Chronic Absenteeism in Virginia High Schools: Teachers' Perceptions of School Leaders'

Influence on School Climate and the Resulting Influence on Student Attendance

A Capstone Project

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Doctor of Education

by

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Executive Summary

Chronic absenteeism is a widespread issue in the Commonwealth of Virginia and across the nation (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Chronically absent students miss ten percent or more of the school year, which equates to a student missing nearly a month or more of school during the course of a year. Consequently, chronically absent students miss out on foundational learning opportunities, hindering their academic growth (Chang et al., 2018). Even though the causes of chronic absenteeism are not fully understood (U.S. Department of Education, 2019), school climate has been identified as a factor that influences student attendance (Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Sahin et al., 2016; Van Eck et al., 2017) and school leaders play an essential role in shaping school climate (Hollingworth et al., 2018; MacNeil et al., 2009).

Researchers have suggested that the relationship between school climate and student attendance is well-suited for more in-depth analysis (Chang et al., 2018). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine school leaders' influence on school climate and the subsequent influence on student attendance. Specifically, this capstone project focuses on the first three domains of the Ontario Leadership Framework: setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the organization to support desired practices (Leithwood, 2012) in relation to high school student attendance. In addition, this study explored the influence of school leaders on school climate and the resulting influence on high school student attendance.

For this capstone project, a latent variable regression analysis was employed to understand the relationship between school leaders and school climate and the influence on student attendance. School leaders' setting directions, building relationships and developing

people, developing the organization to support desired practices, and influencing a positive school climate were not directly observable and were considered unobserved entities, indicating their latent nature. The latent variables for this capstone were operationalized by teachers' responses to the 2019 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions. High school student attendance was observable and considered the dependent variable.

The findings from the study provide insight into the school leader practices that influence student attendance. The findings suggest that when school leaders develop the organization to support desired practices and influence a positive school climate, there is a slight reduction in student absenteeism. Even though the decrease in student absenteeism was minimal, the study indicated a strong relationship between school leaders' ability to develop the organization to support desired practices and influence a positive school climate, resulting in improved student attendance. Based on the findings, I have identified policy and practice recommendations to improve student attendance. The policy recommendations for improving student attendance are as follows: fostering a supportive and inclusive school climate, building a collaborative culture, and collaborating with community partners.   The practice recommendations include actively involving students in decision-making, establishing a professional learning community, and engaging community members to support students at risk of excessive absences.

Keywords: chronic absenteeism, high school, school climate, school leaders, student attendance, latent variable regression analysis

Capstone Approval Form

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This doctoral capstone has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education and Human Development in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Approved Title of Doctoral Capstone:

Chronic Absenteeism in Virginia High Schools: Teachers' Perceptions of School Leaders' Influence on School Climate and the Resulting Influence on Student Attendance

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Dedication

I dedicate this capstone to my family, who have been a constant source of love, support, and encouragement throughout this academic journey. Without their unwavering belief in me and their endless sacrifices, I would not have been able to reach this milestone in my education. With all my love and gratitude.

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I am forever grateful to each and every individual who helped shape this capstone project. This journey has been extraordinary, and I am honored to have shared it with such remarkable individuals.

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Chapter One: Introduction

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2019), education is the great equalizer.

But how can education be the great equalizer when one out of six students miss 10 percent or

more of the school year? The educational system was established on the assumption that

students will attend school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012) as children need to be present in the

classroom to gain from what is offered at school (Chang et al., 2018). Consistently attending

school ensures children develop a solid underpinning for foundational and subsequent learning.

In the United States, over seven million students, or approximately one in six students, missed

15 or more days of school during the 2016-2017 school year (U.S. Department of Education,

2019).

The United States Department of Education (2019) has identified chronic absenteeism

as a hidden educational crisis. Before December 2015, states and districts relied on

inconsistent metrics, including average daily attendance, to gauge student attendance, which

masks or hides the number of students missing a significant amount of school. The definition of

chronic absenteeism varies from state to state with established attendance thresholds ranging

from students missing 15 to 21 days of school each year (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). The Virginia

Department of Education (2019) defines chronic absenteeism as a student missing ten percent

or more of the school year, regardless of the reason. Consequently, in Virginia, chronic

absenteeism equates to a student missing nearly a month or more of school during the course

of a year. Over the past decade, chronic absenteeism has gone from being an undetected issue

to a metric that provides every school in the nation with essential data on how many students

are missing a significant number of days and jeopardizing their academic success (Chang et al., 2018).

Chronic absenteeism is used as an indicator of school quality across the nation (Chang et al., 2018). Combined with academic achievement and graduation rates, chronic absenteeism rates serve as a crucial indicator of school quality in federal education policy (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). In December 2015, the inclusion of chronic absenteeism in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was a defining moment that made chronic absence an integral component of school accountability (Chang et al., 2018). In addition, the Virginia Department of Education heightened its focus on student attendance by including chronic absenteeism as a measure connected with school quality as part of the Standards of Accreditation starting with the 2018-2019 school year (Virginia Department of Education, 2019).

Problem of Practice

Even though the causes of chronic absenteeism are not fully understood (U.S. Department of Education, 2019), school climate stands out in chronic absenteeism studies as a common factor of school-related matters that influence student attendance (Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Sahin et al., 2016; Van Eck et al., 2017). School leaders play an essential role in shaping school climate (Hollingworth et al., 2018; MacNeil et al., 2009). Therefore, this capstone explored teachers' perceptions of school leaders' influence on school climate and the resulting influence on high school student attendance in Virginia. Specifically, this study examined teachers' perceptions of school leaders' influence on school climate and student attendance among 308 high schools in Virginia, drawing on data from the 2019 Virginia School Survey of

Climate and Working Conditions Teacher Survey and the 2018-2019 high school attendance

data available from the Virginia Department of Education School Quality Profile.

The following sections of this chapter preview the literature review in Chapter 2 and

introduce research related to chronic absenteeism, school climate, and school leadership. This

preview highlights the impact of student attendance and emphasizes the rate of chronic

absenteeism in Virginia high schools. Additionally, I discuss the purpose and significance of the

study and offer an overview of the research design, including a summary of the hypotheses.

Finally, I present the study's delimitations, limitations, and the researcher's role.

Preview of the Literature

Chronic Absenteeism

A wide range of research has found that students who face the most significant

challenges and need the most educational support are often chronically absent from school

(U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Chronic absenteeism is not a male or female issue or an

urban or rural issue; chronic absenteeism occurs across gender and geographic location

(Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). A student's lack of commitment and disengagement from school

negatively affects student attendance (Chang & Romero, 2008). Chronic absenteeism results in

lost instructional time, which may cause chronically absent students to fall behind (Virginia

Department of Education, 2019). When students miss school, they miss valuable learning

experiences and opportunities to develop relationships that can impact their school experience

(Gottfried, 2014; London et al., 2016). Broad consensus in the research exists around the

finding that students with extended absences risk serious academic consequences (Chang &

Romero, 2008). The harmful impact of chronic absenteeism on student success in school is

typically increased because students who are chronically absent for one year are often

chronically absent for multiple years (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Frequent absenteeism may have

implications of greater concern because chronic absenteeism is considered a predictor of

academic failure and leads to other risk factors (Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016).

Research has found that excessive absenteeism in high school affects not only initial

achievement levels in ninth grade but also upper-grade performance (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

In high school, more than one out of every five students, or 20 percent, are chronically absent,

compared to 14 percent of students in middle school (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Chronic absenteeism rises in middle school and continues to increase through the twelfth

grade, with seniors often having the highest absenteeism rate (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

According to the Virginia School Quality Profile, during the 2017-2018 school year, 15 percent

or more of high school students were chronically absent in 176 of the 329 high schools in

Virginia (Virginia Department of Education, 2021). In other words, in over half of Virginia's high

schools, 15 percent of the student population was chronically absent during the 2017-2018

school year. Further, in 51 high schools in Virginia, 25 percent or more of the student

population was chronically absent. This rate of absenteeism suggests that many high school

students are unable to fully realize the benefits of school.

School climate is one of the key factors highlighted in research as essential for school

improvement (Astor et al., 2002; Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016; MacNeil et al., 2009; U.S.

Department of Education Office of Safe and Healthy Students, 2017) and may play a significant

role in improving student attendance (Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Sahin et al., 2016; Van Eck et al.,

2017). Researchers have claimed that critical aspects of school climate, like student

connectedness with school and engagement in school activities, may be important

determinants of student attendance (Chen & Weikart, 2008; Henry & Huizinga, 2007). School

climate improvement strategies appear integral for improving students' school experience and

increasing school attendance (Van Eck et al., 2017).

School Climate

The U. S. Department of Education Office of Safe and Healthy Students (2017) suggests

that when schools focus on improving school climate, students are more likely to demonstrate

positive behaviors, which include measurable improvements in student attendance (U.S.

Department of Education, 2019). In the United States, there is a growing interest in school

reform and awareness that school improvement strategies promote safer and more supportive

public schools (Thapa et al., 2012). Educators and researchers have increasingly recognized the

significance of school climate, how students experience school, and the impact on school

improvement (National School Climate Council, 2007). Accordingly, in 2015, the

reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act recommended school climate

as a non-academic measure that state education agencies incorporated into their school

accountability systems (Chang et al., 2018). In 2018, the Virginia Department of Education

selected chronic absenteeism as the indicator of school climate in the accountability and school

improvement system (Virginia Department of Education, 2019).

There is often confusion about the meaning of school culture and school climate

(Lumby, 2012) as both terms are complex, and neither is clearly defined (Hoy, 1990; Schoen &

Teddlie, 2008; Van Houtte, 2005; Van Houtte & Van Maele, 2011). As described by Denison

(1996), culture and climate are distinct phenomena but have been used interchangeably as

some culture and climate studies have become essentially indistinguishable from each other.

Both terms, school climate and school culture, have provided the framework for discussions on

school effectiveness (Hoy, 1990). Historically, culture (shared norms) studies are viewed from

an anthropological perspective and use qualitative research methods to understand the unique

aspects of individual social settings and the evolution of social systems over time (Denison,

1996). Climate (shared perceptions) studies are viewed from a psychological perspective that

historically required quantitative research methods to understand organizational systems'

impact on groups and individuals. According to MacNeil et al. (2009), climate is the preferred

method when measuring the health of an organization. Therefore, for the purpose of this

capstone project, the focus is on school climate.

School climate is a complex and multi-dimensional construct that reflects the

contemporary tone and feel of the school, the perceptions of the relationships, and the

leadership practices (Kearney, 2008; National School Climate Council, 2007). Evidence suggests

that school climate shapes the experience of school life and includes the school's beliefs and

interactions (Aldridge et al., 2018; Davis & Warner, 2018). In essence, climate reflects the

personality of the school (Maxwell & Thomas, 1991; Van Houtte, 2005), indicating how

students, staff, and the community feel about each other and their connection with the school

(National School Climate Council, 2007). A positive school climate supports the social,

emotional, and physical safety of students and staff and fosters respectful, trusting, and caring

relationships (U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Healthy Students, 2016).

Schools and districts that focus on improving school climate are more likely to have

students engage in the curriculum, achieve academically, develop positive relationships, and

are less likely to exhibit problem behaviors (U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe and

Healthy Students, 2016) like absenteeism. Numerous researchers have recognized that

focusing on school climate is necessary for school improvement (Astor et al., 2002; Demir &

Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016; MacNeil et al., 2009; U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe

and Healthy Students, 2017) and school climate reflects staff and student's perception of the

school environment, which hinges upon school culture. A body of research suggests school

leaders are crucial to shaping the school culture by communicating core values, observing

rituals and traditions, frequently speaking of the mission, and celebrating staff and students'

accomplishments (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Hollingworth et al., 2018; Louis & Lee, 2016;

Peterson & Deal, 1998). School leaders create an effective school environment by building

trusting relationships to generate buy-in for implementing change initiatives (Louis, 2006).

When school leaders understand their influence on school climate, they are better equipped to

promote a stable and nurturing environment that supports student success (Hollingworth et al.,

2018).

School Leaders

While other school factors contribute to the climate of a school, leadership is the

catalyst (Hallinger & Heck, 2010a; Leithwood et al., 2004; Meek, 1988). According to Leithwood

(2012), leadership is the exercise of influence on the school community toward the

identification and achievement of the school's vision and goals. School leaders equipped to

handle a complex, changing environment can implement the reforms that lead to considerable

school improvement (Louis, 2006). Research has established that school leaders are pivotal in

developing excellent schools, fostering exceptional teaching, and ultimately enhancing student

achievement and well-being (Leithwood, 2012). Principals who promote and support clear

goals for the school that are accepted and endorsed by the staff reflect a positive impact on the

school climate (MacNeil et al., 2009).

It is the principal's responsibility to shape the school's climate to improve the focus of

the school and enhance the environment (MacNeil et al., 2009). Effective school leadership has

emerged from research as one of the crucial factors needed to enhance and sustain school-

wide improvement (Leithwood, 2012). Shaping school climate is one of the key facets of overall

school improvement for which leaders must attend. Effective school leadership practices that

shape school climate generally parallel those for school improvement. An effective leader can

be responsive to the diverse nature of the community and execute the most routine tasks to

nudge their organizations toward the school's purpose. In 2003, Hallinger reported that

leadership practices must focus on building the organization to improve student outcomes

(Hallinger, 2003). The Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) is an integrated model designed as

a roadmap for school leaders to increase their leadership potential to build the organization to

meet the educational goals of the school and achieve results (Leithwood, 2012).

OLF was developed to cultivate and sustain high-quality school leadership to build

organizational context to support positive student outcomes (Leithwood, 2012). Considerable

research evidence recognizes the responsibility school leaders have in connecting school

climate and school improvement (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Hollingworth et al., 2018;

Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Louis & Lee, 2016; MacNeil et al., 2009). The leadership framework

provides essential insights into the practices and actions that describe effective leaders. OLF

encompasses five domains, each including two to six specific practices (Leithwood, 2012). The

five domains are as follows:

- Setting Directions

- Building Relationships and Developing People

- Developing the Organization to Sustain Desired Practices

- Improving the Instructional Program

- Securing Accountability

Specifically, for this capstone project, the focus is on the first three domains of the OLF,

which are setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the

organization to sustain desired practices. These three domains are fundamental to creating

organizational conditions to support improvement efforts (Leithwood et al., 2004). Researchers

for decades have claimed that school leaders play an integral role in bridging school climate and

school improvement (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Hollingworth et al., 2018; Leithwood &

Jantzi, 1990; Louis & Lee, 2016; MacNeil et al., 2009). The three domains of OLF included in this

research are referenced in literature on school climate as necessary components for school

improvement. As outlined earlier, research literature suggests that focusing on school climate

is vital for school improvement (Astor et al., 2002; Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016; MacNeil

et al., 2009; U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe and Healthy Students, 2017) and

school leaders are crucial to shaping the school climate (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015;

Hollingworth et al., 2018; Louis & Lee, 2016). Each of the three domains has a number of

specific practices associated with it. These three domains capture the efforts of successful

leaders to improve the quality of schools by focusing on improving the school climate to support student success (Leithwood, 2012).

The survey instrument used for this capstone includes a series of questions that align with the three leadership domains. Through an analysis of the survey responses, this research aimed to tease out how these leadership domains influenced school climate. By focusing on the selected leadership domains, this study sought to enhance our understanding of school leaders' influence on school climate and the subsequent influence on student attendance.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Schools are complex systems (Leithwood, 1992), and chronic absenteeism is a widespread issue in many schools and is harmful to student success (Gottfried, 2014). This study aimed to identify the influence of school leaders on shaping school climate and the positive or negative influence on school improvement, specifically student attendance. Based on research, a positive school climate is essential for effectively implementing a change initiative, and the principal plays a critical role in shaping the school's climate (MacNeil et al., 2009). The prime mover of change in a school is the school leader, who can transform the current climate and improve student outcomes (Lakomski, 2001).

Research shows that school leaders who create a positive school climate focused on student engagement and building positive relationships improve student connectedness to school and, by extension, increase student attendance (Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016). Therefore, this quantitative capstone explored the relationship between school leaders, school climate, and the resulting influence on student attendance in Virginia. This study can be used to inform future research on how school climate affects student attendance and the role school

leaders play in shaping school climate. Further, the information garnered from this study can be used to assist schools in establishing strategies to improve student attendance.

Preview of Research Design

For this capstone, I performed a secondary analysis of statewide data from the 2019 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions Teacher Survey and 2018-2019 high school student attendance data available from the Virginia Department of Education School Quality Profile. This study examined how teachers' perceptions of school leaders, setting directions, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization to support desired practices, and influencing a positive school climate, influenced the dependent variable of student attendance using a quantitative approach to analyze the data. More specifically, this study employed a latent variable regression analysis to understand the relationship between teachers' perceptions of school leaders and the positive or negative influence on student attendance. A latent variable is a variable that cannot be observed but can be detected by its effects on variables that are observable (Wagner et al., 2010). Regression analysis is a statistical method used to examine the relationship between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables (Kline, 2015). The latent variable for this capstone was school leaders' influence on school climate and the dependent variable was student attendance. Researchers commonly use regression analysis to understand and analyze relationships between dependent and independent variables and make predictions based on those relationships.

This research used latent variable regression analysis to investigate teachers' perceptions of school leaders' influence on school climate and the resulting influence on

student attendance for 308 high schools with complete data sets out of 329 high schools in Virginia. Specifically, school leaders' influence on school climate was not directly observable and was considered an unobserved entity for this study, indicating its latent nature. Teacher responses to the 2019 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions Teacher Survey revealed the latent variable of school leaders' influence on school climate. For this study, student attendance was observable and considered the dependent variable. Teachers' perspectives of school leaders' ability to set directions, build relationships and develop people, develop the organization to sustain desired practices, and influence a positive school climate were expected to influence high school students' attendance.

The 2018-2019 attendance data utilized for this capstone is publicly available through the Virginia Department of Education School Quality Profile (Virginia Department of Education, 2021). The 2019 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions Teacher Survey was used to operationalize school climate. The 2019 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions Teacher Survey was administered by the Virginia Department of Education and the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (Virginia Department of Education, 2020).

Hypotheses

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between school leaders, school climate, and the resulting influence on student attendance, I conducted a quantitative study using latent variable regression analysis to examine teachers' perceptions of school leaders' influence on school climate and the resulting influence on student attendance. The first three hypotheses were developed to correspond with the first three OLF domains of

setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the organization to sustain desired practices.

Questions from the 2019 School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions Teacher Survey were used to operationalize the school leaders' setting directions, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization to sustain desired practices, and influencing a positive school climate. The hypotheses for this capstone project focused on teachers' perceptions of school leaders' influence on school climate and the subsequent influence on student attendance. Accordingly, the hypotheses are set below.

Hypothesis 1: Teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' setting directions for the school positively influence high school student attendance.

Hypothesis 2: Teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' building relationships and developing people positively influence high school student attendance.

Hypothesis 3: Teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices positively influence high school student attendance.

Hypothesis 4: Teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate positively influence student attendance.

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Delimitations and Limitations

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Delimitations

A conscious decision was made to analyze school climate data through a statewide climate survey. The justification for focusing on chronic absenteeism at the high school level was due to the considerable number of students chronically absent in high school. In addition, research studies indicate chronic absenteeism is more significant at high school than at the

elementary and middle school levels (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Furthermore, the decision was made to focus this study on three of the five school-level leadership domains from the OLF. The three school-level leadership domains included in this study are setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the organization to support desired practices. These three leadership domains are referenced in research literature on school climate as necessary components for school improvement and correspond to questions on the survey utilized for this study.

Finally, the decision was made to use latent variable regression analysis instead of another methodological approach. Regression analysis was used to examine and predict the impact of changes on the independent variable, school leaders' influence on school climate, on the dependent variable, student attendance. Based on this information, latent variable regression analysis provided the appropriate methodological approach to test the hypotheses for this study. The findings from this study provide schools with insights into how teachers' perceptions of school leaders' influencing school climate relate to student attendance.

Limitations

The decision to utilize quantitative school climate data and not qualitative individual school or division data limits the applicability of the data to individual schools, as the data may not reflect a particular school or division. A more intensive study of the culture and climate of a school through qualitative analysis may provide a more in-depth understanding of chronic absenteeism. Even though this capstone did not include a qualitative component, the latent variable regression analysis approach provides valuable information on how school leaders and school climate influence student attendance.

The decision to use the statewide administered survey limits the opportunity to modify questions to hone in on specific practices for an individual school or school system. Additionally, only three of the five OLF leadership practices were included in this study. The two leadership practices not included in this study were improving the instructional program and securing accountability. These two practices are not directly linked to specific questions on the survey selected for this study. Future studies on school leaders, school climate, and student attendance may benefit from understanding how the leadership practices of improving the instructional program and securing accountability link to student attendance. Further, this study focused on teachers' perceptions of school leaders' influence on school climate. This study did not address the impact of other stakeholders (teachers, school staff, students, and parents) on school climate. Even though this study focused on school leaders, it is essential to recognize that multiple stakeholders contribute to the school climate (Van Eck et al., 2017).

Finally, the results of this study may not apply to elementary and middle schools since the focus of this study was on chronic absenteeism at the high school level. Chronic absenteeism rises in middle school and continues to increase through the twelfth grade (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). As students move into high school, the likelihood of chronic absenteeism becomes greater, affecting not only initial achievement levels in ninth grade but also upper-grade performance. Investigating teachers' perceptions of school leaders' influence on school climate and the resulting influence on student attendance at the high school level helps inform practices for the students who miss school the most.

Role of the Researcher

Researcher Background

At the beginning of this research project, I was the assistant superintendent for administration for a medium-sized rural school division in Virginia. One of my responsibilities as assistant superintendent was regularly reporting school attendance to the superintendent, School Board, and the Virginia Department of Education. When I began my position as assistant superintendent, school divisions across Virginia focused on average daily attendance. Average daily attendance is the total number of days of student attendance divided by the total number of days in the school year (Virginia Department of Education, 2019). School systems were encouraged to maintain a 95 percent average daily attendance for each school in the division. In 2015, the Virginia Department of Education and the local school system started to focus on chronic absenteeism, and it became apparent that there were a significant number of students chronically absent. Even though many of the schools in the division had high average daily attendance, when the focus shifted to chronic absenteeism, we found a significant number of students who were chronically absent across the division. In 2015, the school system implemented initiatives to improve student attendance, specifically chronic absenteeism.

While researching information for this study, I was appointed the superintendent of another medium-sized rural school division. As a school division superintendent in Virginia, my responsibility has increased, and now I am responsible for ensuring all schools in the division meet accreditation standards, and chronic absenteeism is a measure for accreditation. Chronic absenteeism is a significant challenge for many high schools in Virginia, and it is a challenge for the high schools in the division for which I am the superintendent.

Influence of the Researcher

Since this quantitative research study focused on publicly available data, my influence on the study was marginal. The survey selected for this study was completed in the spring of 2019, the data has been disaggregated, and the reports have been published. Additionally, the attendance data for the high schools was collected by the Virginia Department of Education and has been posted to the Virginia Department of Education School Quality Profile.

Summary

Chronic absenteeism is a significant issue in schools nationwide (U.S. Department of Education, 2019), and it impacts students' academic success (Chang & Romero, 2008). The education system counts on students to attend school to learn what is being taught (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Consistently attending school is vital to ensuring students develop the foundational skills to be successful in subsequent learning (Chang et al., 2018). If education is the great equalizer (U.S. Department of Education, 2019), then children need to be present in the classroom to gain from what is offered at school (Chang et al., 2018).

It is well established that focusing on school climate is necessary for school improvement (Astor et al., 2002; Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016; MacNeil et al., 2009), including improving student attendance (Gottfried, 2014; Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Sahin et al., 2016; Van Eck et al., 2017). Leaders who create a positive school environment focused on student engagement and building positive relationships improve student connectedness to school and, by extension, increase student attendance (Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016). Therefore, this capstone aimed to explore the relationship between school leaders, school climate, and the resulting influence on student attendance.

Definition of Key Terms

Below are the definitions for the key terms used throughout this capstone project to ensure understanding of these terms.

Accreditation: The accountability system in Virginia used to evaluate school performance incorporating student outcome data in the indicator areas of English, Math, Science, Chronic Absenteeism, Graduation Rates, and Dropout Rates (Virginia Department of Education, 2022).

Average Daily Attendance: Average daily attendance is the total number of days of student attendance divided by the total number of days in the regular school year (Virginia Department of Education, 2019).

Chronic Absenteeism - The Virginia Department of Education (2019) defines chronic absenteeism as a student missing ten percent or more of the school year regardless of the reason.

Comparative Fit Index (CFI) – Comparative fit index is a commonly used fit index in structural equation modeling that assesses the fit of a proposed model to the observed data (Kline, 2015).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) – ESSA was signed into law by President Obama on December 10, 2015. ESSA provides states, districts, and schools with an opportunity to create greater equity for students in the education establishment and accelerate efforts to support historically underserved students (Kostyo et al., 2018).

