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Relationships among urban students’ identification with school, and students’, teachers’, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety, and reading achievement

Kyleah A. Parson
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RELATIONSHIPS AMONG URBAN STUDENTS’ IDENTIFICATION WITH SCHOOL, AND STUDENTS’, TEACHERS’, AND PARENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC PRESS AND SAFETY, AND READING ACHIEVEMENT

A Dissertation
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In Partial Fulfillment
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by
Kyleah A. Parson
May 2012
RELATIONSHIPS AMONG URBAN STUDENTS’ IDENTIFICATION WITH SCHOOL, AND STUDENTS’, TEACHERS’, AND PARENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC PRESS AND SAFETY, AND READING ACHIEVEMENT

by

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DEDICATION

To my best friends, my biggest fans, my rocks, to the three people that I thank God for everyday, my father, Leonard, mother, Sandra and brother Kyle. The four of us made a pact five years ago that WE were going back to school to get a doctorate degree and that is exactly what WE did! Daddy, the motivator, thank you for keeping the mantras “you can do this! Failure is not an Option” on repeat. Mama, the encourager, thank you for all the hot meals, beautiful cards of encouragement and little trinkets of love along the way. Kyle, the supporter, thank you for all the phone calls from across the globe and your financial support. I could not have done this without all of you.

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To the students of an urban school district in a southeastern state, I was You, I am You and this one is for You!!
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RELATIONSHIPS AMONG URBAN STUDENTS' IDENTIFICATION WITH SCHOOL, AND STUDENTS', TEACHERS', AND PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC PRESS AND SAFETY, AND READING ACHIEVEMENT

ABSTRACT

As a result of education reform of the last two decades, state and local educational agencies have concentrated their efforts on improving student outcomes. Research suggests that students' perceptions of identification with school (Finn, 1989; Griffin, 2002; Honora, 2003; Voelkl, 1997), academic press (Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000; Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006; Tschannen-Moran, Parish, & DiPaola, 2006), and safety (Chen, 2007; Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005) influence academic achievement. There is a plethora of research on student and teacher perspectives of these constructs, but very few studies examine relationships among the perspectives of urban students, teachers, and parents and student achievement. The purpose of this study was to examine relationships among student achievement in reading and students' perceptions of identification with school and student, teacher, and parent perceptions of academic press and safety. In this study of an urban school district in a southeastern state, significant relationships were found among students' perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety. There were significant relationships between students' achievement in reading and their perceptions of identification with school, and students' and teachers' perceptions of academic press and safety. A multiple regression analysis revealed that the combined variables of students' perceptions of identification with school and students', teachers', and parents' perceptions of academic press and safety made a significant contribution in predicting students' reading
achievement. Independently, teacher perceptions of academic press and students’ perceptions of safety significantly predicted students’ reading achievement.

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EDUCATIONAL POLICY, PLANNING AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY IN VIRGINIA
Relationships among Urban Students’ Identification with School, and Students’, Teachers’, and Parents’ Perceptions of Academic Press and Safety, and Reading Achievement
Chapter 1: The Problem

Introduction

Students in urban settings face a multitude of challenging situations. Urban students are more likely to experience extreme poverty, poor health, family instability, and observe more violent or criminal acts than their suburban and rural counterparts (Noguera, 2003). For many urban students, school is a safe haven. School is a place where they form bonds through social interactions with their peers and are educated by caring adults. Some students feel a sense of belonging to school and value their education because they believe it is their key to a successful future (Finn, 1989; Voelkl 1997). Others become disconnected from school at an early age (Anderman, 2002; Finn, 1989; Honora, 2003; Mitchell, 2008; Osborne, 1997).

The accountability movement has placed a laser-like focus on quantifiable student outcomes such as standardized test scores and graduation rates. Student achievement and graduation data often paint a picture for the general public of whether a school is deemed as successful or failing. The strong emphasis on achieving federal and state benchmarks has taken attention away from listening to the voices of those who our schools are designed to serve: the students. There is a growing body of research that suggests socio-emotional theories such as students' perceptions of identification with school (Finn, 1989; Griffin, 2002; Honora, 2003; Voelkl, 1997), perceptions of academic press (Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000; Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006; Tschannen-Moran, Parish, & DiPaola, 2006) and safety (Chen, 2007; Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005) influence student academic achievement.
Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by the central hypotheses that there are relationships among students' perceptions of identification with school, academic press and safety and students' achievement in reading and the variables of students' perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety. Student, teacher and parent perceptions of academic press and safety are properties of the school. These dimensions are hypothesized to influence students' perceptions of identification with school, which is a property of an individual, but for purposes of this study will be aggregated to the school level (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
Students who are able to identify with their school feel a sense of belonging to their school and value school and school-related outcomes (Finn, 1989; Voelkl, 1997). Researchers have identified the presence of students’ perceptions of identification with school as an important protective factor in reducing early withdrawal from school (Blue & Cook, 2004; Brideland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; CDC, 2000; Griffin, 2002; Honora, 2003; Finn, 1989; Voelkl, 1997; Zvoch, 2006), participation in risky behaviors (Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009; Blum, 2005; McNeely & Falci, 2004) and increased academic achievement (Honora, 2003; Mitchell, 2008; Osborne, 2001; Steele, 1992; Voelkl, 1997). School and school districts are under enormous pressure to meet state and federal measures. Improvements in such quantifiable measures may be influenced through attention to students’ perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety.

Academic press is a construct of schools, which focuses on academic excellence (Goddard et al., 2000; Shouse, 1995). Students’, teachers’, and parents’ perceptions of the academic environment influence students’ attitudes of their academic success and actual academic performance (Akey, 2006; Goddard et al., 2000; Jussim & Eccles, 1992; Middleton & Midgley, 2002; Perkins, 2008). Researchers have found that academic and social variables of school are interrelated; therefore the constructs collectively are able to predict belonging, a dimension of students’ perceptions of identification with school (Anderman, 2003).

Safety is an essential component of successful teaching and learning environments (Mayer & Furlong, 2010). Students are more apt to identify with school if they perceive their school environment as safe (Ludwig & Warren, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2010). Students will also demonstrate increased academic performance if they feel safe at school (Chen, 2007; Chen & Weikart, 2008; Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Ludwig & Warren, 2009).
Students are an essential component of schools but they are not the only vital stakeholder group in the context of schools. Parents and teachers also play an essential role in the synergy of schools (Mitchell et al., 2010). Teacher and parent perceptions of academic press and safety should also be taken into account in order to obtain a holistic view of the impact of these constructs on student achievement.

**Statement of Problem**

Overall, school divisions in the region under study have worked to improve student outcomes. However, urban school divisions in the state under study and in metropolitan areas around the country are still lag behind their rural and suburban counterparts on academic performance and graduation rates (American Psychological Association [APA], 2010; United States Department of Education [USDOE], 2011; Virginia Department of Education [VDOE], 2011). Students are the reason schools exist and this study will fill in the gaps in the literature regarding student perceptions of identification with school, academic press and safety and their relationships to student achievement.

Although research suggests that students’ perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety individually have positive impacts on students, little is known about the interplay between these constructs (Casella, 2001; Chen & Weikart, 2008; DeRosier & Newcity, 2005; Finn, 1989; Kirby & DiPaola, 2009; Middleton & Midgley, 2002; Mitchell et al., 2010, Voelkl, 1997; Wilson, 2004). In addition, little is known about students’ perceptions of academic press and safety and its relationships to students’ perceptions with identification with school and student achievement. Parent and teacher perceptions of school may influence the level of their involvement and interaction with students, school and school related activities. Research regarding academic press and safety
generally focus on student or teacher perceptions of these constructs. Research is sparse on parent perceptions of academic press and safety. This study is will add a unique voice to the literature by examining the relationship between student achievement in reading in Grades 3-8 and End of Course (EOC) and student perceptions of identification with school in concert with student, teacher and parent perceptions of academic press and safety, over three consecutive school years within an urban school district.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the relationships among students’ perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety, where the student is the unit of analysis?

2. To what extent is students’ achievement in reading related to their perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety, teachers’ perceptions of academic press and safety, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety, where the school is the unit of analysis?

3. To what extent are students’ perceptions of identification with school related to their perceptions of academic press and safety, teachers’ perceptions of academic press and safety, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety, where the school is the unit of analysis?

4. To what extent is the variability in students’ achievement in reading explained by their perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety, teachers’ perceptions of academic press and safety, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety, where the school is the unit of analysis?
Hypotheses

H₁. Students’ perceptions of identification with school will be positively and significantly correlated to academic press, and safety. Student’s perceptions of academic press will be positively and significantly correlated to student perceptions of safety.

H₂. Students’ achievement in reading will be significantly correlated to students’ perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety, teachers’ perceptions of academic press and safety, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety, when aggregated to the school level.

H₃. The independent variables of students’ perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety, teachers’ perceptions of academic press and safety, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety will positively and significantly correlated when aggregated to the school level.

H₄. The combined contributions of students’ perceptions of identification with school, students’, teachers’, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and students’, teachers’, and parents’ perceptions of safety will significantly predict students’ achievement in reading.

Definition of Terms

Students’ perceptions of identification with school. Identification with school is having a sense of belonging to school and valuing school and education related outcomes (Finn, 1989; Voelkl, 1997).

Academic press. Academic press is defined as an academic environment in which administrators, teachers and students understand the importance of academics and are in pursuit of academic excellence (Goddard et al., 2000; McDill, Natriello, & Pallas,
1982; Shouse, 1995). Academic press is also referred to in the research literature as academic emphasis.

School safety. School safety is defined as perceptions of school as a place that is free from disorder, problem behaviors or threats to one's physical or emotional well being (Bosworth, Ford, & Hernandaz, 2011; Chen & Weikart, 2008). School safety is also referred to in the research literature as school violence and school disorder.
CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The educational experience encompasses more than academic achievement, grade promotion and degree attainment (Kirkpatrick-Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001). Concentrations on such measures ignore meeting the socio-emotional needs of our students (Elmore & Huebner, 2010). Social and affective aspects of schooling such as identification with school, academic press and safety are also important in determining how students function socially and academically within the context of schools. The purpose of this chapter is to examine available literature regarding the relationships between student achievement in reading and students’ perceptions of identification with school and students’, teachers’ and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety.

School Climate Constructs

Researchers have conceptualized school climate in several different ways and have utilized a variety of methodologies to define the construct of school climate as it relates to various student outcomes. It is difficult to generalize findings in the research to recommend change in practice because many scholars have developed various constructs of school climate that include but are not limited to factors such as: school organizational structure, facilities management, stakeholder perceptions of the school, interpersonal relationships, and the level of community support and engagement (Tschannen-Moran, Parish, & DiPaola, 2006).

School climate has been defined in terms of openness and health (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006). These two frameworks are consistently utilized across the literature (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006). An open climate is
one in which collegial leadership, collaborative decision making and a degree of teacher empowerment are present (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006). A healthy school climate includes positive relationships between students, teachers and administrators (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006).

Several instruments have been developed and refined in the last few decades in order to assess these specific aspects of school climate. The Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ), one of the first measures of the openness of school climate was developed by Halpin and Croft (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006). The OCDQ has since been adapted and formed the basis of other instruments designed to assess the climate of a school by way of determining the level of openness between its stakeholders (Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006). Researchers have revised the instruments based on the level of the school and the specific dimensions of school climate being assessed (Hoy et al., 2002; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006). The Organizational Health Inventory (OHI), developed by Hoy and Feldman (1987), created a framework for measuring a healthy school climate by assessing the managerial styles and institutional integrity of a school. The OCDQ and OHI have specific number of dimensions depending on the level of the school assessed. The Organizational Climate Index (OCI) is a consolidated measure of the twelve total dimensions from the OCDQ and OHI (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006). The OCI measures four dimensions of school climate: environmental press, collegial leadership, teacher professionalism and academic press (Hoy et al., 2002; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006). This instrument allows researchers to define specific correlations between school climate and student achievement (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006). The evolution of these instruments reflects the changing context in which school climate is assessed. Researchers
have adapted or developed new instruments based on the dimensions of school climate of
greatest interest for particular studies.

There are several constructs of school climate that have been used across the
literature. Constructs of school climate include but are not limited to: students’ perceptions
of identification with school, school connectedness, school bonding, student engagement,
student self-efficacy, student self-affiliation, belonging, attachment, trust, collegial
leadership, collective self-efficacy, academic press, academic optimism, and school safety.
This study examined the school climate construct of students’ perceptions of identification
with school, academic press, and safety.

