

Using Student Concern Forms for creating a sense of safe, caring, and fair schools and  
school connectedness

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### Abstract

For decades researchers have explored school climate and conflict resolution; however, few have engaged in a specific case study analysis of the impact of democratic voice in the construction of school climate. This research explores how the use of Student Concern Forms (SCFs) helps create the sense of a safe, caring, and fair community by giving students and teachers the opportunity to voice when there are infractions against individuals and the school norms; and how participation relates to school connectedness and the sense of taking part in the creation of a moral community. The SCFs were implemented by the principal of a middle school to facilitate comprehensive reporting of student concerns in relation to any aspect of school life (i.e. bullying, conflicts with peers and teachers, etc.). The SCF, initially created as reporting tool, was reintroduced into the school context to open the channels of communication between all parties involved in the reported concern. The forms are reviewed by the administrators of the school, and students are involved in resolution process. This paper analyzes the incidents reported and the actions taken by administrators and students to address the concerns. Specifically, this thesis examines the behaviors reported; what do the teachers and principal write about how the problem is resolved? How are students involved in the resolution process? What is the student's sense of personal and interpersonal safety? Do these forms create a positive moral climate in the school? I explore whether or not students' participation in voicing their concerns has a positive effect on their sense of personal, emotional, and interpersonal safety, their connectedness to school, and sense of creating a more moral environment.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

This study of concerns that adolescents face within the school environment originated from a larger study of adolescent girls' relational and social aggression conducted by Dawn Schrader at Cornell University. When interviewing adolescent girls, several themes emerged that were not included in the original study's analysis. First, the girls enjoyed their involvement in the study because they had a chance to talk about issues that were important to them. They verbalized that letting people know about their everyday interactions and concerns made them feel better about themselves and what was happening in school with their friends. Second, teachers and administrators at the school embraced the researchers being at the school because they felt that the study was an integral part of their efforts to help students feel safe and included, and provided students with a voice in expressing concerns that were important to them. Third, the conversations between the administration and the primary researchers led to a revelation that Student Concern Forms were utilized by the students and staff to create an enhanced school context (behaviorally and psychologically) for students. Lastly, in asking girls in our study what helped them to feel safe in school, they consistently mentioned the Student Concern Forms. However, the girls revealed that although some students used the forms for conflict resolution, others did not use them at all. Still, some students used them to get their peers in trouble; while others did not use them in fear that they would get their friends in trouble, or they themselves would get into more trouble (from their peers) than if they did not use them.

The school administration postulates that the use of mechanisms that give students a sense of control and voice improve school climate, safety, and sense of

belonging. In this study, I hypothesize that the use of Student Concern Forms might eventually decrease aggressive behavior among adolescents through the engagement of student voice and participation within the school environment. While this study cannot track the decrease in behavior over time, it can look at the type of incidents and numbers of concerns students report, how they are dealt with, and how the forms are perceived and used by students. Through this study I analyzed the content of the SCFs, interviewed the principal, and surveyed the entire student population about the forms, to determine the types of concerns reported, student usage patterns, and perceptions of how the forms affect students' and teachers' perceptions of life in the school and the school climate.

This study is one of opportunity: research was already being conducted on social conflicts in schools, namely, girls' relational aggression, and coincidentally, an opportunity arose to study social conflicts as they naturally occurred and were reported by students; the school happened to use a form for such reporting and problem-solving. Therefore, there was already support and plans in place by the administration to make a commitment to improving school climate and safety, as well as students' participation in the process of making that happen, prior to the initiation of the study.

A middle school in upstate New York initiated a program whereby students and teachers can submit Student Concern Forms (SCFs) when they see a breach of conduct that is unsafe, threatening, disrespectful, violent, or otherwise not conducive to a respectful and caring learning environment. These forms, a far cry from the typical referral system, give students both an individual and a collective responsibility in the formation of a moral atmosphere within their school. A copy of this form appears in the Appendix.

The forms themselves, and how they are treated within the school community, teach relationships and problem solving skills that promote good behavior and seek to improve the climate of the school by helping students feel more a part of the development of the school's culture of conflict resolution. Rather than a "rule-by-authority" approach used in most schools across our nation, the principal of the school in this study initiated a philosophically different way of looking at student discipline. This approach encourages students to be aware of and identify conflicts within the school and report them in what is perceived to be a safe way. The principals and teachers involved work with students to resolve the conflicts. An interview with the principal, discussed later, will detail his views on school climate and social conflicts.

In this study I look at how the use of Student Concern Forms creates a safe, caring and fair community by giving people opportunities to voice when there are infractions against individuals and the school, and how that sense of voice and/or participation relates to school connectedness and a sense of being part of creating a moral community. This paper analyzes the type of behaviors reported and the actions taken. The forms contain sections for students and teachers to write about both the concern and the resolution of the conflict. Specifically, this study examines what incidents are reported and how the administration documents the resolution. In addition, I will look at the meaning of voice and participation and its role in the students' sense of personal and interpersonal safety, and creating a positive moral climate.

This thesis will address the following questions: What concerns do students report? Do students perceive their voice as being heard? Do students feel more connected to the school as a result of using the forms? How are students involved in the



resolution process? What are the overall student usage patterns? Finally, are the SCFs an effective tool for moral education? I hypothesize that students' participation in voicing their concerns in the moral interactions in school will have a positive effect on their personal, emotional, and interpersonal safety, their connectedness to school, and sense of participation in creating a more moral environment.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

This thesis explores the importance of student participation in creating a safe and moral school climate. To begin this study I explored the work of prominent moral psychologists to understand the basic approaches to moral education and moral development (Kohlberg, 1981; Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989; Schrader, 2004; Gilligan, 1993; Piaget 1965/1932). Thereafter, I engaged more deeply with literature on student voice and participation within the school climate (Wyness, 2006; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006), focusing particularly on the approaches currently used within schools across the nation. I then explored research in the domain of school climate (Cohen, Shapiro, Fisher, 2006; Anderson, 1982) to understand how the SCF approach to school discipline and moral education relates to recent research on the development of a positive school climate. Upon reviewing the preliminary data and analysis of the study, it became clear that an essential component was missing from the study: conflict resolution education. Therefore, I have also included a brief overview of conflict resolution literature, which is significant to the overall findings and recommendations. The literature review will illuminate the aspects of a safe (i.e., personally, and emotionally, and socially) school environment, and current approaches to moral education that enable students to engage with the school community in the creation of a moral atmosphere. Overall, there are several methods that engage students in the construction of a positive moral atmosphere; however, none of the approaches follow the same methodology as the implementation of the Student Concern Forms.

## **Moral Psychology and Moral Development**

In 1932 the work of Psychologist Jean Piaget transformed our perceptions of human morality; *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (1965/1932) initiated a shift in perspective from thinking about moral development and morality through the lens of philosophy to the domain of psychology. His early works emphasized the morality of constraint vs. the morality of cooperation. The former, a heteronomous orientation grounded in the unequal power relationships of parents and authority, conformity, duty and obligations, and constraint; the later, an autonomous orientation grounded in the society of peers, morality that is egalitarian, flexibly negotiated, mutual, reciprocal, and active. Student participation in schools, especially the ability to voice their opinions about what should happen when conflicts arise, and how they themselves can be taught to deal with their own peer interactions, is a reflection of the transformation of thinking from heteronomous to autonomous morality. Specifically, if students have administrators address and solve problems for them, it perpetuates the idea that moral conflicts are arbitrated by adults in positions of moral authority and power. On the other hand, if students take responsibility for reporting, thinking about, and solving their problems on their own and with their peers, autonomous morality is fostered. Setting up norms of peer reporting and conflict resolution can help transform a school's overall climate to be more akin to an autonomous moral orientation that is governed by norms negotiated by peers, rather than dictated by authorities. This gives students a sense of power and responsibility for creating and maintaining moral relationships, and prepares them better for participation in democratic society later in life. Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral

development, and especially his theory of moral education, the Just Community Approach, explain and exemplify this process.