Latent Variable – A latent variable is a variable that cannot be observed but can be detected by its effects on variables that are observable (Wagner et al., 2010).

Latent Variable Regression Analysis – Latent variable regression analysis is a statistical technique that examines the relationships between latent variables and observed variables (Kline, 2015).

Leadership – Leadership is the exercise of influence on the school community toward the identification and achievement of the school's vision and goals (Leithwood, 2012).

Measurement Model – A measurement model is a statistical model used to assess the relationships between observed variables and their latent constructs (Kline, 2015).

On-Time Graduation – On-time graduation is graduating four years after entering the ninth grade.

Organizational Culture – Organizational culture is the distinct identity where values, beliefs, and assumptions define and drive the behaviors of an organization over time (Van Houtte, 2005).

Regression Coefficient Estimate – A regression coefficient estimate is a value that represents the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable in a regression analysis. The regression coefficient estimate quantifies the change in the dependent variable associated with the independent variable (Kline, 2015).

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) – Root mean square error of approximation is a commonly used measure to assess the accuracy of a prediction model. The RMSEA represents the square root of the average squared difference between predicted and actual values (Kline, 2015).

School Climate – School climate reflects how members of the school community experience the school, which includes supportive relationships, physical and emotional safety, connectivity to

the school, and student engagement (U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe and Healthy

Students, 2016).

Standards of Accreditation (SOA) – The standards for the accreditation of public schools in

Virginia are intended to ensure that an effective educational program is established and

sustained in Virginia's public schools. The SOAs provide the underpinning for establishing high-

quality public education with a system of accountability and continuous improvement (Virginia

Department of Education, 2022).

Standardized Factor Loadings – Standardized factor loadings, also known as standardized

regression weights, in measurement models identify which observed variables are most

strongly associated with each factor, determine which observed variables may not be good

indicators of the intended factor, assess the overall strength of the relationship between each

observed variable and the intended factor, and compare the relative importance of different

observed variables in measuring a given factor (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

Standardized Regression Weights – Standardized regression weights, also known as

standardized factor loadings, in measurement models, identify which observed variables are

most strongly associated with each factor, determine which observed variables may not be

good indicators of the intended factor, assess the overall strength of the relationship between

each observed variable and the intended factor, and compare the relative importance of

different observed variables in measuring a given factor (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chronic absenteeism matters because it negatively affects the academic success of students (Chang & Romero, 2008; Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The students who miss school the most often face considerable challenges and need the most instructional support (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). While the causes of chronic absenteeism are not entirely understood (U.S. Department of Education, 2019), school climate is frequently cited as a factor that influences students' attendance (Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Sahin et al., 2016; Van Eck et al., 2017). Research literature suggests that school leaders have an essential role in shaping school climate (Hollingworth et al., 2018; MacNeil et al., 2009) to improve student attendance (Gottfried, 2014; Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Sahin et al., 2016; Van Eck et al., 2017).

Even though critical aspects of school climate, including student connectedness with school, perceptions of school safety, and engagement in school activities, may be important contributing factors to attendance (Chen & Weikart, 2008; Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016; Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Van Eck et al., 2017), little research has assessed how school leadership and school climate connect to student attendance (Van Eck et al., 2017). In addition, according to Hamlin (2021), very few empirical studies have linked positive school climate to routine student attendance. Therefore, this study was designed to shed light on the influence of school leaders on school climate and the influence on student attendance.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the literature on chronic absenteeism, school climate, and school leaders. More specifically, I review research literature on the risk factors and effects of chronic absenteeism on student outcomes. I define school climate and examine

the research on how the school's climate impacts student attendance. Finally, I review the literature on three domains of school leadership: setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the organization to support desired practices. Before I begin the review, I give an overview of the search strategy used to review the literature on chronic absenteeism, school climate, and school leaders.

Search Methodology

Several search strategies were utilized to evaluate the literature on chronic absenteeism, school climate, and school leaders. In the initial search, I looked for research literature on chronic absenteeism and its impact on student outcomes. Second, in alignment with my framework, I searched for how school climate and culture impacted student attendance. Finally, I focused on how leaders' practices led to school improvement.

The first stage of the search started with entering search terms in the EBSCO database search engine and Google Scholar. Search terms included: "chronic absenteeism," "student attendance," "high school," "school climate," "school culture," "school leaders," "school leadership," and "principal leadership." I specified that the search phrase had to be included in the abstract and selected that only scholarly peer-reviewed articles were included in the search. Specifically, I elected to have the search phrase in the abstract to hone in on the articles relevant to the research topic. This search returned a number of journal articles related to the research topic. Even though I identified several articles to include in the literature review, I narrowed the list to peer-reviewed empirical studies, reports, literature reviews, and meta-analyses. I prioritized the research to include the most recent research and excluded many studies that were more than 20 years old.

As I read the literature, I reviewed articles referenced in the document related to chronic absenteeism, school climate, and school leaders. As I reviewed additional research articles, I continued to search Google Scholar to identify studies frequently cited that matched my topic. When I found articles relevant to my research topic, I downloaded the articles as Adobe pdf files and imported them into Zotero. Zotero is a reference management software designed to manage bibliographical and related research information. In Zotero, I organized the articles into the following categories: student attendance, school climate, and school leaders. The bibliographical references were checked to ensure they met the APA 7th Edition requirements, and I tagged the articles with key terms.

After downloading the article into Zotero, I read the research and took notes in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The Microsoft Excel spreadsheet allowed me to document the essential elements of the journal article. I used the Excel spreadsheet to detail information about the article, including the Digital Object Identifier (DOI), abstract, key findings, keywords, citable notes, electronic location, research method used, date read, and type of study. Like Zotero, I organized the research documents into the categories of school leaders, school climate, and student attendance. The Microsoft Excel spreadsheet allowed me to quickly sort and filter data to find articles and relevant information to include or exclude in the capstone.

The final step of my literature search was to analyze the references of the articles I found to determine if I had missed any significant studies. Butin (2010) notes that analyzing references of relevant articles should be the final step of any literature search and should be completed to verify that the researcher has not inadvertently missed any significant studies. In

addition to reviewing the references, I paid attention to the number of times the literature had been cited on Google Scholar.

Using the information obtained from the search, the following sections of this chapter review the literature on chronic absenteeism, school climate, and school leaders. This review examines the literature on school climate and its impact on student attendance. Finally, the literature review describes three domains of effective school leadership: setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the organization to support desired practices. The next section of the literature review details the risk factors for chronic absenteeism and the effects of student attendance on academic achievement, on-time graduation, and school dropout.

Chronic Absenteeism

Chronically absent students miss nearly a month or more of school over the course of a year, causing students to miss valuable learning experiences (Gottfried, 2014; London et al., 2016). Students who have been chronically absent for several years of school can graduate high school having experienced an entire year less instructional time than their peers (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Understanding who is at risk for chronic absenteeism and its impact helps focus efforts on improvement. Therefore, this section focuses on presenting research on students who are likely to be chronically absent and the challenges associated with excessive absences from school.

Risk Factors for Chronic Absenteeism

Regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, or ethnicity, children lose out when chronically absent (Chang & Romero, 2008). It has been established that students who are

frequently absent from school face significant challenges and need considerable educational

support (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Recognizing the students with a higher

probability of being chronically absent helps school divisions focus their efforts on improving

student attendance. This section details the risk factors for chronic absenteeism, including

demographics of students who have excessive absences, the influence of parental involvement

on student attendance, and the impact on students who are chronically absent for more than

one year.

  Demographics. Research shows that students from low-income homes, students with

disabilities, and students who are homeless or mobile are more likely to be chronically absent

than their peers (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Mounting evidence suggests that

students from low-income homes experience higher rates of chronic absenteeism than other

student groups (Chang et al., 2018; Ready, 2010; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). These

absences add to the challenges for students from low-income homes and cause additional

struggles due to missed instructional time and opportunities to learn (Virginia Department of

Education, 2019). In a cross-sectional study of 587,402 students across grade levels enrolled in

Utah Public Schools in the 2010-2011 school year, researchers found that students from low-

income homes were 90 percent more likely to be chronically absent than their peers (Utah

Education Policy Center, 2012). Consistent with the Utah Education Policy Center study, a

quantitative study of 13,613 kindergarten and first-grade children from 903 schools found that

students from low-income homes were more likely to be chronically absent (Ready, 2010).

Similarly, a study from Oregon Public Schools confirms that economically disadvantaged

students in the primary grades were nearly twice as likely to be chronically absent from school

(Buehler et al., 2012). In addition, this study found that the gap narrows in high school, but economically disadvantaged high school students are still 50 percent more likely to be chronically absent than their peers. Research study after research study confirms that children from low-income families are more likely to be chronically absent than their peers.

This rate of absenteeism suggests that students from disadvantaged homes are unable to fully realize the benefits of public education due to the number of days they are absent from school and the instructional program. Not only are economically disadvantaged students clearly impacted by chronic absenteeism, but studies show that schools with a higher percentage of disadvantaged students tend to have higher levels of absenteeism (Chang et al., 2018). A quantitative study of 94,549 schools across the nation in the 2013-2014 and 2015-2016 school years found that schools with higher levels of chronic absence were more likely schools with a student poverty rate of 75 percent or greater (Chang et al., 2018). This research indicates that students from low-income homes are more likely to be chronically absent from school and that schools with a large percentage of their students living in poverty are more likely to have higher levels of chronic absenteeism.

Research points out that students with disabilities and students who are homeless have a higher probability of having excessive absences. A cross-sectional study from Utah Public Schools found that students with disabilities were 70 percent more likely to be chronically absent than their non-disabled peers (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). In addition, the same study determined that students identified as homeless were 80 percent more likely to be chronically absent. When students with disabilities and students identified as homeless have

excessive absences from school, they miss out on the specialized instruction designed to help them be successful.

Another risk factor associated with chronically absent students identified by the Utah Education Policy Center (2012) were students who moved in and out of schools, otherwise known as mobile students. Mobile students were four times more likely to be chronically absent from school than their peers (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Further, students who spoke a language other than English at home were more likely to have excessive absences from school (Ready, 2010). Research indicates that students who face the most significant challenges, like moving from one school to another, and English learners are often chronically absent from school. English learners and mobile students have unique challenges that make it essential for them to be in school regularly to benefit from the instruction intentionally planned to help them learn the English language or recover from missed instruction.

Even though students with disabilities (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012), homeless students (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012), mobile students (Mac Iver et al., 2008; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012), and students who spoke a language other than English at home (Ready, 2010) are more likely to be chronically absent from school, studies show that the students most at-risk for chronic absenteeism are students from low-income homes (Buehler et al., 2012; Chang et al., 2018; Ready, 2010; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Studies also claim that children with less involved parents are more likely to be chronically absent (Smerillo et al., 2018). As the next section highlights, parental involvement in school may play a role in student attendance.

Parent Involvement. Research on parental involvement in school and student attendance indicates that students with parents who are less involved in their child's school are more likely to experience chronic absenteeism and negative school outcomes (Smerillo et al., 2018). A longitudinal study of a cohort of 1,148 low-income students at risk of school underachievement and dropout found in two of the three high schools studied that children with below-average parental involvement had higher chronic absenteeism than students whose parents were more involved. Further, this study found that for children with less involved parents, chronic absence posed a greater risk that the students would not graduate on time in four years. As this is the only study that researched parental involvement related to student attendance, the generalizability of the findings is limited.

Research highlights that children with less involved parents are more likely to be chronically absent (Smerillo et al., 2018). These absences have the potential for weighty consequences, including failure to graduate on time from high school, as school attendance is vital for students to reap the instructional benefits of attending school. Research also indicates that students who are chronically absent for one year have a higher probability of being chronically absent in subsequent years (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012), as discussed in the next section.

Repeated Chronic Absenteeism. Research has established that students who are chronically absent for one year in high school are more likely to be chronically absent in subsequent years (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). In a longitudinal study of 35,508 eighth-grade Utah Public School students from 2006 through their graduation year 2010, researchers found that 9,847 students were chronically absent for at least one year between

the eighth and twelfth grades (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Of the 9,847 students who

were chronically absent at least once, 5,015 students, or 51 percent, were chronically absent

for more than one year. According to the Utah Education Policy Center (2012), on average, if a

student is chronically absent in one grade, the student is thirteen times more likely to be

chronically absent in the next grade. This data signifies that chronic absenteeism is not an

isolated event, as being chronically absent for one year may predict chronic absenteeism in

subsequent years.

Numerous research studies have established that when chronic absenteeism reaches

high levels, it can disrupt student's opportunity to learn, as elevated student absences impact

student's access to instruction, which may negatively impact student academic achievement

(Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Chang et al., 2018; Chang & Romero, 2008; Demir & Akman

Karabeyoglu, 2016). Understanding the impact of chronic absenteeism on student achievement

is critical. Therefore, the following section draws attention to the effects of chronic

absenteeism on academic achievement, on-time graduation, and school dropout.

Effects of Chronic Absenteeism

Research has consistently connected excessive student absences to a range of effects,

including school dropout (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Chang et al., 2018; Gottfried, 2014), criminal

behavior (Bell et al., 2016; Gottfried & Kirksey, 2017; Sheldon, 2007; Spencer, 2009), and

decreased probability of college enrollment and persistence in college (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

Studies point out that when chronic absence is high, it can affect all students, as teachers spend

more time reviewing concepts for children who missed the instruction (Buehler et al., 2012).

This section presents research to underscore chronic absenteeism's adverse outcomes,

including lower academic achievement, reduced on-time graduation, and school dropout.

Lower Academic Achievement. Studies have established the connection between

increased absence frequency and adverse academic outcomes, especially in elementary school.

As early as kindergarten, research indicates chronic absenteeism is associated with a decline in

reading and math achievement (Gottfried, 2014). In a quantitative study of a national sample

of 10,740 kindergarten students, Gottfried (2014) found that kindergarten students who missed

20 or more days of school demonstrated lower academic performance in both reading and

mathematics. Further, the chronically absent students appeared less willing to learn and

exhibited fewer behaviors that facilitated their ability to learn, which has implications for

learning in subsequent years.

Not only does chronic absence in kindergarten impair academic performance in

kindergarten, but studies also suggest that students who are chronically absent in kindergarten

have weaker academic performance in first grade than their peers who are not chronically

absent (Applied Survey Research, 2011). A longitudinal study of 640 students in two counties in

California found that only 17 percent of chronically absent students in both kindergarten and

first grade were proficient readers by the end of third grade, compared to 64 percent of their

peers who missed less than five percent of school. Research reveals there is a consistent trend

indicating that as absences increase in kindergarten and first grade, the likelihood decreases

that a student will perform at grade level in both reading and mathematics.

Further, researchers claim that kindergarten students with high absenteeism rates have

difficulty attaining the same academic level as their elementary school peers who were not

chronically absent (Buehler et al., 2012). In a longitudinal study in Oregon Public Schools

tracking students in kindergarten from 2004 through their fifth-grade year, Buehler et al. (2012)

found that kindergarteners with high absenteeism rates were not likely to catch up

academically with their peers by the end of fifth grade. The research established that children

who were chronically absent in both kindergarten and first grade had the poorest achievement

levels in fifth grade, followed by students chronically absent in first grade only. The results of

this study suggest a clear relationship between early attendance and later achievement.

Research also indicates that students in upper elementary school suffer academically when

chronically absent in earlier grades.

Not only do students in kindergarten and first grade suffer if they are chronically absent,

but studies indicate that students in upper elementary school experience adverse effects from

being chronically absent. In a longitudinal study of 340,332 students in Wisconsin Public

Schools from 2005 to 2014 that examined the impact of chronic absenteeism on student

achievement, Coelho et al. (2015) found a statistically significant negative relationship between

the number of missed school days and third-grade achievement in mathematics and reading.

Likewise, in a longitudinal study of the School District of Philadelphia of 23,386 third and fourth-

grade students in 175 public schools over five contiguous academic years, Gottfried (2019)

found that chronically absent students tend to have lower reading and math achievement.

These studies indicate that students who are chronically absent in elementary school suffer

academically throughout their elementary school years, specifically in reading and mathematics

achievement. These outcomes allude to the damaging impact of chronic absenteeism in the

early stages of a student's educational journey.

In addition, research indicates that chronically absent students from disadvantaged homes face more significant academic challenges compared to their peers. Chang and Romero (2008) found that chronic absenteeism in kindergarten predicts the lowest levels of achievement at the end of fifth grade for students living in poverty. Similarly, a study in Wisconsin Public Schools found that students who were chronically absent and eligible for free and reduced-price lunch had test score reductions twice that of their peers for each missed day (Coelho et al., 2015). The results of these studies suggest that being in school matters, especially for students from disadvantaged homes.

As previously highlighted, studies suggest chronic absence harms student achievement in elementary school. Moreover, studies indicate that student attendance matters in middle school. A longitudinal study that followed an urban cohort of 1,148 students from Chicago Public Schools found that students who were chronically absent in the early middle grades scored lower on measures of reading and math achievement at the end of eighth grade compared to children who were not chronically absent (Smerillo et al., 2018). Chronically absent students, on average, scored two months behind their peers who were not chronically absent.

In addition to chronic absenteeism negatively impacting the chronically absent student, having a chronically absent classmate may impact the academic achievement of other students in the classroom. In a study of the 175 schools with 23,386 students in the third and fourth grades in the Philadelphia School District over five contiguous academic years, Gottfried (2019) found that having a larger number of chronically absent classmates is associated with lower classroom academic achievement in both reading and math. Not only is chronic absenteeism

detrimental to the academic success of the chronically absent student, but other students in the classroom may suffer academically from having a chronically absent classmate. Chronically absent students often require more time and attention from their teachers to tend to their learning needs.

In summary, chronic absenteeism has adverse implications for student academic achievement, not only for an individual student but also for the classmates of the chronically absent student. Chronic absence predicts lower academic achievement for our youngest students during their formative years and can potentially impair a student's academic trajectory for their entire school career (Gottfried, 2014). Based on the literature available, chronic absenteeism has the potential to harm student's short and long-term academic achievement and may have further implications for on-time graduation.

On-Time Graduation. Research suggests chronically absent students are less likely to graduate from high school on time. On-time graduation is graduating high school four years after entering the ninth grade. In a longitudinal study that followed an urban cohort of students from Chicago Public Schools from kindergarten through graduation, Smerillo et al. (2018) found that students who were chronically absent in the early middle grades had lower rates of four-year graduation compared to children who were not chronically absent. According to this research, chronic absenteeism reduced the likelihood of graduation in four years by 18 percentage points (Smerillo et al., 2018). In another longitudinal study aimed at measuring on-time graduation rates in Baltimore City Public Schools, Mac Iver et al. (2008) found that only one in three students in the sixth-grade cohort in 1999-2000 successfully graduated on time from the district seven years later. Further, students absent for two-ninths

of the academic year were least likely to graduate from high school on time. Based on the results of this study, only 16.5 percent of students who missed 20 percent of a school year graduated on time from Baltimore City Public Schools. Correspondingly, a longitudinal study of 12,972 students enrolled in sixth grade in 1996 through their graduation year in 2003 or 2004 in the School District of Philadelphia found that of the students who attended less than 90 percent of the school year in sixth grade, only 13 percent of the students graduated on time (Balfanz et al., 2007). The results of these studies suggest that there is a strong correlation between chronic absenteeism and students' ability to graduate on time.

In summary, numerous research studies claim that chronically absent students are less likely to graduate from high school four years after entering ninth grade. Chronic absence poses a significant risk to the likelihood that students will graduate on time. Not only does research suggest that chronically absent students are less likely to graduate on time, but research indicates that students with excessive absences are more likely to drop out of high school.

School Dropout. Studies show chronically absent students are more likely to be high school dropouts than their peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). In a longitudinal study of 35,508 Utah public school students that followed the class of 2010 for five years, from their eighth-grade year through their graduation year, researchers found that students who were chronically absent in any year, starting in the eighth grade, were 7.4 times more likely to drop out of school than a non-chronically absent student during any of those years (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Further, after two years or more of being chronically absent, students were more likely than not to drop out of school (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). The Utah

study revealed that each year a student was chronically absent increased the odds of dropping out of school, on average 2.21 times (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). This study uncovered that chronically absent students were 5.5 times more likely to drop out in a future year than their non-chronically absent peers. Furthermore, the information gleaned from this study emphasized that more than 25 percent of the seniors who had been chronically absent at some point between eighth and eleventh grade dropped out of high school.

Studies suggest that children who are chronically absent in middle and high school experience reduced odds of earning a high school diploma and increased odds of dropping out of school altogether. A longitudinal study that followed an urban cohort of 1,148 students from kindergarten through graduation in Chicago Public Schools found that students who were chronically absent in the early middle grades were 11 percentage points less likely to complete high school (Smerillo et al., 2018). The results indicated that students who were chronically absent in the early middle grades were 17 percentage points less likely to graduate with a diploma by the age of 21.

Research reveals that the impact of chronic absenteeism is not only under-documented but is also detrimental to students' success (Gottfried, 2014). The common findings of the research signal that chronic absenteeism negatively impacts student achievement (Applied Survey Research, 2011; Buehler et al., 2012; Chang & Romero, 2008; Coelho et al., 2015; Gottfried, 2014; Gottfried, 2019; Ready, 2010; Smerillo et al., 2018; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012), on-time graduation (Balfanz et al., 2007; Mac Iver et al., 2008; Smerillo et al., 2018; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012), and school dropout (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Smerillo et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2019; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012).

Researchers have linked frequent school absence to adverse outcomes later in life, including

unemployment and incarceration (Bell et al., 2016; Gottfried & Kirksey, 2017; Henry & Huizinga,

2007; Kearney, 2008; Spencer, 2009). When students miss the opportunity to learn, they are

unprepared for subsequent learning and the world beyond high school (Mac Iver et al., 2008).

The research on chronic absenteeism suggests that the negative consequences of missing

excessive school days are high. When students do not have the opportunity to learn the

necessary academic skills because they are absent from school, the achievement gap widens.

This achievement gap widens further as students advance to middle and high school.

School climate may play an essential role in altering chronic absence rates among

schools, yet little research has assessed how school climate relates to student attendance

(Hamlin, 2021; Van Eck et al., 2017). Critical aspects of school climate, including student

connectedness with school, engagement in school activities, and perceptions of school safety,

may be important determinants of attendance (Chen & Weikart, 2008; Henry & Huizinga,

2007). The idea that a positive school climate can improve student attendance is compelling

(Kostyo et al., 2018).

School Climate

Mounting evidence suggests that school climate may impact student attendance,

specifically chronic absenteeism. Research from the National School Climate Council (2007)

affirms that a positive school climate needs to be actively created and sustained by school

personnel and supported by the community. According to Cohen et al. (2009), school climate is

the internal quality and character of school life, which is comprised of many factors that affect

student and adult experiences in schools. School climate reflects the norms, values, behaviors,

goals, teaching and learning practices, interpersonal relationships, and organizational structures within a given school context (Cohen et al., 2009; Thapa et al., 2013). School climate is influenced by the formal organization, informal organizations, personalities of the participants, and the leadership of the school (Hoy, 1990). In essence, school climate is the collective perception of participants' experience in a school (Hoy, 1990; Van Houtte, 2005; Van Houtte & Van Maele, 2011). More specifically, the climate is characterized as the personality of the school (Maxwell & Thomas, 1991; Van Houtte, 2005).

School climate and culture are often confused as the terms have been used interchangeably in educational literature for decades (Denison, 1996; Hoy, 1990; Schoen & Teddlie, 2008; Van Houtte, 2005; Van Houtte & Van Maele, 2011). According to Hoy (1990), both terms, school climate and school culture, have been used to describe school effectiveness and the school's character. Specifically, school culture and school climate have explained how a school works as an organization and the atmosphere that prevails between the stakeholders (Glover & Coleman, 2005). School culture is viewed from an anthropological perspective, and qualitative research methods are used to understand the unique aspects of individual social settings and their evolution over time (Denison, 1996). Climate is typically viewed from a psychological perspective, and quantitative studies are used to understand the organization's impact on groups and individuals. When measuring the health of an organization, climate is the preferred method (MacNeil et al., 2009). For the purpose of this study, the focus is on school climate.

School climate research emphasizes the measurement of the factors that are deemed to affect the perceptions of the school (Glover & Coleman, 2005), including the existing tone of

the school, the feeling of the relationships, and the school's morale (Peterson & Deal, 2002).

Even though school climate constructs, including student connectedness with school,

engagement in school activities, and perceptions of school safety, may be important

determinants of attendance (Chen & Weikart, 2008; Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016;

Hendron & Kearney, 2016; Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Van Eck et al., 2017) little research has

assessed how school leaders and school climate connect to student attendance (Hamlin, 2021;

Van Eck et al., 2017). As a result, this section discusses the impact of school climate on student

attendance.