**Students’ Perceptions of Identification with School**

The quality of social relationships within the school community may influence urban
students’ perceptions of educational and career barriers (Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman,
& Gallagher, 2003; Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2008). Students’ perceptions of identification
with school are a blend of emotional ties and ideas of future success (Mitchell, Kensler,
school was drawn from Finn’s (1989) study on characteristics that lead to early withdrawal
from school. Identification with school is described as having a sense of belonging with
school and valuing school and education-related outcomes (Finn, 1989; Voelkl, 1997).
Identification is formed through a compilation of positive and negative interactions with
school over an extended period of time (Voelkl, 1997). High student achievement and
increased classroom participation over time will propel students to develop a sense of
belonging to school and develop a sense that their dedication to school will result in long-
term success (Voelkl, 1997).
Voelkl (1997) expanded on Finn’s study by including cultural aspects of belonging and valuing. Voelkl's definition of belonging referred to a student's perception of their significance to their school community, feelings of respect and acceptance, inclusion, pride and whether or not school was mentioned in their self-definition. Voelkl's definition of valuing includes appreciating school as a place for learning and as a means to accomplish future aspirations. Osborne (1997) described identification with school as “the extent to which academic pursuits and outcomes form the basis for global self-evaluation” (p. 728). Osborne’s definition links students’ self-esteem directly to academic performance. Students who identify with school perceive above-average academic achievement as rewarding and poor achievement as disappointing, conversely, students who do not identify with school do not correlate any relationship between academic outcomes and self-esteem, therefore are not motivated to succeed in an academic environment (Osborne, 1997). In turn, alienation, normlessness, social isolation and withdrawal are opposing constructs of valuing and belonging (Finn, 1989).

Researchers have conceptualized students’ perceptions of identification with school in several different ways and have utilized a variety of methodologies to define the construct of students’ perceptions of identification with school (Finn, 1989; O’Farrell & Morrison, 2003). Researchers have used terms such as school engagement, connectedness, bonding, attachment, affiliation, involvement, and identification with school interchangeably (Finn, 1989; Libbey, 2004, O’Farrell & Morrison, 2003; Voelkl, 1997). Inconsistent use of these terminologies poses challenges for the duplication and generalization of research on identification with school. However, across the literature, these constructs have been associated with students’ perceptions of identification with school.
Voelkl's (1997) theory of students' perceptions of identification with school is delineated into two categories, belonging and valuing. The operational and descriptive definitions of belonging from Voelkl are closely tied to terms such as connectedness, attachment and bonding in the literature. Voelkl’s definition of valuing is aligned with literature on student engagement.

**Belonging**

School belonging is a cross disciplinary construct. Emerging literature on belonging can be found in psychology, sociology and education (Libbey, 2004). Studies have linked belonging to positive academic, psychological, and behavioral outcomes during adolescence (Anderman, 2002; Osterman, 2000). Anderman (2003) defined belonging as a representation of students’ perceptions of the school as a social institution and their place in it. Research in the area of psychology describes the experience of belonging as an important factor to explain student behavior and academic achievement (Osterman, 2000). Peer relationships and student to teacher relationships are essential components of belonging (Osterman, 2000).

**School connectedness.** School connectedness is defined across the literature as liking school (Libbey, 2004), feeling accepted and valued among peers and adults (Blum, 2005; Mitchell, 2008; Voelkl, 1997), and believing that adults care about learning and students as individuals (Blum, 2005; Mitchell, 2008; Voelkl, 1997). Blum (2005) defined school connectedness as an academic environment in which students have a relationship with a caring adult that is concerned about their academic achievement as a whole. Studies show positive relationships between increased academic achievement and students’ sense of connectedness with caring adults at their school (Booker, 2006; Blum, 2005; Furrer & Skinner, 2003).
**Attachment.** Attachment is defined as a social and emotional bond from one person toward another (Ainsworth, 1973, Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). Bergin and Bergin (2009) conceptualized two functions of attachment in the classroom setting: a) attachment between children and adults establishes feelings of security that motivate children to explore their environment; and b) as children are becoming attached to adults they are adopting adult behavior, values and characteristics. Whether a child has developed secure or insecure attachments to adult figures may determine their academic success or failure (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

**School bonding.** School bonding has been defined as the connections students feel with their school (Eisele, Zand, & Thomson, 2009), a sense of belonging at schools, and established relationships with peers and adults (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Libbey (2004) described school bonding as an overarching theory that includes several dimensions of student’s relationship to school. Students who report that they bond with their school also feel secure and valued (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). “A child who is bonded to school has a sense that ‘people at school like me.’ A child who is not bonded to school feels lonely, outcast, and alienated” (Bergin & Bergin, 2009, p. 156). The work of Wehlage et al. (1989) on school membership intertwined the theory of school bonding and membership. Wehlage et al. suggested that in order for students to feel a sense of membership, they must meet the four conditions of social bonding, “a student is socially bonded to the extent that he or she is attached to adults and peers, committed to the norms of the school, involved in school activities and has belief in the legitimacy and efficacy of the institution” (p. 117).

**School membership.** Studies have theorized membership to be a psychological state that is measured by observable behavior such as attendance, preparedness and participation
Wehlage et al. (1989) examined constructs of Seeman’s (1975) theories of alienation as it relates to school membership. Wehlage et al. postulated three dimensions of perceived school membership: sense of belonging, sense of commitment to the academic work of school, and sense of commitment to school as an institution. The degree in which a student exhibits commitment to academics and the institution depend on the formal and informal relationships between students and adults at school (Wehlage et al., 1989). If teachers have high expectations of students and believe that they can succeed academically then students will have a higher sense of commitment to their academic performance, contrarily, if students believe that school activities are meaningful and important then they will have a higher sense of commitment toward their school (Wehlage et al., 1989).

**Valuing**

There are conflicting opinions in the literature concerning whether students enter school with preconceived notions of identification or if they are developed over time. The relationship between students and adults may enhance or damage student values of the educational process. In a study of 104 schools in one southern state, Voelkl (1997) concluded that students’ identification with school developed over time based on early success or failure in school. McNeely, Nonnemaker, and Blum (2002) proposed that students enter school with preconceived notions toward education based on the educational attainment of adults who interact with students during their developmental years and level of support a student may receive from adults regarding school. Thus, there is evidence that students both come to school with a sense of valuing and that it develops over time.

**Student engagement.** Researchers have identified student engagement as a component of identification with school (Finn, 1989; Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Voelkl, 1997;
Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Wehlage et al., 1989). Researchers have defined engagement in three ways, behavioral, emotional and cognitive (Finn, 1989; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). Behavioral engagement focuses on the degree of an individual student’s participation in school, including positive behaviors such as attending school, completing assignments, and involvement in academic and social extra-curricular activities (Fredricks et al., 2004; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). Engagement is also referred to as a psychological or emotional characteristic of identification with school (Finn, 1989; Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Voelkl, 1997, Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Wehlage et al., 1989). Emotional engagement involves positive or negative relationships with and perceptions of peers, teachers, academics and school as an institution (Finn, 1989; Fredricks et al., 2004; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). Emotional engagement creates a bond between students and their school and is a motivating factor for their participation in academics (Fredricks et al., 2004). Cognitive engagement refers to how students invest in their learning and the self-regulation of their learning processes (Fredricks et al., 2004). Students who are disengaged in school tend to exhibit problem behaviors such as disruptive classroom behavior, poor attendance, truancy, and even early withdrawal from school (Finn, 1989; Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Voelkl, 1997; Wehlage et al., 1989). According to Klem and Connell (2004) student engagement is a strong predictor of academic achievement and positive behavior in school, regardless of socio-economic status.

Alienation and Disidentification with School
Alienation and disidentification with school have been seen across the literature as an opposing constructs of students' perceptions of identification with school (Finn, 1989; Griffin, 2002; Osborne & Walker, 2006; Steele, 1992; Voelkl, 1997). Seeman (1975) identified six pertinent elements of alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, self-estrangement, and cultural estrangement. Powerlessness is described an individual's perception of having little to no control, personal or social. Often times, students who are retained in school experience feelings of powerlessness which eventually leads to disidentification with school or worse early withdrawal from school (Blue & Cook, 2004; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Finn, 1989). In a study of students that withdrew from school early, 45% students felt ill-prepared for high school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Many of the study participants were retained in elementary and middle school and believed that they could not catch up. According to data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) of the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), students who have been previously retained are 2-11 times more likely to drop out of high school (Blue & Cook, 2004). Retention negatively impacts the student's self-esteem and social standing among their peers (Blue & Cook, 2004).

Meaninglessness is described as an individual's perception of society as temperamental, unpredictable or a belief that life itself has little meaning (Seeman, 1975). Students who experience academic success are more likely to identify with school. Conversely, those who do not experience success tend to devalue school and find little meaning in the educational process (Archambault et al., 2009; Booker, 2006; Honora, 2003; Osborne, 2001; Voelkl, 1997).

In relation to the six elements of alienation, normlessness and social isolation are most related to belonging and valuing within the construct of students' perceptions of
identification with school (Finn, 1989). Normlessness exists when societal norms are broken and typically rules for behavior are ignored (Seeman, 1975). Social isolation refers to individuals’ feelings of separation from the group or isolation of group standards. Students who do not feel a sense of belonging with school may feel unwanted, not accepted or isolated from their peers or other adults at school. Students that exhibit social isolation behaviors in school may have negative effects that extend into adulthood. In the last decade, educators and school health professionals have linked school connectedness as a factor to reduce adolescent participation in compromising behaviors (Blum, 2005). School connectedness is also linked to positive mental outcomes for adolescents and as predictor of mental health in adulthood (Libbey, 2004). Students who do not identify with school demonstrate problem behaviors such as disengagement, low attendance, disruption in class, truancy, and eventual withdrawal from school (Finn, 1989).

Self-estrangement is the self-belief that one would be more successful in life if the circumstances of society did not prevent their advancement (Seeman, 1975). Cultural-estrangement refers to the rejection of customary values within a society (Seeman, 1975). Both constructs parallel Steele’s (1992) social science theory regarding stereotype threat. Steele’s stereotype threat suggests that when there are negative stereotypes about the intellectual ability of minority groups then members of the group may suffer aversive consequences (Osborne & Walker, 2006; Steele, 1992). Therefore, students who feel a sense of self or cultural estrangement may disidentify with school. Steele’s (1992) seminal work on the stereotype threat introduced the term disidentification to the literature. Theorists argue that there are negative perceptions of minority groups in American culture (Steele, 1992; Osborne, 2001). Some argue that negative stereotypes of minority groups are transferred into
the culture of our schools (Booker, 2006; Griffin, 2002; Honora, 2003; Osborne, 2001; Steele 1992). Identification with school in this context describes the process by which students gauge their own self-perception and self-esteem based on their successes in school (Steele, 1992, 1997). Therefore, the more success a student experiences the more they identify with school. Steele argued that the culture of American education propels minority students who would typically identify with school into a state of disidentification. Steele’s theory of stereotype threat proposes that many students experience anxiety in the classroom setting, such as concern over giving wrong answers during whole group question and answer periods. This anxiety is exaggerated among minority students (Osborne, 2001; Steele, 1997). If they give the wrong answer, not only is it personally damaging but also the individual may think it perpetuates the negative group stereotype (Osborne, 2001; Steele, 1997). Therefore, the student devalues their identification with school in order to protect their own self-concept (Osborne, 2001; Mitchell 2008; Steele, 1997). Empirical studies may not affirm linguistic-cultural theories such as Steele’s stereotype theory; however, several studies uphold the premise that African Americans and Hispanics identity with school at lower rates than their Caucasian or Asian American counterparts.

Voelkl (1997) investigated the antecedents of school identification among 1,335 African American and Caucasian eighth grade students from mixed demographic schools in a southern state. Caucasian students displayed higher levels of participation and achievement while African Americans had higher levels of identification than white students. The study revealed that the correlations between racial background and identification with school were not significant. However, African American students in the eighth grade identified higher with school than their white peers. This particular portion in the study may be reflective of
African American subculture. African American students are taught at an early age that education is their ticket out of generational poverty. If you apply Steele’s stereotype theory to this finding in the data, many African American students may identify with this cultural norm despite their individual successes and failures in school. An African American student may be failing academically but may outwardly feign identification with school in order to protect their own self-esteem and self-worth. Booker (2006) described this concept as the identification-connection divide. The identification-connection divide suggests an African American student may be cognizant of the importance of an education however; their current education environment may not be conducive to establishing a sense of belonging. This decreased sense of belonging may eventually negatively impact student achievement.

School Level and Identification with School

Research suggests that the grade configuration of a school positively influences students’ perceptions of belonging, a component of identification with school (Anderman, 2003; Anderman, 2002). Anderman (2002) examined the individual and school-level predictors of perceived school belonging. Approximately 58,000 ethnically-diverse seventh to twelfth grade students from 132 rural, suburban and urban schools across the United States participated in the study. Study participants completed an Add Health questionnaire designed to measure perceived school belonging and self-concept. He found that students who attended Kindergarten -12 schools reported a slightly greater perception of belonging than students who attended traditional elementary (Kindergarten-5), middle (6-8) and high (9-12) schools.