The development of a moral school climate is integrally linked to the field of moral psychology and moral development. Moral development “refers to a sense of obligation to take the point of view of others in making value judgments and judgments of obligation in relation to others” (Kohlberg & Lickona, 1987, p.156). Conceptualized through the works of Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg’s structural stage model of moral development postulates six stages of development that “describe unique modes of reasoning about justice in interpersonal relations” (McDonough, 2005, p.199). The “moral judgment (or cognitive evaluation and justification) of prescriptive values of right and wrong” (Gibbs, 2002, p.17) is a crucial element of Kohlberg’s theory. His theory explains the structure of the psychology people use to justify their moral choices. In his theory, the understanding of what is moral changes over a person’s life and experience from concrete, individualistic needs and consequences, to ideas of social norms and conformity and the understanding of social systems, to the understanding that behavior should be conducted and justified through principles that uphold moral perspectives of justice, fairness, and responsible actions to others.

However, Kohlberg’s work is not only grounded in his stage model. He is largely a proponent of moral education, and his Just Community schools illustrate this commitment. Kohlberg’s Just Community Approach to education highlights the fundamental underpinnings of the movement toward a safe school climate and students as agents within their educational community.

“The process of developing collective norms and building a moral community frees students to express their moral perspectives free from

external authority constraints, reflect upon their own moral assumptions, and engage in dialogue that creates opportunities for restructuring held moral assumptions and reconstructing more complex moral reasoning” (Schrader, 2004, p.91).

Community building through dialogue about moral transgressions within the context of the school enables students to become active participants in the creation of a positive and moral school climate. As Schrader (2004) points out, the dialectic model of moral reasoning within the school environment has the power to transform students’ moral reasoning. Overall, individual changes within the school community can have a higher-order impact on the overall moral atmosphere of the school.

Kohlberg’s initial approach to moral education involved the discussion of hypothetical dilemmas within the classroom setting to impact students’ moral development. Over time these hypothetical dilemmas evolved into examining real life situations occurring among students and teachers within the context of the school. Kohlberg’s Just Community schools are “participatory democratic institutions, where each member, student and teacher alike...is a participant in moral discussions on the school’s justice issues” (McDonough, 2005, p.200). The schools and classrooms were developed with the goal of creating “a classroom community in which the ideals of justice and co-operation become lived realities for children” (Kohlberg & Lickona, 1987, p.157). The programs are designed to make use of the actual conflicts that students face in their everyday interactions with other students, with the teachers, and with the administrators of a school. These conflicts often have moral grounds. Students experience situations of infringement of personal rights, feel that they are not attended to, or listened to—that is, not treated as important in and of themselves or as members of a community. Also these conflicts involve violation of personal rights and property, or of

lack of respect or ill treatment. Many moral education programs have demonstrated clear success in reducing truant and violent behavior, increased individual moral development, created shared norms of responsibility for the school and one another, and helped students feel a higher level of participation in school (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989). According to Larry Nucci (2001), “a climate of mutual respect and warmth, with fair and consistent application of rules, forms the elemental conditions for an educationally constructive moral atmosphere” (p.167); I argue - a safe school climate.

These basic principles of moral development and moral education can be transformative when applied to the development of a moral school climate and a safe school community. The components of school climate go hand in hand with moral development, because resolving conflicts within a school through a developmental approach is insufficient for true moral development and the development of a moral school climate. There needs to be a human element of personal involvement in being able to recognize a moral problem, think about the moral reasons and justifications for making moral choices, and choosing among action choices to resolve the problem or act morally and responsibly. This helps change the climate, and also the people within that context.

### **School Climate**

School climate refers to the student’s subjective experience within the school (Cohen, Shapiro, Fisher, 2006). In a review of school climate literature, Anderson (1982) highlights other significant conceptualizations and assertions about school climate

through the ages, emphasizing that school climate is the total environmental quality within a given school building.

School climate often shapes the students' experience and behavior. There is a new emphasis on safe and caring schools given the studies connecting positive school climate with a range of positive effects for students and fewer disciplinary incidents (Cohen et. al, 2006). "Improving school climate is a process...[that is] socially, emotionally, ethically, as well as academically, informed" (Cohen et. al, 2006). According to Cohen and colleagues, the decision to improve school climate must be collaborative, incorporating the students, teachers, and faculty, as well as community members; school climate is of the utmost importance because no student can receive a complete education if we are inattentive to the social, emotional and ethical aspects of school life. In fact, "honoring students' voices and promoting student participation reduces risky behavior and supports student learning" (Cohen et. al, 2006, p.30).

Above, I addressed the critical elements of moral education and moral psychology that inform our understanding of the domain of moral development, setting the stage for a broader understanding of the Student Concern Forms (SCFs) within the school environment. I now turn to the literature on student voice and participation to grapple with the notion of voice as a means of enabling students to engage with the construction of their school climate and school community.

### **Student Voice and Participation**

Student voice and participation are fundamental to the understanding of the use of SCFs in this case study. The basic act of completing an SCF is an enactment of student

voice, and their contribution is an element of their participation in the creation of the school climate. The literature highlights student voice and participation within the context of the classroom as a means of developing democratic citizenship among youth.

Although “building effective skills to promote responsible citizenship” is the core business of schools (Morrison, 2003, p.702), today, citizenship and democratic education play only a small role in the development of our students as a populace. Rather than educating our youth about becoming active and vocal citizens within a democratic community, we are teaching them as outsiders what a democratic community looks like. Schrader (2004) asserts, “The essential purpose of school is to create a rational and thoughtful citizenry,” if this is the case, “it needs to be a place of honesty and precision” (p.7). Schrader argues that Dewey’s conceptualization of schools as microcosms of society is essential, and that the educative process needs to involve practice in being a democratic citizen; which means each person having a voice and participating fully in the social life of the school. Rudduck and Fielding (2006) concur: “Consolation and participation are an enactment, in the present, of democratic principles and are powerful allies in the task of redefining the status of young people in schools and shaping more democratic structures for learning” (p. 223).

Referring to schools in the United Kingdom, Wyness (2006) asserts that “citizenship education as it currently stands does little to change the subaltern status of children in schools” (p.211), in order to improve citizenship education and introduce the critical component of a network of participation, we need to provide children with “routine channels” through which their voices can be heard. I argue that these routine channels start from within the school context, and when used in a constructivist manner



can have a profound impact on the moral climate of the school, the students' sense of interpersonal, personal, and emotional safety, their connectedness to the school, and their sense of participating in the creation of a more moral environment. Constructivism involves students making sense of their experiences, rather than having the meaning of experiences imposed on them from outside authorities. This is consistent with an autonomous morality perspective (Piaget, 1965/1932), and aids the process of moral development. Piaget's theory of constructivism and education advocates active participation in social interaction so that learning and development of mutual respect and cooperation, the goals of morally autonomous development, can take place.

“Listening is the foundation of democratic participation; it encourages inclusiveness and respect” (McKibben, 2004, p.81). In democratic learning communities, all individuals, students and adults alike are respected. “As educators, we have a responsibility to do everything we can to ensure that students never lose the sense of buoyant confidence in the power of their voices” (McKibben, 2004, p.81). Referrals and disciplinary action remove student voice from the discipline process, and deter the opportunity for students to learn from their transgressive behaviors.

Although much of the literature explores student voice from a citizenship perspective, the concept can be extended to understand how the role of students as participants in solving conflicts, and as citizens within their school community, translates to the larger context of participation and the development of lifelong citizenship skills.

### **School Connectedness and Belongingness**

Kohlberg and Lickona (1987) recognize that the source of community is “the feeling of unity, of connectedness, of being part of a larger whole” (p.170). The fundamental question becomes how do school climate and student voice and participation contribute to the students’ sense of connectedness and belongingness?

“School connectedness generally includes the sense of attachment and commitment a student feels as a result of perceived caring from teachers and peers” (Wilson, 2004, p.293). In a study coordinated by the Safe Communities Schools Initiative, Wilson (2004) found that school connectedness has a positive effect independent of school climate, and that school connectedness demonstrated a stronger and more consistent contribution than climate to reducing both aggression and victimization. Common characteristics in schools where students report a positive school climate include an emphasis on academic achievement, positive relationships among students and teachers, respect for all members of the school community, fair and consistent discipline policies, attention to safety issues, and family and community involvement (Wilson, 2004, p.293). Research on school connectedness reports consistent positive developmental patterns among students with a high degree of school connectedness, including improved academic achievement, reduced delinquency rates, and decreased rates of health-compromising behavior (Wilson, 2004, p.293). Overall, the amount of connectedness experienced by the average student appears to consistently contribute to predicting his likelihood of aggression and victimization (Wilson, 2004, p.299).