School Climate and Student Attendance

Studies suggest that when schools focus on creating a positive school climate, students

are willing to attend school more frequently and are less likely to skip school, as there is a

connection between a school's climate and student attendance (Van Eck et al., 2017). Research

indicates that school climate improvement strategies appear critical for improving the

overarching experience of attending school and increasing school attendance. By the same

token, research claims that schools with unfavorable climates adversely affect student

attendance (Chen & Weikart, 2008). For example, in a multilevel latent profile analysis of

25,776 middle and high school students in 106 schools, Van Eck et al. (2017) found schools

where students rated the school with a "marginal climate" or "climate challenged" were more

likely to have higher chronic absence rates than schools where students reported their school

had a favorable climate. Similarly, a mediation analysis of 6,839 middle school students and

470 high school students from 26 West Virginia schools found that a positive school climate was

associated with a reduced likelihood of skipping school (Daily et al., 2020). Along the same

lines, in a study of 236 New York schools representing a total of 143,788 middle school students in grades 6 through 8, Maxwell (2016) found that students higher ratings of school climate predicted lower student absenteeism.

More specifically, studies suggest that student absences increase when students lack commitment to their school (Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016). For example, in a study of randomly selected students conducted in ten high schools with 581 students from the ninth to eleventh grades selected through cluster sampling from secondary schools in Burdur, Demir and Akman Karabeyoglu (2016) found students' lack of commitment to their school had a significantly negative effect on the absenteeism of high school students. The study found that absenteeism was predicted negatively and significantly by students' commitment to school (Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016). The study also found that student commitment to school, which includes establishing positive relationships with teachers and other students, is the most important predictor of absenteeism.

As established in the research from Demir and Akman Karabeyoglu (2016), studies indicate that student absenteeism may be linked to students' positive or negative connection with their school environment. In another study that measured students' perceptions of their school environment, Henry and Huizinga (2007) discovered that students who perceived the school environment as positive missed fewer days of school than those who had a negative perception of the school environment. For the purpose of the study, students negative views of their school environment included the perception of an unsafe environment, poor student-teacher relationships, and the opinion that teachers did not use positive teaching practices. In a similar study of New York middle and high school students, Hamlin (2021) found that

individual perceptions of school safety and academic engagement were related to fewer chronic absences. Among the four measures of school climate that were investigated, perceived school safety seemed to have the strongest consistent relationship with student attendance (Hamlin, 2021). These studies suggest that school attendance likely suffers when students feel unsafe, detached, and disengaged.

Research studies also point out that a positive school climate may impact student attendance and student mental health (Hendron & Kearney, 2016). In a structural equation modeling study of 398 middle and high school students with problematic attendance that examined the relationship between school climate and absenteeism, Hendron and Kearney (2016) found that a positive school climate helped reduce school absenteeism and improve student mental health. This study suggests that when schools intentionally improve school climate, they likely create conditions that lead to higher rates of student attendance and improvement to overall student health.

Considerable research evidence suggests that student's perception of the school climate may be crucial to student attendance and student success (Daily et al., 2020; Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016; Hamlin, 2021; Hendron & Kearney, 2016; Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Maxwell, 2016; Van Eck et al., 2017). Not only does student perception of the school climate potentially impact student attendance, but student's positive commitment to the school may increase student attendance (Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016; Hamlin, 2021; Henry & Huizinga, 2007) and improve student's mental health (Hendron & Kearney, 2016). Research indicates that principal leadership impacts school climate and student success (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008).

Therefore, the following section highlights research on how school leaders impact the school climate.

School Leaders

The research literature on school climate has paid attention to the role school leaders play in bridging school climate and school improvement (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Hollingworth et al., 2018; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Louis & Lee, 2016; MacNeil et al., 2009). Over the past 50 years, scholars have sought to understand how school leaders contribute to school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Marks & Printy, 2003). Research suggests that the principal is essential and significant in determining the quality and success of a school (Gurr et al., 2005). According to Hallinger and Heck (2010a), no single leadership approach improves all schools, as leaders must be responsive to the school's capacity to change as conditions develop over time.

Therefore, this section of the literature review on school leaders details how principals contribute to school effectiveness by concentrating on three aspects of school leadership associated with the roles and responsibilities of school leaders (Leithwood, 2012). Specifically, for this capstone project, the literature review focuses on three OLF leadership domains: setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the organization to sustain desired practices. School leaders are crucial to shaping the school climate by

- communicating core values (setting directions and developing the organization to sustain desired practices);
- frequently speaking of the mission (setting directions);

- celebrating staff and students' accomplishments (building relationships and developing people); and

- building trusting relationships (building relationships and developing people) to generate buy-in for implementing change initiatives (developing the organization to sustain desired practices).

Research has claimed for decades that focusing on school climate is necessary for school improvement (Astor et al., 2002; Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016; MacNeil et al., 2009; U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe and Healthy Students, 2017). These three domains relate to creating and sustaining high-quality school leaders who are able to create a school climate focused on improving student outcomes (Leithwood, 2012). The following section outlines how the OLF domain setting directions contribute to school leadership and student success.

Setting Directions

According to Leithwood (2012), setting directions contributes to the alignment of effort and increases the effectiveness and efficiency of the school organization. Research suggests that the primary purpose of setting directions is to ensure that members of the organization work toward a common purpose (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2012). Setting direction, which includes developing and promoting a vision, is the most significant part of a leader's impact (Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004). Research has found that one of the most fundamental actions a principal initiates within a school is to develop and promote a strong vision for the school (Leithwood et al., 2004). According to Sun and Leithwood (2015), in their research review of 110 studies, most leadership models incorporate "direction-setting

leadership practices," which include developing a vision and setting goals. Further, direction-setting practices were found to have a significant impact on the disposition of the school culture and the sense of mission, and large impacts on creating a safe and orderly environment and achieving a shared goal.

Likewise, according to a meta-analysis of seven published, peer-reviewed studies between 1978 and 2006, Robinson et al. (2008) found a moderate effect between establishing goals and setting expectations and the positive outcome of these leadership practices on student achievement. According to Robinson et al. (2008), clear goals provide a common purpose and clarity and communicate how individuals can contribute to the vision. Robinson et al. (2008) propose that if goals are to be influential factors, school leaders need to focus on motivational and direction-setting activities and their alignment with intended student outcomes. Hallinger and Heck (2002) agree that successful schools have a coherent and well-defined set of beliefs. According to their single-level and multilevel structural equation modeling analysis of 122 schools, Hallinger and Heck (2002) found that organizational processes, like developing a mission and setting direction, were significantly related to school outcomes. They found that a critical quality of the school leader is helping develop a shared understanding of the organization and its goals to strengthen the sense of purpose (Hallinger & Heck, 2002). These studies suggest that a school leader's clear focus on the vision for the school and adaptability promotes a school climate critical to students' success.

Research shows that school leaders must promote their shared vision and that the shared vision must be accepted and championed by the staff (MacNeil et al., 2009). A study of 29 schools located in a large suburban school district in southeast Texas in which 1,727 teachers

rated the schools' organizational health found that organizational health scores are higher

when the principal supports a clear vision for the school which is accepted by the staff (MacNeil

et al., 2009). The school leader's ability to widely communicate and promote the vision, gain

buy-in from the staff to ensure stakeholders are working toward a common purpose, and

maintain enthusiasm and a sense of optimism makes the school vision a reality.

Vision and goals must be communicated widely to foster motivation (Leithwood, 2012).

As the research highlighted above articulates, setting direction and communicating that

direction is a powerful leadership tool to improve the school climate and student outcomes

(Robinson et al., 2008). Specific practices of identifying and articulating a vision, fostering the

acceptance of group goals, and creating high expectations signal to staff that some activities are

more important than others. School leader's ability to set directions has been found to have a

significant impact on the disposition of the school climate and positively impact the safe and

orderly environment (Sun & Leithwood, 2015), and strengthen the sense of purpose, which is

critical to students' success (Hallinger & Heck, 2002). However, it is not enough for school

leaders to set direction; they must also build relationships with their staff (Robinson et al.,

2008) to encourage teachers to support the vision and build capacity (Hallinger & Heck, 1996;

Marks & Printy, 2003).

Building Relationships and Developing People

The second domain of the OLF, building relationships and developing people,

emphasizes the need to build staff knowledge and skills to accomplish organizational goals,

including consistently reflecting the school's core values and establishing trust (Leithwood,

2012). Researchers have claimed that successful school leaders create conditions that build

capacity for professional learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Marks & Printy, 2003), which increases the ability of the school to improve (Heck & Hallinger, 2010a). An essential component of building relationships and developing people includes the leader learning alongside staff to improve the school climate and academic achievement (Robinson et al., 2008).

Research suggests that influential school leaders make strong connections with people and value their contribution to the educational community (Murphy et al., 2006). In their exploration of empirical studies of effective schools and school improvement related to their learning-centered leadership framework, Murphy et al. (2006) found that school leaders focused on creating a learning community, promoting professional development, and nurturing the community's growth. These leaders foster the development of learning communities and are skilled in nurturing staff growth through professional development focused on best practices and school improvement. Learning-centered leaders assist teachers with strengthening their instructional practices and plan for learning experiences to grow all members' skills which positively impacts the school environment.

Studies have demonstrated the connection between leader learning and student outcomes. In a meta-analysis of twelve studies comparing the effects of inductively derived sets of leadership practices on student outcomes, Robinson et al. (2008) found that when school leaders are actively involved with their teachers in learning and development, student outcomes improve. The researchers indicate that school leaders perceived as a source of instructional expertise significantly influence teachers' instructional practices. School leaders' involvement in teacher development provides the school leader with the awareness of the

formal and informal learning required to help staff make and sustain the changes vital for improved student outcomes.

Additionally, school leaders must understand the instructional practices that shape quality teaching. Research suggests that the ability of school leaders to engage in practices that develop staff is influenced by the leaders' knowledge of what is required to develop quality teaching and learning (Leithwood et al., 2004). In their review of research commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, Leithwood et al. (2004) indicate that high-quality leaders improve student outcomes by providing teachers with the necessary support and training to succeed. Educational and school improvement rely on the development of both the school leader and the professional learning of teachers (Hallinger, 2010).

For a school leader to build relationships and develop people to improve student outcomes, the school leader must care for the teacher's well-being and professional learning (Murphy et al., 2006). As the research highlighted above points out, leaders must build the knowledge and skills of staff to accomplish organizational goals (Leithwood, 2012), create conditions that build capacity for professional learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Marks & Printy, 2003), strengthen instructional practices by planning for professional learning experiences (Robinson et al., 2008), and understand the instructional practices that help improve student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2004). School leaders' involvement in planning and participating in teacher learning provides them with a thorough understanding of the learning required to enable staff to make and sustain changes to improve student success and foster a positive school climate (Robinson et al., 2008). It is through the school leader's ability to interact with the school climate to have clarity, acceptance, and support that the school climate is improved

(MacNeil et al., 2009). School leaders not only need to tend to teacher professional development, but they must also develop the organization to support desired practices.

Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices

This section emphasizes the third domain of the OLF, developing the organization to support desired practices which includes adapting the school's practices to maximize student and school outcomes (Leithwood, 2012; Marks & Printy, 2003; Murphy et al., 2006). When school practices are misaligned with school goals, redesigning the school's infrastructure is vital for school improvement (Leithwood, 2012). The school leader is critical to the successful restructure (Murphy et al., 2006). Research supports the idea that school improvement leadership is unique to every school (Hallinger & Heck, 2010a), and every school has its own unique improvement path (Hallinger & Heck, 2010b).

Research has found that an essential component of successful school improvement is the willingness of school leaders to adapt their strategies to respond to constantly changing conditions (Hallinger, 2003; Jackson, 2000). In a longitudinal study of 198 elementary schools in a western state in the United States, Hallinger and Heck (2010a) found that changes in student achievement positively correlated to changes in collaborative leadership and school improvement capacity. These findings indicate that schools can improve student outcomes regardless of initial achievement levels by changing organizational processes such as leadership and school improvement capacity. These findings suggest that leadership and school improvement capacity work together where growth in one area can promote a positive change in the other (Hallinger & Heck, 2010a). This research reaffirms the significance of leadership as a catalyst for school climate improvement.

Not only do school leaders have the responsibility to promote positive change that impacts student outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 2010a), school leaders are responsible for creating and maintaining a safe and healthy environment (Leithwood, 2012). Research indicates that school leaders must focus on instruction and the organization in a mutually supportive manner to provide a safe, healthy, and accepting school where students feel safe and protected (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Leithwood, 2012; Robinson et al., 2008). In an exploratory factor regression analysis of survey data from parents, teachers, assistant principals, and principals from Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Grissom and Loeb (2011) found that a school leader's ability to manage the organization matters for school improvement. This study identifies organizational management as developing a safe school environment, managing budgets and resources, and maintaining campus facilities. This study proposes that effective school leaders are competent in leading instruction and organizational management.

School leaders must be willing to adapt strategies to respond to their unique school environment (Hallinger, 2003; Jackson, 2000) and tend to organizational matters (Grissom & Loeb, 2011) to improve student outcomes. Grissom and Loeb (2011) found that much of the principal's daily activities were consumed by organizational matters, which left little time to focus on the core business of teaching and learning. Even though school leaders spend a significant amount of their time on organizational matters (Grissom & Loeb, 2011), the closer school leaders get to focusing on school climate and core leadership practices, the more likely they are to have a positive impact on student and school outcomes (Robinson et al., 2008). A

positive school climate is an essential component of school improvement, and the school leader

plays an integral role in setting the school's climate (MacNeil et al., 2009).

Summary

The direct and indirect costs of absenteeism are high for individuals, schools, families,

and communities (Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016). When students are frequently absent

from school, the achievement gap widens due to missed learning opportunities that can impact

academic success and create negative attitudes toward school. When school leaders develop a

positive school climate, they are better able to promote a stable and nurturing environment

that supports student success, including school attendance (Hollingworth et al., 2018). When

schools focus on improving school climate, students are more likely to develop positive

relationships and demonstrate positive behaviors (U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe

and Healthy Students, 2017), which include measurable improvements in student attendance

(U.S. Department of Education, 2019). School-wide climate improvement strategies appear

critical for improving the overarching experience of attending school and increasing school

attendance (Van Eck et al., 2017). It is through the school leader's ability to interact with the

school's climate in a manner that improves the focus and adaptability of the school that

improves the learning environment (MacNeil et al., 2009).   An increased focus on the quality of

school climate may be critical for reducing the chronic absenteeism rate in middle and high

schools.

School leaders markedly impact the success of schools (Hallinger & Heck, 1996;

Leithwood et al., 2004). However, as Hallinger and Heck (2010a) highlight, no single approach

to leadership creates conditions to improve student outcomes and schools. School leaders are

essential for determining how to employ the right skills to positively impact student and school

outcomes (Murphy et al., 2006). School leaders provide a critical bridge between school

improvement efforts and making a difference for all students (Leithwood et al., 2004). Leaders

who build a collaborative culture, nurture respect and trust, and help develop clarity around

the vision and goals improve student outcomes (Leithwood, 2012).

Chapter Three: Research Methods

This study investigated teachers' perceptions of school leaders' influence on school climate and the positive or negative influence on school improvement, specifically student attendance in Virginia. The literature on school leaders' impact on school climate and the resulting influence on student attendance guided the framework for the study. Research has shown the importance of a positive school climate to support student attendance and the importance of the school leader on school climate. Researchers have suggested that the relationship between school climate and student attendance, specifically chronic absenteeism, is suited for more in-depth analysis (Chang et al., 2018). In this chapter, I articulate the analytical framework that outlines the foundation for this study and state the hypotheses. I discuss the research design, describe the participants and instrumentation utilized for this study, and explain the method for analyzing the data. Additionally, I detail the methodological and data collection limitations, and note ethical considerations.

Analytical Framework

Purposefully, for this capstone project, I elected to study three domains of leadership practice based on the first three domains of the OLF. The analysis focused on the three leadership domains: setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the organization to sustain desired practices. As described in Chapter Two, these three leadership domains are fundamental to successful leadership (Leithwood et al., 2004) and improving school climate (Astor et al., 2002; Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016; MacNeil et al., 2009; U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe and Healthy Students, 2017). Researchers have established that it is necessary to focus on school climate to improve student outcomes

(Astor et al., 2002; Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016; MacNeil et al., 2009; U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe and Healthy Students, 2017) and school leaders are essential in shaping school climate (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Hollingworth et al., 2018; Louis & Lee, 2016). Figure 1 provides a visual illustration underscoring the relationship between school leaders and three OLF domains, which include setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the organization to sustain desired practices.

Figure 1

Diagram of Three OLF School Leader Domains Connected to Capstone Project
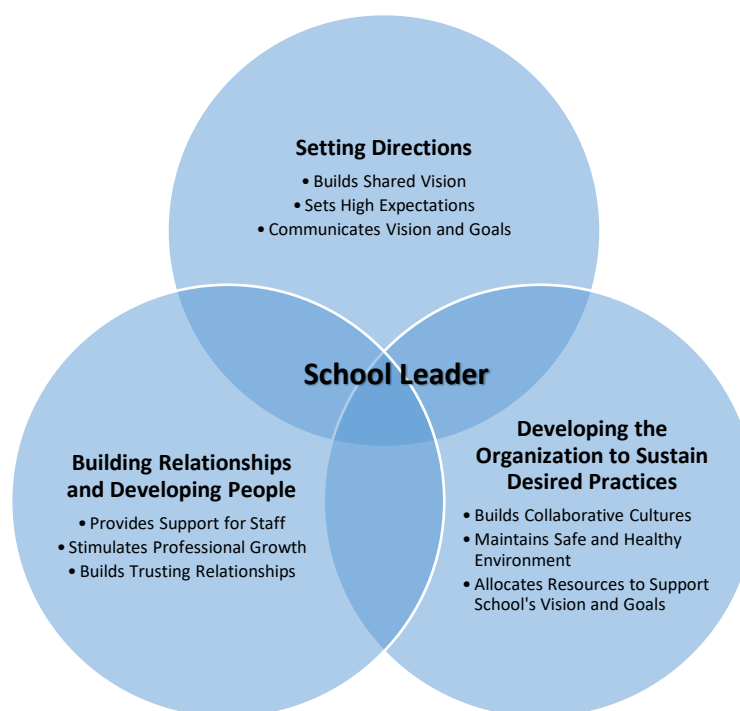
The analytical framework employed for this study concentrated on examining the influence of school leaders on school climate, as perceived by teachers, and the subsequent influence on student attendance, specifically chronic absenteeism. Figure 2 provides a visual depiction for understanding the foundation for this research. To assess the impact of school

leaders on school climate, the 2019 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions (2019 VSSCWC) Teacher Survey was utilized to operationalize the latent variables of school leaders' setting directions, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization to support desired practices, and influencing a positive school climate. Once the latent variable was operationalized, the latent construct could be used to understand the influence of school leaders on student attendance.

Figure 2

Framework Teachers' Perceptions of Leaders' Influence on Climate and Resulting Influence on Attendance
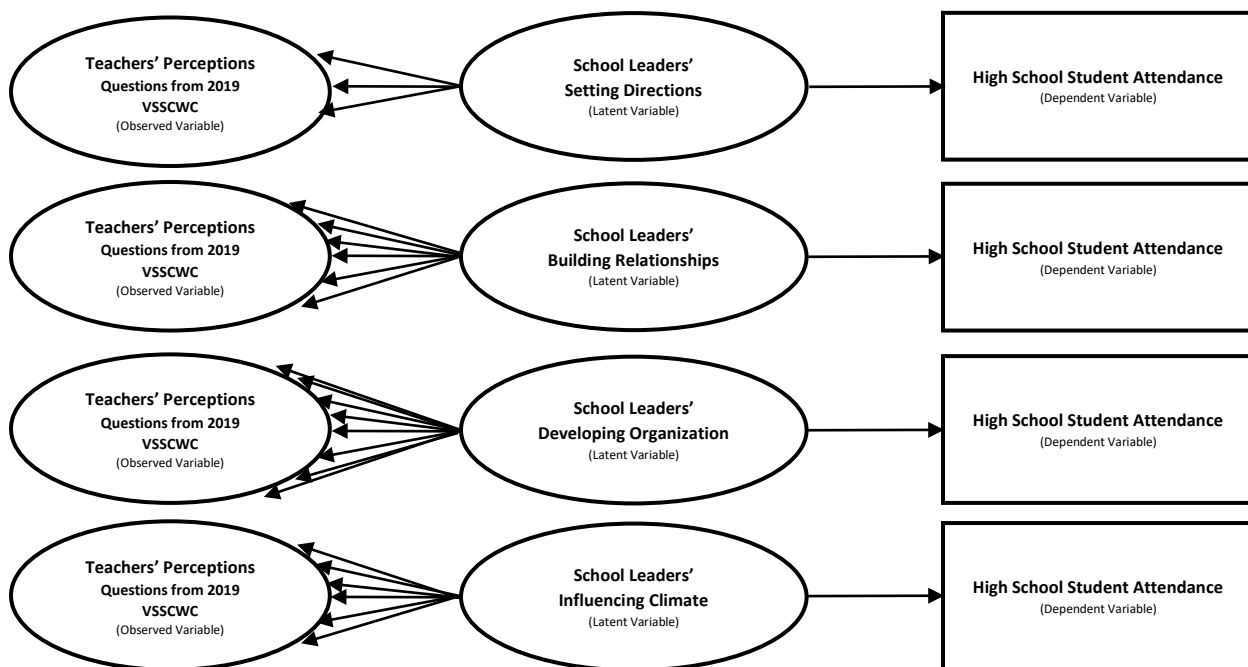
Note: The 2019 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions Teacher Survey was used to operationalize the school leaders' latent variables.

Hypotheses

This study utilized a latent variable regression analysis, explained later, to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between school leaders, school climate, and the resulting

influence on student attendance, specifically chronic absenteeism. By closely examining the

influence of school leaders on school climate and the resulting influence on students'

attendance, I hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1: Teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' setting directions for the

school positively influence high school student attendance.

Hypothesis 2: Teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' building relationships

and developing people positively influence high school student attendance.

Hypothesis 3: Teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' developing the

organization to support desired practices positively influence high school student attendance.

Hypothesis 4: Teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' influencing a positive

school climate positively influence student attendance.

The first three hypotheses relate to the successful leadership practices discussed in

Chapter Two. In this study, teachers' perceptions operationalized the latent variables of school

leaders' ability to set directions, school leaders' ability to build relationships and develop

people, and school leaders' ability to develop the organization to support desired practices. As

represented in Figure 2, the model connects teachers' perceptions of school leaders' ability to

influence school climate and the resulting influence on student attendance. The fourth

hypothesis relates to school leaders' influencing a positive school climate and the resulting

influence on student attendance.

Research Design

To answer these hypotheses, I used a quantitative approach to analyze data on the

influence of school leaders on school climate and the resulting influence on student

attendance. This study utilized latent variable regression analysis to understand the relationship between school leaders and school climate and the positive or negative influence on student attendance using high school student attendance data and a state-level climate survey. The attendance data used for this capstone was accessible through the Virginia Department of Education School Quality Profile. The state-level climate survey was the 2019 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions, in which 308 high schools participated. According to Butin (2010), surveys allow researchers to gather data from a broad sample, potentially providing a more representative sample than qualitative methods.

This study examined how the latent variables of school leaders' ability to set directions, build relationships and develop people, develop the organization to support desired practices, and influence a positive school climate influenced the dependent variable of student attendance. A latent variable is a variable that cannot be observed but can be detected by its effects on variables that are observable (Wagner et al., 2010). Specifically, in this study, school leaders' ability to shape climate is not directly observable and considered unobserved, indicating the latent nature. The latent variable of school leaders' setting directions, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization to support desired practices, and influencing a positive school climate were operationalized using teachers' perceptions from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey. For the purpose of this study, student attendance is observable and considered the dependent variable.

Participants and Instrumentation

A conscious decision was made to study chronic absenteeism at the high school level as research indicates chronic absenteeism is more significant at the high school level than at the

elementary and middle school level (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). This study utilized attendance and survey data from 308 out of 329 high schools in Virginia with complete data sets. The 2018-2019 attendance data used for this capstone was publicly available from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) School Quality Profile (Virginia Department of Education, 2021). The data utilized for school climate was the 2019 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions (2019 VSSCWC) Teacher Survey. The survey provided school climate and school leader information disaggregated by school.