The transition from elementary through middle school to high school is difficult for many students. Students identify more with school on the elementary level; however,
identification decreases over time, especially during the transitions between elementary to middle and middle to high (Anderman, 2003; Mitchell, 2008). African Americans tend to devalue school more as they advance from middle to high school (Honora, 2003). Detachment from school is also linked to decreased identification with school (Honora, 2003). Using Goodenow’s (1993) measure of school belonging, Anderman (2003) conducted a study of urban and rural middle school students from a southeastern state. Participants in the Anderman study completed the surveys over time. Survey data was collected in the spring of participants’ sixth grade year and again in the fall and spring of their seventh grade year. Anderman described each survey point as a wave and compared the mean scores of the reported student sense of belonging over time. Study results showed that students’ sense of belonging declined significantly during the course of the year-long study. Mitchell and Forsyth (2004) investigated the effects of parents’ and students’ trust in the principal on students’ perceptions of identification with school. The researchers used Voelkl’s (1997) measure of Identification with School. The researchers found that students’ perceptions of identification were strongest in elementary schools that reported high parent trust of the principals and weakest in high schools that also reported high parents’ trust of principal. The researchers also determined that students’ perceptions of identification with school declined from elementary to secondary grade levels.

**Student-Teacher and Student-Parent Relationships and Students’ Perceptions of Identification with School**

There are several variations in the literature regarding a specific definition of identification with school. Despite the variations in the research, a constant theme within identification with school, school membership, school attachment and school bonding are the

Students who are connected to their school believe adults care about the learning process and the student as an individual (Blum, 2005). In a study of 74 schools in one midwestern state, Mitchell (2008) found students identified more with school, felt a sense of belonging and value as a result of continuous interaction with caring adults at school. The study showed a significant relationship between students’ perceptions of identification with school and academic achievement (Mitchell; 2008). In a study of Australian 11th grade students, students’ perceptions of their relationships between their peers and teachers were a predictor of their identification with school (Lizzio, Dempster, & Neumann, 2011). Furrer and Skinner (2003) linked students with a history of secure attachments to adults with increased school performance.

The extent to which students’ relationships with adults are characterized as positive and supportive relationships or negative and devaluing relationships may be the deciding factor on whether students experience success or failure in school and later on during their adulthood (Decker, Dona, & Christenson, 2007; McNeely, 2003; Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000; Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen, 2000; Steele, 1992). Beside infancy, the early adolescent period is another major time in the span of human life that individuals are
dependent on the interactions between themselves and other individuals (Roeser et al., 2000).

Roeser et al. (2000) explained the crux of adolescence and schooling:

During these years (Ages 10-14), adolescents experience biological, cognitive, and social-emotional changes amid maturing relationships with parents, deepening peer relationships, and the transition to a new school. The fact that a significant minority of adolescents are not doing well in terms of their academic achievement, social and behavioral choices, and mental health suggests serious problems not only within such youth but also across the broader cast of adults and institutions charged with helping them become full members of society (pp.443-444).

Rosenfeld et al. (2000) examined the associations among support from parents, teachers, and friends and students’ outcomes such as satisfaction with school, engagement, self-efficacy, academic achievement, attendance and problem behaviors. The researchers found that teacher support was positively associated with student behavior and outcomes however; the most significant relationships were between students who reported high level of support from parents, teachers and friends. Students who perceived support from all three groups had higher satisfaction with school, higher engagement and stronger self-efficacy.

Research suggests that relationships matter (Klem & Connell, 2004). Students who establish positive relationships with their peers, teachers and other caring adults experience higher levels of identification with school and other positive student outcomes (Decker et al., 2007; Klem & Connell, 2004; McNeely, 2003; Roeser et al., 2000; Rosenfeld et al., 2000).

**Academic Press**

Academic press is defined across the literature as a press for student achievement (Goddard et al., 2000), administrators, teachers and students perceptions of the importance of
academics (McDill et al., 1982), and the pursuit of academic excellence (Goddard et al., 2000; Shouse, 1995). Academic press is a construct within the crux of school policies and procedures (Murphy, Weil, Hallinger, & Mitman, 1982). Academic press is synonymous with the term academic emphasis also used within the research literature (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006).

The quest for academic excellence has been a part of the culture of the American education system for decades. Some may gauge this push toward academic press as a fundamental construct within our schools, others may deem it as a mark that our current educational system is still striving to achieve and maintain. The Coleman Report (1966) concluded that an individual student’s socio-economic status was the strongest predictor of student achievement. Post-Coleman era researchers started to identify specific school characteristics that fostered increased student achievement, regardless of the student’s socio-economic background (Goddard et al., 2000; Kirby & DiPaola, 2009). The effective schools movement of the 1970s shaped specific theories on means to improve student achievement (Purkey & Smith, 1983). Edmonds’ (1979) work on the effective schools formula is widely cited amongst educational research as the pivotal study that associated specific school characteristics to student achievement (Goddard et al., 2000; Stedman, 1987). Edmonds’ (1979) formula for effective schools was comprised of five factors: strong principal leadership, high teacher expectations for student achievement, an emphasis on basic skills, an orderly environment, and frequent, systematic evaluations of students. Education research over the last three decades has utilized the constructs of effective schools in the form of dimensions of school climate. Academic emphasis emerged as one of the numerous measurable constructs of school climate (Goddard et al., 2000; Hoy, Hannum, & Tschannen-
Moran, 1998a, 1998b; Kirby & DiPaola, 2009; Murphy et al., 1982). Schools that foster academic emphasis are described, “in such schools, teacher set high but achievable goals, they believe in the capability of their students to achieve, the school environment is orderly and serious, and students, as well as teachers and principals, pursue and respect academic success” (Goddard et al., 2000, p. 686).

**Student Perceptions of Academic Press**

Students’ perceptions of the school environment and activities, teachers’ expectations and their relationships with teachers influence their academic attitudes and behaviors (Middleton & Midgley, 2002). Middleton and Midgley (2002) examined the role of achievement goals and press for understanding in predicting educational outcomes. Approximately 512 fifth grade students from 22 elementary schools in four diverse school districts in a mid-western state participated in the study. Participants were administered surveys that measured the students’ goal orientation and academic beliefs. Academic press was positively associated with self-regulation and self-efficacy. The researchers concluded that when teachers pressed students to focus on schoolwork as a means to improve their academic performance, students felt more confident about being successful than students who were not academically pressed. Akey (2006) examined the relationships between school context, student attitudes and behavior, and achievement. Akey added to the notion of academic press by adding the dimension of teacher support. The researcher defined school context as supportive relationships with teachers, clear, high and consistent behavioral and academic expectations and high quality instruction and pedagogy. Student attitudes and behavior was measured in terms of engagement and perceived academic competence. Study participants included 449 tenth and eleventh grade students from three large urban school
districts across the United States. Survey data was collected for two consecutive years. Survey instruments used measured students’ perceptions of their level of participation in academic-related activities, levels of attainable success in school, teacher support, teacher expectations, and student-to-student interactions in the classroom. The results showed that students’ perceptions of teacher support, teacher expectations and student-to-student interactions in the classroom were significantly and positively related to student engagement. Results also revealed that students’ perceptions of teacher support were also significantly related to students’ perceptions of their academic competence. The significant positive relationships in the study were also consistent from year one to year two.

Teacher Perceptions of Academic Press

Teachers’ academic expectations of students influence students’ feelings of their present and future academic success (Jussim & Eccles, 1992). Teacher academic press or academic emphasis analyzed at the school level is viewed as “perceptions of individual teachers about the collective” (Goddard et al., 2000, p. 687). Teachers’ perceptions regarding students’ academic abilities and the importance of academics comprise norms that influence the actions of the group and the overall performance of schools (Goddard et al., 2000). In a study of 45 elementary schools in a large urban district in the Midwest, Goddard, Sweetland, and Hoy (2000) examined the impact of academic emphasis on student achievement. State standardized achievement data was collected from student participants and teacher participants the academic emphasis section of the Organizational Health Inventory for Elementary Schools (OHI). Results from the study showed that academic emphasis was a significant predictor of student achievement in both mathematics and reading. The researchers reported “a 1-unit increase in a school’s academic emphasis score is associated
with a 16.53-point average gain in student mathematics achievement and an 11.39-point average gain in reading achievement" (Goddard et al., 2000, p. 698).

**Parent Perceptions of Academic Press**

Research is sparse regarding parent perceptions of academic press of their child's school. However, there are a few studies that pertain to parent's perceptions of the school climate of their child's school. In a study of 10,270 parents in 112 urban school districts across the United States, “contrary to popular reports” parents were found to be “optimistic and positive about their schools” (Perkins, 2008, p.15). Parents’ perceptions of their child’s school may be contingent upon the degree of their involvement with the school and their source of information about the school: their child, teachers and administrators, neighbors, media etc. Perkins (2008) found that 62% of parents indicated that their primary source of information about the school was their children. However, parents who rely on media outlets such as newspaper and television for information regarding their school had more negative perceptions of the school.

**Safety**

Students have an optimal opportunity for learning and achieve their full potential in safe and orderly environments (NEA, 2011). Public attention on school safety increases after highly publicized school shootings, however violence on school grounds has declined in recent years (Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Mayer & Furlong, 2010). Research suggests that the perception of safety for students, teachers and parents influence their level of involvement with schools and school related personnel (Astor, Benbenishty, Zeira, & Vinokur, 2002; Bosworth et al., 2011; Chen & Weikart, 2008; Gottfredson et al., 2005).
School safety is an influential dimension of school climate (Perkins, 2008). Bosworth et al. (2011) define safe schools as free from physical violence. Student learning is impacted by the level of disorder that occurs at a school (Casella, 2001; Chen, 2007; Chen & Weikart, 2008; Cornell & Mayer, 2010; DeRosier & Newcity, 2005; Wilson, 2004). Chen and Weikart (2008) posits:

A safe school is a prerequisite for students to concentrate their energy in learning related activities. Conversely, fear and avoidance can be a major factor in affecting student participation in school activities and therefore negatively affect student learning (p. 4).

Students’ Perceptions of Safety

Researchers contend that the feeling or perception of danger is more important than the actual acts of violence that may occur in schools (Astor et al., 2002; Bosworth et al., 2011; Chen & Weikart, 2008; Gottfredson et al., 2005). In a study of 223 elementary, middle and high school students from a large urban district in the northeast, DeRosier and Newcity (2005) examined the relationship between school climate and students’ perceptions of safety at school. This study defined school climate in terms of behaviors that correspond to specific interpersonal and intrapersonal character traits such as friendship, civility, courage and responsibility. Study participants were surveyed using the School Climate Survey (SCS) and the School Safety Survey (SSS). Results showed significant correlations between students who reported feelings of friendship, self-control, and greater tolerance for differences and perceiving their school environment as safe.

Teachers’ Perceptions of Safety
Teachers play a vital role in the dynamics of schools. Overall, teachers perceive schools as a safe place for children (Bosworth et al., 2011; Mayer & Furlong, 2010; Roberts, Wilcox, May, & Clayton, 2007). However, teachers' perceptions of safety may impact their job performance and negatively impact school climate (Roberts et al., 2007). In a study of 1,438 high school teachers in a mid-western state, Roberts, Wilcox, May, and Clayton (2007) examined individual versus shared school experiences on teacher perceptions of safety. Results showed that individual teachers who experienced higher levels of victimization and high levels of observed student misconduct reported negative perceptions of school safety. Teachers' perceptions of school efficacy correlated with high perceptions of safety. Observed school-level student misconduct and school-level physical disorder were significant contextual effects in the study. Group perceptions of incivility were a contextual effect that existed "above and beyond" individual perceptions of incivility (Roberts et al., 2007, p. 50).

**Teachers and Students Perceptions of Safety**

Bosworth et al. (2011) examined school climate factors that contributed to student and faculty perceptions of safety in urban, suburban and rural high schools in a western state. Students and faculty identified physical characteristics, safety features, organization, school discipline, school staffing, and relationships as elements that constitute a safe school. Students and teachers specifically mentioned the presence of cameras, locked doors and school resource officers as physical characteristics, which increased their perceptions of school safety. Schools that enforced clear and consistent discipline systems, positive relationships amongst faculty and students, and visible teacher presence were also mentioned as factors that increased students' perception of safety. Teachers cited relationships among faculty and with students as factors that increased their perception of safety. Teachers and
students surveyed were in agreement 61% regarding their perceptions of safety, despite academic achievement, size or neighborhood characteristics. The researchers concluded that school climate was the highest contributing factor of perception of safety above high academic achievement.

Parents’ Perceptions of Safety

Researchers have also studied parents’ perceptions of safety in schools. A study from The Council of Urban Boards of Education (Perkins, 2008) surveyed parents in 100 urban school districts. Study participants consisted of 10,270 parents in 112 schools across the United States. Seventy-five percent of the parents surveyed believe their students attended schools that were deemed safe learning environments and less than 10% did not. Parents’ perceptions of school safety declined as the grade level increased. High school parents were least positive regarding school safety. Seventy-six percent of parents who had first-hand experience with the school were more positive about school safety than 73% of the parents who relied on information from teachers or the principal. When asked whether students fight a lot in school, 42% of parents strongly disagreed or disagreed 12% of parents believed students carried weapons to school. However, parents’ perceptions of weapons in school significantly increased to 31% if they identified the newspaper as their primary source of information about their school.