In addition, “the extent to which students perceive they belong in a school setting is related to positive social, psychological, and academic orientations” (Nichols, 2008, p.146). “Students who feel they belong in schools are more likely to adopt healthy and adaptive motivational orientations toward academic achievement” (Nichols, 2008, p.147). In fact, belonging is inversely related to negative belief systems (depression and antisocial attitudes), which suggests that belonging may be a critical variable that contributes to students’ capacity to adapt to school cultures in psychologically positive ways (Nichols, 2008, p.148). Overall, Nichols found that “student’s general impressions of their school (climate) do not necessarily equate with how they view themselves as school participants (belong)” (Nichols, 2008, p.161). Thus, if schools can create structures or mechanisms that would help students perceive that they had some kind of voice or control over the important things that happen to them in the schools, then significant results would be seen in terms of belongingness and positive psychological development, such as moral development or the sense that their school has a moral climate. SCFs may be a simple mechanism that can provide that sense of voice, and thereby develop the connectedness or belonging that promote a moral climate.

In a study of college students, Schrader (2004) acknowledged that students “want to feel known, acknowledged, cared for, respected, treated with equal value, challenged but not imitated, and comfortable” (p.97). Taken together, these components of the school environment “promote a sense of safety while providing a context for [changes that are] moral in nature.” Through the application and understanding of basic student needs within the school context, we can develop mechanisms of moral education in an effort to educate students and improve the climate of the school.

## **Moral Education and Conflict Resolution Today**

With an overall understanding of the elements of moral development and moral education, student voice and participation, and school connectedness and belongingness, we can examine “what works” in education, and how the SCFs fit within the larger context of approaches to moral education today. In addition, this section explores conflict resolution education as a means of understanding developmental education approaches that are not exactly aligned with moral education.

Morrison (2003) recommends that safe school communities be built through more responsive and more restorative action. Restorative justice values accountability and support, and focuses on relationships and their repair. This approach to the development of a safe school community values the community and the individual as equals, whereas, punitive approaches value the community over the individual. It is exactly this kind of approach that the SCFs attempt to emulate, even though the development of the forms by the principal of the school did not have this theory in mind when the forms were developed. The concepts of responsibility and restorative justice fit well with Piaget’s conceptualization of the development of autonomous versus heteronomous morality. Restorative justice involves balancing perspectives and role taking, which is only possible as students grapple with the rules themselves, not by having those rules dictated by others. In the policy of zero tolerance, a rules and authority based disciplinary approach, students are denied their voice, and do not learn to take personal responsibility for conflict resolution. This is an unacceptable course of action in regulating safe school communities (Morrison, 2003). Zero tolerance operates in the domain of regulatory formalism, defining the rules and being responsive in advance; for example, you hit

another student and you are suspended; it is a heteronomous morality. On the other hand, restorative justice allows you to be responsive to the student as an individual within the context of the community; it is an autonomous morality. For example, you hit a student – why? What is underlying these actions? In taking a restorative justice approach to building safe school communities we are encouraging emotional intelligence and inevitably reducing crime and harmful behavior (Morrison, 2003).

Sergiovanni (1992) advocates purposing. He recognizes that when strategies evolve from purposing, “the continuous stream of actions by an organization’s formal leadership which has the effect of inducing clarity, consensus, and commitment regarding the organizations purpose, they become powerful substitutes for leadership and enable people to be driven from the inside” (Vaill, 1984, p.57 in Sergiovanni, 1992). There was a purposeful intention behind implementation of the SCFs, thereby transforming the school climate from a bureaucratic regime to a community focused on interpersonal, personal, and emotional development.

According to *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution Education*, “safe schools, social justice, and cooperative learning environments are essential features of the American educational system” (Bodine & Crawford, 1998, p.4). Most often, “conflicts result from competition, misunderstanding of verbal and non-verbal signals, prejudice, a lack of respect for others, and an inability to properly vent hurt, abuse, or anger” (Hill & Hill, 1984, p.5). Conflict resolution education develops knowledge of the means for constructively dealing with conflicts for both individuals and groups. Conflict resolution programs provide a proactive means of addressing principles for counteracting school violence through four approaches: (1) *the process curriculum approach*: setting aside

classroom time to teach problem-solving processes; (2) *the mediation program approach*: providing “neutral third party facilitation services” to help those in conflict reach a resolution; (3) *the peaceable classroom approach*: a whole-classroom approach to teaching students basic problem solving strategies and processes; and (4) *the peaceable school approach*: “a comprehensive, whole school methodology” that builds upon the peaceable classroom approach (Bodine & Crawford, 1998, p.61).

Specific conflict resolution approaches include the *Boston Program for Young Negotiators* based upon the fundamental belief that “teaching people how to achieve their goals without violence is the best means of violence prevention” (Bodine & Crawford, 1998, p.63). The four components include: teacher training and community involvement; negotiation curricula; follow-up opportunities; and ongoing curriculum development and innovation. Street Law, Inc. has designed other conflict resolution education programs that “promote cooperation instead of competition” (Bodine & Crawford, 1998, p.67). These programs include *We Can Work It Out*, a step by step design to teach conflict management and mediation processes, and *The Conflict Zoo*, a program for upper elementary level students to “teach the building blocks of conflict resolution and the concepts of justice and fairness” (Bodine & Crawford, 1998, p.67).

Morrison (2003) promotes the use of development workshops to address the challenges of developing school climate, including RCP – *Respect, Consideration, and Participation*, a program that emphasizes resolving conflict because conflict results in harm to relationships (Morrison, 2003). On the other hand, Pearce and Pearce (2001) focuses on students as discussion leaders to initiate a school-wide dialogue process designed to develop citizenship skills and enhance school climate. When we think about

schools as communities and possibilities for moral education, RCP programs are more aligned with traditional disciplinary and authoritarian approaches to leadership.

However, the school-wide dialogue mimics many of the critical aspects of Kohlberg's Just Community, because students become discussion leaders, and skill development is incorporated into the workshop.

Conflict resolution workshops are not the focus of this study; however, the SCFs do contain space for students to write how they think the concern should be resolved, and then a section to document how the conflict was actually resolved. Although SCFs are not a workshop, per say, their use and the discussion that follows their completion can be viewed as mimicking many of the same basic strategies that appear in such workshops. The resolution of the conflicts by either the students or administrators within the school dictates where the completion of SCFs lies along the continuum from strict discipline to moral education.

As we look at this case study, it is important to consider the students' perception of responsibility to the school context as it relates to the completion of the Student Concern Forms. The use of SCFs within the school environment is, at present, not an actual approach to moral education, but meets some of the fundamental principles of constructive developmental programs. It is more analogous to a conflict resolution education curriculum that is under administrative guidance. Critical elements of voice and participation, and even student connectedness and belongingness, are evident within the use of Student Concern Forms, but the forms themselves are not quite a moral education intervention, nor a form of conflict resolution. However, they may have implications for accomplishing both, depending on how the students, teachers, and

administrators use the forms. Therefore, this study is designed to examine the use of the forms.



### Chapter 3 Methods

The Student Concern Form (SCF) system of reporting concerns was implemented at this school in the fall of 2005. The form was re-instated in the school (previously, the form was used as solely a recording mechanism) by the former assistant principal (current principal) who wanted to introduce a less adversarial approach to reporting problems than the traditional authority-based “incident report” that was the current practice in the school. His idea was to involve students in the process of expressing their concerns by reporting incidents that they were “concerned” about that violated their sense of well being, the positive culture of their peers, or the school rules. Students were introduced to these forms and encouraged to use them. The students who completed the form, and those named on the form, were then called to meet with the building administrators to help the students address their own concerns by resolving conflicts among themselves with adult guidance. It was perceived that such a system would teach students interpersonal skills and decrease the number of disciplinary hearings and incident reports. Additionally, the principal advocated the use of these forms as a way for students to feel a sense of responsibility for helping to create a positive social climate in the school.

