	5
15. The superintendent is responsive to the needs and concerns expressed by administrators.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Staff members are aware of our district mission and goals.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I have confidence in the integrity of my colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Data on district operations are reviewed regularly to determine progress in achieving goals.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Results of our district monitoring process lead me to review my own practices.	1	2	3	4	5

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	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Frequently
Directions: The following are statements about your school/district. Please indicate the extent to which each occurs, from Never (1) to Very Frequently (5).					
20. Our district has implemented an effective process for monitoring progress in achieving goals.	1	2	3	4	5
21. District supervision/evaluation criteria include measures of staff accountability.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Members of district departments have a detailed understanding of how their work relates to that of other departments.	1	2	3	4	5
23. District leaders assist staff members in finding resources to accomplish their goals.	1	2	3	4	5
24. The organizational structures of the district facilitate the day-to-day work of all staff groups.	1	2	3	4	5
25. I can communicate with most other members of the district.	1	2	3	4	5
26. District support to my school reflects the school's unique needs.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Our district systematically monitors the progress of school improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Results of our district monitoring process stimulate significant improvements in the district.	1	2	3	4	5
29. Our district incorporates student assessment data into all appropriate decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
30. District policies and procedures recognize that student learning supersedes administrative convenience.	1	2	3	4	5