The Interactions between Students’ Perceptions of Identification with School, Academic Press, and Safety

Educational researchers have described measuring school climate as “taking the pulse” of a school. Students’ perceptions of identification with school, academic press and safety are constructs of school climate. Students’ perceptions of these constructs have been
linked to positive student outcomes (Anderman 2003; Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Eisele et al., 2009; Elmore & Huebner, 2010; Finn, 1989; Mitchell et al., 2010; Voelkl, 1997). Research suggests that academic press and safety can each function as predictors of student's perceptions of identification with school (Anderman, 2003; Mitchell et al., 2010; Ludwig & Warren, 2009; Perkins, 2008).

**Students’ Perceptions of Identification and Academic Press**

Students' perceptions of identification with school and academic press are measurable constructs. Anderman (2003) analyzed the relationship of academic motivational variables and teachers' promotion of mutual respect on students' sense of school belonging over time. The study defined academic motivational variables as students' perceptions of classroom task goal orientation, expectancy for academic success, and academic task values. The study revealed, "schools are institutions within which academic and social dimensions are inherently intertwined and, thus one should expect both academic and social variables to predict the sense of belonging" (Anderman, 2003, p. 6).

Anderman (2003) found students' perceptions of the task goal orientation of their classes and academic task values were related positively to their sense of school belonging over time. Task goal orientation is described as "students' perceptions that their teachers emphasized personal mastery and improvement as reasons for undertaking academic tasks." Academic task values was defined as students perceptions of whether academic tasks interesting, important and useful. Also, students' sense of belonging declined significantly over time. However, the degree to which belonging declined was partially dependent on student's perceptions that their sixth grade teacher promoted an environment of mutual
respect in the classroom. Students who reported that they perceived their teachers to foster respect reported less negative change in belonging over time.

Students’ perceptions of academic press and their sense of value of school influence positive academic and social outcomes. Roeser et al. (2000) studied the effects of students’ perceptions of their relationships with teachers and staff on their academic and social functioning over time. They analyzed results from interviews and survey instruments that measured academic competence, valuing of school and emotional distress. Study participants included 1,480 primarily African American and Caucasian American families with students entering 7th grade from a large county in an Eastern state. They determined that self-perceptions of academic competence and valuing of school predicted decreased school problem behavior. They found that adolescents who perceived their teachers emphasized content mastery and self-improvement as means for success, believed that they could achieve, fostered curriculum relevancy and provided emotional support showed increased motivation to learn and increased mental health over time. Students’ perceptions of academic competence, valuing of school and emotional health were predictors of their grades, behavior in school and the quality of relationships with their peers.

**Students’ Perceptions of Identification with school and Safety**

Unfortunately, urban youth are frequently subjected to being witnesses of community violence (Casella, 2001). Overexposure to community violence affects students in a myriad of ways. Some experience negative psychological and psychosocial consequences and others are able to succeed despite the obstacles (Ludwig & Warren, 2009). Research suggests that school related factors such as students’ perceptions of identification with school are related to students’ sense of safety at school (Ludwig & Warren, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2010). Mitchell
et al. (2010) studied the effects of student trust of teacher and student perceptions of safety on identification with school. They analyzed student school climate survey data from 8,256 third through twelve graders in one large urban district in a southeastern state. They found that students' perceptions of identification with school were positively correlated with student perception of safety. School safety made a small yet significant contribution to the explanation of identification with school. This study affirms the premise that student perception of safety is correlated and predictive of students' perceptions of identification with school. They also observed that student perception of safety and students' perceptions of identification was negatively correlated with school level. This suggests that students' perceptions of identification with school and perception of safety decline as students matriculate from elementary to secondary school.

**Students’ Perceptions of Identification with School, Academic Press, and Safety**

Students are the main focal point of the work of schools. Research shows that positive student outcomes such as high student achievement, high graduation rate and low disciplinary infractions are positively influenced by identification to school (Blue & Cook, 2004; Blum, 2005; Brideland et al., 2006; Finn, 1989; Mitchell, 2008; Steele, 1992, 1997; Voelkl, 1997) Students may not be able to identify to their school if they feel unsafe (Mitchell et al., 2010) or feel that their teachers do not have high expectations of them (Anderman, 2003). Ludwig and Warren (2009) examined the relationship between students’ perceptions of identification with school and perceived teacher support, which is considered a construct of academic press to psychosocial outcomes to urban youth exposed to community violence. Participants included 175 students from two large urban high schools in the northeast. Participants responded to survey items that measured frequency of violence
exposure in community settings, students’ perceptions of identification with school (as measured by Voelkl’s 1996 scale), student perceptions of the degree to which they felt supported by teachers, the degree of emotional and behavioral problems for youth (as measured by the Youth Self Report, 1991) and hope (as measured by the Children’s Hope scale, 1997). Results showed exposure to violence was significantly related to psychological symptoms. Hope, on the other hand was related to lower ratings of psychological symptoms. Conversely, higher identification with school and higher teacher support were significantly related to lower ratings of psychological symptoms and higher ratings of hope.

**Student Achievement in Reading**

Reading is the foundation for success in school and life after school. When No Child Left Behind (NCLB) 2001 was instituted more than a decade ago, one of its primary goals was improving literacy by putting literacy first (NCLB, 2001). Today, reading proficiency continues to be an indicator of overall poor academic performance (Boling & Evans, 2008; Katsiyannis, Ryan, Dalun, & Spann, 2008; Reschly, 2010), early withdrawal from school (Boling & Evans, 2008; Katsiyannis et al., 2008; Reschly, 2010), participation in juvenile delinquency (Christle & Yell, 2008; Katsiyannis et al., 2008; National Assessment of Adult Literacy [NAAL], 2003; Reschly, 2010), living in poverty (Reschly, 2010), and incarceration (Christle & Yell, 2008; Katsiyannis et al., 2008; NAAL, 2003; Reschly, 2010). Research suggests that students’ perceptions of identification with school (Osborne, 2001; Voelkl 1997), academic press (Goddard et al., 2000; Hoy et al., 2006; Kirby & DiPaola, 2009) and safety (Chen, 2007; Chen & Weikart, 2008; Gottfredson et al., 2005; Mitchell et al., 2010) influence student achievement in reading.

**Students’ Perceptions of Identification with School**
Whether students feel as if they belong to school and value school related outcomes may influence their academic performance (Voelkl, 1997; Osborne, 2001). In a longitudinal study of elementary and middle school students in 104 urban, suburban, rural, and inner-city schools in a southern state, Voelkl (1997) examined the antecedents of students' perceptions of identification with school. Academic achievement data was collected from fourth and seventh grade students who participated in the state standardized achievement test. The state mandated standardized test is a comprehensive exam in reading, language, mathematics, science and social science. Students’ perceptions of identification with school were significantly correlated to fourth and seventh grade achievement. Using Voelkl’s (1996), Identification with School Questionnaire (ISQ), Osborne and Walker (2001) examined identification with academics and student performance. Identification with academics is defined as valuing academics and included academics as part of their self-definition (Osborne & Walker, 2001). Identification with academics is similar to the valuing component of Voelkl (1997) definition of identification with school. This study used student GPAs as a measure of student performance. The study revealed that students with higher GPAs identified with academics significantly more than students who did not.

**Academic Press**

Research suggests that there are positive relationships between academic press and student achievement. Goddard, Sweetland, and Hoy (2000) examined teacher perceptions of academic emphasis and student achievement in reading and math in a large urban Midwestern school district. The study sample included 2,429 students and 444 teachers from elementary schools in the urban district. Teachers in the study responded to the academic emphasis component of the Organizational Health Inventory for Elementary Schools (Hoy &
Student achievement data was collected from the state mandated standardized test in reading. Teacher academic emphasis and student achievement data was aggregated to the school level. The study showed that teacher perceptions of academic emphasis explained 50% of the variance in reading.

Safety

A safe and orderly school fosters a positive learning environment (Casella, 2001; Chen, 2007; Chen & Weikart, 2008; Cornell & Mayer, 2010; DeRosier & Newcity, 2005; Wilson, 2004). Conversely, fear, avoidance, anxiety based on school and will negatively impact student achievement (Chen, 2007; Cornell & Mayer, 2010). Chen (2007) examined school disorder and student achievement in a large urban school district in an Eastern state. This study measured school disorder as student behavioral incidences. Incidences were categorized as major crime, minor crime and non-crime and collected and reported by the police department in the city under study. The personnel from the city police department report to the schools and are responsible for school safety within each school. Student achievement data was comprised of school mean mathematics and reading scores from the state mandated standardized tests. A Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the school safety and student achievement model. Student achievement explained 82% of the variance in school safety.

Summary

The research of the relevant literature supported the premise that students' perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety positively influences student outcomes. Research also suggests that the school climate constructs under study are a
predictor of student achievement in reading. Studies have explored the relationships between students' perceptions of identification with school and academic press or students' perceptions of identification with school and safety. The empirical studies reviewed focus on students' perceptions of identification with school, teachers' perceptions of academic press, and students' and teachers' perceptions of safety. This study will expand the literature on academic press and safety by adding the voices of students, teachers, and parents and examining the relationships among the constructs and between the constructs and student achievement in reading.
CHAPTER 3: Methodology

Introduction

Research suggests that students’ perceptions of identification with school (Finn, 1989; Griffin, 2002; Honora, 2003; Voelkl, 1997), academic press (Goddard, et al., 2007; Kirby & DiPaola, 2009; Middleton & Midgley, 2002), and safety (Casella, 2001; Chen & Weikart, 2008; DeRosier & Newcity, 2005; Wilson, 2004) separately impact student achievement in positive ways. The intent of the study was to bridge the gap between three affective theories that have had positive impacts on students by examining the relationships between the constructs and student achievement in reading. This chapter describes the research questions and methods used in the study. Descriptions of the participants, data collection, instruments, and data analysis procedures used in this study are included.

Research Questions

1. What are the relationships among students’ perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety, where the student is the unit of analysis?

2. To what extent is students’ achievement in reading related to their perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety, teachers’ perceptions of academic press and safety, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety, where the school is the unit of analysis?

3. To what extent are students’ perceptions of identification with school related to their perceptions of academic press and safety, teachers’ perceptions of academic press and safety, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety, where the school is the unit of analysis?
4. To what extent is the variability in students’ achievement in reading explained by their perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety, teachers’ perceptions of academic press and safety, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety, where the school is the unit of analysis?

Methods

Participants

Students, teachers, and parents from an urban school division in a Southeastern state participated in this study. The school district is comprised of 35 elementary schools, nine middle schools and five high schools. It is noteworthy that one middle school closed during the 2010-2011 school year. The district conducted a three-year phase out by eliminating enrollment of sixth and seventh grade students during the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years respectively. Students who previously attended this school were split between neighboring middle schools. Students and teachers from each school participated in the study. Parent participation from the schools varied based on whether parents elected to participate in the survey.

Student participants. In total, 28,895 students participated in the study from May 2009 to May 2011. Students in Grades 3, 4, and 5 comprised the elementary student participation, students in Grades 6, 7, and 8 were the middle school participants and students in Grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 were the high school participants, respectively as shown in Table 3.1. The mean total student population per school year from 2008 to 2011 was approximately 34,000. The mean demographic makeup of the student population in the studied district from 2008 to 2011 was: 63% African American, 23% Caucasian, 4% Hispanic, and 2% Asian, with 59% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch.
Table 3.1

*Numbers of Student Participants per Year by Grade Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,518</td>
<td>1,260</td>
<td>1,774</td>
<td>4,552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,541</td>
<td>1,666</td>
<td>1,998</td>
<td>5,205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1,678</td>
<td>1,720</td>
<td>1,850</td>
<td>5,248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>719</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>881</td>
<td>2,317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>747</td>
<td>1,089</td>
<td>2,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>718</td>
<td>1,018</td>
<td>2,399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>872</td>
<td>1,734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>1,657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>1,437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>754</td>
<td>1,296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>111</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,336</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,485</strong></td>
<td><strong>12,074</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 contains total student demographic information for the district under study and actual demographic information for the student participants.

Table 3.2

*Student Ethnicity Comparing School District Percentages and Percentage of Student Participants per Year*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>64 (48.0)</td>
<td>63 (46.0)</td>
<td>63 (47.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>23 (19.0)</td>
<td>23 (18.0)</td>
<td>23 (18.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3 (3.0)</td>
<td>3 (3.0)</td>
<td>2 (2.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>4 (3.0)</td>
<td>4 (3.0)</td>
<td>4 (3.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>&lt;1 (1.0)</td>
<td>&lt;1 (2.0)</td>
<td>&lt;1 (1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multi-racial</td>
<td>6 (12.0)</td>
<td>6 (13.0)</td>
<td>6 (15.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No response</td>
<td>0 (14.0)</td>
<td>0 (19.0)</td>
<td>0 (13.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n% = Percentage of student ethnicity of the student participants per year.*
**Teacher participants.** In total, 7,550 elementary, middle, high and vocational and alternate school teacher responses were collected from May 2008 to May 2011, as shown in Table 3.3. The teachers surveyed were full-time instructional staff including regular, special education teachers, and other professional faculty such as librarians and school counselors. Full-time teachers from the district’s auxiliary sites also participated in the study. Paraprofessionals, classified staff members, and members of the administration were not included.