Over the past four years, these forms have been filed away in a storage room, untouched after the conflict was resolved. Professor Dawn Schrader’s research revealed the use of these forms; our interest was piqued as to whether the concerns that students report on the forms reflected the types of concerns that came up in her girls’ relational aggression study, or explained why the culture of this middle school was so much better than other schools, according to the study’s participants. In other words, did the use of

SCFs change or set the tone for the culture of the school to create a sense of safety for the students in it?

Schrader's research team suspected that the forms contain rich data about the problems students and teachers perceive that affect school climate including students' connectedness, perception of safety, and sense of participation in the school. In order to fully understand the impact of the forms on the school climate, I engaged in an extensive qualitative and quantitative research study. According to Creswell (1998), the qualitative method of inquiry is based upon "methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem" (p.15). As explored in the literature review, issues of school safety and moral development are critical components of the experiences of youth in education. This study relies upon the principles of qualitative inquiry to develop "a complex, holistic picture [by] analyz[ing] words, report[ing] detailed views of informants and conduct[ing] the study in a natural setting" (Creswell, 1998, p.15). There are three fundamental components of this study: an analysis of the Student Concern Forms, a distribution of questionnaires to students and teachers, and an interview with the school's principal, in addition to my observations within the school environment.

This study is specifically grounded in case study research, "an exploration of a 'bounded system' or case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p.61). Each component of this research is critical to the overall understanding and development of theories within the context of school climate and moral development. The multiple modes of inquiry serve as puzzle pieces in the development of an expansive picture of school climate

through the lens of myself as a researcher, the students as agents within the school context, and the principal as the initiator and key player within the school environment.

### **Aims and Research Questions**

The present study has two aims. The first aim is to examine the use of concern forms as a demonstration of the importance of student voice in expressing concerns. The second is to understand how students perceive the use of Student Concern Forms and their effect on the school climate.

As explored above, student voice is instrumental in creating a positive school environment in which students feel a sense of belonging, which in turn contributes to enhanced academic success. This study examines the role of voice and participation in the formation of the students' sense of personal and interpersonal safety, and the creation of a positive moral climate. I hypothesize that the students' participation in voicing their concerns in the moral interactions in school will have a positive effect on their personal, emotional, and interpersonal safety, their connectedness to school, and sense of participation in creating a more moral environment

In analyzing the Student Concern Forms, I examine the type of behaviors reported and the actions taken as reported on the forms. Specifically, what concerns do students report? What do the teachers and principal write about how the problem is resolved? How are students involved in the resolution process? This chapter presents the results of the data on the forms to illustrate the kinds of actions and behaviors students are concerned about in school that affects their sense of safety and well being in the school context.

In addition to looking at the SCFs, a questionnaire was developed to be administered to the entire student body to survey the perceptions of the use of SCFs in the school and their impact. Those data are reported as well.

### **Participants and Data Sources**

This study is an analysis of data that has been collected by the school for purposes that had no research base in mind, as well as a questionnaire designed specifically to survey attitudes and perceptions of the use and impact of SCFs. Previously, the SCFs were a means of documenting incidents in the school as opposed to a pro-active means of conflict resolution. The data consists of a sample of completed SCFs from the inception of the idea to the present. The sample includes data from 2004-2005 grades six through eight, 2006-2007 grades six through eight, and September 2007 through February 2008 for grades six through eight. In collecting the forms from their storage location, it was discovered that an additional sample of SCFs were removed from the initial filing system. Those data have been placed in a separate category entitled miscellaneous. These forms include data from the 2004-2005 school year through the 2007-2008 school year, and are not differentiated or identifiable by grade level. Therefore, I analyzed a total of ten files comprised of 433 forms.

The population of the questionnaire participants is composed of 581 students (all students enrolled in the school for the 2007-2008 school year) and fifty five teachers (teachers assigned a home base, or home room, class). The school houses 166 sixth graders, 199 seventh graders, 208 eighth graders, and eight un-graded students. The current principal of the school has been in his current role for two years, previously

serving as the assistant principal. The invitation and encouragement to use these forms as a comprehensive means of learning about conflicts within the school environment, acts of aggression, or incidents outside of school that are impacting the school environment, was spearheaded by this principal.

### **Student Concern Forms**

The basis for this part of the study is the content of the SCFs completed by the middle school students (Appendix A). These forms have four content areas: (1) please describe what happened; (2) have you tried to settle; (3) what would you like to happen; (4) for administration only.

To protect the students' identities, a research assistant (RA) was employed to clear identifying information (names) from the forms. All 433 forms were duplicated so the originals would remain unmarked. Upon completion of the copies, the RA erased any names that appeared on the form, replacing each with an identifier to help us understand what was happening to whom in the incident, keeping gender information intact for possible future analysis. Females were labeled F, males M. The first female mentioned on the form was labeled F1, male, M1, so on and so forth. The names of teachers and administrators were removed as well and replaced with Ms. or Mr.

After the data was cleaned each form was reviewed four times, once for each of the four content areas of the form, as mentioned above. Each section of the form was examined separately to avoid bias or contamination across questions. Resultant themes, listings of the information gleaned from the forms, were typed into a Microsoft Word File. Given the number of forms, it would have been too time consuming to enter each

form into a separate file to be analyzed by Atlas TI statistical software. Therefore, each file was compiled together to generate a list of incidents reported.

Once the 433 forms were completely reviewed, a coding manual of themes was developed. Given the rich data, I employed an open coding scheme allowing the data to illuminate the themes from within. Open coding is primarily used in the Grounded Theory Approach (Creswell, 1998). Although this study is not completely Grounded Theory, many of the elements of the approach can be seen in the methodology used to collect and analyze this data, including the development of theory in response to a particular phenomenon. My RA and I developed a list of themes that were most evident during initial review of the forms. These major themes were: threats, disobedience of authority; verbal abuse; personal; non-verbal aggression; relational aggression; teacher and administration behaviors; student identified harassment; miscellaneous. Sub-themes were then developed within the major categories to understand more specific behaviors. For example, “spreading rumors” and “talking about me behind my back” were defined as sub-themes within the overall category of relational aggression. Incidences that were more defined by space or place (lunch room, bus) were coded as miscellaneous because the behavior reported was directly related to the context, for example, “he poured hot sauce on my lunch.” An example of this coding scheme is in the Appendix G.

## **Questionnaires**

The student and teacher questionnaires are a quantitative and qualitative means of analyzing the perceptions of the effect of the SCFs on the promotion of an interpersonal, personal, and emotionally safe school environment. The questionnaires (See Appendix C

and D) were administered during home base (homeroom) over the course of two days. In total 299 student and seventeen teacher questionnaires were collected. These questionnaires contained no personal identification information aside from the student's grade or the grade(s) taught by the teacher. The questionnaire was administered to presumably all 581 students through their home base; the teacher questionnaire was administered to fifty-five teachers (those assigned a home-base class). There is no way of telling whether all students received a questionnaire, but each student was asked to answer the questionnaire only once. Some students and teachers may have been absent on those days; other home base teachers may not have participated in the distribution. I have no way of knowing. The home base teachers dropped off all completed questionnaires into a marked box in the mailroom. The principal of the school publicly gave support for this project, which may have led to good participation on the part of the teachers.

Befitting of case study research, I chose an anonymous questionnaire to understand the use of the SCFs within the school. In addition, the questionnaires allowed me to gather first hand information on student perceptions of their school environment to illuminate their experiences within the school context with hopes of establishing a connection to the overall school climate. The questionnaires were developed after a brief initial analysis of the SCFs. In this initial analysis I generated a list of incidents that students repeatedly reported, including stealing, talking about me behind my back, physical fighting, and name-calling, among others. In addition to requesting data on how often the students completed the SCFs and what incidents they reported, I included a series of questions to understand the student perceptions of the effect of the SCFs on the

overall climate of the school. These questions include: *Do you feel that the Student Concern form has an impact on making you feel: Physically safer at school? More connected with your friends? More connected with the school community? Better about yourself?* In addition, students were asked about the overall effectiveness of using a concern form to solve conflicts: *Do you feel more control over the way problems are handled in your school because of using the Student Concern Form?*

The questionnaire responses were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Student questionnaires consisted of one qualitative and seventeen quantitative questions. Each response was coded using a basic numerical system. For yes/no questions, the response “yes” received a “1,” “no” a “2,” responses in between yes and no or marked “sometimes” received a “1.5.” Responses in which both were circled or students declared neither received a “0.” Many students included qualitative responses to the quantitative questions; these responses were coded as follows: “I don’t know” – “IDK.” In addition, when a participant did not respond to a question, the answer was coded “DNR.” For questions in which participants circled multiple answers (i.e. *If yes, what kinds of things do you report on them? Circle all that apply*) responses were coded “1” for yes, “2” for no, and “DNR” for no reported answer.