An important factor considered when selecting the attendance and climate survey data was the COVID-19 pandemic. The last day of in-person school due to the COVID-19 pandemic was March 13, 2020. The extended school closures in Virginia due to the pandemic significantly skewed the attendance data for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years. For the 2021-2022 school year, 685 schools in Virginia met the accreditation standards for student attendance, while 1,146 schools failed to meet the accreditation standard (Virginia Board of Education, 2023). It was found that in the Commonwealth of Virginia, out of 1,831 schools, a staggering 62.6% of those schools experienced a chronic absenteeism rate of 15% or higher. In light of these challenges, the Virginia Board of Education suspended the use of the chronic absenteeism indicator for the accreditation year 2022-2023. Even though the Virginia Board of Education suspended the accreditation standard for chronic absenteeism for the 2021-2022 school year (2022-2023 accreditation year), the evidence remains that chronic absenteeism continues to be a significant issue in schools throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Student Attendance Data

This research study utilized publicly available student attendance data from the VDOE

School Quality Profile website (Virginia Department of Education, 2021). The attendance

information available on the VDOE School Quality Profile site was viewed and downloaded for

all students, females, males, Asian students, Black students, Hispanic students, Multiple Race

Students, White students, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and

English learner students. This attendance data was publicly available for all Virginia

elementary, middle, and high schools.

Specifically, for this study, chronic absenteeism data was collected for the 2018-2019

school year for all high schools in Virginia. I collected attendance data for all 329 high schools in

Virginia, encompassing a total of 369,561 high school students. The process involved

downloading the attendance data from the VDOE School Quality Profile website under the

learning climate tab by division and school. Subsequently, this attendance data was paired with

the school's survey data. The attendance data was aggregated by school and did not identify

individual student information. Appendix A provides a sample of the attendance data

downloaded from the VDOE School Quality Profile, including the percentage of chronically

absent students calculated by high school. Although the attendance data from the VDOE

School Quality Profile is publicly accessible, the sample data presented in Appendix A has been

deidentified to protect individual school information.

School Climate Data

The data set utilized for this study for school climate was the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher

Survey. The 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey was administered by the Virginia Department of

Education and the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (Virginia Department of Education, 2020). The 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey was a statewide school climate survey designed to help schools create and maintain favorable working conditions for professionals working in Virginia's public schools (Virginia Department of Education, 2020). The 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey was administered by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (VDCJS). The statewide data collection compared schools to regional and state norms and intends to track the progress of statewide initiatives over time.

The 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey, presented in Appendix B, measured the following four domains: professionalism; teaching, instruction, and student support; school and community support; and safety (Virginia Department of Education, 2020). The professionalism domain measure emphasized staff collegiality, teacher leadership, and autonomy. The teaching, instruction, and student support domain focused on the academic and workspace environment. The third domain of school and community support emphasized the leadership of the school administration, performance assessments for teachers and staff, professional development, expectations for managing student behavior, and adults working together on behalf of students. Finally, the fourth domain, safety, measured how all members of the school environment feel welcomed, supported, and safe. The 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey (see Appendix A) consisted of 85 items, of which 76 were attitudinal questions that used a Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. There were 15 questions from the professionalism domain; 15 questions from the teaching, instruction, and student support

domain; 38 questions from the school and community support domain; and eight questions from the safety domain.

The VDOE administered the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey from January 7, 2019, through March 15, 2019 (Virginia Department of Education, 2020). The surveys were completed online during a three-week window and all responses were anonymous (See Appendix C for an overview of the survey process). The teacher working conditions survey was administered to all teachers licensed by the VDOE regardless of the grade served. School divisions were provided reports, as illustrated in Appendix D, which summarized teacher data by school, division, region, and state.

Teacher Responses. For the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey, all teachers licensed through the VDOE were asked to participate and complete the teacher version of the survey (Virginia Department of Education, 2020). It is important to note that participation in the survey was voluntary, allowing teachers to decline participation. According to data from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey, participation included 1,678 schools in Virginia (Miller, 2020). Of the 93 percent of schools that participated in the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey, 79 school divisions had 100 percent participation, and 17 had less than 75 percent participation. Of the 54,207 teachers who responded to the survey, 83 percent were female. The majority of the respondents worked at their current school for ten years or less. Thirty-six percent of the respondents worked at their current school for one to three years, 32 percent worked at their current school for four to ten years, and 30 percent worked at their current school for eleven or more years. Forty-five percent of the respondents were elementary teachers, 21 percent taught students with disabilities, 11 percent taught English learners, 8 percent taught English

language arts, 8 percent taught math, 6 percent taught social studies, and 5 percent taught

science. The survey asked the respondents to mark all the grades they taught for the 2018-

2019 school year, and 21 percent indicated they taught ninth grade, 23 percent taught tenth

grade, 23 percent taught eleventh grade, and 22 percent taught twelfth grade.

Of the 329 high schools in Virginia, 308 participated in the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher

Survey. There were 54,207 responses from teachers, with 16,242 of those responses coming

from high school teachers. For this capstone project, only high school teacher responses to the

2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey were included. I downloaded the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey

data from the Virginia Department of Education. After I downloaded the data, the Virginia

Department of Education provided the codebook for the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey, which

can be found in Appendix E.

Trustworthiness and Validity. According to the Virginia Department of Education

(2020), several questions from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey were based on a survey the

VDOE piloted in 2017. The psychometric analyses conducted on the responses from the 2017

survey found the measure reliable and valid at both the school and respondent levels. In

addition, other questions on the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey have been used as part of other

survey efforts in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and analyses of those responses determined

that the measures are reliable and valid.

Analysis of the Data

This study used a quantitative approach to examine how the latent variables of school

leaders' setting directions, building relationships and developing people, developing the

organization to support desired practices, and influencing a positive school climate influenced

the dependent variable of student attendance. This study employed a latent variable

regression analysis to understand the relationship between school leaders and school climate

and the positive or negative effect on student attendance. A latent variable is a variable that

cannot be observed but is inferred from other observed variables (Wagner et al., 2010). A

latent variable allows researchers to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the

underlying constructs of interest when direct measurement is not possible. According to Kline

(2015), regression analysis is a statistical method used to examine the relationship between a

dependent variable and one or more independent variables. Regression analysis helps to

understand how changes in the independent variables are associated with changes in the

dependent variable, provides insight into how different factors affect the outcome, and gives a

deeper understanding of the relationship between variables (Kline, 2015). The central idea of

latent variable regression analysis is to explore and understand the relationship between latent

and observed variables. The focus of latent variable regression analysis is examining how latent

variables, representing underlying constructs, influence the observed variables.

In order to operationalize the latent variable of school leaders' influence on school

climate, questions were utilized from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey. The latent variable

regression analysis sought to measure the influence of school leaders on school climate, as

perceived by teachers, and the resulting influence on student attendance. There were four

hypotheses statements for this study. The first three hypotheses are about different leadership

areas, which suggests three latent school leader variables: school leaders' setting directions,

school leaders' building relationships and developing people, and school leaders' developing

the organization to support desired practices. The latent variable for the fourth hypothesis was

school leaders' influencing a positive school climate. I ran separate measurement models for each of the four latent variables.

A measurement model, also known as a model to operationalize the latent variable, was created to establish the relationship between the observed variable, teachers' responses to the questions selected from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey, and the latent variable. A measurement model was created for each latent variable to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the observed variables and the latent construct (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Specifically, using standardized factor loadings in measurement models can help researchers to identify which observed variables are most strongly associated with each factor, determine which observed variables may not be good indicators of the intended factor, assess the overall strength of the relationship between each observed variable and the intended factor, and compare the relative importance of different observed variables in measuring a given factor. Standardized factor loadings are typically considered important if greater than or equal to .30. However, some researchers argue that factor loadings should be greater than or equal to .40 or .50 to be considered significant (Costello & Osborne, 2005). The higher the standardized factor loading, the stronger the relationships between the observed and latent variables.

After the measurement models were created and the strength of the relationships between each observed variable was identified, I created the latent variable regression models to examine the relationships between teachers' perceptions of school leaders' influence on school climate and high school student attendance. The latent variable regression model evaluated for fit using the chi-square, χ^2, fit statistic, the root mean square error of

approximation, RMSEA (Steiger & Lind, 1980), and the comparative fit index, CFI (Bentler,

1990). The χ^2 test measures the discrepancy between the observed and expected covariance

matrices and provides a p-value to determine whether the model fits the data (Bentler, 1990).

The RMSEA measures the discrepancy between the observed and hypothesized model

covariance matrices, and lower values indicate better fit (Steiger & Lind, 1980). The CFI

compares the fit of the hypothesized model to a null model and ranges from 0 to 1, with values

closer to 1 indicating a better fit (Bentler, 1990). For this capstone, it should be noted that the

criterion for good model fit is an RMSEA < .06 and CFI > .95, following the seminal work of Hu

and Bentler (1999). All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Amos (Version 28) (Arbuckle,

2021). The following sections highlight the three OLF domains, school leaders' influence on the

school climate, and the questions selected from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey used to

operationalize the latent variables in the analysis models.

School Leaders' Setting Directions

Hypothesis 1 states that teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' setting

directions for the school positively influence high school student attendance. According to

Leithwood (2012), setting directions includes the school leader building a shared vision,

communicating the vision and goals, and creating high expectations. The latent variable of

school leaders' setting direction was operationalized using the following questions from the

2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey:

- This school's administrators communicate a clear vision for this school (2019 VSSCWC
  Question 37).

- Teachers and other staff have a shared vision for this school (2019 VSSCWC Question 38).

- This school's administrators set high expectations for all students (2019 VSSCWC Question 40).

The three survey questions used for the OLF domain of setting directions align with three of the four practices of the setting directions domain, which include building a shared vision, creating high expectations, and communicating the vision and goals. A measurement model was created to establish the relationship between the observed variable, teachers' responses to the three questions selected from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey, and the latent variable, school leaders' setting directions. Following the analysis of the measurement model, the subsequent step involved constructing and analyzing the latent variable regression model. The latent variable regression model aimed to measure the influence of teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' ability to set directions and the resulting influence on high school student attendance, specifically chronic absenteeism.

School Leaders' Building Relationships and Developing People

Hypothesis 2 states that teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' building relationships and developing people positively influence high school student attendance. As research points out, leaders must build the knowledge and skills of staff to accomplish organizational goals (Leithwood, 2012), create conditions that build capacity for professional learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Marks & Printy, 2003), strengthen instructional practices by planning for professional learning experiences (Robinson et al., 2008), and understand the instructional practices that help improve student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2004). The latent

variable of school leaders' building relationships and developing people was operationalized by using the following six questions from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey:

- I feel respected by this school's administrators (2019 VSSCWC Question 32).

- I feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to me with school administrators (2019 VSSCWC Question 33).

- I trust this school's administrators to do what they say they will do (2019 VSSCWC Question 34).

- This school's administrators support the professional development of staff (2019 VSSCWC Question 35).

- Teachers receive feedback that can help them improve their teaching (2019 VSSCWC Question 42).

- Professional development is differentiated to meet the individual needs of teachers (2019 VSSCWC Question 45).

The six survey questions used for the OLF domain of building relationships and developing people align with four of the five practices of the domain, which include providing support and demonstrating consideration for individual staff members; stimulating growth in the professional capacities of staff; modeling the school's values and practices; and building trusting relationships with and among staff, students, and parents. A model for operationalizing the latent variable of school leaders' building relationships and developing people was created to establish the observed variable, namely teachers' responses to the six questions from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey. Subsequently, after analyzing this model for operationalizing the latent variable, the latent variable regression model was created and

analyzed. The latent variable regression model sought to measure the influence of teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' ability to build relationships and develop people on high school student attendance.

School Leaders' Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices

Hypothesis 3 states that teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices positively influence high school student attendance. According to Hallinger (2003) and Jackson (2000), successful school improvement is the willingness of school leaders to adapt their strategies to respond to constantly changing conditions. This latent variable of school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices was operationalized using the following eight questions from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey:

- Teachers engage in collaborative problem solving in this school (2019 VSSCWC Question 4).

- Teachers are effective leaders in this school (2019 VSSCWC Question 5).

- Teachers and other adults at this school support one another to meet the needs of students (2019 VSSCWC Question 13).

- Teachers and adults at this school collaborate to make this school run effectively (2019 VSSCWC Question 15).

- The physical environment of my classroom supports my teaching and my students' learning (2019 VSSCWC Question 28).

- My school provides me with sufficient access to appropriate instructional materials (2019 VSSCWC Question 30).

- Sufficient resources are available for professional development in my school (2019 VSSCWC Question 44).

- Teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues (2019 VSSCWC Question 50).

The eight survey questions used for the OLF domain of developing the organization to support desired practices align with four of the six practices of the domain, which include building collaborative cultures and distributing leadership, structuring the organization to facilitate collaboration, maintaining a safe and healthy environment, and allocating resources in support of the school's vision and goals. A measurement model was developed to establish the relationship between the observed variables, teachers' responses to the eight questions from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey, and the latent variable, school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices. Following the analysis of the measurement model, the latent variable regression model was constructed to measure the influence of teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices and the resulting influence on high school student attendance.

School Leaders' Influencing a Positive School Climate

Hypothesis 4 states that teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders influencing a positive school climate positively influence student attendance. School leaders who create a positive school climate and build positive relationships with students and staff positively impact student attendance (Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016). This latent variable of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate was operationalized using the following six questions from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey:

- I feel respected by teachers and other adults at this school (2019 VSSCWC Question 12).

- Teachers and other adults at this school support one another to meet the needs of all students (2019 VSSCWC Question 13).

- Teachers and other adults at this school trust one another (2019 VSSCWC Question 14).

- I am treated with respect by students at this school (2019 VSSCWC Question 70).

- I feel safe at this school (2019 VSSCWC Question 71).

- Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn (2019 VSSCWC Question 78).

The measurement model was created after the six survey questions were selected to operationalize the latent variable of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate. The measurement model was created to establish the relationship between the observed variable, teachers' responses to the six questions selected from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey, and the latent variable, school leaders' influencing a positive school climate. After analyzing the measurement model, the subsequent step involved constructing and analyzing the latent variable regression model to measure the influence of teachers' perceptions of school leaders' influencing the school climate and the resulting influence on high school student attendance.

Methodological and Data Collection Limitations

The primary objective of this study was to explore the relationship between school leaders, school climate, and student attendance. The analytical framework intended to hone in on the focus of the study and was used as a lens for understanding the research design and method for analyzing the data. This study focused on understanding how school leaders' influence on school climate influenced student attendance. By utilizing statewide data, this study allowed for a comprehensive investigation of the 132 school divisions in Virginia in

relation to the framework of the study. The framework concentrated on school leaders'

influence on school climate, based on teachers' perceptions, and the resulting influence on

student attendance.

When selecting the attendance and climate survey data, an essential factor considered

was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The prolonged school closures in Virginia during the

pandemic significantly affected the attendance data for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school

years. In the 2021-2022 school year, out of 1,831 schools in Virginia, only 685 schools met the

accreditation standards for student attendance, while 1,146 schools failed to meet the standard

(Virginia Board of Education, 2023). According to the data from the Virginia Board of Education

(2023), 43 percent of schools in Virginia did not meet accreditation standards for attendance in

the 2021-2022 school year. As a result, the accreditation standard for chronic absenteeism was

suspended by the Virginia Board of Education for the 2021-2022 school year. However, it

remains evident that chronic absenteeism was a significant issue in 2018-2019 that has been

exacerbated by the pandemic. Therefore, this study focused on student attendance and school

climate data collected during the 2018-2019 school year.

The 2018-2019 student attendance data has been collected from school divisions and

reported to the Virginia Department of Education (Virginia Department of Education, 2021).

This data is readily accessible to the public in aggregate form by school and by division. Since

this data has been reported and is available on the School Quality Profile, I am unable to

examine if there were individual or school reasons for excessive student absences, like a

catastrophic weather event that impacted a number of families in the school and caused

significant absenteeism. The information provided does not disaggregate information for

individual students to hone in on particular reasons for the excessive absences. Further, the use of statewide administered survey data limits the opportunity to modify questions to explore specific practices of an individual school or school system.

Further, the data for the current study are from a single academic year. On the face of it, this may seem to violate the temporal precedence required by prediction; however, it is logical that school leaders' attitudes, opinions, and behaviors influence teachers' perceptions of school climate within the same year. Also, the data from school leaders and teachers were collected from mid-winter to early spring, while the student attendance data was collected through the end of the school year. Nevertheless, caution must be exercised with the causality implied by the statistical model. Notwithstanding this limitation, the current study shed light on the relationship among the variables.

Ethical Considerations

The data utilized for this survey includes information publicly available and does not identify individual students, staff, or school leaders. The 2018-2019 attendance data was collected from the Virginia Department of Education School Quality Profile, which is publicly available by division by school on the Virginia Department of Education website (Virginia Department of Education, 2021). Further, the 2019 Virginia School Climate and Working Conditions Teacher Survey results are publicly available from the Virginia Department of Education (Virginia Department of Education, 2020).

The information gleaned from this investigation was aggregated by school and division. This study provides valuable information for school leaders and the school community on how school leaders influence school climate and the resulting influence on student attendance. The

outcome of this research helps inform school leaders' practices to improve student attendance,

specifically chronic absenteeism. Understanding where and why student absences are high

offers educators an opportunity to predict the schools and students who need additional

support to ensure students have an opportunity to learn.

Chapter Four: Findings

This study was guided by four hypotheses that explored school leaders' influence on school climate and the subsequent influence on student attendance. The first hypothesis predicted that teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' setting directions would positively influence high school student attendance. The second hypothesis predicted that teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' building relationships and developing people would positively influence high school student attendance. The third hypothesis predicted that teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices would positively influence high school student attendance. Finally, the fourth hypothesis predicted that teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate would positively influence high school student attendance.

In this chapter, the hypotheses were examined to determine the connection between teachers' perceptions of school leaders' ability to influence school climate and the subsequent influence on high school student attendance. The first three hypotheses attempted to uncover, according to teachers' perceptions, how the three distinct leadership domains of setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the organization to support desired practices influenced high school student attendance. The purpose of these hypotheses was to explore the influence of the leadership domains on student attendance. The fourth hypothesis explored how teachers' perceptions of school leaders' shaping school climate influenced high school student attendance. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the methodological approach for this study was latent variable regression analysis. This approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between teachers' perceptions of

school leaders and the positive or negative influence of perceived leadership practices on high school student attendance.

The development of the measurement model is explained and the interpretation of the data is presented. Following the creation and interpretation of the measurement model, the creation of the latent variable regression model is discussed. In this study, the latent variable regression model was used to examine the influence of the latent variables of school leaders' setting directions, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization to support desired practices, and influencing a positive school climate, on the observed variable, high school student attendance. After the details of the latent variable regression model are described, the outcomes from the latent variable regression analysis are interpreted and reported, explaining the extent to which the evidence supported or disconfirmed the hypotheses. Concluding this chapter, the findings are summarized, highlighting the key results derived from the analyses.

Hypotheses

Teachers' perception of school leaders' ability to set directions, build relationships and develop people, and develop the organization to support desired practices were expected to influence high school students' attendance. Further, teachers' perceptions of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate were expected to positively influence student attendance. The following four hypotheses guided this study:

Hypothesis 1: Teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' setting directions for the school positively influence high school student attendance.

Hypothesis 2: Teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' building relationships and developing people positively influence high school student attendance.

Hypothesis 3: Teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices positively influence high school student attendance.

Hypothesis 4: Teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate positively influence student attendance.

The models used to operationalize the latent variable, or measurement models, were created to determine the degree to which each observed variable of teacher perceptions in the dataset correlated to the latent variable of school leaders' setting directions, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization to support desired practices, and influencing a positive school climate. Standardized factor loadings, or standardized regression weights, were used to compare the relative strength of each variable's relationship with the latent construct (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). The standardized factor loadings represented the correlation between each observed variable of teachers' perceptions and the underlying factor of leaders' practices. The significance of the standardized factor loading analysis was determined using a threshold of .50 or higher (Costello & Osborne, 2005). While there are no universally agreed-upon thresholds for standardized factor loadings in latent variable analysis, the higher the standardized factor loading, the stronger the relationship between the observed variable and the underlying latent construct.

After the measurement model and the standardized factor loadings were assessed, the latent variable regression models were created to examine the relationships between the observed and latent variables. The latent variable measurement model and regression model

were evaluated for fit using the chi-squared (χ^2) fit statistic, the root mean square error of

approximation (Steiger & Lind, 1980), and the comparative fit index (Bentler, 1990) with the

criteria values of CFI > .95 and RMSEA < .06 as indicative of good model fit following the seminal

work of Hu and Bentler (1999). IBM SPSS Amos (Version 28) was used to conduct all analyses.

Hypothesis 1 - School Leaders' Setting Directions

The first hypothesis examined the influence of teachers' positive perceptions of school

leaders' ability to set directions and the resulting influence on high school student attendance.

It was hypothesized that teachers' perceptions of school leaders' direction setting abilities

would positively influence student attendance. In order to determine if there was a

relationship between the three questions selected from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey and

school leaders' setting directions, I created a model for operationalizing the latent variable of

school leaders' setting directions, as shown in Figure 3. The model measured the relationships

between the observed variables, teachers' perceptions using three questions from the 2019

VSSCWC Teacher Survey and the latent construct, school leaders' setting directions.

Figure 3

Measurement Model School Leaders' Setting Directions
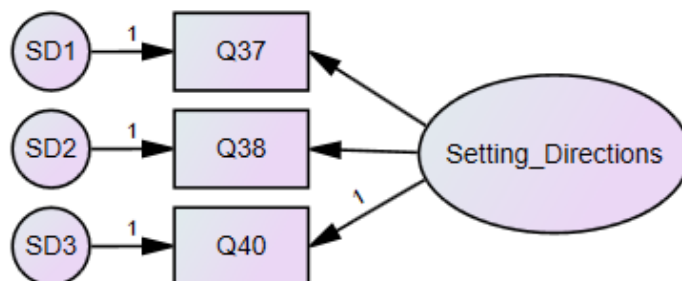
The three questions selected from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey, presented in Table

1, were used to assess the relationship between the observed variable of teachers' perceptions

and the latent construct of school leaders' setting directions. Standardized factor loadings, or

standardized regression weights, were employed to measure the significance of the

relationship between the observed variables and the latent variable. The model to

operationalize the latent variable revealed statistically significant relationships between the

selected survey questions and the latent construct of school leaders' capacity to set directions.

As represented in Table 1, all three standardized regression weights estimated in the model to

operationalize the latent variable were greater than λ = .90, indicating a strong and statistically

significant relationship between the latent variable (school leaders' setting directions) and the

observed variable (teachers' perceptions). These findings suggested that the included questions

effectively captured the latent construct of school leaders' setting directions.

Table 1

Measurement Model Outcome School Leaders' Setting Directions

Variable	Estimate
Q37: This school's administrators communicate a clear vision for the school.	.965*
Q38: Teachers and other staff have a shared vision for this school.	.943*
Q40: This school's administrators set high expectations for all students.	.916*

Note: The estimates (standardized factor loadings) displayed in this table were calculated from

the measurement model.

* Indicates a strong relationship between the observed variable and the latent construct.

Following the identification of a significant relationship between the latent variable of

school leaders' setting directions and the selected questions from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher

Survey, a latent variable regression model was developed, as illustrated in Figure 4. The main

objective of this model was to examine the influence of the latent variable of school leaders'

setting directions on the dependent variable, high school student attendance. Specifically, the

model aimed to understand the relationship between school leaders' setting directions and the

percentage of high school students chronically absent from school (PCA).

Figure 4

Standardized Estimates School Leaders' Setting Directions
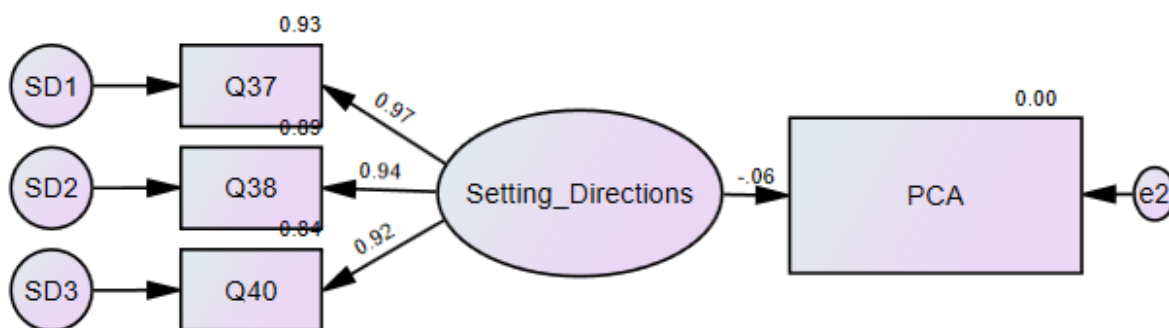
Note: PCA represents the percentage of students chronically absent from school.

As described above, the latent variable regression model was developed to investigate

the influence of teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' setting directions on high

school student attendance. Table 2 presents the findings of the latent variable regression

analysis. The analysis revealed a chi-square (χ^2) value of $\chi^2(2) = 2.867$, the root mean square

error of approximation (RMSEA) value of RMSEA = .038, and comparative fit index (CFI) value of

CFI = .999, which indicated a good fit of the model to the data. For this study, the criteria

values of CFI > .95 and RMSEA < .06, as established by Hu and Bentler (1999), served as

commonly used benchmarks for evaluating model fit.