Table 3.3

*Numbers of Teacher Participants per Year*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Elementary</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Vocational and alternate sites</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,327</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>2,580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,417</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>2,651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,243</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>2,319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,987</td>
<td>1,491</td>
<td>1,668</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>7,550</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographic information on the years of experience for teachers who participated in the study is displayed in Table 3.4.
Table 3.4

*Years of Experience for Teacher Participants per Year*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>0-1</th>
<th>1-2</th>
<th>3-5</th>
<th>6-10</th>
<th>11-15</th>
<th>16-20</th>
<th>21+</th>
<th>No response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8.0)</td>
<td>(9.0)</td>
<td>(19.0)</td>
<td>(21.0)</td>
<td>(15.0)</td>
<td>(9.0)</td>
<td>(19.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6.4)</td>
<td>(7.4)</td>
<td>(20.3)</td>
<td>(22.4)</td>
<td>(15.7)</td>
<td>(9.6)</td>
<td>(18.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.1)</td>
<td>(6.2)</td>
<td>(18.3)</td>
<td>(22.2)</td>
<td>(18.8)</td>
<td>(10.8)</td>
<td>(20.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = Number of teacher participants.*

**Parent participants.** In total, 4,580 parents participated in the study, as shown in Table 3.5. Parent surveys were not funded for the 2010-2011 school year; therefore parent data responses were only collected from May 2008 to May 2010. Specific demographic information on parents who participated is unknown due to survey anonymity.

Table 3.5

*Numbers of Parent Participants per Year*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Elementary</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Blank surveys</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,008</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>2,019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,625</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,633</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>1,029</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>4,580</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instrumentation**

This study is part of a larger study conducted by the participating school district. Three separate instruments were utilized for this study, the Student Climate Survey (SCS),
Teacher Climate Survey (TCS), and Parent Climate Survey (PCS). Each survey was comprised of several composite measures. The survey items remained constant for all three years of this study. For the purpose of this study, responses to items constituting students' perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety were extracted and analyzed from the SCS. The SCS utilized a five-point Likert scale with 1 representing “strongly disagree” to 5 representing “strongly agree.” Academic press and safety were extracted from the TCS and PCS. Teacher academic press items utilized a five-point response scale with 1 representing “never” to 5 representing “very frequently.” Teacher safety item utilized a five-point response scale with 1 representing “not at all,” 2 “very little,” 3 “some,” 4 “quite a bit,” and 5 “great deal.” Parent safety and parent academic press utilized a five-point Likert scale with 1 representing “strongly disagree” to 5 representing “strongly agree.”

Students’ perceptions of identification with school. Identification with school has been defined as having a sense of belonging with school and valuing school and education-related outcomes (Finn, 1989; Voelkl, 1997). The items utilized on the SCS were from Voelkl’s (1996) Identification with School Questionnaire (ISQ). The ISQ is a 16-item questionnaire; nine items reflect student’s feelings of belonging to school and the remaining seven representing valuing school and education related outcomes. Eight of the 16 items from the ISQ were on the SCS. Five of the eight items depicted belonging and the remaining three were concerning valuing. The participating school district decided to cut several items in order to decrease the overall number of student responses. Sample items included, “I feel proud of being a part of my school,” “School is one of my favorite places to be,” “I feel like I
am a part of school.” Reverse worded items included, “Going to school is a waste of time,” and “Most of the things we learn in school are worthless.”

The ISQ was created and tested on a sample of 3,500 eighth graders (Voelkl, 1996). A confirmatory factor analysis of the data was conducted to determine the factor structure of the scale. The analysis found that belonging and valuing were separate but highly correlated factors. The strong correlation of \( r = .85, p < .01 \) between valuing and belonging suggested that both factors could be regarded as a single factor (Voelkl, 1997). The Cronbach’s alpha for the ISQ when combining the belonging and valuing items was \( \alpha = .84 \) (Voelkl, 1997). The alpha coefficient of reliability for student academic press in the current study was .81.

**Students’ perceptions of academic press.** Academic press is defined as an academic environment in which administrators, teachers and students understand the importance of academics and are in pursuit of academic excellence (Goddard et al., 2000; McDill et al., 1982; Shouse, 1995). Ten items on the SCS measured student perceptions of academic press. These items were an adaption of an instrument that measured teacher perceptions of academic press from Hoy, Hannum, and Tschannen-Moran (1998)’s Organizational Health Inventory (OHI). Sample items included, “Students work hard to get good grades,” “This is school is serious about learning,” “I can get extra help at school, if needed,” and “Good grades are recognized.” The alpha coefficient of reliability for student academic press in the current study was .85.

**Teachers’ perceptions of academic press.** Six items on the TCS measured teacher’s perceptions of academic press. These items were taken directly from the Hoy et al.’s OHI (1998). The alpha coefficient of reliability for academic press was .92 (Hoy et al., 1998). Sample items included, “The school sets high standards for academic performance,”
“Academic achievement is recognized and acknowledged by the school,” and “Students try hard to improve on previous work.” The alpha coefficient of reliability for teacher perceptions of academic press in the current study was .84.

**Parents’ perceptions of academic press.** Eight items on the PCS measured parent’s perceptions of academic press. These items were adapted from the Hoy et al.’s OHI. (1998) Sample items included, “The school sets high standards for academic performance,” “Academic achievement is recognized and acknowledged by the school,” and “This school has high standards for all.” The alpha coefficient of reliability for parent perceptions of academic press in the current study was .91.

**Students’ perceptions of safety.** Safe schools have been conceptualized as a place that is free from disorder, problem behaviors or threats to one’s physical or emotional well being (Bosworth et al., 2011; Chen & Weikart, 2008). Eight items on the SCS measured student perceptions of safety. Mitchell et al. (2010) conducted a factor analysis of the safety items. The researchers extracted two of the eight items that represented student perceptions of safety and feeling threatened. Both factors were combined during the second order factor analysis. The alpha coefficient of reliability for student academic press in the current study was .72. Sample items on this scale were “I feel safe outside and around the school,” “Gangs are a problem at my school,” “I stay home sometimes because I don’t feel safe at school.”

**Teachers’ perceptions of safety.** Ten items on the TCS measured teacher’s perceptions of safety. These items were an adaption of the items found in the SCS. Teachers were asked to respond to the following response, “to what extent is each of the following a problem at your school.” Sample items on this scale were “Physical conflicts among students (fighting),” “Disorder in classrooms,” “Threats of violence toward teachers,” and “Students
threatening other students.” The alpha coefficient of reliability for teacher perceptions of safety in the current study was .94.

**Parents' perceptions of safety.** Nine items on the PCS measured parent’s perceptions of safety. These items were an adaption of the items found in the SCS. Sample items include, “My child is safe at school,” “Bullying is a problem at my child’s school” and “The schools’ administration place priority on an orderly, safe and secure learning environment.” The alpha coefficient of reliability for parent perceptions of safety in the current study was .71.

**Students' Achievement.** The Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) are state mandated assessments that measures achievement annually on rigorous academic standards. Due to the anonymity of student survey responses, individual student achievement data could not be tied to individual student responses for students’ perceptions of identification with school and students’ perceptions of academic press and safety. Therefore, the school district under study provided the school level mean scale scores for Grades 3-8 and End of Course (EOC) on the reading Virginia SOL. EOC high school reading assessments are only given once in the 11th grade. SOL scores range from 200-600. A score of a 400 is the base for minimal proficiency, scores from 500-600 are considered passed advanced. The aggregated number by school varied because data were collected from May 2009 to May 2011.

**Data Collection**

Students, teachers, and parents’ responses were collected as part of the study. Each year the SCS and TCS were hand delivered by district personnel to each school in late April. Students in Grades 3-12 were randomly selected to participate in the survey based on their assigned homeroom. Approximately half of the homerooms in each school were randomly
selected. The TCS was administered during the monthly faculty meeting. To ensure that
teachers could complete the surveys in an open environment, specific teachers were
designated to administer and collect the TCS. School principals were not present during the
administration of the surveys nor did they have access to the surveys after completion.
Parents were randomly selected to participate in the study. However, the total number of
parents selected from each school was based on that school’s student population to ensure
fair representation across the school division. Approximately 20,000 surveys were mailed
during the 2008-2009 school year, and 21,000 surveys were mailed during the spring of
2009-2010. Only, 2,019 parents responded in 2008-2009, which resulted in 10.1% response
rate. In 2008-2009, 144 parents returned a blank survey, resulting in 1,875 actual surveys
analyzed. In 2009-2010, 2,561 parents responded which resulted in a response rate of 12.2%.
Table 3.6 contains descriptive information regarding the number of parent surveys mailed,
surveys returned, and response rate. Surveys were mailed to parents based on the addresses
listed in the district student database system. In cases of households with multiple children,
parents were asked to respond based on the school attended by their oldest child. Packages
included the survey instrument and a self-addressed stamped envelope for parents to use after
completion of the survey. In order to maintain anonymity of responses, the school district
contracted an external company for mailing and distribution. Low parent response rates,
mailing expenses, and budget cuts were the rationale for cutting the parent surveys during the
2010-2011 school year.
Table 3.6

Number of Parents Surveyed, Surveys Returned, and Response Rate per Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Parent surveys mailed</th>
<th>Surveys returned (% of return)</th>
<th>Actual surveys processed</th>
<th>Response rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>856 (4.3)</td>
<td>2,019</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>708 (3.4)</td>
<td>2,561</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>1,564</td>
<td>4,580</td>
<td>8.73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student achievement data were collected for the purpose of this study. Reading SOL scores from the spring 2009, 2010 and 2011 testing administrations were obtained from district personnel. Students in Grades 3-8 complete a grade level reading state mandated test, SOL every spring. High school students are tested in reading once during their eleventh grade year. Mean reading SOL scores were calculated for each grade level based on the total number of tested participants.

Data Analysis

The focus of Research Question 1 was the relationships between student perceptions of organizational features and students' perceptions of identification with the school, thus the unit of analysis was the student. For Research Questions 2-4, the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents were aggregated at the school level and considered a property of the school; thus the unit of analysis was the school.

Student achievement scores in reading were also aggregated at the school level. Mean SOL reading scores for Grades 3-8 and EOC were obtained by school from May 2009 to May 2011. These scores were combined to obtain a total student achievement in reading score. This total score was used for Research Questions 2 and 4. There were 35 elementary
schools, an average of eight middle schools, and five high schools over a three-year period for a total of 149 schools.

The first three research questions were explored using descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations. The fourth question was examined using a multiple regression analysis. Data sources including SCS, TCS, and PCS and analyses for research questions are shown in Table 3.7.
Table 3.7
Data Sources (Student Climate Survey, Teacher Climate Survey, and Parent Climate Survey) and Analyses for Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Data analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the relationships among students' perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety, where the student is the unit of analysis?</td>
<td><em>SCS</em> 5,7-10,12,27,28;2-4,15,16,18,19,25,26,33;22,34-37,40,44,46</td>
<td>Correlation analyses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To what extent is students' achievement in reading related to their perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety, teachers' perceptions of academic press and safety, and parents' perceptions of academic press and safety, where the school is the unit of analysis?</td>
<td><em>SCS</em> 5,7-10,12,27,28;2-4,15,16,18,19,25,26,33;22,34-37,40,44,46, <em>TCS</em> 5,6,14,15,21,22;C1-C10, <em>PCS</em> 1-3,6,7,9,24,31;4,27,41-43,46,47,49,50</td>
<td>Correlation analyses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To what extent are students' perceptions of identification with school related to their perceptions of academic press and safety, teachers' perceptions of academic press and safety, and parents' perceptions of academic press and safety, where the school is the unit of analysis?</td>
<td><em>SCS</em> 5,7-10,12,27,28;2-4,15,16,18,19,25,26,33;22,34-37,40,44,46, <em>TCS</em> 5,6,14,15,21,22;C1-C10, <em>PCS</em> 1-3,6,7,9,24,31;4,27,41-43,46,47,49,50</td>
<td>Correlation analyses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. To what extent is the variability in students' achievement in reading explained by their perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety, teachers' perceptions of academic press and safety, and parents' perceptions of academic press and safety, where the school is the unit of analysis?</td>
<td><em>SCS</em> 5,7-10,12,27,28;2-4,15,16,18,19,25,26,33;22,34-37,40,44,46, <em>TCS</em> 5,6,14,15,21,22;C1-C10, <em>PCS</em> 1-3,6,7,9,24,31;4,27,41-43,46,47,49,50, SOL Reading achievement data</td>
<td>A multiple regression analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. SCS = Student Climate Survey, TCS = Teacher Climate Survey, PCS = Parent Climate Survey, SOL = Virginia Standards of Learning.*
**Research Question 1.** What are the relationships among students’ perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety, where the student is the unit of analysis? Data were obtained from the students identification with school, student academic press, and student safety subscales on the SCS from 2009, 2010, and 2011. Correlation analyses were conducted in order to determine the relationships among students’ perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety.