Analyzing the student’s responses to questionnaires clarified students’ perceptions of voice and democratic participation in school, and elucidated what students think are the moral problems that they face everyday, the problems they need help solving, and the problems that make them feel unsafe or threatened in school. In addition, the responses determined what conflicts within the school caused them not to feel connected or comfortable within their school context.



**Interview**

The principal of the school was interviewed to increase my understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of the use of student concern forms in this school (See Appendix E), the reasons for continued use, and the overall goals for the use of the forms within the school. In addition, this interview elucidated the principal's conception of a positive school climate. The interview lasted approximately forty five minutes.

We chose not to engage in interviews with other members of the school community because of time and resource constraints. Students were not interviewed in order to protect the privacy of the incidents reported through the SCFs.

## Chapter 4 Results and Discussion

Through a thorough analysis of the content of the SCFs and the data compiled from the student and teacher questionnaires, I hoped to ascertain the relationship between the use of the SCFs and overall climate of the school, particularly to determine whether or not the SCFs are a tool for moral education and moral engagement in the formation of a moral school climate. A content analysis of the SCFs detailed the incidents that students reported, ranging from physical altercations to lost belongings. In addition, the analysis indicated that students were using the forms as a plea for help. The questionnaires allowed me to identify student usage patterns and student perceptions of the forms as they relate to school climate and belongingness.

This section highlights the findings of both the Student Concern Forms and the questionnaires. The information within the SCFs was analyzed qualitatively, using a coding scheme developed by myself and a research assistant (see Appendix G). As described earlier, codes were selected in such a way that each incident reported fit within a specific domain, for example “non-verbal aggression.” Initially, this code was broken into specific categories; however, additional codes were generated from the data through open coding, the identification of concepts within the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This allowed me to conceptualize the instances and see whether or not categories were missing from the original codes. At the conclusion of the coding process, the codes were (re)merged into overall categories, such as “non-verbal aggression.” This open coding methodology enabled me to develop more lucid understanding of student concerns and how they relate to one another. The qualitative research also provided a substantial amount of rich information to accompany the quantitative questionnaire analysis.

The questionnaires were analyzed for specific relationships (outlined in Chapter 3), particularly student voice and connectedness in relation to the overall climate of the school. Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative data paint a picture of student life and the use of SCFs at this school.

### **Student Concern Forms**

The report of the results in this section is organized by the questions that are posed on the concern forms.

#### *What Happened?*

A total of 433 Student Concern Forms (SCFs) were analyzed for the purpose of this study. 179 of the SCFs had been completed by females, 216 by males, thirty-seven by teachers, and one by an entire class of students. These forms were analyzed for content to determine what happened in each particular incident, how the student tried to solve the issue, the ideal solution, and the final resolution. Although a vast majority of the incidents reported through these forms pertained to conflicts and concerns within the immediate school environment, three forms were filed for incidents outside of the school (over the weekend) and seven for conflicts that arose on the bus to or from school.

The incidents most often reported referred to verbal abuse within the school environment; in fact, 160 of the forms referred to incidents of verbal name-calling alone. This category includes all types of name-calling ranging from the less severe, “checkbox,” to racially charged comments such as “eww white boy ewww,” sexual orientation, “lesbo,” and sexual promiscuity “slut,” “whore,” and even verbal teasing, “[he said] I am not good at basketball.” The second most frequently reported incidents

involved physical violence within the school. These acts range from minor pushing to overt physical altercations. Physical altercations included, “chucking balls at me during gym class,” “I was stabbed with a pencil,” and “he hit me in the eye with a rubber-band.” Overall, 129 incidents of physical altercations were reported. In addition to physical aggression within the school environment, the students also report a number of verbal conflicts with other students. This indicates that name-calling and physical altercations are incidents that students are most concerned with in relation to their overall feelings of safety (interpersonal, personal, and emotional) within their school environment.

*How Did you Try to Solve the Issue?*

In an informal conversation with the school principal, he noted that the most important part of the form for the school is the student detail of how they tried to solve the conflict. In eighty-one of the incidents reported, students verbally requested that the behavior against them stop in a direct confrontation with the individual; students often write, “I asked him to stop,” or “I told her not to bother me.” In only four extreme cases did students resort to violence as a means of “resolving” their conflict with another student; one student writes, “We tried to move to the front of the bus, but he followed us so we had to resort to violence.” However, in nineteen instances students report that they are turning in the SCF as a means of handling the situation. From one student’s perspective, “I’m handling it right now.”

### *The Ideal Solution*

The response area, “What would you like to see happen,” allows students to identify what they see as a fair or just response to the situation. In 146 instances, students report that they want the situation to stop. Writing, “stay away from me and leave me alone,” “stop immediately,” and “just tell him to stop.” The school principal views this as “an authentic, real response” (Personal Interview, March 12, 2008). Only twenty-two students request a verbal apology, while seventy-two cite some sort of punishment as a means of retribution. Punishments range from a simple call for a “consequence,” to more strict punishments such as lunch detentions, ISS (in-school suspension), OSS (out-of-school suspension), and ETs (calls to home).

### *The Resolution*

Finally, the resolution portion of the form is reserved for administrative use. In this area, the administrator records how the situation was handled, noting any potential punishment, notes from the mediation, or further action necessary. Forty instances were resolved through group mediation. According to the school Principal, “...if we can do a mediation for an hour and get them to a place where they can both move forward, then I’m happy” (Personal Interview, March 12, 2008). Of the incidents reported, only fifty were resolved through a specific type of punishment (LD, ET, ISS, or OSS), and twenty warnings were issued, with the promise of a consequence if the behavior continues. Most often incidents are handled through verbal negotiation such as the group mediation or meetings with the individuals involved. In forty-eight cases the students shook hands and agreed to give one another space. In an interview with the school Principal, he reported

that many instances end by “saying look, I’m sorry about that and moving forward.” In another twenty-three cases the aggressor issued a verbal apology to the victim.

Overall this content analysis sets the stage for the larger understanding of the school as a moral community and students as participants with a voice in the community. Developing a thorough understanding of the incidents reported was critical to elucidating the issues students face, and those that they view are of the utmost concern.

### **Questionnaires**

Questionnaires were administered across two days during home base. One questionnaire was distributed to each of the 581 middle school students. In addition, one teacher questionnaire was distributed to each of the fifty-five home base teachers. Out of the 581 questionnaires distributed to the student population, 299 were returned and analyzed, a 51% response rate. Of the fifty-five questionnaires distributed to home base teachers, seventeen were returned and analyzed, a 31% response rate. I have no way of determining how many students refused to do the questionnaire or how many faculty members refused to distribute them to their classes. I also do not know how many of the students were absent on the days of the survey. Thus the response rate is calculated based on the population of the student body with knowledge that these percentages are simply estimates based on complete attendance and complete cooperation in distributing the questionnaires to all students.

Although the student questionnaire was composed of seventeen multiple choice questions and one short answer, for the purpose of this study a subset of seven questions were analyzed: (1) *Do you think it makes the problem better or worse?* (2) *Are the*

*teachers and principals listening to you when you use the Student Concern Form?* (3) *Do you feel that your use of the Student Concern Form has an impact on making you feel physically safer in school?* (4) *Do you feel that your use of the Student Concern Form has an impact on making you feel more connected with the school community?* (5) *Do you feel that your use of the Student Concern Form has an impact on making the school a better place?* (6) *What would keep you from using a Student Concern Form?* (7) *What makes it hard to turn in a form?* Because these are Student Concern Forms, only two questions from the teacher's questionnaire were analyzed: (1) *Do you feel that your use of the Student Concern Form has an impact on making the school a better place?* (2) *What would keep you from using a Student Concern Form?* The above questions were selected because they are most relevant to the research aims and questions.

