



# School Safety: Examining High School Student Perspectives on School Climate

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## Abstract

Recent acts of violence have motivated school administrators to provide safe environments for learners. Research suggests that feelings of safety are linked to mental health and academic outcomes. This study examines gender differences of high school student perceptions of climate on feelings of safety strategies. The findings will provide practitioners with guidelines as to how to improve school safety strategies by addressing school climate for students at both individual and school-wide levels.

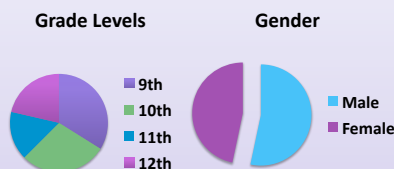
## Literature Review

- School climate includes people's experiences, norms, interpersonal relationships, and organizational structures of school environment (National School Climate Council, 2007).
- School safety refers to schools or programs in which students are safe from violence, bullying, harassment, and substance use (Safe Supporting, n.d.).
- It is important to consider elements that promote positive school climate, as this has been found to foster youth development and learning necessary for a productive, satisfying life (National School Climate Council, 2007).
- Research suggests that school climate has a strong impact on school violence and prevention (Greene, 2005).
- When students feel safe and attached, they are more likely to turn away from harmful influences and experience greater academic success (Rodney et al., 2005).
- Students make up a large portion of the school population; therefore it is essential to further examine students' perceptions of school safety, climate, and safety strategies (Booren et al., 2010, p. 172).

## Method

- 168 High School students from a school in southeastern Wisconsin were surveyed using components of the Safe and Responsive Schools (SRS) Survey and the Indicators of Preferences for School Safety (IPSS) Survey.

### Demographic data of high school participants:



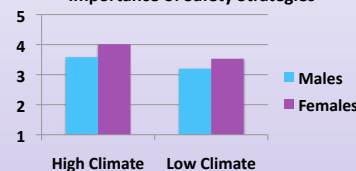
- The Connection/Climate ( $\alpha=.94$ ) component of the SRS was used as a means to assess the connection students feel within their school and their perception of the responsiveness of the school environment (Skiba et al., 2006).
- The Rule Enforcement ( $\alpha=.81$ ) and Counseling ( $\alpha=.72$ ) portions of the IPSS were used in order to assess the perceived importance of safety strategies that could be used in schools (Booren & Handy, 2009). These components were chosen as they were projected to possess the most meaningful outcomes for school mental health providers.
- An ANOVA was computed with the independent variables of male/female and high/low climate (as assessed by a median-split on the SRS survey) and the dependent variable of safety composed of rule enforcement and counseling from the original IPSS survey.

Scale	Mean	SD	Min	Max	$\alpha$
Climate	3.8	.57	1.88	5.00	.84
Safety	3.57	.69	1.40	5.00	.84

## Results

- The ANOVA revealed a significant main effect between gender on perceived importance of safety strategies:  $F(1,143) = 13.20, p < .05, \eta^2 = .08$ .
- In addition, there was a significant main effect of high and low climate perceptions on perceived importance of safety strategies:  $F(1,143) = 16.62, p < .05, \eta^2 = .10$ .
- There was no interaction effect between gender and climate on perceived importance of safety strategies:  $F(1, 143) = .22, p > .05, \eta^2 = .00$ .

### Perceptions of Climate on Perceived Importance of Safety Strategies



### Qualitative Data Top Answers

- **Q1: If you could add one thing that would help you feel safer at school, what would it be?:**
  1. Nothing; this school is already safe (N=53)
  2. Increased adult supervision/monitoring (N=15)
  3. Stop/address bullying (N=8)
- **Q2: If a new student were to come to school, what would you tell them is your favorite thing about your school?:**
  1. Sports, clubs, activities, and other extra-curricular programs/activities (N=43)
  2. The teachers (N=36)
  3. The people at school (N=34)
- **Q3: On a rating scale from 1 to 10 (1=cold and distant, 10=warm and inviting), how would you rate the overall climate of your school? What is one thing you would like to change or see done to move this school up one level on the rating scale?**
  - Mean rating of climate:  $M=7.29 (SD=.78)$
  - Suggestions to improve: teacher-student relationships, address cliques, and provide mentoring relationships

## Discussion and Implications

### Gender on Safety

- Results revealed that males indicated lower perceptions of climate and less important feelings of safety strategies than female students.

### Climate on Safety

- Students who indicated greater perceptions of school climate rated the importance of safety strategies as higher than students who had lower perceptions of positive school climate.

### Implications for School Psychologists

- School psychologists can help to improve school safety interventions by addressing school climate and connectedness for students at both individual and school-wide levels. This can be done through PBIS efforts, early warning systems, peer mediation, link crews, clubs, improving the relationship between teachers and students, etc.
- In particular, school psychologists should be more aware of disciplinary and counseling tactics that are used to ensure feelings of connectedness with male students.

## References

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## Acknowledgements

- University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Graduate Studies Office for support of this research project.
- Staff and students at Pewaukee High School in Pewaukee, WI for their participation in this study.