Table 2

Regression Analysis School Leaders' Setting Directions Influence on Student Attendance

Model	χ^2	*df*	*p*	RMSEA	CFI
Setting Directions	2.87	2	.238	.038	.999

Note: RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index

The latent variable regression analysis revealed a regression coefficient, denoted by β, with a value of β = -0.060. The regression coefficient represents the relationship between a dependent and independent variable in regression analysis. In this model, an interpretation of β suggested that for every one-unit increase in the independent variable, the dependent variable is expected to decrease by 0.06 units of a standard deviation. The negative value of the regression coefficient indicated an inverse relationship between school leaders' setting directions and students' chronic absenteeism, implying that chronic absenteeism among high school students tends to decrease as school leaders' ability to set directions increases. However, it is important to note that the regression coefficient was not statistically significant, β = -0.06, *p* = .303, and R^2 = .004. This lack of statistical significance suggested that the observed relationship between school leaders' setting directions and student chronic absenteeism may not be reliable. The squared multiple correlation, also known as R^2, was found to be 0.4 percent. R^2 represented the proportion of variability in the outcome variable that was accounted for by the observed variables in the regression model. The low R^2 value suggested that the independent variable was limited in predicting the variance in the dependent variable.

In summary, even though the RMSEA and CFI values indicated that the model was a good fit for the data, the lack of statistical significance and the low R^2 suggested that the observed relationship may not be reliable or meaningful. While the RMSEA and CFI suggested model fit, the regression coefficient and squared multiple correlation suggested no significant relationship between school leaders' setting directions and student attendance. It is important to note that the lack of statistical significance does not necessarily mean that there is no relationship at all; therefore, caution must be used when interpreting the data. As a result, further research is necessary to draw a more definitive conclusion regarding teachers' positive perceptions of school leaders' setting directions and the influence on high school student attendance.

Hypothesis 2 - School Leaders' Building Relationships and Developing People

The second hypothesis in this study investigated school leaders' building relationships and developing people, as perceived by teachers, and the resulting influence on high school student attendance. This second latent variable, school leaders' building relationships and developing people, was operationalized through the observed variable, teachers' perceptions. Similar to the approach for the first hypothesis, latent variable regression analysis was used to explore the second hypothesis. First, a measurement model was created to estimate the relationship between the six questions from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey and school leaders' ability to build relationships and develop people (see Table 3). The measurement model, illustrated in Figure 5, evaluated the relationships between the observed variable of teachers' perceptions and the latent construct of school leaders' building relationships and developing people.

Figure 5

Measurement Model School Leaders' Building Relationships and Developing People
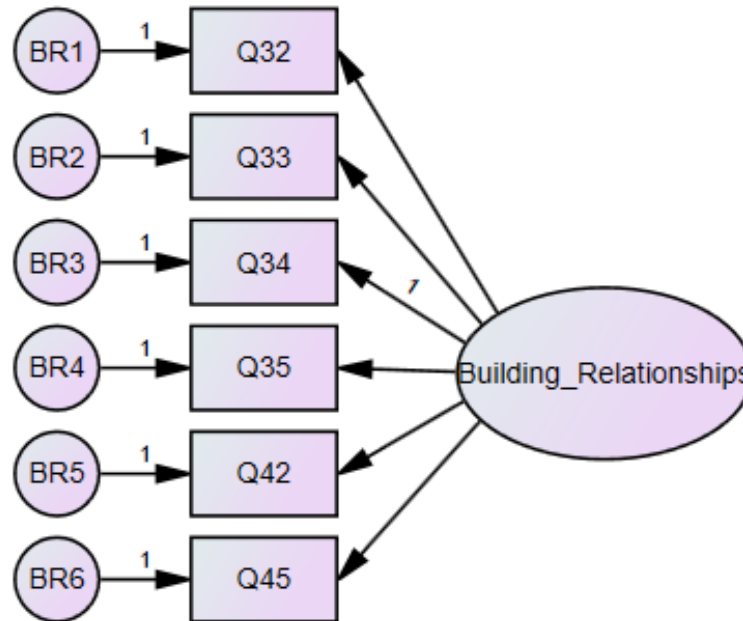
As presented in Table 3, the results of the measurement model indicated moderate to strong relationships between the selected questions from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey and school leaders' building relationships and developing people. Five of the six questions in the measurement model exhibited standardized regression weights greater than $\lambda = .89$, suggesting strong relationships between the observed variable and the latent construct. One of the six questions, "professional development is differentiated to meet the individual needs of teachers," was estimated at $\lambda = .601$. According to Costello and Osborne (2005), there are no universally agreed-upon thresholds for standardized factor loadings in latent variable analysis; however, the higher the standardized factor loading, the stronger the relationship between the observed variable and the underlying latent construct. These findings indicated that five of the six questions included in the model had a strong relationship with the latent construct, and one

of the six questions had a moderate relationship with the latent construct of school leaders'

building relationships and developing people.

Table 3

Measurement Model Outcome School Leaders' Building Relationships and Developing People

Variable	Estimate
Q32: I feel respected by this school's administrators.	.973*
Q33: I feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to me with school administrators.	.957*
Q34: I trust this school's administrators to do what they say they will do.	.957*
Q35: This school's administrators support the professional development of staff.	.920*
Q42: Teachers receive feedback that can help them improve their teaching.	.896*
Q45: Professional development is differentiated to meet the individual needs of teachers.	.601

Note: The estimates (standardized factor loadings) displayed in this table were calculated from

the measurement model.

* Indicates a strong relationship between the observed variable and the latent construct.

After establishing the significance of the relationship between the latent variables of

school leaders' building relationships and developing people and the six questions selected

from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey, I proceeded to create the latent variable regression

model as depicted in Figure 6. This model aimed to analyze how the latent variable of school

leaders' building relationships and developing people influenced student attendance,

specifically the percentage of high school students who were chronically absent from school

(PCA). Through latent variable regression analysis, I sought to understand whether the latent construct of school leaders' building relationships and developing people influenced the percentage of high school students who are chronically absent from school (PCA).

Figure 6

Standardized Estimates School Leaders' Building Relationships and Developing People
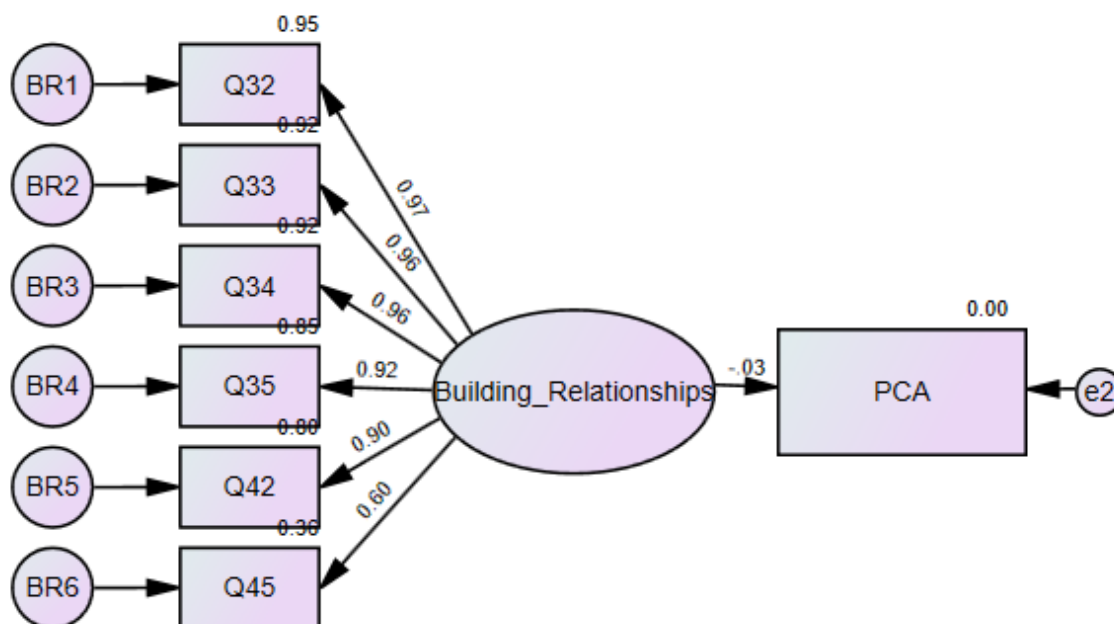
Note: PCA represents the percentage of students chronically absent from school.

The findings from the latent variable regression analysis for school leaders' building relationships and developing people, as presented in Table 4, revealed a $\chi^2(14)= 146.71$, $p <$ .001, RMSEA = .176, and CFI = .948. According to the commonly used benchmarks for evaluating model fit, as established by Hu and Bentler (1999), the RMSEA of .176 does not indicate a good model fit. However, the CFI of .948, which is close to the benchmark of CFI > .95, suggests a reasonably good fit. Even though the RMSEA suggested a poor fit, the CFI suggested a relatively good fit, which could mean the model has some limitations in specific

areas, but overall, it still provided an acceptable fit. However, it is important to exercise

caution when interpreting the data and generalizing from it.

Table 4

Regression Analysis School Leaders' Building Relationships Influence on Student Attendance

Model	χ^2	*df*	*p*	RMSEA	CFI
Building Relationships	146.71	14	<.001	.176	.948
Building Relationships Preferred Model	79.97	9	<.001	.16	.970

Note: RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index

The latent variable regression analysis revealed a regression coefficient of β = -0.034,

representing the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. In this

model, the interpretation of β suggested that for every one-unit increase in the independent

variable, the dependent variable decreased by 0.03 of a standard deviation. It is important to

note that the regression coefficient was not statistically significant, β = -0.034, *p* = .558, and R^2 =

.001. This lack of statistical significance suggested that the observed relationships between

school leaders' building relationships and developing people and high school student chronic

absenteeism may not be reliable. The squared multiple correlation was found to be 0.1

percent, representing the proportion of variability in the outcome variable that can be

accounted for by the independent variable in the regression model. The regression coefficient's

negative value indicated an inverse relationship between school leaders' building relationships

and developing people and high school students' chronic absenteeism. This negative value

implied that chronic absenteeism among high school students decreased as school leaders'

ability to build relationships and develop people increased. It is important to note that an R^2

value of 0.1 percent indicated a relatively weak relationship between the independent and

dependent variables. However, the low R^2 value suggested that an extremely small portion of

variability is accounted for in the model.

In order to try to find a better model fit, I created a second latent variable regression

model. In this revised latent variable regression model, question 45, ("professional

development is differentiated to meet the individual needs of teachers"), was removed based

on results from the measurement model, which revealed that question 45 had the lowest

standardized factor loading of λ = .601. The findings from the revised latent variable regression

model revealed a $\chi^2(9)$= 79.97, p < .001, RMSEA = .160, and CFI = .970, as shown in Table 4

(Building Relationships Preferred Model). According to the commonly used benchmarks for

evaluating model fit, as Hu and Bentler (1999) established, the RMSEA of .160 still does not

signify a good model fit, suggesting the model still did not fully capture the underlying

relationships in the data. However, the CFI = .970 suggested a good fit indicating that the model

adequately represented the data and captured the relationships between the variables. Since

the second model yielded a comparative fit index above the threshold, suggesting a slightly

improved fit, the second model is preferred over the initial model. Therefore, the second

model is referred to as the preferred model.

Based on the preferred model results, the regression coefficient, p-value, and squared

multiple correlations remained unchanged with β = -0.034, p = .555, and R^2 = .001. Therefore,

the exclusion of question 45 did not noticeably improve model fit in the preferred model latent

variable regression analysis. To summarize, even though the CFI value suggested that the model

fits the data, the lack of statistical significance and the low R^2 suggest that the observed

relationship may not be reliable or meaningful. While the preferred model suggested

improvement, the latent construct of school leaders' building relationships and developing

people did not show a clear relationship with high school student attendance. Further

exploration is necessary to draw a more definitive conclusion regarding teachers' positive

perceptions of school leaders' building relationships and developing people and the influence

on high school student attendance.

Hypothesis 3 - School Leaders' Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices

The third hypothesis investigated school leaders' developing the organization to support

desired practices, as perceived by teachers, and the resulting influence on high school student

attendance. This study's latent variable, school leaders' developing the organization to support

desired practices, was operationalized through the observed variables, teachers' perceptions.

To analyze this hypothesis, a measurement model using latent variable regression analysis,

similar to the approach used for the previous hypotheses, was employed. The measurement

model was constructed to explore the relationship between the eight selected questions from

the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey (see Table 5) and school leaders' ability to develop the

organization to support desired practices. Figure 7 illustrates the measurement model

designed to test these relationships.

Figure 7

Measurement Model School Leaders' Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices
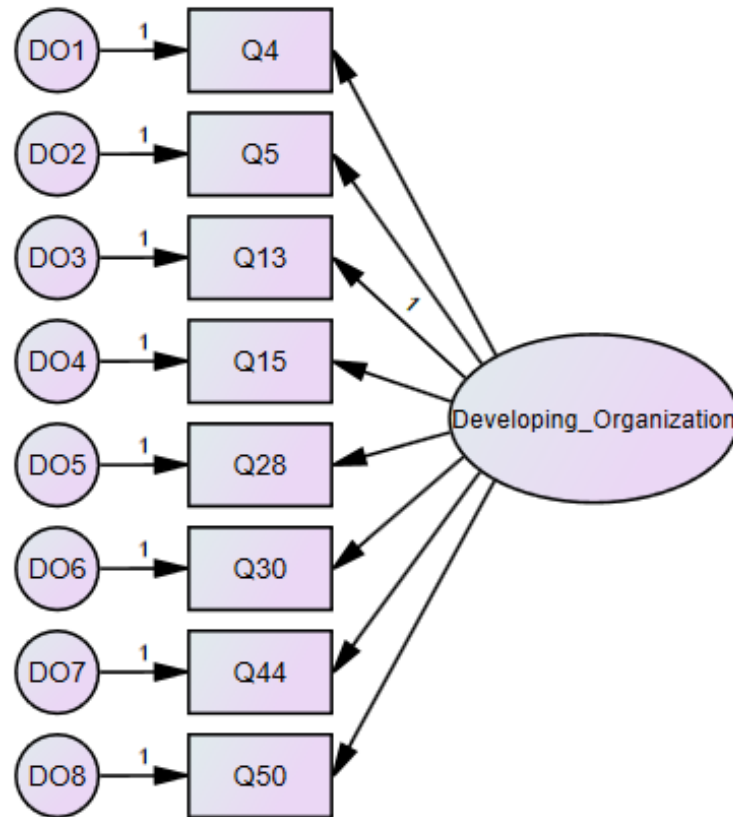
Standardized factor loadings were used to assess the strength and significance of the

relationships between the observed variables from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey and the

latent variable of school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices. As

shown in Table 5, four of the eight questions in the measurement model had standardized

regression weights estimated greater than λ = .89, which suggested strong relationships

between the observed variables and the latent construct. The other four questions were

estimated to be greater than λ = .54. According to Costello and Osborne (2005), there are no

universally agreed-upon thresholds for standardized factor loadings; however, the higher the

standardized factor loading, the stronger the relationship between the observed variables and the latent construct. These findings suggested that four of the eight questions in the measurement model had a strong relationship between the observed variable and the latent construct. The other four questions had a moderate relationship between the observed variable, teachers' perceptions, and the latent construct of school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices.

Table 5

Measurement Model Outcome School Leaders' Developing Organization to Support Practices

Variable	Estimate
Q15: Teachers and adults at this school collaborate to make this school run effectively.	.969*
Q13: Teachers and other adults at this school support one another to meet the needs of students.	.928*
Q5: Teachers are effective leaders in this school.	.911*
Q4: Teachers engage in collaborative problem solving in this school.	.898*
Q44: Sufficient resources are available for professional development in my school.	.718
Q30: My school provides me with sufficient access to appropriate instructional materials.	.677
Q50: Teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues.	.580
Q28: The physical environment of my classroom supports my teaching and my students' learning.	.548

Note: The estimates (standardized factor loadings) displayed in this table were calculated from the measurement model.

* Indicates a strong relationship between the observed variable and the latent construct.

After examining the correlation between the latent variable (school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices) and the observed variables (teachers' perceptions), a latent variable regression model was created, as depicted in Figure 8. The latent variable regression analysis aimed to investigate the relationship between the latent variable of school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices and the influence on the percentage of high school students who were chronically absent from school (PCA). Specifically, the model aimed to understand the relationship between school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices and the percentage of high school students who are chronically absent from school.

Figure 8

Standardized Estimates School Leaders' Developing the Organization to Support Practices
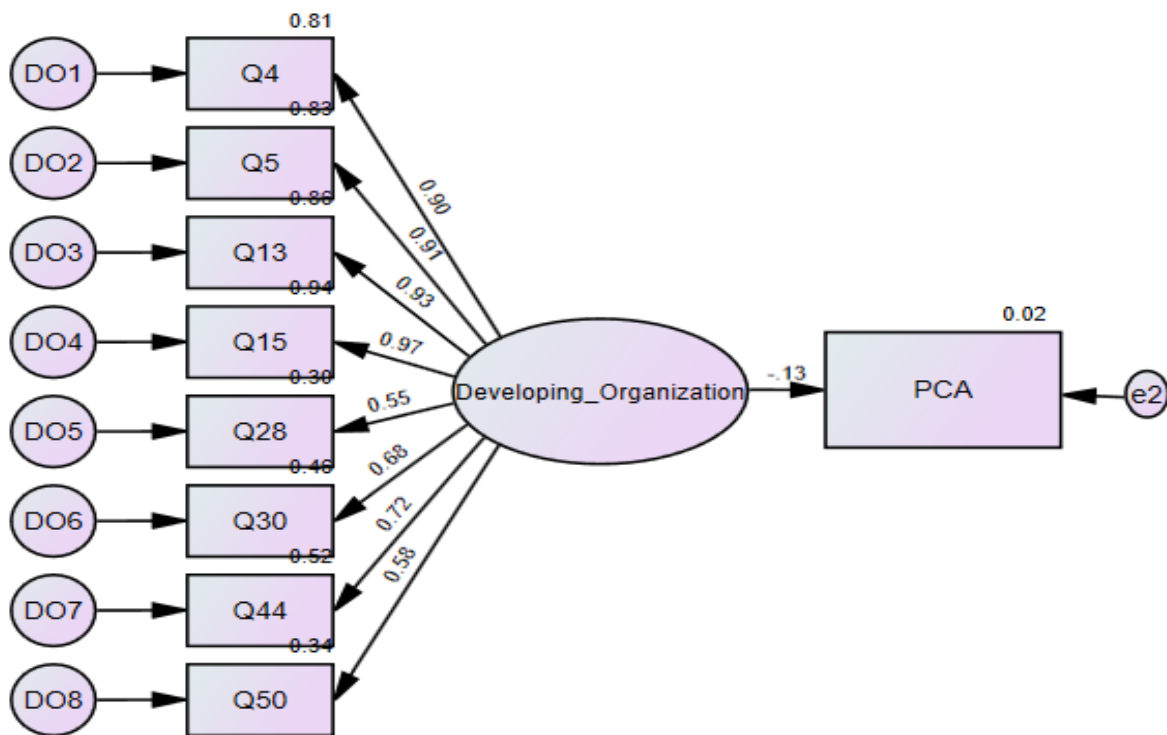
Note: PCA represents the percentage of students chronically absent from school.

The latent variable regression analysis examined the relationship between teachers' perception of school leaders' ability to develop the organization to support desired practices and the influence on high school students' attendance. As presented in Table 6, the findings revealed a χ^2(27)= 333.292, *p* < .001, RMSEA = .192, and CFI = .871. According to the commonly used benchmarks for evaluating model fit, as established by Hu and Bentler (1999), neither the RMSEA = .192 nor the CFI = .871 indicated a good model fit. In order to find a better model fit, I created a second latent variable regression model to investigate the influence of school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices on high school students' attendance. For this second latent variable regression model, I removed four questions from the analysis (Q44, Q30, Q50, and Q28, shown in Table 5) that, according to the measurement model, had a moderate relationship with the latent construct of school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices. As shown in Table 6 (Developing Organization Preferred Model), the findings revealed a χ^2(5) = 8.47, p = .132, RMSEA = .048, and CFI = .998. According to the commonly used benchmarks for evaluating model fit, as established by Hu and Bentler (1999), the RMSEA = .048 and the CFI = .998 indicated a good model fit.

Table 6

Regression Analysis School Leaders' Developing Organization Influence on Student Attendance

Model	χ^2	*df*	*p*	RMSEA	CFI
Developing Organization	333.292	27	<.001	.192	.871
Developing Organization Preferred Model	8.47	5	.132	.048	.998

Note: RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index

Based on the results of the preferred model, the second latent variable regression model created to measure the influence of school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices on student attendance, the regression coefficient of β = -0.138 indicated a negative relationship between teachers' perception of school leaders' ability to develop the organization to support desired practices and the percent of students chronically absent. The interpretation suggested that as teachers perceive school leaders' ability to develop the organization to support desired practices increases, the percentage of chronically absent students decreases. In this model, the interpretation of β suggested that for every one-unit increase in the independent variable, the dependent variable decreased by 0.14 of a standard deviation.

It is important to note that the regression coefficient was statistically significant, β = -0.138, p = .016, and R^2 = .019 percent. The model suggested a relatively weak relationship between the independent and dependent variables, as indicated by the R^2 value of 1.9 percent. Overall, these findings suggest that there is evidence to support model fit, and according to the regression coefficient, it is unlikely that the observed relationship between the independent and dependent variables may have occurred by chance. Further investigation is needed to understand the factors influencing student attendance.

Hypothesis 4 – School Leaders' Influencing a Positive School Climate

The fourth hypothesis investigated teachers' perceptions of school leaders' influence on a positive school climate and the subsequent influence on high school student attendance. Using the same latent variable regression analysis process, a measurement model was created to determine if the six questions from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey (see Table 7) had a

significant relationship with the latent variable of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate. As depicted in Figure 9, the measurement model was designed to test the relationship between the latent variable of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate and the observed variable of teachers' perceptions of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate.

Figure 9

Measurement Model School Leaders' Influencing a Positive School Climate
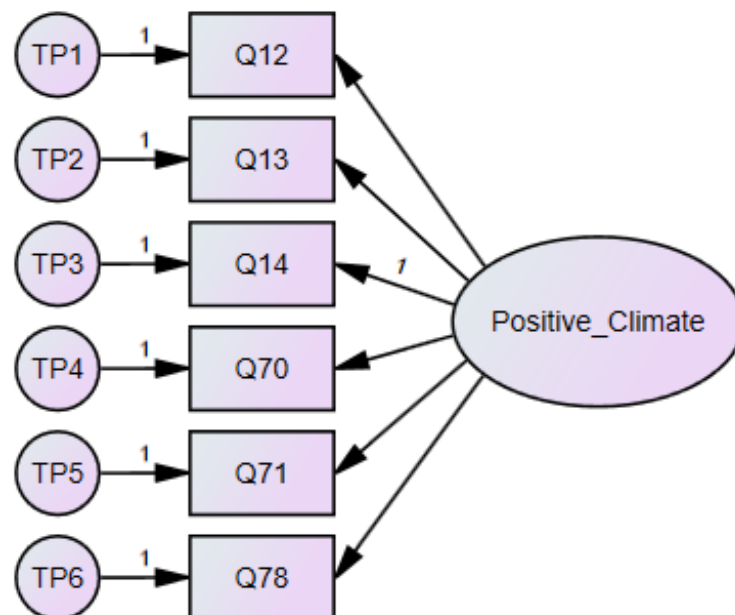
Like the first three hypotheses, the measurement model was used to gauge the significance of the relationship between the latent variable of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate and the observed variables of teachers' perceptions. The results of the measurement model indicated strong relationships between three of the six questions from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey and the school leaders' ability to influence a positive school climate. Three of the six questions' standardized regression weights estimated in the

measurement model were greater than λ = .90, suggesting strong relationships between the observed variables and the latent construct. The other three questions were estimated to be greater than λ = .67. There are no universally agreed-upon thresholds for standardized factor loadings in latent variable analysis (Costello & Osborne, 2005); however, the higher the standardized factor loading, the stronger the relationship between the observed variable and the latent construct. These findings indicate that three of the six questions included in the model had a strong relationship with the latent construct, and the other three questions had a moderate relationship with the latent construction of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate.

Table 7

Measurement Model Outcome School Leaders' Influencing Positive School Climate

Variable	Estimate
Q14: Teachers and other adults at this school trust one another.	.964*
Q13: Teachers and other adults at this school support one another to meet the needs of all students.	.958*
Q12: I feel respected by teachers and other adults at this school.	.906*
Q78: Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.	.834
Q71: I feel safe at this school.	.715
Q70: I am treated with respect by students at this school.	.673

Note: The estimates (standardized factor loadings) displayed in this table were calculated from the measurement model.