Survey responses indicate that 67% of the students sampled have never used a SCF (student concern form). According to the data, 111 students, (37%) of the respondents felt that completing an SCF improved the situation. The students verbalized multiple reasons why the forms make the problem better, including “adults get involved,” “the problem just stops,” “they talk to the person.” When asked, *are the teachers and principals listening to you when you use the Student Concern Form*, 122 participants (42%) said “yes.” One student recalls, “teachers, depends on who, [administrator], yea [he/she] listens, when [he/she] hears.” However, one student verbalized, “NO! [administrator] does NOT! get someone else in charge of dealing with them [he/she] SUCKS!!”

Overall, students felt that the use of SCFs did not help them to feel physically safer at school, nor more connected with the school community (37% and 41%

respectively). The respondents reported, “my friendship is good and the SCF does not make it better or worse,” and “I don’t think the form would connect me to anyone better.” On the other hand, one student recalled, “its just comforting to know that if I have problem someone will help solve it.” (These are direct quotes from students, therefore spelling errors have not been corrected to preserve the richness of data provided through the students’ voices.)

A small majority (36%) of respondents did say that they felt the use of the SCF had an impact on making the school a better place. Still, one student asserts, “Why would it? No one values our opinions. Nothing’s ever gonna change for the better till we’re gone.”

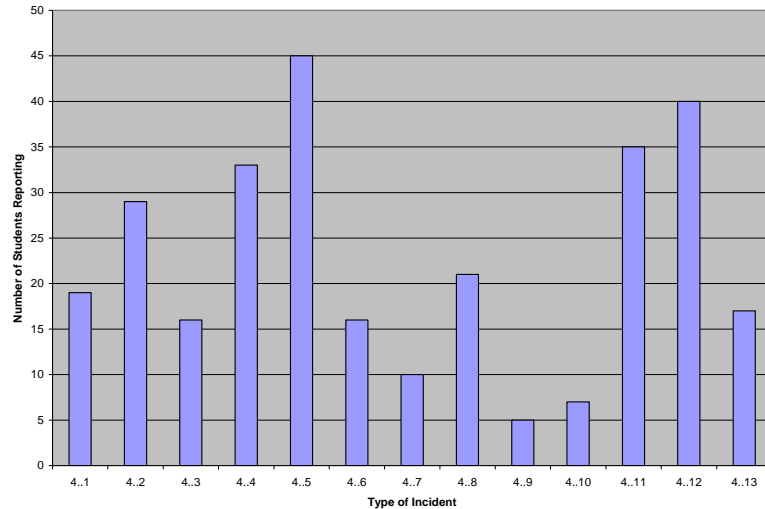
In addition to the significance of the effect of the SCFs on school climate, this study aims to understand student usage patterns. According to the questionnaire results, the two main factors that prevent students from using the forms are that *nothing would happen* and *I can handle it on my own*. As far as what makes it hard to turn in a form, the data suggests that students find it hard because they *think it will not change anything* (29%) and they are *afraid that [they] will get in more trouble from [their] friends for turning one in* (35%). In addition, 9% of students selected “other.” The responses fell under the categories of, don’t have a need to use one, for example, “not having problems; personal reasons, “I prefer to speak in person;” commentary on the helpfulness of the form, “nothing happens when you use it;” concern for another person, “I would get the other person in trouble;” and random anecdotes, for example, “teacher’s suck.” One student also mentioned, “people would think I am a baby.”



Answers to the survey data demonstrate that 47% of the teachers who completed the survey felt that their use of the SCF has an impact on making the school a better place. The teachers responded similarly to students when asked, *what would keep you from using a student concern form?* 17% of teachers responded that *nothing would happen* and *I can handle it on my own*. In addition, four teachers responded “other” and included descriptions such as “not having concern taken care of in a timely manner.”

Chart 1 (see below) visually depicts student responses to *If yes, what kinds of things do you report on them* (in reference to the SCFs). The two most frequently reported incidents are 4.5 and 4.12, name calling and bullying respectively. The incidents reported in the chart below are: 4.1 Stealing; 4.2 Talking about me behind my back; 4.3 Talking about others behind their back; 4.4 Physical fighting, ex. Hitting, punching, kicking; 4.5 Name calling; 4.6 Vandalism of personal property, ex. Lockers; 4.7 Fighting over a girlfriend/boyfriend; 4.8 Personal threats, ex. “I want to fight you!”; 4.9 Academic problems, ex. Too many tests on one day; 4.10 Lost belongings; 4.11 Conflict with a teacher; 4.12 Bullying; 4.13 Other.

Chart 1

*Incidents I Report on the Student Concern Forms*

Overall, the analyses indicate that the top two concerns reported by students are verbal abuse and physical violence. However, based on the survey data, a majority of students are not using the SCFs, therefore a small portion of the student body is reporting their concerns, and reporting them frequently. Despite the variable usage among the student population, students that do use the forms recognize that they help the situation, and they feel as though they are being listened to. The questionnaire data allowed me to determine that the two main factors that prevent both the teachers and the students from using the SCFs are feeling that the form “won’t change anything” and that they will get into “more trouble” for using the form.

*Student Use*

According to the results of our survey data, only 33% of the respondents actually use the student concern forms. This highlights the fact that their influence within the school community is not as pervasive as initially assumed. In an interview with a school principal, he drew attention to a study conducted a few years ago through the Tompkins

Coalition for Youth. According to the initial survey, less than 20% of the student population filled out the SCFs. Although formal research has not been conducted to date on the use of SCFs among students of different socio-economic levels within the school community, as a general observation the principal noted that “I think our lower income children use SCFs. Does that mean they’re involved in more conflict? I don’t have the data or information to share that or make that estimation... We’ve helped a couple of kids, what we’ve done is empower them to say I have this mechanism” (Personal Interview, March 12, 2008). Later, he goes on to say, “I can’t imagine that rich kids don’t have the same problems as poor kids.”

The question becomes, why aren’t kids using them? In response to the questionnaires, a significant percentage of the students (29%) say they do not use SCFs because they think that *it won’t change anything*. It is evident, that these students don’t perceive the forms as a way of changing the school climate. In addition, perhaps students with a higher SES who have higher social emotional skills don’t see a need to get an adult involved. Overall, higher SES students operate at a higher skill level versus students with a lower SES, therefore lower SES students may not be as developmentally advanced, so they look to the adult to solve their problems for them. This is reflected in the 19% of students who responded “yes” to: *Does a concern form help solve the problem for you?*

These observations and the under use of SCFs within the general population explains student usage patterns and why many students are not using them. Parents often approach the school principal and say “well, my child is afraid of retaliation...or my kid felt like they were ratting on somebody or being a snitch” (Personal Interview, March 12,

2008). We need to reverse the tide of retaliatory language and peer pressure as a means of resisting help in resolving student conflicts.

According to Curcio and First (1993), “bullied children are reluctant to complain or to appear as weak or as crybabies” (p.39), therefore, how can we develop proactive approaches to encourage students to report incidents in which they feel that they have been bullied or teased. This study demonstrated that many students feel that they can cope with it on their own (15% of survey respondents) and reporting wasn’t quite their style. As the principal notes, “Often times we’ll have a situation where we’re sitting there and it’s why didn’t you let us know?” The response: “you know I don’t fill those out, other kids fill those things out” (Personal Interview, March 12, 2008). Therefore, the emergence of “social pressures” deters students from resolving their conflicts. However, when incidents are not handled in a participatory and proactive way, the administration is left to handle conflicts of a greater magnitude.