**Research Question 2.** To what extent is students’ achievement in reading related to their perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety, teachers’ perceptions of academic press and safety, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety, where the school is the unit of analysis? The scores from Grades 3-8 and EOC SOL reading examinations were dependent variable. The variables were the student identification with school, and student academic press, and student safety subscales on the SCS, teacher academic press and teacher safety subscales on the TCS, and parent academic press and parent safety subscales on the PCS from 2009, 2010, and 2011. Correlation analyses were used to determine the relationships between student achievement in reading and their perceptions of identification with school and students’, teachers’, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety.

**Research Question 3.** To what extent are students’ perceptions of identification with school related to their perceptions of academic press and safety, teachers’ perceptions of academic press and safety, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety, where the school is the unit of analysis? Data were obtained from the student identification with school, and student academic press, and student safety subscales on the SCS, teacher academic press and teacher safety subscales on the TCS, and parent academic press and
parent safety subscales on the PCS from 2009, 2010, and 2011. Correlation analyses were used to determine the relationships among students’ perceptions of identification with school and students’, teachers’, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety.

**Research Question 4.** To what extent is the variability in students’ achievement in reading explained by their perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety, teachers’ perceptions of academic press and safety, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety, where the school is the unit of analysis? The scores from Grades 3-8 and EOC SOL reading examinations were dependent variable. The predictors were the students identification with school, and student academic press, and student safety subscales on the SCS, teacher academic press and teacher safety subscales on the TCS, and parent academic press and parent safety subscales on the PCS from 2009, 2010, and 2011. A multiple regression analysis was conducted using the seven predictors to determine the combined and individual predictions for overall student achievement in reading.

**Ethical Safeguards**

This study used archival data from surveys that were administered by the participating school district in 2009, 2010 and 2011. The school district’s Department of Strategic Evaluation, Assessment and Support administered the survey based on school district policy. Survey information was kept secure and confidential during the survey administration. Survey participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, their responses were anonymous in nature, and they could discontinue the process at any time without penalty. In order to protect the privacy and anonymity of the participants, individual identifiable information was excluded from survey demographics. Permission to proceed with the study was granted by the Protection of Human Subjects Committee at the College of
William and Mary and by the school district's senior coordinator of Research and Evaluation and the executive director for the Department of Strategic Evaluation, Assessment and Support. The Protection of Human Subjects Committee determined that this study was in compliance with appropriate ethical standards and was exempted from formal review.
CHAPTER 4: Data Analysis

This chapter will examine the relationships among students' perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety. Analyses were conducted to determine the relationships among students' achievement, their perceptions of identification with school, and students', teachers', and parents' perceptions of academic press and safety. Further analyses examined each independent variable's relative predictions of students' achievement in reading.

Descriptive Summary

Students' perceptions of identification with school, student academic press, and student safety were the subscales utilized for this study. Subscale data were aggregated to the school level by calculating a score from each student's, teacher's, and parent's completed subscale, then computing one mean score for each subscale, which comprised the school-level subscale score.

Mean SOL scores in reading were obtained for Grades 3-8 and EOC by school over a three-year period. A total student achievement in reading score was obtained from the mean SOL scores in Grades 3-8 and EOC by school for each year of the study, as Table 4.2 shows.

Results

The relationships among variables in Research Questions 1, 2 and 3 were conducted using correlation analyses (Table 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3). Predictors of achievement were analyzed in Research Question 4 using a multiple regression analysis (Table 4.4).

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 examined the relationships among student's perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety. The student was the unit of analysis.
Total number of student participants was 28,895 as shown in Table 3.1. Correlation analyses were used to determine the relationships among students' perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety. A summary of intercorrelations, means, and standard deviations for students' perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety is shown in Table 4.1. Considering the large student sample size for the analyses for Research Question 1, using an alpha level at \( p < .001 \) is more appropriate than alpha level at \( p < .05 \) or \( p < .01 \). The results indicated significant relationships among students' perceptions of identification with school and academic press \((r = .67, p < .001)\), students' perceptions of identification with school and safety \((r = .42, p < .001)\) and students' perceptions of academic press and safety \((r = .39, p < .001)\) as shown in Table 4.1. The strongest relationship was found between students' perceptions of identification with school and academic press.

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students' perceptions of</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>( N )</th>
<th>( M )</th>
<th>( SD )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Identification with school</td>
<td>.67***</td>
<td>.42***</td>
<td>28,304</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Academic press</td>
<td>.39***</td>
<td>28,355</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Safety</td>
<td></td>
<td>27,448</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* \( N = \) Number of student participants.

***\( p < .001 \).*
Research Question 2

Research Question 2 examined the relationships among students’ achievement in reading, their perceptions of identification with school, and students’, teachers’, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety. The school was the unit of analysis. Correlation analyses were used to determine the relationships among reading achievement and the primary variables in the study. Table 4.2 contains a summary of intercorrelations, means, and standard deviations for students’ reading achievement, their perceptions of identification with school, and students’, teachers’, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety.

Table 4.2

Summary of Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Students’ Reading Achievement Scores and Students’ Perceptions of Identification with School, and Students’ Teachers’, and Parents’, Perceptions of Academic Press and Safety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Reading achievement</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>3.76 (0.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>4.18 (0.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>press</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td></td>
<td>147</td>
<td>3.82 (0.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>105</td>
<td>4.12 (0.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>.63**</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>3.37 (0.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>3.24 (0.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>3.89 (0.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>149</td>
<td>460.79 (22.22)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = Number of schools.

*p < .05. **p < .01.
Students' perceptions of identification with school and their reading achievement. The results indicated a significant relationship between students’ perceptions of identification with school and their reading achievement ($r = .23, p = .004$).

Students', teachers', and parents' perceptions of academic press and students' reading achievement. The results indicated a significant relationship between students’ perceptions of academic press and their reading achievement ($r = .18, p = .031$). The results indicated a significant relationship between teachers’ perceptions of academic press and students’ reading achievement ($r = .56, p < .001$). The results showed that the relationship between parents’ perceptions of academic press and students’ reading achievement was not significant ($r = -.01, p = .904$).

Students', teachers', and parents' perceptions of safety and students' reading achievement. The results indicated a significant relationship between students’ perceptions of safety and their reading achievement ($r = .63, p < .001$). The results indicated a significant relationship between students’ reading achievement and teachers’ perceptions of safety ($r = .56, p < .001$). The results showed that the relationship between parents’ perceptions of safety and students’ reading achievement was not significant ($r = -.07, p = .464$).

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 examined the relationships among students’ perceptions of identification with school, and students’, teachers’, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety. The school was the unit of analysis. Correlation analyses were used to determine the relationships among the variables. The results indicated that students’ perceptions of identification with school had significant relationships with these variables:
students' perceptions of academic press ($r = .96, p < .001$), students' perceptions of safety ($r = .68, p < .001$), teachers' perceptions of academic press ($r = .70, p < .001$), teachers' perceptions of safety ($r = .69, p < .001$). The results indicated that students' perceptions of academic press had significant relationships with all of the variables: students' perceptions of safety ($r = .61, p < .001$), teachers' perceptions of academic press ($r = .71, p < .001$), teachers' perceptions of safety ($r = .66, p < .001$), parents' perceptions of academic press ($r = .20, p = .04$), and parents' perceptions of safety ($r = .20, p = .04$). The results indicated that students' perceptions of safety had significant relationships with teachers' perceptions of academic press ($r = .73, p < .001$) and with teachers' perceptions of safety ($r = .84, p < .001$). The results indicated a significant relationship between teachers' perceptions of academic press and safety ($r = .87, p < .001$). The results indicated a significant relationship between parents' perceptions of academic press and safety ($r = .85, p < .001$). Table 4.3 contains a summary of intercorrelations, means, and standard deviations for students' perceptions of identification with school, students', teachers', and parents' perceptions of academic press and safety aggregated to the school level.
Table 4.3


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>1. Student</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>.96***</td>
<td>.70***</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.68***</td>
<td>.69***</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with School</td>
<td>2. Student</td>
<td>146</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.71***</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.61***</td>
<td>.66***</td>
<td>.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Press</td>
<td>3. Teacher</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.73***</td>
<td>.87***</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Parent</td>
<td>102</td>
<td></td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.85***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>5. Student</td>
<td>146</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.84***</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Teacher</td>
<td>144</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Parent</td>
<td>102</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = Number of schools.
*p < .05. ***p < .001.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 examined to what extent is the variability in students' achievement in reading explained by students' perceptions of identification with school, students', teachers', and parents' perceptions of academic press and safety. The school was the unit of analysis. A multiple regression analysis was conducted using the seven predictors to determine the combined and individual predictions for overall student achievement in reading. Independent variables of students' perceptions of identification with school, students', teachers', and parents' perceptions of academic press and safety that were predicting students' achievement in reading are shown in Table 4.4.
Table 4.4

Summary of Predictors (Students' Perceptions of Identification with School, Students', Teachers', and Parents' Perceptions of Academic Press and Safety) for Students' Achievement in Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>$b$</th>
<th>$SE_b$</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>$t(103)$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification with school</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>27.315</td>
<td>20.21</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>44.37</td>
<td>10.86</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>4.09***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>12.57</td>
<td>11.97</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic press</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>-60.91</td>
<td>18.22</td>
<td>-.91</td>
<td>-3.34**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>44.37</td>
<td>10.86</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>4.09***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>-13.37</td>
<td>8.53</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>41.30</td>
<td>10.86</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>3.80***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>-3.81</td>
<td>7.70</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>-13.37</td>
<td>8.53</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-1.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** $F(7,104) = 18.06^{***}$, $R^2 = .57$, adjusted $R^2 = .53$.

**p < .01. ***p < .001.

The results indicated that the independent variables combined accounted for a statistically significant amount of variance for students' overall reading scores, adjusted $R^2 = .53$, $F(7,104) = 18.06$, $p < .001$ (Due to the small sample size with many [seven] predictors, using the adjusted $R^2$ value is more appropriate than using the $R^2$ value in this study). Students' perceptions of identification with school, students', teachers', and parents' perceptions of academic press and safety explained 53% of the variance in students' overall reading scores.
The results showed that students' perceptions of academic press significantly negatively predicted students' overall reading scores ($\beta = -.91, p = .001$), when in the context of this set of predictor variables. This indicates that when students’ perceptions of academic press increase one standard deviation, the average amount of students’ reading scores decrease $.91$, while other independent variables are held constant. The results showed that teachers’ perceptions of academic press significantly predicted students' overall reading scores ($\beta = .66, p < .001$). This indicates that when teachers’ perceptions of academic press increase one standard deviation, the average amount of students’ reading scores increase $.66$, while other independent variables are held constant. The results showed that students’ perceptions of safety significantly predicted students’ overall reading scores ($\beta = .49, p < .001$). This indicates that when students’ perceptions of safety increase one standard deviation, the average amount of students’ reading scores increase $.49$, while other independent variables are held constant.

However, students’ perceptions of identification with school ($\beta = .37, p = .180$), teachers’ perceptions of safety ($\beta = -.08, p = .622$), and parents’ perceptions of academic press ($\beta = .14, p = .296$), and parents’ perceptions of safety ($\beta = .20, p = .120$) did not make significant independent contributions to explaining variance in students’ reading scores when in the context of the other predictor variables in this analysis.

Summary

This chapter presented the relationships among students’ perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety. Strong relationships were found among students’ perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety.

It also presented the relationships between students’ achievement in reading and students’ perceptions of identification with school, students’, teachers’, and parents’
perceptions of academic press and safety. Strong relationships were found between students’ achievement in reading and students’ perceptions of identification with school, students’ and teachers’ perceptions of academic press and students’ perceptions of safety.

This chapter also presented the relationships among students’ perceptions of identification with school, and students’, teachers’, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety. Strong relationships were found among students’ perceptions of identification with school, students’ and teachers’ academic press and safety. Additionally, a strong relationship was found between parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety.

The multiple regression analysis indicated that the combined contribution of all independent variables was a significant predictor of students’ reading achievement scores. Students’ and teachers’ perceptions of academic press and students’ perceptions of safety were significant independent variables in predicting students’ reading achievement.
CHAPTER 5: Conclusions

The push for accountability in schools has positioned school districts to find a myriad of ways to increase student success. This study suggests several viable means for student success through the lens of students’ perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the implications of these findings for future research and practice.

Discussions

Results from the present study support and extend previous research on students’ perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety by suggesting that there are relationships among students’, teachers’, and parents’ perceptions of these variables and students’ reading achievement.

Correlation Analyses of Students’ Perceptions of Identification with School, Academic Press, and Safety

Correlations of student perceptions in relationship to other variables in this study reveal important findings. In general, student voice has not played a strong role in educational research.