* Indicates a strong relationship between the observed variable and the latent construct.

Following the establishment of the relationship between the latent variable of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate and the six questions selected from the 2019

VSSCWC Teacher Survey, the latent variable regression model was created, as shown in Figure

10. The intent of the model was to investigate the influence of the latent variable of school

leaders' influencing a positive school climate on the percentage of chronically absent students

(PCA) from school for the 2018-2019 school year.

Figure 10

Standardized Estimates School Leaders' Influencing a Positive School Climate
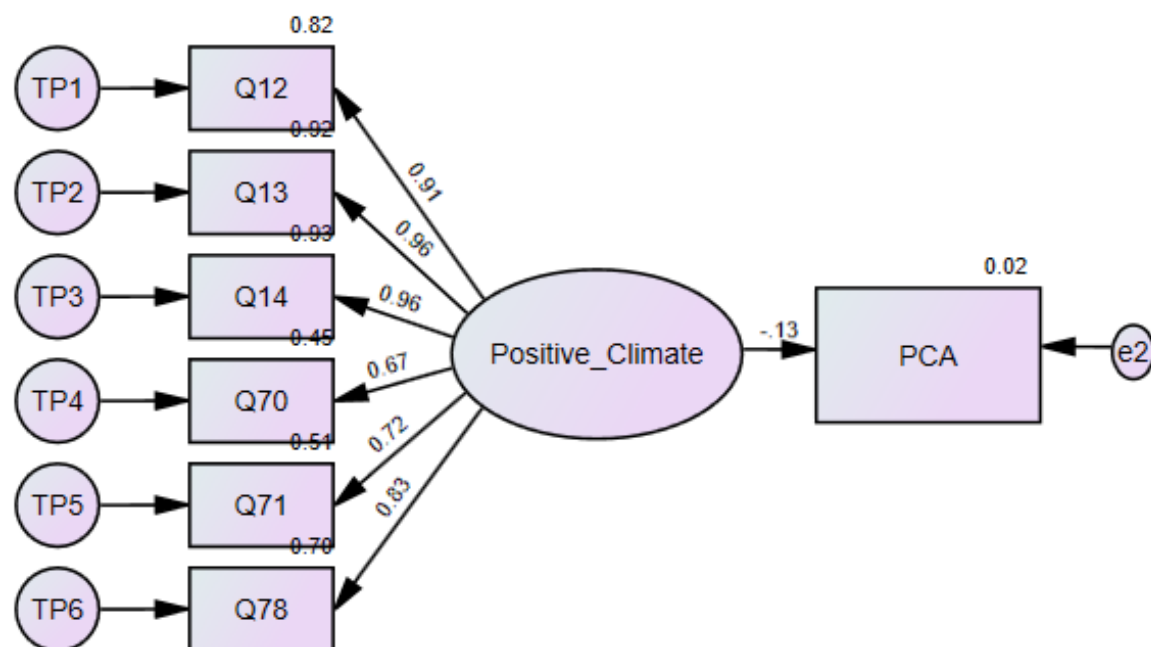
Note: PCA represents the percentage of students chronically absent from school.

The latent variable regression analysis examined the relationship between teachers'

perception of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate and the resulting influence

on student attendance. As presented in Table 8, the findings reveal $\chi^2(14) = 340.601$, $p < .001$,

RMSEA = .276, and CFI = .846. According to the commonly used benchmarks for evaluating

model fit, neither the RMSEA = .276 nor the CFI = .846 indicated a good model fit.

To find a better model fit, I created a second latent variable regression model to investigate the influence of school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices on students' attendance. For this second latent variable regression model, I removed the three questions from the analysis (Q78, Q71, and Q70, shown in Table 7) that, according to the measurement model, had a moderate relationship with the latent construct of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate. As shown in Table 8 (Positive School Climate Preferred Model), the findings revealed $\chi^2(2) = 17.433$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .159, and CFI = .986. According to the commonly used benchmarks for evaluating model fit, established by Hu and Bentler (1999), the RMSEA does not indicate a good fit, but the CFI = 0.986 indicates a good model fit.

Table 8

Regression Analysis School Leaders' Influencing a Positive School Climate

Model	χ^2	df	p	RMSEA	CFI
Positive School Climate	340.60	14	<.001	.276	.846
Positive School Climate Preferred Model	17.43	2	<.001	.159	.986

Note: RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index

Based on the results of the preferred model, the second latent variable regression model was created to measure school leaders' influence on school climate and the positive or negative influence on student attendance. The regression coefficient was $\beta = -0.121$. The negative regression coefficient indicates a negative relationship between teachers' perceptions of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate and the percentage of chronically absent

students. This regression coefficient suggested that the percentage of chronically absent

students decreased as school leaders' ability to influence a positive school climate increased.

The interpretation of β suggested that for every unit increase in the independent variable,

school leaders' influencing a positive climate, the dependent variable, student absenteeism,

was expected to decrease by 0.12 of a standard deviation.

It is important to note that the regression coefficient was statistically significant, $β = -0.121$, $p = .035$, and $R^2 = .015$. These findings suggested evidence supporting model fit and a

relatively weak relationship between the independent and dependent variables, as indicated by

the R^2 value of 1.5 percent. Overall the findings provided evidence of model fit, supporting the

relationship between school leaders' ability to influence a positive school climate and student

attendance. Further investigation is needed to understand the factors significantly influencing

student attendance.

Summary

In this chapter, I utilized latent variable regression analysis to understand how

underlying factors operationalizing school leaders' practices of setting directions, building

relationships and developing people, developing the organization to support desired practices,

and influencing a positive school climate influenced the observed variable of high school

student attendance, specifically chronic absenteeism. I created four measurement models to

examine the relationship between the latent variables and their observed indicators. In all four

hypotheses, the measurement model indicated moderate to significant relationships between

the latent and observed variables, indicating that the questions included in the measurement

model effectively captured the latent construct. After validating the observed variables

operationalized the latent construct, I used latent variable regression analysis to determine the

relationship between the latent variables and observed variables of student attendance. As

shown in Table 9, two models indicated good model fit, and the other two models indicated

some model fit. All of the models indicated a weak relationship between the latent variable

and the dependent variable. In the next chapter, I discuss the findings in relation to the

literature on school leaders' setting directions, building relationships and developing people,

developing the organization to support desired practices, and influencing a positive school

climate and provide recommendations for future research.

Table 9

Latent Variable Regression Analysis Summary of Model Fit

Model	χ^2	*df*	*p*	RMSEA	CFI	Model Fit
Setting Directions	2.87	2	.238	.038	.999	Good Model Fit
Building Relationships (Preferred Model)	79.97	9	<.001	.160	.970	RMSEA Poor Model Fit; CFI Good Fit
Developing Organization (Preferred Model)	8.47	5	.132	.048	.998	Good Model Fit
Positive School Climate (Preferred Model)	17.43	2	<.001	.159	.986	RMSEA Poor Model Fit; CFI Good Fit

Note: The results presented in this table are based on the preferred latent variable regression

model created to improve fit.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Recommendations

In this study, I attempted to determine how school leaders influence student attendance based on teachers' perceptions of school leaders' setting directions, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization to support desired practices, and influencing a positive school climate. In Chapter One, the significance of chronic absenteeism and its negative consequences on student achievement were discussed. Chronic absenteeism, defined as a student missing ten percent or more of the school year, can hinder student success and deprive them of valuable learning opportunities (Gottfried, 2014; London et al., 2016). Based on existing research that school leaders impact school climate and student success (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008), I hypothesized that school leaders' ability to set directions, build relationships and develop people, develop the organization to support desired practices, and influence a positive school climate would positively influence high school student attendance.

In Chapter Two, I provided a comprehensive overview of the literature on chronic absenteeism, school climate, and school leaders. The research focused on understanding the risk factors and consequences of chronic absenteeism on student outcomes. Additionally, I examined how school climate impacts student attendance. Finally, I reviewed the literature on the three domains of school leadership (setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the organization to support desired practices) selected for this capstone. Chapter Three highlighted the analytical framework that formed the foundation for this study. I proposed four hypotheses, discussed the research design, described the participants and instrumentation, and explained the methods for analyzing the data.

Chapter Four detailed the statistical analyses of the data and presented the results of

the measurement model and the latent variable regression analysis. Chapter Four described in

detail the measurement model, or model for operationalizing the latent variable, for each

hypothesis. After validating the relationship between the latent construct and observed

variables of teachers' perceptions in the measurement model, I conducted the latent variable

regression analysis to investigate the relationship between the latent variables of school

leaders' practices and the observed variables of high school student attendance. This analysis

determined how well the models captured the relationships between the observed variables of

teachers' perceptions, the latent variables of school leaders' practices, and the extent to which

the latent variable influenced high school student attendance.

In this chapter, I present a concise overview of the findings derived from the latent

variable regression analyses, focusing on the relevance to the existing literature on chronic

absenteeism, school climate, and school leaders. I briefly explain the data utilized for this

capstone and the rationale behind selecting the data from the 2018-2019 school year.

Furthermore, I explore teachers' perceptions of school leaders' setting directions, building

relationships and developing people, and developing the organization to support desired

practices and the resulting influence on student attendance in relation to findings. I then

discuss teachers' perceptions of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate and the

resulting influence on student attendance. Next, I offer several recommendations for future

research, such as exploring additional data sources to gain a more comprehensive

understanding of the relationship between teachers' perspectives of school leaders' practices.

Finally, based on the results of this study, three policy recommendations and three practice

recommendations are made to superintendents across the Commonwealth of Virginia to help improve student attendance in schools and divisions.

Discussion

This capstone investigated the relationships between school leaders' influence on school climate and its potential impact on student attendance. While the causes of chronic absenteeism remain unclear (U.S. Department of Education, 2019), research on chronic absenteeism has identified school climate as a key factor affecting student attendance (Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Sahin et al., 2016; Van Eck et al., 2017). Moreover, school leaders are believed to play an integral role in shaping school improvement initiatives (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Hollingworth et al., 2018; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Louis & Lee, 2016; MacNeil et al., 2009). To address these connections, this study explored four hypotheses regarding school leaders' influence on school climate and the potential influence on student attendance. The four hypotheses encompassed the school leaders' practices of setting directions, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization to support desired practices and influencing a positive school climate. By investigating these hypotheses, the intent was to gain a deeper understanding of how school leaders' influence can impact student attendance, specifically chronic absenteeism. The following sections discuss the results of the latent variable regression analyses for all four hypotheses.

School Leaders' Setting Directions

The existing literature on school improvement has recognized the important role school leaders play in contributing to school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Marks & Printy, 2003), yet little research has assessed how school leaders influence student attendance

(Hamlin, 2021; Van Eck et al., 2017). It has been suggested that school leaders' ability to set directions plays an integral role in aligning efforts and ensuring a shared purpose within the organization (Leithwood, 2012). Based on the research, for this capstone, I explored teachers' perceptions of school leaders' setting directions and the resulting influence on student attendance. Even though the results of this study did not indicate a statistically significant relationship between teachers' perceptions of school leaders' ability to set directions and student attendance, further research is warranted.

The results of the study suggested that even though the model was a good fit for the data, the lack of statistical significance and the low R^2 suggested that the observed relationship may not be meaningful. The RMSEA and CFI suggested the model fits the data; the regression coefficient and the squared multiple correlation suggested no significant relationship existed between school leaders' setting directions and student attendance. Three questions from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey were used to operationalize the latent variable of school leaders' setting directions. However, the three selected questions may not have fully represented the complexity of the latent construct of school leaders' setting directions. According to Kline (2015), including additional observed variables can enhance the measurement of the latent variable and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying construct. Furthermore, the questions operationalizing the OLF domain of setting directions aligned with three of the four practices of the setting directions domain. The three practices that had questions to operationalize the latent variable were:

- building a shared vision;

- creating high expectations; and

- communicating the vision and goals.

The fourth practice that did not have a representative question was identifying specific, shared short-term goals. For future studies, including all four practices for the OLF domain of school leaders' setting directions may improve reliability, enhance validity, reduce bias, and capture complexity in the latent variable regression model. In addition, ensuring the questions selected for each of the practices are meaningful and relevant in operationalizing the latent variable ensures that key aspects of the construct are captured. For future research on teachers' perceptions of school leaders' setting directions and the resulting influence on student attendance, developing a survey that aligns better with the four practices of the OLF setting directions domain may be beneficial. Although this study did not find a significant relationship between school leaders' setting directions and student attendance, further research is necessary to make a definitive claim regarding the importance of school leaders' setting direction and student attendance.

While this study suggested that school leaders' setting directions did not significantly influence student attendance, it is vital that school leaders not disregard the setting directions domain. Previous research has shown that school leaders' ability to set direction significantly impacts the school climate and contributes to a safe and orderly environment (Sun & Leithwood, 2015). Furthermore, setting direction plays an essential role in the effectiveness and efficiency of the school organization (Leithwood, 2012).

School Leaders' Building Relationships and Developing People

Existing literature suggests that school leaders who establish strong relationships and value the contributions of individuals have a positive impact on school effectiveness (Murphy et

al., 2006). Additionally, school leaders who prioritize building capacity for professional learning

create an environment that promotes collaboration, continuous growth, and collective efficacy

among staff members (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Marks & Printy, 2003). Based on the research,

for this capstone, I explored teachers' perceptions of school leaders' building relationships and

developing people and the resulting influence on student attendance. Even though the results

of this study did not indicate a statistically significant relationship between teachers'

perceptions of school leaders' ability to build relationships and develop people and student

attendance, further research is necessary to delve deeper into this topic and uncover any

potential connections.

Based on the preferred model study, the results suggested that the model was a

relatively good fit for the data with a comparative fit index of .970, indicating that the model

adequately represented the data and captured the relationships between the variables. The

root mean square error of approximation did not signify a good model fit, suggesting the model

did not fully capture the underlying relationships in the data. The lack of statistical significance

and the low R^2 suggested that the observed relationship may not be meaningful. While the

comparative fit index suggested that the model fit the data, the regression coefficient and

squared multiple correlation indicated no significant relationship existed between school

leaders' building relationships and developing people and high school student attendance,

specifically chronic absenteeism.

For the preferred model, five questions from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey were

used to operationalize the latent variable of school leaders' building relationships and

developing people. However, it is important to note that the five selected questions may not

fully capture the complexity of the latent construct of school leaders' building relationships and developing people. The questions used to operationalize the OLF domain of building relationships and developing people aligned with four of the five practices of the building relationships and developing people domain. The four practices with questions to operationalize the latent variable were:

- providing support and demonstrating consideration for individual staff members;

- stimulating growth in the professional capacities of staff;

- modeling the schools' values and practices; and

- building trusting relationships with and among staff, students, and parents.

The fifth practice, establishing productive working relationships with teacher federation representatives, did not have a representative question. However, this practice may not be as relevant as ensuring the questions selected for the other four practices are meaningful and relevant in operationalizing the latent variable, school leaders' building relationships and developing people, to ensure key aspects of the construct are captured. It is essential to ensure that the selected questions for each practice effectively capture critical aspects of the construct.

For future research on teachers' perceptions of school leaders' building relationships and developing people and the resulting influence on student attendance, it may be beneficial to create a survey that aligns better with the five practices of building relationships and developing people domain. Even though this study did not find a significant relationship between school leaders' building relationships and developing people, further research is

necessary to draw a definitive conclusion regarding the importance of school leaders' building

relationships and developing people and student attendance.

While this study suggested that school leaders' building relationships and developing

people did not significantly influence student attendance, school leaders should not disregard

the building relationships and developing people domain. Research has shown that school

leaders' ability to build relationships and develop people significantly impacts student

outcomes by providing teachers with the necessary support to succeed (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Further, educational and school improvement relies on the development of both the school

leader and the professional learning of teachers (Hallinger, 2010).

School Leaders' Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices

When school practices do not align with school goals, redesigning the school's

infrastructure is vital for school improvement (Leithwood, 2012), and the school leader is

critical to the successful restructure (Murphy et al., 2006). Research has found that an essential

component of successful school improvement is the willingness of school leaders to adapt their

strategies to respond to changing conditions (Hallinger, 2003; Jackson, 2000). Based on existing

research, for this capstone, I explored teachers' perceptions of school leaders' developing the

organization to support desired practices and the resulting influence on student attendance.

The results of this study indicated a statistically significant but weak relationship between

teachers' perceptions of school leaders' ability to develop the organization to support desired

practices and student attendance.

Based on the preferred model, the latent variable regression analysis results suggested

that the model was a good fit for both the comparative fit index and the root mean square

error of approximation, suggesting the model captures the underlying relationships in the data.

The model indicated that the regression coefficient was statistically significant, but the

relationship was relatively weak between the independent and dependent variables. The

interpretation suggested that for every unit increase in the independent variable (school

leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices), the dependent variable

(students' chronic absenteeism) decreased by 0.14 of a standard deviation. While the model

suggested a relatively weak relationship between school leaders' developing the organization

to support desired practices and students' chronic absenteeism, the results point to school

leaders' influencing student attendance. Even though the decrease in student absenteeism was

marginal, school leaders should continue the practice of developing the organization to support

desired practices.

Further, consideration must be given to ensuring the questions fully operationalize the

latent variable of school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices. For

the preferred model, four questions from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey were used to

operationalize the latent variable of school leaders' developing the organization to support

desired practices. However, the four selected questions may not fully represent the

complexity of the latent construct of school leaders' developing the organization to support

desired practices. The questions operationalizing the OLF domain of developing the

organization to support desired practices aligned with two of the six practices of developing the

organization to support desired practices domain. The two practices which had questions to

operationalize the latent variable were:

- building collaborative cultures and distributing leadership; and

- structuring the organization to facilitate collaboration.

Based on the preferred model, four practices related to school leaders' developing the organization did not have a representative question. Those practices were

- building productive relationships with families and community;

- connecting the school to the wider environment;

- maintaining a safe and healthy environment; and

- allocating resources in support of the school's vision and goals.

For future studies, including all six practices for the OLF domain of school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices may improve reliability, enhance validity, and capture complexity in the latent variable regression model. In addition, ensuring the questions selected for each of the practices are meaningful and relevant in operationalizing the latent variable ensures that key aspects of the construct are captured. For future research on teachers' perceptions of school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices and the resulting influence on student attendance, the researcher may want to consider creating a survey that aligns better with the six practices of the OLF developing the organization to support desired practices. While school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices suggested a good model fit, and there was a relationship between school leaders' developing the organization to support desired practices and student attendance, albeit weak, more research is necessary to make a definitive claim.

School Leaders' Influencing a Positive School Climate

Previous research has examined the role of school leaders in connecting school climate with school improvement (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Hollingworth et al., 2018; Leithwood &

Jantzi, 1990; Louis & Lee, 2016; MacNeil et al., 2009), but limited attention has been given to understanding how school climate relates to student attendance (Hamlin, 2021; Van Eck et al., 2017). Existing studies suggest that strategies to improve school climate are crucial for enhancing the overall experience of attending school and increasing attendance rates (Van Eck et al., 2017). By the same token, research claims that schools with unfavorable climates adversely affect student attendance (Chen & Weikart, 2008). For these reasons, I explored teachers' perceptions of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate and the resulting influence on student attendance. The findings of this study revealed a statistically significant relationship between teachers' perceptions of school leaders' ability to influence a positive school climate and student attendance.

Based on the preferred latent variable regression model, the results suggested that the model fits the data. The comparative fit index indicated a significant model fit, and although the root mean square error of approximation was outside the threshold, the model captured the underlying relationships in the data. The findings suggested evidence supporting model fit and a relatively weak relationship between the independent variable (school leaders' influence on a positive school climate) and the dependent variable (student absenteeism), as indicated by the squared multiple correlations. The interpretation indicated that for every unit increase in the independent variable, school leaders' influencing a positive school, the dependent variable, student absenteeism, decreased by 0.12 of a standard deviation. While the model suggested a relatively weak relationship between school leaders' influencing a positive school climate and student chronic absenteeism, the results indicated that school leaders influence student

absenteeism. Even though the decrease in student absenteeism is slight, school leaders should continue the practice of positively influencing the school climate.

Furthermore, ensuring the survey questions fully operationalize the latent variable of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate is critical. While three questions from the 2019 VSSCWC Teacher Survey were used in the preferred model to operationalize the latent variable of school leaders' positively influencing the school climate, it is possible that these questions may not fully encompass the complexity of the construct. Future studies should consider including additional questions that enhance the reliability, validity, and capture the intricacies of the latent variable of school leaders' positively influencing school climate. For future research on teachers' perceptions of school leaders' influencing a positive school climate and the resulting influence on student attendance, the researcher may consider creating a survey that explicitly targets school leaders' influencing a positive school climate. While the preferred model of school leaders' influencing the school climate suggested a good model fit and there was a relationship between school leaders' influencing the school climate and student attendance, more research is necessary to establish a definitive claim.

Recommendations

Future studies should aim to identify other potential factors that may have a more significant impact on student attendance than school leaders' abilities. The current study had limitations, such as a small number of observed variables and model fit, which can be overcome by using larger samples and more comprehensive models to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Based on the findings of this study, there are several recommendations for future research that can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex relationships

between school leaders, school climate, and student attendance. First, exploring additional data sources to better understand the relationships between teachers' perceptions, school leaders' abilities, and high school student attendance. I recommend adding a qualitative component, such as interviews or focus groups, that can provide rich information and deepen understanding of the complexities involved in school leaders' influence on student attendance. In addition, incorporating students' perceptions of school climate is essential for a more comprehensive understanding of why students attend or do not attend school. Another recommendation is to include all five OLF domains in the study and formulate survey questions that effectively capture each domain and its associated practices. The two leadership domains not included in this study were improving the instructional program and securing accountability. Finally, I suggest identifying other factors that may influence student attendance. While this study focused on school leaders' influence on school climate, additional variables may contribute to student attendance.

Future studies may want to explore a more comprehensive survey that includes questions that align with the school leaders' setting directions, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization to support desired practices, and influencing a positive school climate. This study utilized a statewide survey that was not specifically designed to align with OLF. The questions from the survey did not address all of the practices for each of the OLF leadership domains. Adding specific questions to address all domains and practices may provide greater insight into school leaders' ability to influence student attendance.

Future research may want to consider incorporating a qualitative component to the study, such as interviews or focus groups with students, staff, school leaders, and parents,

which could provide valuable insights into the perceptions and experiences that shape the school climate and influence student attendance. The qualitative data could be used to triangulate and validate the quantitative results, as well as offer a deeper understanding of the complex factors of student attendance. In particular, conducting interviews or focus groups with students, staff, school leaders, and parents may reveal specific strategies or practices that effectively improve school climate and student attendance, which could inform the development of targeted interventions. Additionally, qualitative data may shed light on the nuances and intricacies of the relationships between school leaders, teachers, students, and parents, which are difficult to capture through quantitative measures alone.

Additionally, future studies may want to examine students' perspectives of school climate. Students' perceptions of school climate are integral to improving student attendance as they can offer valuable insights into the factors influencing their attendance. Students' experiences and perceptions can shed light on specific aspects of the school climate that impact their motivation and engagement in school. By considering students' perspectives, the researcher could better understand the complex dynamics between school climate and student attendance. School leaders can tailor strategies and interventions to address chronic absenteeism by paying attention to students' thoughts regarding the climate of the school.

Furthermore, future research may also want to include all five OLF domains. The three domains included in this study were setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the organization to support desired practices. The two domains not included in this study were improving the instructional program and securing accountability. Including all five OLF domains with appropriate survey questions to operationalize the practices

included in the domains may allow for a more comprehensive examination of school leaders'

ability to influence student attendance. Understanding how high school student attendance is

influenced by improving the instructional program and securing accountability may provide

valuable insights into the factors contributing to higher attendance rates. By investigating

these two additional domains, researchers may better understand how school leaders can

address challenges related to student attendance.

However, expanding this study to include all five domains of the OLF may not

necessarily contribute to solving the nationwide issue of high school student attendance.

Chronic absenteeism was a problem in the 2018-2019 school year and continues to pose a

significant challenge. The study's findings indicate that school leaders have a limited impact on

student attendance, and it is worth noting that the OLF was not specifically designed to address

attendance issues. Given these considerations, it appears that additional frameworks and

models need to be developed to effectively address student absenteeism, especially

considering the increase in absences since the Covid-19 pandemic. Student absenteeism is

recognized as an educational crisis, and there is currently a scarcity of research on how to

improve student attendance overall and especially the role of the school leader in addressing

this pressing issue.

Finally, future studies may consider exploring the impact of external factors such as

family circumstances, socioeconomic status, and community support on student attendance.