### *School Safety and School Climate*

Violence is pervasive in schools across the country. In fact, school violence has been identified as a public health issue; therefore the challenge to care for our students and teach them proactive conflict resolution methods is ever more important. When we can create caring, safe, and healthy schools, we can help deter student violence. For example, despite the significant number of forms that have reported incidents of relational and physical aggression at this local middle school, over the past five years, there has only been one legitimate fight. From the principal’s perspective:

“Two guys squaring off and knocking each other around. Now you say that to anybody else that you’re in a middle school with 600 kids and

there's one fist fight, that's pretty astonishing. That doesn't mean a kid hasn't been pushed, that doesn't mean a kid hasn't been kicked, doesn't mean a kid hasn't been knocked around and stuff like that, but I think there's, I think folks are going to have a sense of calm, a sense of assurance, not only the student body but the faculty when they fill out a Student Concern Form and it's dealt with okay. Folks know that they're supported, children know that they're supported." (Personal Interview, March 12, 2008)

This incident is at the heart of the role of SCFs within the school climate. According to Sprague and Walker (2005), "the administrative and management practices of the school's leadership have a tremendous influence on the school climate of the school" (p.14). They categorize this domain (school leadership) as one of four sources of vulnerability to school safety; the other three being: design, use and supervision of school space; the nature of the neighborhood served by the school; and characteristics of students enrolled.

Within the domain of administration and management practices lies positive recognition of all students and support for teachers in classroom and behavior management. These two qualities are intrinsic in the use of SCFs. From the administration's perspective, no incident is too small to be reported on an SCF and handled in a timely manner, and teachers can also report on the SCF. However, students and teachers have a different perspective. In many cases students cry for help "listen to me" or denounce the administration for poor handling of a situation, "NO! Ms. [administrator] does NOT! get someone else in charge of dealing with them [he/she] SUCKS!!" Students recognize when they are not being listened to and supported, and it is often important for the administration to remove their rose colored glasses and open their eyes to the inner world the students.

*Student Voice*

In the interview with the school principal, he offered explanations of the SCFs as a means of students enacting their voice. The forms “give kids a mechanism to say, you know what, I really prefer that you stop teasing me at home base in the morning. So it gives them assurances that their voices are going to be heard” (Personal Interview, March 12, 2008). He goes on to say that “It’s a mechanism for kids to say, I’ve got this off my chest, I’ve got some help.”

Therefore, although students are voicing their concerns, their voices are not being heard directly by the larger school community. In a true Just Community Approach, whether within the classroom or the entire school, conflicts are negotiated as a collective, and every student becomes a part of the resolution, particularly in instances in which one student has posed a threat to the entire school community. Therefore, although these forms give voice and agency to students within the school community, they are individualistic. Based on both the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data, it appears that, for the students who use the forms, they act as an enactment of student participation in the school environment, and foster an overall sense of belongingness and connectedness to the school community. In many cases, they are a cry for help, but a cry that is evaluated and viewed highly by members of the administration.

However, the students who do not use the forms are not enacting their voice within the school community. Students of higher SES and other students within the school community that shy away from the use of the forms are actually missing the opportunity to engage their voices in the formation a moral school climate. Every instance that is reported by a student voicing their concerns is another step along the way

to the creation of a positive moral school climate. Essentially, these small instances create a higher-order impact; however, given the small percentage of students within the community, the impact on the overall school climate is minimal.

From the standpoint of developing student voice and assessing voice and participation in the formation of a moral school climate, this program does not work. However, if we re-evaluate our conceptualizations of student voice, and think about student voice and participation as an enactment of caring for themselves and their peers, and taking the initiative to report the wrong-doings they experience or see, we have taken a giant leap toward the individual development of moral integrity and action.

Therefore, select individuals within the school community benefit from the use of SCFs, and these benefits are evident within the school community. As the principal recounts, “whether it’s a thumbs up or whether you see the kids sitting together in the cafeteria, or whether you notice that one group is getting along with another group” you can see the difference. Sometimes, “you can see a kid walk a little taller, you can see them say hey thanks a lot, this seems better” (Personal Interview, March 12, 2008). Still, it is important to consider how the students perceive the use of the forms by the administration. For example, do the students who use the forms still look at this as adult intervention and problem solving—a heteronomous morality in play, while those who do not use the forms think and act more morally autonomous—using Piaget’s conceptions of moral development?

As reporting becomes more acceptable within the school environment, and students turn to adults to help resolve their conflicts, I think we will see an overall improvement within the school climate. Perhaps we will see a decrease in the use of the

forms as students move from sixth to seventh, to eighth grade, and learn to solve their problems within their peer groups instead of relying on adult authorities as conflict mediators. Alternatively, students may see the use of the forms and adult intervention as a kind of threat to themselves and their peer status—almost like a snitching or getting people (including themselves) in more trouble. These are indicators of larger social and personal issues, where voices are forced “underground” (Brown & Gilligan, 1992) and students deny themselves in relationships in order to appear to have smooth friendships, regardless of the cost to the self. These theoretical and empirical questions are yet to be examined. At this point, the use of SCFs is an enactment of voice and participation only for the students who chose to use them, and these students alone perceive that by using these forms, they are creating a safer community for themselves.



## Chapter 5 Recommendations

Although this school is engaging in a novel method of student reporting of concerns within the school environment, taking a proactive approach to reducing school violence, they need to take the next step in actually building conflict resolution and moral educational skills among the student body. The use of reporting mechanisms can be dangerous if used in the wrong way. Engaging in reporting schemes, then holding “mediating” sessions that are more punitive than pro-active, with authorities dishing out consequences pre-determined by the administrators is a morally reprehensible practice from the point of view of Kohlberg’s moral education theory, moral development theory, Just Community schools, and similar research and practice in the area of participatory engagement, school climate, character and moral education, and conflict resolution. In fact, “conflict resolution education is based on the underlying principles of cooperative problem solving” (Filner, 1998, p.xv in Bodine & Crawford, 1998). In order to teach kids how to resolve their conflicts in the long term, we need to begin to educate them as to how, and provide them with the tools they need.

The school principal has noted the shift in use to SCFs as a philosophical shift in the function of school discipline. Even teachers are using the forms to report incidents in which they feel a student needs help or are concerned about their behavior, as opposed to the triplicate referral forms or incident reports of earlier days. However, there is another philosophical leap to take. The principal notes, sometimes “we have to give out consequences, it’s not so much about the consequence, it’s about the education around it” (Personal Interview, March 12, 2008). However, focusing on education about the consequence vs. education around the issue at hand works against the philosophy of using

SCFs as a form of conflict resolution education. After five years of successful use in deterring meta-scale violence, it is time for the school to take the next step and educate the students in the field of conflict resolution and moral development. This change would take time; however, just as the use of the SCFs is “time well spent,” so too would additional time devoted to educating students on the fundamental principles of conflict resolution.

In addition, more effort needs to be made on the part of the school administrators to understand why only select populations of students are completing the SCFs. Clearly, other students within the school community face similar conflicts every day, and in many situations these conflicts could be even worse. It is now time to engage in a shift toward collective responsibility. Although assemblies at the start of the year preach the message of “tell us what is going on” and forms are available throughout the school (in the main office, the guidance office, even some classrooms); there needs to be extra strides taken to assure that other students also feel interpersonally, personally, and emotionally safe within the school environment.

## Chapter 6 Conclusion

This case study explored the use of Student Concern Forms (SCFs) as a tool for moral education and student voice and participation in the construction of a moral school climate. Both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data included in the study: the content of the SCFs, student and teacher questionnaires, and an interview with the principal, demonstrate that the forms are not actually a moral education tool nor a direct means of creating a holistic moral school climate, they are in fact a strategic disciplinary approach.

Overall, the data shows that the forms are helpful for the small subset of the student population that use them to report their concerns, and these students feel as though they have a voice within their school. Although this study determined student usage patterns and made recommendations for developing a more educational approach to using these forms within the context of the school, there are still many questions left un-answered. For example, why do some students use them and not others? Why are some concerns reported while others remain hidden within the student group? What are teachers doing to encourage or discourage the use of the forms? What follow-up is provided to the students to help them to feel safe in school?