Students’ perceptions of identification with school and students’ perceptions of academic press. When analyzed with the school as the unit of analysis, one of the strongest correlation relationships in this study is that between students’ perceptions of identification with school and academic press. These results suggest that when students perceive their school as a serious learning environment then they will in turn identify with school. Teachers play an instrumental role on how students feel about school. There are ten items on the SCS
that comprise students’ perceptions of academic press, five of the ten items are related to students’ perceptions of their teacher. Teacher-related items are:

- My teachers believe that I can learn
- My teachers have prepared me for the next grade and the future
- If I don’t understand something, the teacher will work with me until I get it
- I can get extra help at school, if needed
- My teachers keep me informed about my progress.

Teachers are essential to students’ perceptions of academic press and whether students identify with school. The results of this study confirm prior studies in that students feel a greater sense of belonging to school when they understand the importance of academics and perceive that their teachers have high expectations for academic success (Anderman, 2003). Students will feel a sense of belonging to school when they believe that adults care about learning and students as individuals (Blum, 2005; Mitchell, 2008; Voelkl, 1997).

**Students’ perceptions of identification with school and students’ perceptions of safety.** Research is scarce on students’ perceptions of identification with school and safety. The results of this study align with claims in previous research that suggest that students’ perceptions of identification with school are related to students’ sense of safety at school (Ludwig & Warren, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2010). Students are more likely to identify with school when they perceive that their school environment is safe and conducive for learning. Students would have difficulty feeling a sense of belonging or valuing for their school if they feel physically or emotional threatened at school.
Many students of urban schools learn to adapt to what others deem as a dangerous environment. Overexposure to violence is considered normal. For many urban students, the schoolhouse is a safe place even though their communities are pledged with disorder and chaos. Therefore, it is possible that whether or not students feel as though their school environment is safe, they may nonetheless identify with school.

**Correlation Analyses of Students’ Reading Achievement and Students’ Perceptions of Identification with School, and Students’, Teachers’, and Parents’ Perceptions of Academic press and Safety**

One of the distinguishing characteristics of this study is that it examined student identification with school, academic press, and safety from students’, teachers’, and parents’ perceptions and its relationships to students’ achievement in reading. A myriad of studies suggest that there are relationships among students’ perceptions of identification with school (Finn, 1989; Honora, 2003; Osborne, 1997; Voelkl, 1997), academic press (Goddard et al., 2000; Hoy, et al., 2006; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006), and safety (Chen, 2007; Chen & Weikart, 2008; Gottfredson et al., 2005) and student achievement. Unfortunately, very few studies have examined the combined influence of student, teacher and parent perceptions of academic press and safety to student achievement. The findings from this study provide evidence that students’ perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety influence student achievement.

**Students’ perceptions of identification with school and students’ reading achievement.** The results indicate that students’ perceptions of identification with school and students’ achievement in reading are significantly correlated when the school is the unit of analysis. The results of this study are consistent with previous studies on the influence of
students' perceptions of identification with school on student achievement (Finn, 1989; Honora, 2003; Osborne, 1997; Voelkl, 1997). Students who experience academic success in school are more likely to identify with school (Finn, 1989; Honora, 2003; Osborne, 1997; Voelkl, 1997).

**Perceptions of academic press and students’ reading achievement.** The results indicate that students’ and teachers’ perception of academic press and students’ achievement in reading are significantly correlated when aggregated to the school level. These results are consistent with previous studies in that there is a relationship between teachers’ perceptions of academic press and student achievement (Goddard et al., 2000; Hoy et al., 1998, 2006). Teachers are instrumental in setting the academic tone in schools. Students thrive in an environment that fosters high expectations of academic achievement. When students believe that their teachers care about their success, they will strive to be successful.

This study does not show a relationship between parents’ perceptions of academic press and students’ reading achievement. Prior studies found that parents’ perceptions of the school depend upon their interaction with school and the source of communication regarding school (Perkins, 2008). The results might suggest that there is a disconnect between parents and their children and between parents and the school. Students and teachers have significant perceptions of academic press because they are directly involved with schools. Parents are indirectly involved in schools through their children.

**Perceptions of safety and reading achievement.** The results confirm that students’ and teachers’ perception of safety and students’ achievement in reading is significantly correlated when aggregated to the school level. These results confirm prior studies regarding the relationship between safety and student achievement (Casella, 2001; Chen &
Weikart, 2008; DeRosier & Newcity, 2005; Wilson, 2004). Student learning is impacted by the level of disorder that occurs at a school (Casella, 2001; Chen & Weikart, 2008; DeRosier & Newcity, 2005; Wilson, 2004). Schools should be a safe haven, free from violence and disorder. When students have to worry about their physical or emotional well-being, then their focus on academics will decline. It is also difficult for teachers to reach optimal job performance if they do not feel safe at work.

This study does not show a relationship between parents’ perceptions of safety and students’ reading achievement. Research is scarce on the relationship between parents’ perceptions of safety and students’ achievement. The results might suggest that whether parents feel the school is safe is not related to their child’s reading achievement. Parents may be accustomed to their urban environment. Parents may not perceive their child’s school as unsafe; therefore their perceptions of safety of the school do not correlate to their child’s reading achievement.

**Correlation Analysis of the Variables**

A correlation analysis was conducted among students’ perceptions of identification with school, students’, teachers’, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety in order to determine the relationships between the participants’ perceptions of each variable. The correlation analysis was aggregated to the school level.

**Students’ perceptions of identification with school.** This analysis confirmed that students’ perceptions of students’ perceptions of identification with school are strongly and significantly correlated to students’ and teachers’ perceptions of academic press and safety. The finding shows a strong relationship between students’ perceptions of identification with school and academic press. This finding might suggest that if students perceive their school
is serious about academics, they will more likely identify with school. Students' perceptions of identification are also strongly and significantly correlated to students' and teachers' perceptions of academic press and safety. The findings might suggest that if students and teachers perceive that academic achievement is recognized and acknowledged by the school, and that they feel safe while at school, more students will identify with school than not.

Mitchell et al. (2010) also found significant correlations between students' perceptions of identification with school and safety.

Students' perceptions of identification with school are not significantly correlated to parents' perceptions of academic press or safety. This might suggest that parents' perceptions of the school are not related to whether their child feels a sense of belonging or valuing to the school.

**Students', teachers', and parents' perceptions of academic press and safety.** The findings of the study show that students' perceptions of academic press are strongly and significantly correlated to teachers' and parents' perceptions of academic press and students', teachers', and parents' perceptions of safety. The findings might indicate that students' perceptions are correlated to teachers' because students are dependent upon their teachers, whether students' interactions with teachers are positive or negative. Students and teachers have a direct and ongoing relationship in schools. This finding also suggests that there are relationships among the perceptions of the internal environment (students and teachers) and the external environment (parents).

The correlation between students' reading achievement and parents' perceptions of academic press or safety is not significant. The multiple regression analysis does not show parents' perceptions of academic press or safety as predictors of students' reading
achievement. However, mean and standard deviation of parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety show that overall parents have positive perceptions of their child’s school. This finding is consistent with prior research in that overall, urban parents have positive feelings toward their child’s school (Perkins, 2008). The finding might also suggest that there is a disconnect between parents and the school.

**Multiple Regression Analysis**

The results indicate that the combined contributions of students’ perceptions of identification with school, students’, teachers’, and parents’ perceptions of academic press and safety significantly predict students’ achievement scores in reading. Independently, teachers’ perceptions of academic press and students’ perceptions of safety significantly predicted students’ reading achievement. These findings confirm the relationship between perceptions of the academic environment and student achievement. These findings might indicate that if students and teachers feel that students take learning seriously and teachers have high expectations of students, students’ achievement in reading tend to be high. These findings also confirm the importance of providing a safety and orderly environment for students and teachers. It is challenging for students to demonstrate positive academic performance in a chaotic and disorderly environment. The finding that students’ perceptions of academic press significantly negatively predicted students’ overall reading scores might be due to a problem with multicollinearity (see the Limitations and Delimitations section). Thus, this finding should be interpreted with caution.
Limitations and Delimitations

Rudestam and Newton (2007) defined limitations as potential weaknesses in the study design over which the researcher had no control. The implementation of the student, teacher, and parent surveys was controlled solely by the school district that participated in the study. Completion of the survey responses by all three-stakeholder groups was voluntary; therefore, sample responses may not be reflective of the overall teacher, student, or parent population of the district.

Another potential limitation of the study is the changes in leadership within the school district. Changes in leadership ranged from new principals and assistant principals hires to several transfers of principals and assistant principals on the elementary level. The most substantial change occurred within the office of superintendent in 2011. Because data were aggregated to the school level, any trends that may be observed due to changes in leadership was not reflected based on the current study design.

There was another limitation within the sample used for this study. Data for the study were collected for three years, in the same district using the same survey. In order to maintain participants’ anonymity, identifying information such as name, student or teacher identification number, and parent address was not included in the demographic section of participant surveys. Having the ability to link specific information from each participant, such as students’ ethnicity and students’ reading scores, to their specific teachers’ and parents’ responses would have enhanced the study. Although utilizing the same survey increased the reliability of the survey instrument, this may also be seen as a limitation. Participants might have given routine responses based on memory instead of honestly reporting their perceptions of the variables based on the overall climate of the current school
year. Some of participants may have completed the survey a maximum of three times. Moreover, it is likely that students enrolled in Grades 3-10 and continued enrollment in the district under study completed more than once during the data collection period. It is also likely that teachers who were employed with the district during the data collection period completed the survey more than once. Each response was treated as independent for calculating the correlation coefficients between variables where the student was the unit of analysis for Research Question 1. In the correlation analysis for Research Question 1, the correlation coefficients may have been inflated.

Another limitation is the possible effects of restriction of range of scores on the correlation between the variables and reading scores where the school was the unit of analysis for Research Question 2. The correlation between two variables is dependent on the range of possible values of the measured variables. Restricting the range of scores reduces the correlation that exists in an unrestricted population. Because each student’s reading score could not be identified, the school level mean scores of the variables were used for Research Question 2. As a result, this procedure restricted the range of the scores of each variable, which might have deflated the correlation coefficients. Further, independent variable weights estimated by using multiple linear regressions are also biased when there is restriction in the range of the dependent variable. Thus, the regression coefficients of the independent variables might have been deflated for Research Question 4.

Another important limitation is that the parameter estimates become very difficult to interpret if there are high correlations among the independent variables. The correlation between the students’ perceptions of identification with school and academic press ($r = .96, p > .001$) in Research Question 3 was very high. The effect of the high correlations on multiple
regression coefficients is called multicollinearity. Multicollinearity changes the coefficients values and increases their variance. This does not negate the overall model from predicting the value of the dependent variables. However, although the typical effect of multicollinearity is reducing the values of the parameter estimates, it can also make a suppression effect. This may cause the coefficient to be correlated in the opposite direction (DeCoster, 2006). One commonly used measure of multicollinearity is the variance inflation factor (VIF). Coefficients with VIFs of 10 or more tend to have severe multicollinearity. In this study, the VIFs were 16.94 for students' perceptions of identification with school and 16.38 for their perceptions of academic press. These variables indicate a serious problem with multicollinearity. Additionally, tolerances range from 0 to 1, where lower values are related to more multicollinearity. Coefficients with tolerances less than .10 tend to have severe multicollinearity (DeCoster, 2006). In this study, the tolerances for both students' perceptions of identification with school and academic press were .06, which also indicate a serious problem with multicollinearity. Therefore, the findings from these two predictors for Research Question 4 should be interpreted with caution.

Delimitations are purposeful restrictions to the study design enforced by the researcher (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). This study used extant data from a single urban school system, including every elementary, middle, and high school in the district. Because the school district is located in an urban setting, generalizations of this study were delimited to urban school districts with similar demographics.

Implications for Future Research

This study extended our understanding of students' perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety. Many prior research studies have analyzed students
perceptions of identification with school (Finn, 1989; Griffin, 2002; Honora, 2003; Osborne, 1997, Voelkl, 1997) and students' perceptions of academic press (Goddard et al., 2000; Hoy et al., 2006, Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006) and safety (Chen, 2007; Cohen, et al., 2009; Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Gottfredson, et al., 2005) independently. Other studies analyzed attributes of students' perceptions of identification with school and academic press (Anderman, 2003; Roeser et al., 2000) and students' perceptions of identification with school and safety (Ludwig & Warren, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2010). This study is unique in that it measures students' perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety in concert with each other. Findings from this study confirm that these variables are positively and significantly correlated. Future research should be conducted to add to the research base on student perceptions of students' perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety.

A major highlight of this study is the findings on the relationship among the primary variables and students' achievement in reading. Students' perceptions of identification with school, students' and teachers' perceptions of academic press, and safety are positively and significantly correlated to reading achievement. However, students' perceptions of safety and teachers' perceptions of academic press show the strongest relationships with students' achievement in reading. Future research should be conducted on the relationships among these variables along with further investigations on the predictive value of students' perceptions of safety and teachers' perceptions of academic press on students' achievement.