Understanding how these factors intersect with school-related factors could provide a more

comprehensive understanding of the complexities of student attendance and inform the

development of effective interventions. By addressing the limitations of the current study and exploring other potential factors, future research can build on the findings of this study.

Further research is necessary to understand the complex nature of student attendance and to develop effective strategies and interventions that can be implemented at the school level to improve student attendance. Such strategies can be developed based on the findings of the study and can target the identified factors that influence school climate and student attendance. Understanding these potential outcomes can provide further justification for interventions aimed at improving school climate and student attendance.

Summary

Chronic absenteeism is a complex issue impacting schools across the nation and has been identified as a hidden educational crisis (U.S. Department of Education, 2019), as students need to be in school to develop a solid foundation for subsequent learning (Chang et al., 2018). Missing nearly a month or more of school during the course of a year jeopardizes the academic success of students. In this study, I have explored four hypotheses to understand how school leaders can impact student attendance through the influence of school climate. The study suggested that school leaders' influence on school climate may marginally influence student attendance; however, additional research is needed to establish definitive claims. Specifically, as related to this study, school leaders' ability to develop the organization to support desired practices and influence a positive school climate slightly decreased student absenteeism. Even though the decrease in student absenteeism was marginal, the study indicated a significant relationship between school leaders' ability to develop the organization to support desired practices and influence a positive school climate.

In summary, future research can expand upon the findings and shortcomings of this study by including more comprehensive survey questions, incorporating a qualitative component, examining students' perceptions of school climate, and exploring additional factors that may impact school climate and student attendance. These approaches can provide a greater understanding of the relationships between school leaders, school climate, and student attendance and contribute to the development of evidence-based strategies and interventions to improve student attendance. With a more comprehensive understanding of the complex factors that influence school climate and student attendance, schools can implement evidence-based practices that promote a positive learning environment and support students' success. This is critical not only for individual student success but also for the success of schools as a whole.

Action Policy and Practice Recommendations

In the final section, I make three recommendations for school policy and three recommendations for school practice to improve student attendance based on the results of this study. The major findings from this study revealed a statistically significant but weak relationship between school leaders' ability to influence a positive school climate and develop the organization to sustain desired practices, as perceived by teachers. This study emphasized the significance of school leaders' influence on fostering a positive school climate. When school leaders prioritize creating a supportive, inclusive, and engaging environment for students, the school can decrease chronic absenteeism. Also, the study highlights the importance of school leaders' role in developing the organization to support desired practices. When school leaders are able to establish processes to facilitate collaboration and build productive relationships

with families and the community, the school positively impacts student attendance. The

following sections detail the policy recommendations along with associated school practice.

Policy Recommendation 1 - Foster a Supportive and Inclusive School Climate

A range of research highlighted in the literature review (Astor et al., 2002; Demir &

Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016; MacNeil et al., 2009; U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe

and Healthy Students, 2017) has established that school leaders who foster a positive school

climate have a positive impact on student attendance. This capstone further supports the

notion that school leaders' ability to positively influence the school climate has a marginal but

positive correlation to improving student attendance. Consequently, the first policy

recommendation is for school leaders to prioritize the establishment of a supportive and

inclusive school climate where every student feels valued and connected. In order to achieve

this, school leaders should focus on building relationships and fostering a sense of belonging

among students, families, and staff, thereby cultivating a positive school climate. The next

section highlights the corresponding practice recommendation associated with the first policy

recommendation.

Practice Recommendation 1 - Encourage Student Engagement and Voice. Research

suggests student attendance declines when students feel detached and disengaged from the

school environment (Chen & Weikart, 2008; Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Maxwell, 2016; Van Eck et

al., 2017). In order to address this issue, one approach is to encourage student engagement

and voice. By actively involving students in decision-making processes, students feel more

connected to the school as they have opportunities to share their perspectives, ideas, and

concerns. Implementing student-led initiatives and clubs that promote inclusivity and provide a

platform for students to connect to the school community may enhance student engagement and positively influence student attendance.

Policy Recommendation 2 - Build a Collaborative Culture

One of the practices for the OLF domain of developing the organization to support desired practices is structuring the organization to facilitate collaboration. A study by Murphy et al. (2006) found that school leaders who fostered the development of learning communities strengthened the school community and improved student outcomes. This capstone's results further support the notion that school leaders' ability to develop the organization to support desired practices correlates with a marginal but positive effect on student attendance. Accordingly, the second policy recommendation is for school leaders to build a collaborative community that promotes a sense of shared responsibility and engagement among all stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers, students, parents, and the community. Creating a supportive environment where everyone works together to prioritize and address attendance issues is essential. The corresponding practice recommendation is presented next based on the second policy recommendation.

Practice Recommendation 2 - Establish a Professional Learning Community. Research by Murphy et al. (2006) highlights the significance of school leaders who prioritize the establishment of a learning community. These leaders foster the growth of the educational community and promote the development of learning communities that focus on implementing best practices for school improvement. Building upon this research, one approach is to form a professional learning community (PLC) dedicated to improving student attendance. Within this PLC, educators can share best practices, engage in professional development focused on

attendance strategies, and collaborate on innovative approaches tailored to the school's specific needs.

Policy Recommendation 3 - Collaborate with Community Partners

Another practice of the OLF domain of developing the organization to support desired practices is the establishment of productive relationships with families and the community. Recognizing the significant impact that the community has on improving student outcomes, this practice emphasizes the importance of school leaders building solid connections with the community. School leaders who effectively cultivate productive relationships with the community actively encourage engagement with a broader network of community services when necessary (Leithwood, 2012; Murphy et al., 2006). Thus, the third policy recommendation is for school leaders to collaborate with community partners to promote a connection between schools and local agencies, nonprofits, and businesses. Engaging community stakeholders in initiatives to support student attendance, including mentoring programs, after-school activities, and addressing barriers to attendance, such as transportation or health-related issues, is recommended. By embracing collaboration with community partners, schools can foster a collaborative environment that harnesses the resources and expertise of the community to improve student attendance.

Practice Recommendation 3 - Create Volunteer and Mentorship Programs. Research suggests that student absences increase when students lack commitment to their school (Demir & Akman Karbeyoglu, 2016). In order to encourage student commitment to school, one approach is to engage community members as volunteers and mentors who can serve as role models for students who face attendance challenges. These volunteers and community

members can offer guidance and support to students and create opportunities for them to feel included and connected to the school community. By involving community members, schools can promote a sense of belonging and encourage students to develop a stronger commitment to the school and their attendance.

In order to share the recommendations from my capstone to inform policy and practices to improve student attendance, I prepared a memo for the UVA K-12 Advisory Council, which includes superintendents from school divisions throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. The memo summarizes the study, highlighting the key findings and offering recommendations for both policy and practice. These recommendations aim to assist schools and divisions throughout Virginia in their endeavors to enhance student attendance and foster positive student outcomes.

Improving Student Attendance in Virginia High Schools: Recommendations for Divisions

To: UVA K-12 Advisory Council - Dr. Stewart Roberson, Chairperson

Subject: Recommendations for policy and practice for school superintendents to improve student attendance in the Commonwealth of Virginia, based on a quantitative research study conducted for 308 high schools throughout Virginia.

Problem of Practice: Student attendance, specifically chronic absenteeism, has been a complex issue in the Commonwealth of Virginia since the Virginia Department of Education heightened its focus on student attendance by including chronic absenteeism as a measure connected with school quality as part of the Standards of Accreditation starting with the 2018-2019 school year (Virginia Department of Education, 2019). The causes of chronic absenteeism are not fully understood (U.S. Department of Education); however, school climate stands out in chronic absenteeism studies as a common factor that influences student attendance (Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Sahin et al., 2016; Van Eck at al, 2017) and school leaders play an essential role in shaping school climate (Hollingworth et al., 2018; MacNeil et al., 2009). Chronic absenteeism was an issue for many high schools in 2018-2019 and continues to be an issue intensified by the pandemic.

Study Design: Student absenteeism is a complex problem of practice; therefore, I focused my research on school leaders' influence on school climate and the subsequent influence on student attendance. This study focused on the following three Ontario Leadership Domains: setting directions, building relationships and developing people, and developing the organization to support desired practices. Also, this study included school leaders' influence on school climate. The study employed latent variable regression analysis to understand the relationship between school leaders and school climate and the resulting influence on high school student attendance. To understand which school leaders' domains have the greatest capacity to increase student attendance, I used the 2019 Virginia School Climate and Working Conditions Teacher Survey from 308 high schools across the Commonwealth of Virginia. Of the 308 high schools, there were 16,242 responses from high school teachers.

Major Themes and Findings: The major themes and findings of the study revealed a statistically significant but weak relationship between school leaders' ability to influence a positive school climate and develop the organization to sustain desired practices, as perceived by teachers. This relationship indicated a connection between these factors and decreased chronic absenteeism. The study emphasized the significance of school leaders' influence on fostering a positive school climate. When school leaders prioritize creating a supportive,

inclusive, and engaging environment for students, the school can decrease chronic absenteeism. Also, the study highlights the importance of school leaders' role in developing the organization to support desired practices. When school leaders are able to establish processes to facilitate collaboration and build productive relationships with families and the community, the school positively impacts student attendance.

Recommendations: Based on the findings of the study, I make the following three recommendations for school policy and three recommendations for school practice to decrease student chronic absences:

- **Policy Recommendation: Foster a Supportive and Inclusive School Climate** – Implement policies that promote a supportive and inclusive school climate where all students feel valued and connected. Encourage school leaders to prioritize relationship-building and create a sense of belonging among students, families, and staff.
    - **Practice Recommendation: Encourage Student Engagement and Voice** – Actively involve students in decision-making processes in the school. Create opportunities for students to share their perspectives, ideas, and concerns. Implement student-led initiatives and organizations that promote inclusivity and provide a platform for students to contribute to the school community.
- **Policy Recommendation: Build a Collaborative Culture** – Establish policies that foster a collaborative culture that promotes a sense of shared responsibility and engagement among all stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers, students, parents, and the community. Create a supportive environment where everyone works together to prioritize and address attendance issues.
    - **Practice Recommendation: Establish a Professional Learning Community** – Form a professional learning community (PLC) focused on attendance improvement. PLCs offer educators a platform to share best practices, engage in professional development related to attendance strategies, and collaborate on innovative approaches tailored to the specific needs of the school.
- **Policy Recommendation: Collaborate with Community Partners** – Establish policies encouraging collaboration between schools and community partners, such as local agencies, nonprofits, and businesses. Engage community stakeholders in initiatives to support student attendance, including mentoring programs, after-school activities, and addressing barriers to attendance, such as transportation or health-related issues.
    - **Practice Recommendation: Create Volunteer and Mentorship Programs** – Engage community members as volunteers and mentors to support students at risk of chronic absenteeism. Establish mentorship programs where community members can serve as positive role models, offering guidance and support to students facing attendance challenges.

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Appendix A

Sample of Student Attendance Data Downloaded from the VDOE School Quality Profile

Div_Name	Sch_Name	All_Not_CA	All_CA	PCA	F_Not_CA	F_CA	PFCA
Division 1	High School 1	578	89	13.3%	267	48	15.2%
Division 2	High School 2	243	46	15.9%	109	23	17.4%
Division 3	High School 3	641	57	8.2%	300	17	5.4%
Division 4	High School 4	38	7	15.6%	18	4	18.2%
Division 5	High School 5	1731	167	8.8%	825	72	8.0%
Division 6	High School 6	979	134	12.0%	506	73	12.6%
Division 7	High School 7	1068	71	6.2%	525	30	5.4%
Division 8	High School 8	483	169	25.9%	243	77	24.1%
Division 9	High School 9	432	92	17.6%	200	45	18.4%
Division 10	High School 10	918	232	20.2%	450	101	18.3%
Division 11	High School 11	617	76	11.0%	309	38	11.0%
Division 12	High School 12	60	159	72.6%	28	73	72.3%
Division 13	High School 13	1882	426	18.5%	915	194	17.5%
Division 14	High School 14	2184	275	11.2%	1088	119	9.9%
Division 15	High School 15	2087	206	9.0%	1007	95	8.6%
Division 16	High School 16	405	40	9.0%	171	19	10.0%
Division 17	High School 17	594	88	12.9%	262	34	11.5%
Division 18	High School 18	698	75	9.7%	341	39	10.3%
Division 19	High School 19	193	8	4.0%	90	2	2.2%
Division 20	High School 20	1306	78	5.6%	627	32	4.9%
Division 21	High School 21	689	70	9.2%	327	32	8.9%
Division 22	High School 22	793	126	13.7%	386	72	15.7%
Division 23	High School 23	305	51	14.3%	143	26	15.4%
Division 24	High School 24	493	44	8.2%	231	23	9.1%
Division 25	High School 25	980	74	7.0%	475	42	8.1%
Division 26	High School 26	520	134	20.5%	252	72	22.2%
Division 27	High School 27	389	105	21.3%	195	40	17.0%
Division 28	High School 28	110	18	14.1%	58	8	12.1%
Division 29	High School 29	330	72	17.9%	151	34	18.4%
Division 30	High School 30	189	44	18.9%	94	17	15.3%
Division 31	High School 31	192	17	8.1%	91	13	12.5%
Division 32	High School 32	442	122	21.6%	213	48	18.4%
Division 33	High School 33	345	36	9.4%	172	19	9.9%
Division 34	High School 34	891	97	9.8%	449	44	8.9%
Division 35	High School 35	739	73	9.0%	335	37	9.9%

Appendix B

2019 Virginia Working Conditions Survey - Teacher Version

This is a review copy, not for circulation or use. The actual survey is online with formatting for easier reading. Questions are grouped around working conditions topics (in BOLD CAPS *below). These topics do not appear in the online survey.*

Instructions for Teachers:

This survey is being given to teachers whose primary job responsibility is interacting with students in classroom settings. All teachers are asked to complete the survey regardless of the grade level of the students with whom they teach or interact. The purpose of the survey is to help schools create and maintain positive working conditions for professionals working in Virginia's public schools.

Your individual answers to the survey are anonymous, which means that no one will know how you answered. It is important that you submit only one completed survey for each school at which you work.

The survey should take about 15-20 minutes to complete.

In order to access the online survey, you must enter the unique password for the teacher survey which was assigned to your school. Your principal, or your principal's designee, will have this password for you. All teachers at the same school will have the same password, so you will not be identified by this password. It is important that you submit only one completed survey for each school at which you work. The researchers for this survey are obligated to protect your identity.

What is your password for taking this survey? _____

---

1. Are you a teacher in this school? [NOTE: If "No" is selected, the respondent will be redirected to the staff version of the Virginia Working Conditions Survey.]
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

I. **PROFESSIONALISM**

A. TEACHER LEADERSHIP

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
2. Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction.	○	○	○	○	○	○

3. Teachers are relied upon to make decisions about educational issues.	○	○	○	○	○	○
4. Teachers engage in collaborative problem solving in this school.	○	○	○	○	○	○
5. Teachers are effective leaders in this school.	○	○	○	○	○	○

B. TEACHER AUTONOMY

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. I am free to be creative in my teaching approach.	○	○	○	○	○	○
7. I control how I use my scheduled class time.	○	○	○	○	○	○
8. I set the grading and student assessment practices in my classroom.	○	○	○	○	○	○
9. Current policies convey confidence in my ability to do well at my job.	○	○	○	○	○	○
10. My role as an educator is respected under current policies.	○	○	○	○	○	○
11. I feel that policy directives are improving our education system.	○	○	○	○	○	○

C. STAFF COLLEGIALITY

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
12. I feel respected by teachers and other adults at this school.	○	○	○	○	○	○
13. Teachers and other adults at this school support one another to meet the needs of all students.	○	○	○	○	○	○
14. Teachers and other adults at this school trust one another.	○	○	○	○	○	○
15. Teachers and other adults at this school collaborate to make this school run effectively.	○	○	○	○	○	○
16. Teachers and other adults at this school have taught me things that have helped me do my job better.	○	○	○	○	○	○

II.   TEACHING, INSTRUCTION, AND STUDENT SUPPORT

A.   INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
17. Teachers and other adults at this school expect students to use facts and evidence to support their ideas.	O	O	O	O	O	O
18. Teachers and other adults at this school want students to think about different ways to solve problems.	O	O	O	O	O	O
19. Teachers and other adults at this school encourage students to provide constructive feedback to others.	O	O	O	O	O	O
20. Teachers and other adults at this school encourage students to share their ideas about what they are studying in class.	O	O	O	O	O	O
21. Teachers and other adults at this school often connect what students are learning to life outside the classroom.	O	O	O	O	O	O

B.   ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
22. Teachers and other adults at this school expect students to succeed.	O	O	O	O	O	O
23. Teachers and other adults at this school provide students the support they need to succeed.	O	O	O	O	O	O
24. Teachers and other adults at this school feel responsible to help all students achieve their full potential.	O	O	O	O	O	O
25. Students come to school ready to learn.	O	O	O	O	O	O
26. Students willingly participate in classroom lessons.	O	O	O	O	O	O
27. Students put forth the effort required to learn the material.	O	O	O	O	O	O

C. INSTRUCTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
28. The physical environment of my classroom supports my teaching and my students' learning.	○	○	○	○	○	○
29. I have adequate space to work productively.	○	○	○	○	○	○
30. My school provides me with sufficient access to appropriate instructional materials.	○	○	○	○	○	○
31. I have the support I need to incorporate technology into my instruction.	○	○	○	○	○	○

III. SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

A. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
32. I feel respected by this school's administrators.	○	○	○	○	○	○
33. I feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to me with school administrators.	○	○	○	○	○	○
34. I trust this school's administrators to do what they say they will do.	○	○	○	○	○	○
35. This school's administrators support the professional development of staff.	○	○	○	○	○	○
36. This school's administrators support teachers' efforts to maintain discipline in the classrooms.	○	○	○	○	○	○
37. This school's administrators communicate a clear vision for this school.	○	○	○	○	○	○
38. Teachers and other staff have a shared vision for this school.	○	○	○	○	○	○
39. This school's administrators understand how children learn.	○	○	○	○	○	○
40. This school's administrators set high expectations for all students.	○	○	○	○	○	○

B. TEACHER EVALUATION

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
41. Teacher performance is assessed objectively.	O	O	O	O	O	O
42. Teachers receive feedback that can help them improve their teaching.	O	O	O	O	O	O
43. The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.	O	O	O	O	O	O

C. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
44. Sufficient resources are available for professional development in my school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
45. Professional development is differentiated to meet the individual needs of teachers.	O	O	O	O	O	O
46. Follow-up is provided after professional development activities to give teachers additional support.	O	O	O	O	O	O
47. Professional development provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues to refine teaching practices.	O	O	O	O	O	O
48. Professional development enhances teachers' abilities to improve student learning.	O	O	O	O	O	O

D. DEMANDS ON TEACHERS' TIME

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
49. Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students.	O	O	O	O	O	O
50. Teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues.	O	O	O	O	O	O
51. The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient.	O	O	O	O	O	O

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
52. Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students.	O	O	O	O	O	O

E. MANAGING STUDENT BEHAVIOR

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
53. Students know how this school defines inappropriate behavior.	O	O	O	O	O	O
54. Students know there are consequences for breaking school rules.	O	O	O	O	O	O
55. Teachers and other adults at this school consistently enforce rules for student behavior.	O	O	O	O	O	O
56. When students are accused of doing something wrong, they get a chance to explain.	O	O	O	O	O	O
57. Students are acknowledged for positive behavior.	O	O	O	O	O	O
58. There are supports to help a student who consistently misbehaves develop positive behavior.	O	O	O	O	O	O
59. We use data to evaluate and, if needed, adjust this school's student conduct policies.	O	O	O	O	O	O
60. This school's rules for student behavior are effective.	O	O	O	O	O	O

F. NEW TEACHER SUPPORT

Indicate whether new teachers are provided the following supports at your school. *Mark one response per line.*

	Yes	No	Do not know
61. Formally assigned a mentor	O	O	O
62. Reduced workload	O	O	O
63. Release time to observe other teachers	O	O	O
64. Formal time to meet with mentor during school hours	O	O	O

G. RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS/GUARDIANS

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
65. Teachers and other adults provide useful information to parents and guardians to support their children's learning at home.	○	○	○	○	○	○
66. Teachers and other adults help parents and guardians teach healthy social and emotional skills.	○	○	○	○	○	○
67. This school maintains clear, two-way communication with parents and guardians.	○	○	○	○	○	○
68. This school does a good job of encouraging parent/guardian involvement.	○	○	○	○	○	○
69. Parents and guardians help their children achieve the educational goals of the school, both academic and behavioral.	○	○	○	○	○	○

IV. SAFETY

A. CONCERNS ABOUT SAFETY

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
70. I am treated with respect by students at this school.	○	○	○	○	○	○
71. I feel safe at this school.	○	○	○	○	○	○
72. I feel there is adequate security in this school.	○	○	○	○	○	○

B. PREVALENCE OF BULLYING

What is bullying? **Bullying means any aggressive and unwanted behavior that is intended to harm, intimidate, or humiliate the victim; involves a real or perceived power imbalance between the aggressor or aggressors and victim; and is repeated over time or causes severe emotional trauma. 'Bullying' includes cyber bullying. 'Bullying' does not include ordinary teasing, horseplay, argument, or peer conflict.**

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
73. Bullying is a problem at this school.	O	O	O	O	O	O
74. Students at this school are bullied about their race or ethnicity.	O	O	O	O	O	O
75. Students at this school are bullied about their clothing or physical appearance.	O	O	O	O	O	O
76. Students at this school are bullied about their sexual orientation.	O	O	O	O	O	O
77. Students at this school are bullied about their disability.	O	O	O	O	O	O

V. SUMMARY

78. Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.
   - O Strongly Disagree
   - O Disagree
   - O Somewhat Disagree
   - O Somewhat Agree
   - O Agree
   - O Strongly Agree

79. Which of the following best describes your immediate professional plans?
   - O Continue teaching at my current school
   - O Continue teaching in this division but leave this school
   - O Continue teaching in this state but leave this division
   - O Continue teaching in a state other than Virginia
   - O Continue working in education but pursue a non-teaching position
   - O Leave education to retire
   - O Leave education to work in a non-education field
   - O Leave education for other reasons

VI.   DEMOGRAPHICS

80. Are you male or female? *Mark one.*
    ○   Male   ○   Female

81. What is the best description of your race? *If you are multi-racial, mark all that apply.*
    ○   American Indian or Alaska Native
    ○   Asian
    ○   Black or African American
    ○   Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
    ○   White
    ○   Other Race

82. Is your ethnic background Hispanic or Latino? *Mark one.*
    ○   Yes   ○   No

83. Which subjects are you teaching this year? *Mark one response per line.*

	Yes	No
Bilingual/English language learners/English as a Second Language	○	○
Career and technical education	○	○
Early childhood education	○	○
Elementary education	○	○
English Language Arts	○	○
Fine Arts (e.g., art, dance, music, theatre)	○	○
Foreign language	○	○
Health/physical education	○	○
History/social studies/civics/geography	○	○
Mathematics	○	○
Science	○	○
Special education	○	○
Other	○	○

84. Which grades are you teaching this year? *Mark all that apply.*

PK	K	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

85. How many years have you worked at this school? *Mark one.*

1-3 years	4-10 years	11-20 years	More than 20 years
○	○	○	○

86. Have you already submitted a completed 2019 Virginia Working Conditions Survey for this school?
    ○ No, this will be the first 2019 survey I will submit for this school.   ○ Yes, I have already submitted a 2019 survey for this school.

Appendix C

2019 Virginia School Climate and Working Conditions Survey – Overview of Survey Process

2019 VIRGINIA SCHOOL CLIMATE AND WORKING CONDITIONS SURVEYS

OVERVIEW OF THE SURVEY PROCESS

Step 1. Select a 3-week window to administer the survey to all students and staff.

- These anonymous surveys must be completed between January 7 and March 15, 2019.
- Log on by December 14, 2018 to: http://window.vaschoolsurvey.info.

Step 2. Send information letters to staff and to parents and guardians.

- Use templates provided for the information letters to staff and to parents and guardians.

Step 3. Administer online the surveys to students and working conditions surveys to staff.

- Provide students and staff with the passwords for completing the survey.
- Keep track of the number of students that **do not** complete the survey.

Step 4.   Complete the online School Participation Form.

- Log on to: http://participation.vaschoolsurvey.info to provide a summary of the participation of students in the school climate survey and staff in the working conditions survey.

Step 5. Watch your email for feedback reports.

- Each school will receive feedback reports summarizing the student responses to the School Climate Survey (if applicable) and staff responses to the Working Conditions Survey.

Detailed instructions will be provided separately to each school in November, 2018. These instructions will include the passwords required to access online surveys.

Appendix D

2019 Virginia Working Conditions Survey – Teacher Results Statewide

This report contains the average statewide responses to the 2019 Virginia Teacher Working Conditions Survey administered in January-March 2019 by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), in partnership with the University of Virginia, as part of VDOE's work to support the efforts of schools and divisions to provide teachers with supporting working conditions.

93% of schools participated and 67% of their teachers completed a survey. This report summarizes the survey responses of 54,207 teachers.

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE FOR SCREENING PURPOSES ONLY.

1a. Are you a teacher in this school?
1b. Have you already submitted a completed 2019 Virginia Working Conditions Survey for this school?

Professionalism

A. TEACHER LEADERSHIP

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
2. Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction.	3%	6%	8%	20%	37%	25%
3. Teachers are relied upon to make decisions about educational issues.	4%	8%	12%	27%	34%	15%
4. Teachers engage in collaborative problem solving in this school.	2%	4%	7%	24%	39%	24%
5. Teachers are effective leaders in this school.	2%	3%	6%	21%	42%	25%

B.   TEACHER AUTONOMY

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. I am free to be creative in my teaching approach.	2%	4%	7%	19%	35%	33%
7. I control how I use my scheduled class time.	3%	6%	7%	20%	36%	27%
8. I set the grading and student assessment practices in my classroom.	3%	7%	9%	23%	36%	22%
9. Current policies convey confidence in my ability to do well at my job.	4%	7%	11%	23%	37%	18%
10. My role as an educator is respected under current policies.	4%	7%	10%	22%	37%	21%
11. I feel that policy directives are improving our education system.	7%	12%	18%	31%	24%	8%

C.   STAFF COLLEGIALITY

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
12. I feel respected by teachers and other adults at this school.	2%	3%	5%	19%	41%	29%
13. Teachers and other adults at this school support one another to meet the needs of all students.	2%	3%	6%	23%	40%	27%
14. Teachers and other adults at this school trust one another.	2%	5%	9%	27%	38%	19%
15. Teachers and other adults at this school collaborate to make this school run effectively.	2%	4%	7%	24%	39%	25%
16. Teachers and other adults at this school have taught me things that have helped me do my job better.	1%	2%	3%	16%	42%	36%

Teaching, Instruction, And Student Support

D. INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
17. Teachers and other adults at this school expect students to use facts and evidence to support their ideas.	0%	1%	3%	19%	52%	25%
18. Teachers and other adults at this school want students to think about different ways to solve problems.	1%	1%	3%	19%	47%	29%
19. Teachers and other adults at this school encourage students to provide constructive feedback to others.	1%	3%	7%	28%	44%	18%
20. Teachers and other adults at this school encourage students to share their ideas about what they are studying in class.	0%	1%	4%	22%	48%	24%
21. Teachers and other adults at this school often connect what students are learning to life outside the classroom.	1%	2%	5%	26%	46%	21%

E. ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
22. Teachers and other adults at this school expect students to succeed.	0%	1%	2%	11%	45%	40%
23. Teachers and other adults at this school provide students the support they need to succeed.	1%	2%	4%	18%	47%	28%
24. Teachers and other adults at this school feel responsible to help all students achieve their full potential.	1%	1%	4%	16%	45%	33%
25. Students come to school ready to learn.	4%	10%	18%	37%	25%	6%
26. Students willingly participate in classroom lessons.	2%	4%	10%	31%	40%	13%
27. Students put forth the effort required to learn the material.	4%	10%	17%	37%	26%	6%

F. INSTRUCTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
28. The physical environment of my classroom supports my teaching and my students' learning.	2%	4%	7%	16%	42%	29%
29. I have adequate space to work productively.	3%	4%	7%	15%	41%	30%
30. My school provides me with sufficient access to appropriate instructional materials.	2%	4%	7%	20%	42%	24%
31. I have the support I need to incorporate technology into my instruction.	3%	5%	7%	18%	38%	29%

School and Community Supports

G. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
32. I feel respected by this school's administrators.	4%	4%	6%	14%	35%	37%
33. I feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to me with school administrators.	7%	7%	9%	19%	32%	27%
34. I trust this school's administrators to do what they say they will do.	5%	6%	9%	19%	34%	27%
35. This school's administrators support the professional development of staff.	2%	3%	4%	16%	41%	34%
36. This school's administrators support teachers' efforts to maintain discipline in the classrooms.	7%	7%	10%	20%	33%	23%
37. This school's administrators communicate a clear vision for this school.	4%	5%	7%	18%	37%	29%
38. Teachers and other staff have a shared vision for this school.	2%	4%	8%	23%	41%	21%
39. This school's administrators understand how children learn.	3%	4%	7%	19%	40%	28%
40. This school's administrators set high expectations for all students.	3%	4%	7%	17%	38%	31%

H. TEACHER EVALUATION

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
41. Teacher performance is assessed objectively.	3%	4%	7%	19%	45%	23%
42. Teachers receive feedback that can help them improve their teaching.	3%	5%	9%	22%	39%	22%
43. The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.	3%	4%	7%	17%	43%	24%

I. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
44. Sufficient resources are available for professional development in my school.	3%	5%	10%	27%	39%	15%
45. Professional development is differentiated to meet the individual needs of teachers.	7%	11%	16%	27%	27%	11%
46. Follow-up is provided after professional development activities to give teachers additional support.	5%	10%	17%	30%	29%	10%
47. Professional development provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues to refine teaching practices.	3%	7%	12%	28%	36%	14%
48. Professional development enhances teachers' abilities to improve student learning.	3%	6%	10%	29%	37%	16%

J. DEMANDS ON TEACHERS' TIME

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
49. Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students.	10%	11%	16%	24%	28%	11%
50. Teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues.	6%	10%	15%	27%	30%	12%
51. The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient.	12%	13%	17%	23%	26%	9%
52. Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students.	5%	8%	14%	26%	35%	11%

K. MANAGING STUDENT BEHAVIOR

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
53. Students know how this school defines inappropriate behavior.	5%	8%	11%	21%	37%	17%
54. Students know there are consequences for breaking school rules.	8%	9%	13%	21%	33%	16%
55. Teachers and other adults at this school consistently enforce rules for student behavior.	7%	10%	15%	24%	31%	13%
56. When students are accused of doing something wrong, they get a chance to explain.	0%	1%	2%	16%	55%	26%
57. Students are acknowledged for positive behavior.	1%	2%	4%	18%	45%	30%
58. There are supports to help a student who consistently misbehaves develop positive behavior.	6%	9%	13%	27%	32%	14%
59. We use data to evaluate and, if needed, adjust this school's student conduct policies.	5%	8%	13%	25%	34%	15%
60. This school's rules for student behavior are effective.	9%	10%	15%	27%	29%	11%

L. NEW TEACHER SUPPORT

Indicate whether new teachers are provided the following supports at your school. *Mark one response per line.*

	Yes	No	Do not know
61. Formally assigned a mentor	82%	4%	14%
62. Reduced workload	8%	57%	34%
63. Release time to observe other teachers	34%	29%	37%
64. Formal time to meet with mentor during school hours	34%	31%	34%

M. RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS/GUARDIANS

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
65. Teachers and other adults provide useful information to parents and guardians to support their children's learning at home.	1%	2%	5%	25%	47%	21%
66. Teachers and other adults help parents and guardians teach healthy social and emotional skills.	3%	8%	14%	31%	32%	12%
67. This school maintains clear, two-way communication with parents and guardians.	1%	2%	5%	23%	46%	23%
68. This school does a good job of encouraging parent/guardian involvement.	1%	3%	6%	24%	41%	24%
69. Parents and guardians help their children achieve the educational goals of the school, both academic and behavioral.	4%	10%	18%	36%	23%	8%

Safety

N. CONCERNS ABOUT SAFETY

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
70. I am treated with respect by students at this school.	3%	5%	8%	22%	41%	21%
71. I feel safe at this school.	2%	3%	5%	14%	44%	32%
72. I feel there is adequate security in this school.	5%	6%	9%	19%	39%	22%

O. PREVALENCE OF BULLYING

What is bullying? **Bullying means any aggressive and unwanted behavior that is intended to harm, intimidate, or humiliate the victim; involves a real or perceived power imbalance between the aggressor or aggressors and victim; and is repeated over time or causes severe emotional trauma. 'Bullying' includes cyber bullying. 'Bullying' does not include ordinary teasing, horseplay, argument, or peer conflict.**

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this school? *Mark one response per line.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
73. Bullying is a problem at this school.	9%	30%	23%	25%	9%	3%
74. Students at this school are bullied about their race or ethnicity.	17%	40%	22%	14%	5%	1%
75. Students at this school are bullied about their clothing or physical appearance.	12%	31%	20%	25%	9%	3%
76. Students at this school are bullied about their sexual orientation.	21%	39%	19%	14%	5%	2%
77. Students at this school are bullied about their disability.	23%	39%	20%	13%	4%	1%

P. SUMMARY

78. Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.

    4%   Strongly Disagree

    3%   Disagree

    5%   Somewhat Disagree

    16%   Somewhat Agree

    41%   Agree

    30%   Strongly Agree

79. Which of the following best describes your immediate professional plans?

    82%   Continue teaching at my current school

    5%   Continue teaching in this division but leave this school

    3%   Continue teaching in this state but leave this division

    1%   Continue teaching in a state other than Virginia

    3%   Continue working in education but pursue a non-teaching position

    2%   Leave education to retire

    2%   Leave education to work in a non-education field

    1%   Leave education for other reasons

Q. DEMOGRAPHICS

80. Are you male or female? *Mark one.*

    18% Male   82% Female

81. What is the best description of your race? *If you are multi-racial, mark all that apply.*

    1%   American Indian or Alaska Native

    2%   Asian

    9%   Black or African American

    0%   Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

    84% White

    13% Other Race

82. Is your ethnic background Hispanic or Latino? *Mark one.*

    4%   Yes   96% No

83. Which subjects are you teaching this year? *Mark one response per line.*

	Percent
Bilingual/English language learners/English as a Second Language	11%
Career and technical education	5%
Early childhood education	7%
Elementary education	43%
English Language Arts	39%
Fine Arts (e.g., art, dance, music, theatre)	6%
Foreign language	3%
Health/physical education	6%
History/social studies/civics/geography	31%
Mathematics	38%
Science	33%
Special education	23%
Other	5%

84. Which grades are you teaching this year? *Mark all that apply.*

PK	K	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
4%	15%	16%	16%	17%	17%	16%	13%	12%	12%	21%	23%	23%	22%

85. How many years have you worked at this school? *Mark one.*

1-3 years	4-10 years	11-20 years	More than 20 years
36%	33%	23%	9%

Appendix E

Virginia Department of Education Codebook for 2019 Virginia School Survey of School and Working Conditions

Variable Name	Variable Type	Variable Description	School Climate Domain and Measure (if applicable)	Variable Values Code
div_num	str3	Division number: 3-digit unique id		
div_name	str49	Division name		
schoolid	str8	Unique school id of the form: DDD-SSSS		
sch_name	str58	School name		
sch_num	str4	School number: 4-digit unique-within-division id		
sid	str7	Survey password used to link response to a school		
responseid	str17	Unique respondent id randomly-generated when respondent opened survey		
q1	byte	Q1. Are you a teacher in this school?		N/Y
q2	byte	Q2. Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction.	Professionalism - Teacher Leadership	SD-SA (6)
q3	byte	Q3. Teachers are relied upon to make decisions about educational issues.	Professionalism - Teacher Leadership	SD-SA (6)
q4	byte	Q4. Teachers engage in collaborative problem solving in this school.	Professionalism - Teacher Leadership	SD-SA (6)
q5	byte	Q5. Teachers are effective leaders in this school.	Professionalism - Teacher Leadership	SD-SA (6)
q6	byte	Q6. I am free to be creative in my teaching approach.	Professionalism - Teacher Autonomy	SD-SA (6)
q7	byte	Q7. I control how I use my scheduled class time.	Professionalism - Teacher Autonomy	SD-SA (6)
q8	byte	Q8. I set the grading and student assessment practices in my classroom.	Professionalism - Teacher Autonomy	SD-SA (6)
q9	byte	Q9. Current policies convey confidence in my ability to do well at my job.	Professionalism - Teacher Autonomy	SD-SA (6)

Variable Name	Variable Type	Variable Description	School Climate Domain and Measure (if applicable)	Variable Values Code
q10	byte	Q10. My role as an educator is respected under current policies.	Professionalism - Teacher Autonomy	SD-SA (6)
q11	byte	Q11. I feel that policy directives are improving our education system.	Professionalism - Teacher Autonomy	SD-SA (6)
q12	byte	Q12. I feel respected by teachers and other adults at this school.	Professionalism - Staff Collegiality	SD-SA (6)
q13	byte	Q13. Teachers and other adults at this school support one another to meet the needs of all students.	Professionalism - Staff Collegiality	SD-SA (6)
q14	byte	Q14. Teachers and other adults at this school trust one another.	Professionalism - Staff Collegiality	SD-SA (6)
q15	byte	Q15. Teachers and other adults at this school collaborate to make this school run effectively.	Professionalism - Staff Collegiality	SD-SA (6)
q16	byte	Q16. Teachers and other adults at this school have taught me things that have helped me do my job better.	Professionalism - Staff Collegiality	SD-SA (6)
q17	byte	Q17. Teachers and other adults at this school expect students to use facts and evidence to support their ideas.	Teaching, Instruction, and Student Support - Instructional Practices	SD-SA (6)
q18	byte	Q18. Teachers and other adults at this school want students to think about different ways to solve problems.	Teaching, Instruction, and Student Support - Instructional Practices	SD-SA (6)
q19	byte	Q19. Teachers and other adults at this school encourage students to provide constructive feedback to others.	Teaching, Instruction, and Student Support - Instructional Practices	SD-SA (6)
q20	byte	Q20. Teachers and other adults at this school encourage students to share their ideas about what they are studying in class.	Teaching, Instruction, and Student Support - Instructional Practices	SD-SA (6)
q21	byte	Q21. Teachers and other adults at this school often connect what students are learning to life outside the classroom.	Teaching, Instruction, and Student Support - Instructional Practices	SD-SA (6)

Variable Name	Variable Type	Variable Description	School Climate Domain and Measure (if applicable)	Variable Values Code
q22	byte	Q22. Teachers and other adults at this school expect students to succeed.	Teaching, Instruction, and Student Support - Academic Environment	SD-SA (6)
q23	byte	Q23. Teachers and other adults at this school provide students the support they need to succeed.	Teaching, Instruction, and Student Support - Academic Environment	SD-SA (6)
q24	byte	Q24. Teachers and other adults at this school feel responsible to help all students achieve their full potential.	Teaching, Instruction, and Student Support - Academic Environment	SD-SA (6)
q25	byte	Q25. Students come to school ready to learn.	Teaching, Instruction, and Student Support - Academic Environment	SD-SA (6)
q26	byte	Q26. Students willingly participate in classroom lessons.	Teaching, Instruction, and Student Support - Academic Environment	SD-SA (6)
q27	byte	Q27. Students put forth the effort required to learn the material.	Teaching, Instruction, and Student Support - Academic Environment	SD-SA (6)
q28	byte	Q28. The physical environment of my classroom supports my teaching and my students' learning.	Teaching, Instruction, and Student Support - Instructional Environment	SD-SA (6)
q29	byte	Q29. I have adequate space to work productively.	Teaching, Instruction, and Student Support - Instructional Environment	SD-SA (6)
q30	byte	Q30. My school provides me with sufficient access to appropriate instructional materials.	Teaching, Instruction, and Student Support - Instructional Environment	SD-SA (6)
q31	byte	Q31. I have the support I need to incorporate technology into my instruction.	Teaching, Instruction, and Student Support - Instructional Environment	SD-SA (6)
q32	byte	Q32. I feel respected by this school's administrators.	School and Community Supports - School Leadership	SD-SA (6)
q33	byte	Q33. I feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to me with school administrators.	School and Community Supports - School Leadership	SD-SA (6)

Variable Name	Variable Type	Variable Description	School Climate Domain and Measure (if applicable)	Variable Values Code
q34	byte	Q34. I trust this school's administrators to do what they say they will do.	School and Community Supports - School Leadership	SD-SA (6)
q35	byte	Q35. This school's administrators support the professional development of staff.	School and Community Supports - School Leadership	SD-SA (6)
q36	byte	Q36. This school's administrators support teachers' efforts to maintain discipline in the classrooms.	School and Community Supports - School Leadership	SD-SA (6)
q37	byte	Q37. This school's administrators communicate a clear vision for this school.	School and Community Supports - School Leadership	SD-SA (6)
q38	byte	Q38. Teachers and other staff have a shared vision for this school.	School and Community Supports - School Leadership	SD-SA (6)
q39	byte	Q39. This school's administrators understand how children learn.	School and Community Supports - School Leadership	SD-SA (6)
q40	byte	Q40. This school's administrators set high expectations for all students.	School and Community Supports - School Leadership	SD-SA (6)
q41	byte	Q41. Teacher performance is assessed objectively.	School and Community Supports - Teacher Evaluation	SD-SA (6)
q42	byte	Q42. Teachers receive feedback that can help them improve their teaching.	School and Community Supports - Teacher Evaluation	SD-SA (6)
q43	byte	Q43. The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.	School and Community Supports - Teacher Evaluation	SD-SA (6)
q44	byte	Q44. Sufficient resources are available for professional development in my school.	School and Community Supports - Professional Development	SD-SA (6)
q45	byte	Q45. Professional development is differentiated to meet the individual needs of teachers.	School and Community Supports - Professional Development	SD-SA (6)

Variable Name	Variable Type	Variable Description	School Climate Domain and Measure (if applicable)	Variable Values Code
q46	byte	Q46. Follow-up is provided after professional development activities to give teachers additional support.	School and Community Supports - Professional Development	SD-SA (6)
q47	byte	Q47. Professional development provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues to refine teaching practices.	School and Community Supports - Professional Development	SD-SA (6)
q48	byte	Q48. Professional development enhances teachers' abilities to improve student learning.	School and Community Supports - Professional Development	SD-SA (6)
q49	byte	Q49. Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students.	School and Community Supports - Demands on Teachers' Time	SD-SA (6)
q50	byte	Q50. Teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues.	School and Community Supports - Demands on Teachers' Time	SD-SA (6)
q51	byte	Q51. The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient.	School and Community Supports - Demands on Teachers' Time	SD-SA (6)
q52	byte	Q52. Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students.	School and Community Supports - Demands on Teachers' Time	SD-SA (6)
q53	byte	Q53. Students know how this school defines inappropriate behavior.	School and Community Supports - Managing Student Behavior	SD-SA (6)
q54	byte	Q54. Students know there are consequences for breaking school rules.	School and Community Supports - Managing Student Behavior	SD-SA (6)
q55	byte	Q55. Teachers and other adults at this school consistently enforce rules for student behavior.	School and Community Supports - Managing Student Behavior	SD-SA (6)
q56	byte	Q56. When students are accused of doing something wrong, they get a chance to explain.	School and Community Supports - Managing Student Behavior	SD-SA (6)
q57	byte	Q57. Students are acknowledged for positive behavior.	School and Community Supports - Managing Student Behavior	SD-SA (6)

Variable Name	Variable Type	Variable Description	School Climate Domain and Measure (if applicable)	Variable Values Code
q58	byte	Q58. There are supports to help a student who consistently misbehaves develop positive behavior.	School and Community Supports - Managing Student Behavior	SD-SA (6)
q59	byte	Q59. We use data to evaluate and, if needed, adjust this school's student conduct policies.	School and Community Supports - Managing Student Behavior	SD-SA (6)
q60	byte	Q60. This school's rules for student behavior are effective.	School and Community Supports - Managing Student Behavior	SD-SA (6)
q61	byte	Q61. Formally assigned a mentor	School and Community Supports - New Teacher Support	N/Y/DK
q62	byte	Q62. Reduced workload	School and Community Supports - New Teacher Support	N/Y/DK
q63	byte	Q63. Release time to observe other teachers	School and Community Supports - New Teacher Support	N/Y/DK
q64	byte	Q64. Formal time to meet with mentor during school hours	School and Community Supports - New Teacher Support	N/Y/DK
q65	byte	Q65. Teachers and other adults provide useful information to parents and guardians to support their children's learning at home.	School and Community Supports - Relationships with Parents/Guardians	SD-SA (6)
q66	byte	Q66. Teachers and other adults help parents and guardians teach healthy social and emotional skills.	School and Community Supports - Relationships with Parents/Guardians	SD-SA (6)
q67	byte	Q67. This school maintains clear, two-way communication with parents and guardians.	School and Community Supports - Relationships with Parents/Guardians	SD-SA (6)
q68	byte	Q68. This school does a good job of encouraging parent/guardian involvement.	School and Community Supports - Relationships with Parents/Guardians	SD-SA (6)

Variable Name	Variable Type	Variable Description	School Climate Domain and Measure (if applicable)	Variable Values Code
q69	byte	Q69. Parents and guardians help their children achieve the educational goals of the school, both academic and behavioral.	School and Community Supports - Relationships with Parents/Guardians	SD-SA (6)
q70	byte	Q70. I am treated with respect by students at this school.	Safety - Concerns about Safety	SD-SA (6)
q71	byte	Q71. I feel safe at this school.	Safety - Concerns about Safety	SD-SA (6)
q72	byte	Q72. I feel there is adequate security in this school.	Safety - Concerns about Safety	SD-SA (6)
q73	byte	Q73. Bullying is a problem at this school.	Safety - Prevalence of Bullying	SD-SA (6)
q74	byte	Q74. Students at this school are bullied about their race or ethnicity.	Safety - Prevalence of Bullying	SD-SA (6)
q75	byte	Q75. Students at this school are bullied about their clothing or physical appearance.	Safety - Prevalence of Bullying	SD-SA (6)
q76	byte	Q76. Students at this school are bullied about their sexual orientation.	Safety - Prevalence of Bullying	SD-SA (6)
q77	byte	Q77. Students at this school are bullied about their disability.	Safety - Prevalence of Bullying	SD-SA (6)
q78	byte	Q78. Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.		SD-SA (6)
q79	byte	Q79. Which of the following best describes your immediate professional plans?		TPlans
q80	byte	Q80. Are you male or female?		M/F
q81_a	byte	Respondent selected "American Indian or Alaska Native" in Q81		N/Y
q81_b	byte	Respondent selected "Asian" in Q81		N/Y
q81_c	byte	Respondent selected "Black or African American" in Q81		N/Y
q81_d	byte	Respondent selected "Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander" in Q81		N/Y
q81_e	byte	Respondent selected "White" in Q81		N/Y

Variable Name	Variable Type	Variable Description	School Climate Domain and Measure (if applicable)	Variable Values Code
q81_f	byte	Respondent selected "Other race" in Q81		N/Y
q82	byte	Q82. Are you Hispanic or Latino?		N/Y
q83_a	byte	Respondent selected "Bilingual/English language learners/English as a Second Language" in Q83		N/Y
q83_b	byte	Respondent selected "Career and technical education" in Q83		N/Y
q83_c	byte	Respondent selected "Early childhood education		N/Y
q83_d	byte	Respondent selected "Elementary education" in Q83		N/Y
q83_e	byte	Respondent selected "English Language Arts" in Q83		N/Y
q83_f	byte	Respondent selected "Fine arts (e.g. art, dance, music, theatre)" in Q83		N/Y
q83_g	byte	Respondent selected "Foreign language" in Q83		N/Y
q83_h	byte	Respondent selected "Health/physical education" in Q83		N/Y
q83_i	byte	Respondent selected "History/social studies/civics/geography" in Q83		N/Y
q83_j	byte	Respondent selected "Mathematics" in Q83		N/Y
q83_k	byte	Respondent selected "Science" in Q83		N/Y
q83_l	byte	Respondent selected "special education" in Q83		N/Y
q83_m	byte	Respondent selected "other subject" in Q83		N/Y
q84_a	byte	Respondent teaches prekindergarten		N/Y
q84_b	byte	Respondent teaches kindergarten		N/Y
q84_c	byte	Respondent teaches 1st grade		N/Y
q84_d	byte	Respondent teaches 2nd grade		N/Y
q84_e	byte	Respondent teaches 3rd grade		N/Y
q84_f	byte	Respondent teaches 4th grade		N/Y
q84_g	byte	Respondent teaches 5th grade		N/Y

Variable Name	Variable Type	Variable Description	School Climate Domain and Measure (if applicable)	Variable Values Code
q84_h	byte	Respondent teaches 6th grade		N/Y
q84_i	byte	Respondent teaches 7th grade		N/Y
q84_j	byte	Respondent teaches 8th grade		N/Y
q84_k	byte	Respondent teaches 9th grade		N/Y
q84_l	byte	Respondent teaches 10th grade		N/Y
q84_m	byte	Respondent teaches 11th grade		N/Y
q84_n	byte	Respondent teaches 12th grade		N/Y
q85	byte	Q85. How many years have you worked at this school?		Exp
q86	float	Q86. Have you already submitted a completed 2019 Virginia Working Conditions Survey for this school?		Screen