Findings of this research suggest that students' perceptions of identification with school, students', teachers', and parents' perceptions of academic press, and safety collectively are significant predictors of students' achievement in reading. This study may be
one of the first to examine the relationships between students’ achievement and students’, teachers’, and parents’ perceptions of academic press, and safety. The results of this study warrant replication of this study in other contexts. In order to confirm the reliability of the study, similar studies should be conducted in other urban school districts, as well as rural and suburban districts in various regions of the United States.

**Implications for Practice**

Federal and state accountability measures have pressured school districts to find the most effective and efficient methods to improve student achievement. School districts tend to implement a cadre of research driven instructional strategies in order to make an impact on student learning. This study results suggest that focus on theoretical measures such as students’ perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety might also yield increased academic performance in schools.

**Students’ Perceptions of Identification with School**

Students’ perceptions of identification with school were found to have a positive relationship between student perceptions of academic press and safety, and students’ achievement in reading. Prior research showed that failure to identify with school resulted in increased early withdrawal from school (Blue & Cook, 2004; Brideland et al., 2006; CDC, 2000; Finn, 1989; Voelkl, 1997), decreased academic performance (Honora 2003; Mitchell, 2008; Osborne, 2001; Steele, 1992; Voelkl, 1997), and increased participation in risky behaviors (Archambault et al., 2009; Blum, 2005; McNeely & Falci, 2004). Decreasing the dropout rate and ensuring that students graduate on time, is a top priority in education today. High school dropouts are an issue that continuously plagues our urban cities (Blue & Cook, 2004, VDOE, 2011). Newspapers have reported stories of “Drop-out Factories”, the Obama
Administration has pledged millions of dollars in competitive grants for schools that increase graduation rates by producing college and career ready students (USDOE, 2010) and policy makers continue to stall increasing federal and state benchmarks for graduation and student achievement hoping to give school districts time to catch up. The question at hand is if present and prior research has shown that students’ perceptions of identification with school have positive impacts on student outcomes, how can policymakers, education leaders and teachers assist in increasing a construct of school climate that is a property of the individual and not the school?

Overall, policy makers can mandate that constructs such as students’ perceptions of identification with school are consistently measured through implementing annual school climate surveys to students and staff. In this new age of education reform, “what gets measured gets done.” By enforcing school climate measures as a mandate of Standards of Quality (SOQ) or Standards of Accreditation (SOA), schools and school districts leaders will put forth the necessary effort and oversight to ensure that healthy school environments are created and maintained.

School district leaders are not involved with daily interactions with students; however, school district leaders are instrumental in setting the tone for the climate in their schools. Creating an open and healthy school climate flows from the top down. School district leaders can establish and maintain open, honest, trusting relationships with principals and principals can model the same for teachers and teachers for students.

The findings of this study showed that students’ perceptions of identification with school and students’ perceptions of academic press are closely related. Students who identify with school also perceive that their teachers have high expectation for them and believe that
they can achieve at higher levels. Therefore, students’ perceptions of identification with
school are related to student and teacher interactions (Mitchell, 2008; Voelkl, 1997).
Teachers must be trained in the attributes of students’ perceptions of identification with
school and how they can positively influence students’ interactions with school.

Academic Press

Students’, teachers’, and parents’ perceptions of academic press were examined for
this study. Findings from the study imply that students’ and teachers’ perceptions of
academic press are related to student achievement. The study confirms claims in early
research that suggest that academic press is imperative to improving student achievement
(Goddard et al., 2000, Hoy et al., 1998, 2006; Kirby & DiPaola, 2009). Policymakers and
school district leaders can support academic press in schools by creating laws and policies
that ensure that school districts have the resources necessary to recruit, hire and retain
effective teachers. School district leaders and principals can support teachers by creating a
school climate and culture where academic excellence is top priority and students who strive
to reach high academic expectations are celebrated and honored.

Policymakers are recognizing the importance of hiring and retaining effective
teachers for schools. A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and
Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is a framework created by the United States Department of
Education (USDOE) that outlines the federal government’s steps in transforming education
reform in the 21st century (USDOE, 2010). One of the main components of the blueprint is
“great teachers and leaders in every school.” Subcategories of the component is ensuring
that the best teachers and leaders are where they are needed most and strengthening teacher
and leader preparation and recruitment (USDOE, 2010).
Ensuring that the best teachers and leaders are where they are needed most is a critical component of protecting academic press, especially for urban school districts. Urban school districts tend to have a higher teacher turnover rate and larger numbers of new inexperienced teachers (Kearney, 2008). In light of the current economic crisis in education, many school districts have opted to decrease or even eliminate out of state recruitment programs. School districts should strive to build or improve existing relationships between neighboring colleges and universities. School districts can work side by side with neighboring teacher preparation programs at the university to provide job opportunities for students. An urban Midwest school district implemented a “Grow Your Own” program at the high school level (Kearney, 2008). The program identified and supported students interested in the teaching profession. The district also offered on the spot employment for prospective candidates during career fairs at nearby universities. The district experienced substantial gains in the number of minority teachers hired and were able to increase retention rates as a result of their innovative recruitment techniques (Kearney, 2008).

School leaders should create enabling structures that provides support instead of roadblocks and allow for problem solving and shared decision making instead of punishing failure (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). School leaders and teachers must work collectively to provide a nurturing environment that will facilitate increased student achievement. Belief and actions from individual teacher to the collective can promote or hinder academic press. Individually teachers can create classroom environments in which academic success and progress is celebrated. Traditionally, students who excel academically receive accolades through based on above average grades through honor roll assemblies or honor society inductions. Teachers can create opportunities for all students to be honored through
celebrating student's academic progress. Celebration of progress in addition to success will allow all students to experience academic success.

Safety

Students', teachers', and parents' perceptions of safety were examined for this study. The strongest relationship between the primary variables and reading achievement were within students' perceptions of safety. Unsafe schools have multiple consequences for students including increase in personality disorders (Frey, Ruchkin, Martin, & Schwab-Stone, 2009) negative perceptions of school climate (Brand, Felner, Seitsinger, & Burns, Bolton, 2008; Chen, 2007; Chen & Weikart, 2008), and decreased student achievement (Chen, 2007; Ludwig & Warren, 2009; Mitchell et al, 2010). Findings from this study suggest that policymakers, school districts and school leaders must work to improve school safety in order to foster positive student achievement.

Successful, safe, and healthy students are a component of the Reauthorization of ESEA (2010). The legislation will be pushing for states and local school districts to use data to improve students' safety, health and well-being. The Act also provides for competitive grants for districts to collaborate with the community to design programs that improve academic and developmental outcomes for students. Legislation will assist in mandating uniform standards for safe and drug free schools. However, mandates without funding to ensure full implementation adds an added burden to an ever-increasing school budget deficit. It will be detrimental to the safety and protection of students and staff to cut monies from programs or personnel that promote school safety.

Research suggests that physical characteristics, school discipline, and relationships are attributes that students and teachers perceive as necessary elements that constitute safe
schools (Bosworth et al., 2010). Students and teachers specifically mentioned the presence of cameras, locked doors and school resource officers as physical characteristics that increased their perceptions of school safety (Bosworth et al., 2010). Schools and school districts should invest in updated security systems and protect school resource officers from common reductions in force due to budgetary constraints.

Schools that enforce clear and consistent disciplinary practices result in increased student and teacher perceptions of safety (Bosworth et al., 2010). Student code of conduct and related consequences for code violations are typically clear and communicated to students, parents, and staff members in a myriad of ways. However, the inconsistent enforcement of disciplinary infractions from teachers and administrators lead to negative perceptions of safety from students and teachers. Teachers and administrators must strive to apply fair consequences for student misbehavior.

Lastly, urban schools face challenges that may be minimal or even non-existent in some rural and suburban areas. In some urban areas, violence or disorder from the community spills over into the schools. Urban schoolteachers may perceive their school as unsafe when in actuality; incidents that occur outside of school skew their perception of safety. Some teachers are more afraid of the outside environment than the students that come from those environments. Studies suggest that positive relationships among students, staff, parents, and community members are intricate components of increased perceptions of safety (Bosworth et al., 2010; Casella, 2001; Perkins, 2008). Teachers who perceive their school as safe, despite problems that occur outside of school may have made a connection to their school by building positive relationships with students, staff, and community members.
Final Thoughts

This study is one of the first to tell the story of urban schools through the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents. Findings from this study confirm that there are relationships between students’ perceptions of identification with school, and students’, and teachers’ perceptions of academic press, and safety. Findings from this study also confirm that students’ perceptions of identification with school and students’, teachers’, and parents’ perceptions of academic press, and safety combined predict students’ achievement in reading. Schools that are able to provide environments where students are accepted, respected and included, teachers set high expectations and believe that students can attain them and students, teachers and parents perceive their school is safe, student achievement will rise. In an era of accountability and education reform, this study provides a means of increasing academic performance beyond curriculum and instruction. Education leaders and researchers must continue to measure students’ perceptions of identification with school, academic press, and safety and use its results to improve school environments.


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Appendix A

Survey Instructions for Students:

Teacher information- Your homeroom was selected at random to participate in the annual District Stakeholder Survey. Please distribute the surveys to students in your homeroom and return all forms to your representative when completed. Special education students may complete the survey if they are included in your homeroom and are capable of completing the survey.

Please have students fill in their grade. If a student has no opinion on a question, they should leave it blank. Please share with the students that the survey is voluntary in nature and the confidentiality of the responses will be protected.

Any questions you may have should be directed to the Department of Strategic Evaluation, Assessment and Support at 628-3836.
Appendix B

Survey Instructions for Administering School Representative- Teacher Surveys:

Confidentiality of responses is critical. The teacher survey is to be administered to full-time teachers and other full-time faculty or certified educators working in school— all persons who have a teacher contract. Included: teachers (classroom, special ed., etc) or other professional faculty (librarian, counselors). Excluded: principal, assistant principals, teacher aids, health care, transportation or security employees, and classified employees (all).

Please distribute the surveys to the professional faculty as described above. When finished, the teachers should return the survey to the designated representative. Please have the professional staff fill in their school code number. If a teacher has no opinion on a question, they should leave it blank. Please share with the teachers that the survey is voluntary in nature and the confidentiality of the responses will be protected. Please let the teachers know that any question or concerns that cannot be sufficiently addressed by the school representative can be addressed by the Department of Strategic Evaluation, Assessment and Support at 628-3836.
Appendix C

Survey Instructions for Parents:

As part of our improvement efforts, American Public Schools† would like to know your opinions about your child’s school and education. Please complete this survey and mail it back within one week in the envelope provided. Survey results will be summarized by schools for reporting purposes, and individual surveys will be held confidential.
Appendix D

Student Perception Subscales

Student Identification with School

5. I feel proud of being part of my school.

7. School is one of my favorite places to be.

8. School is more important than most people think.

9. There are adults at school who are interested in me.

10. Most of the things we learn in school are worthless.

12. Going to school is a waste of time.

27. I enjoy coming to school.

28. I feel like I am a part of my school.

Academic Press

2. Student try hard to improve.

3. This school is serious about learning.

4. Students work hard to get good grades.

15. My teachers believe that I can learn.

16. Good grades are recognized.

18. I am responsible for what I learn.

19. My teachers have prepared me for the next grade and the future.

25. If I don’t understand something, the teacher will work with me until I get it.

26. I can get extra help at school, if needed.

33. My teachers keep me informed about my progress.
Safety

22. Gangs are a problem at my school.

34. I feel safe inside the school.

35. I feel safe outside and around the school.

36. I have been threatened or bullied.

37. I stay home sometimes because I don’t feel safe at school.

40. Stealing is a problem in this school.

44. Students fight a lot.

46. Students are picked on or teased.
Appendix E

Teacher Perception Subscales

Academic Press

D5. The school sets high standards for academic performance.

D6. Students respect others who get good grades.

D14. Academic achievement is recognized and acknowledged by the school.

D15. Students try hard to improve on previous work.

D21. The learning environment is orderly and serious.

D22. Students seek extra work so they can get good grades.

Safety

C1. Physical conflicts among students (fighting)

C2. Gang activity

C3. Disorder in classrooms

C4. Disorder in hallways

C5. Threats of violence towards teachers

C6. Students threatening other students

C7. Students intimidating other students

C8. Bullying

C9. Students in this school fear others students

C10. Students in this school make fun of other students
Appendix F

Parent Perception Subscales

Academic Press

1. The school sets high standards for academic performance.
2. The school has done a good job teaching my child how to read.
3. Academic achievement is recognized and acknowledged by the school.
6. Teachers relate class work to my child’s current world, future careers.
9. I am satisfied with the overall instruction my child has received at this school.
24. This school has high standards for all.
31. Students try hard to improve their schoolwork.

Safety

4. The learning environment is orderly.
27. I don’t have to worry about my child when he/she is at school.
41. My child is safe at school.
42. The school’s administration places priority on an orderly, safe and secure learning environment.
43. Student discipline is enforced fairly and consistently.
46. Bullying is a problem at my child’s school.
47. My child is safe outside of school.
49. The school handles discipline problems quickly.
50. Gangs are a problem at my child’s school