We begin with the many levels of analysis and understanding of the general use of the forms. What at face value appeared to be a means of students voicing their concerns within the school climate can actually be seen as a mechanism of administrative control and information gathering on what is occurring within the school environment. When students complete the forms, the administrators are more aware of what is going on and take a pro-active approach to preventing school violence. However, the administration

needs to be more aware of the ways in which students perceive the use of the forms and the mechanisms of conflict resolution that are being used with the students; as well as how those conflict resolution processes are interpreted psychologically, from a moral point of view, by the students. There is a constant shift between the interpersonal (group mediation) and the threat of punishment (staged resolutions, ISS, OSS, ET, and Lunch Detention). Based on an initial analysis of the Resolutions documented on the SCFs, not all conflicts and concerns are handled in the same way. For hitting another student, one student may receive a Lunch detention, while another may receive ISS. The question of why decisions are made is still unclear. More importantly, how are the decisions made? It appears that the forms have become muddled within the school community. Therefore, it is important for the administration to step back and reflect upon their experiences with the SCFs (as this study has initiated), overall successes, and perhaps even failures to point to the next wave of improvements and developments within the context of the overall school environment.

Upon the conclusion of this study, it is still unclear why so many students actually “freak out” when you ask them about the SCFs. Perhaps they perceive them as disciplinary tools rather than tools for interpersonal negotiation. If this is the case, how can we alter their perceptions?

Despite the many trails left un-navigated, it is clear that the use of SCFs has improved the lives of a small population within the school community. This is not an insignificant finding. Perhaps those who feel that they have the least amount of power or lack a vocal outlet are the ones who use the forms, and benefit most from them. It gives them some sense of belonging that might not otherwise be there, and helps them to feel

safe in their school—or at least to have the power to try to feel safer in the school.

Although the SCFs are not currently being used as a tool for moral education, they can in fact be modified in their content and use to become an educational tool to teach conflict-resolution. At this time, this school is in the right place to begin programs that allow students to resolve their conflicts through a more literal Just Community Approach, and also engage in dilemma discussion and peer negotiation that bridges the realm between discipline and moral education.

The present work is invaluable to the school administration that has not had the time to evaluate the rich data intrinsic to the forms over the history of their use. In addition, this research has clarified the distinction between discipline measures, conflict-resolution education, and moral education. Overall, the SCF implementation is a strategic discipline approach that borders on conflict-resolution, but has broader implications for voice, moral psychology, and moral education. Although this school is not a Just Community school, it has the potential to enact these principles and develop students that are equipped with the strength to voice their concerns and act as moral citizens.

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APPENDIX A

**STUDENT CONCERN FORM**  
Return to the Associate Principal's Office

Student filing out form: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_ Team: \_\_\_\_  
(Name)

Student(s) Involved: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_  
(Name)

\_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_  
(Name)

*Please Describe What Happened: (As much detail as possible)*

Where: \_\_\_\_\_

When: \_\_\_\_\_

What Happened? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(use back of page)

\_\_\_\_\_

List All Witnesses: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Have you tried to settle this matter? No  Yes  How?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What would you like to happen? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**FOR ADMINISTRATION ONLY**

Administrative Action: ( )Mediation ( )Meeting w/Individual ( )Resolved
Copies To: ( )Counselor ( )Social Worker ( )Psychologist ( )Team ( )SpEd ( )ISS

## APPENDIX B

## Text for Letter of Approval

Thank you for considering your school for my research on school climate. This letter briefly summarizes the empirical study on the creation of a moral school climate through the use of Student Concern Forms.

The purpose of this study is to understand the impact of the use of Student Concern Forms on the moral climate of the school. Specifically, does the use of the Student Concern Form help create a safe, caring, and fair community? To do so, we want to examine what issues the students are reporting, how they would like the conflict to be resolved, and the actual resolution. Essentially, we want to determine if, through the use of the Student Concern Forms, students feel a sense of voice and participation and an enhanced connectedness to the school community. Although we will look at the conflicts reported, the focus of the study is on the desired resolution and actual resolution. We are asking that as many students as possible complete a questionnaire that will help us determine the frequency of student completion of the Student Concern Forms, and the students' perceptions of the school environment as a result of having the power to voice their concerns. This survey will be distributed during home base so as not to interfere with the scheduled time allotted to academic courses. Teachers will also complete a similar questionnaire. In addition, we will be requesting an interview with the school Principal to understand the Student Concern Form initiative and their perceived impact on the school environment.

In order to understand the impact of the use of the Student Concern Forms on the school context and moral atmosphere of the school, we are going to need to view forms that have been completed by the students. These forms will all be made anonymous by a research assistant for the study. Therefore, no students will be associated with the incidents that have been reported. This is not a case study, nor a program evaluation. The findings of this study are not meant for use within a community and will not be distributed to members of the community.

Please be assured that this study will involve little time on behalf of your administrative staff and teachers. I will be asking for 1) use of the copy machine after school hours, 2) use of space to clean the data, 3) 10 minutes during home base for students to complete a questionnaire. My research assistants and I will take care of all other aspects of the study. We will be happy to share the results of the study with you upon completion.

Thank you for your help with this very important topic.

Sincerely yours,

Nicole Mangiere '08  
Candidate for Distinction in Honors Research, Cornell University

I hereby give permission to Nicole Mangiere (under the supervision of Dawn Schrader) to conduct the research study described above on school climate in Boynton Middle School.

Signature of Boynton Middle School Principal: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

## Student Questionnaire

By completing this form I consent to participation in this study. If I have any questions, I know that I can contact Nicole Mangiere at [nm235@cornell.edu](mailto:nm235@cornell.edu). The study is being directed by Prof. Dawn E. Schrader at Cornell University. You may contact her regarding any questions about the study at 255-9258 or [des14@cornell.edu](mailto:des14@cornell.edu). Your answers to this questionnaire are anonymous and whether or not you complete it is up to you. Completing the questionnaire or not will have no effect on your relationship with your school, the researchers, or with Cornell.

**Questionnaire for Students**

1. What grade are you in?      6      7      8 (circle one)
  
2. Have you ever used a Student Concern Form?
 

*Yes*                      *No*                      *I don't know what that is*
  
3. How often have you used the Student Concern Form over the past year?
 

*Never*              *1-3 times*              *4-6 times*              *7-9times*              *more than 10*
  
4. If yes, what kinds of things do you report on them? (circle all that apply).
 

*Stealing*

*Talking about me behind my back*

*Talking about others behind their back*

*Physical fighting, ex. Hitting, punching, kicking*

*Name calling*

*Vandalism of personal property, ex. lockers*

*Fighting over a girlfriend/boyfriend*

*Personal threats, ex. "I want to fight you!"*

*Academic problems, ex. Too many tests on one day*

*Lost belongings*

*Conflict with a teacher*

*Bullying*

*Other (please explain in the space below)*

5. If no, what kinds of things would you report on them? (circle all that apply).

*Stealing*

*Talking about me behind my back*

*Talking about others behind their back*

*Physical fighting, ex. Hitting, punching, kicking*

*Name calling*

*Vandalism of personal property, ex. lockers*

*Fighting over a girlfriend/boyfriend*

*Personal threats, ex. "I want to fight you!"*

*Academic problems, ex. Too many tests on one day*

*Lost belongings*

*Conflict with a teacher*

*Bullying*

*Other (explain)*

6. Do you consider the problems that you report on the SCF important problems for you?

*Yes*

*No*

If yes, why?

If no, why not?

7. On a scale of 1 -10, how hard is it to make a report on the form?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Easy</i>			<i>I don't think about it</i>				<i>Hard</i>		

8. What makes it hard to turn in a form: (circle all that apply)

*Getting the form*

*Turning it in without being seen*

*Being afraid that you will get in more trouble from your friends for turning one in*

*Being afraid that you will get in more trouble from your teachers for turning one in*

*Thinking it will not solve the problem*

*Thinking it will not change anything*

*Other (explain)*

9. What do you think happens once you turn in the form?

10. Does a concern form help solve the problem for you?

*Yes*              *No*

If yes, how?

11. Do you think it makes the problem better or worse?

*Better*              *Worse*

How does it make it better or worse?

12. Are the teachers and principals listening to you when you use the Student Concern Form?

*Yes*              *No*

13. Do you feel that your use of the Student Concern Form has an impact on making the school a better place to be?

*Yes*                      *No*

14. Do you feel that your use of the Student Concern Form has an impact on making you feel:

Physically safer in school    *Yes*                      *No*

More connected with your friends    *Yes*                      *No*

More connected with the school community    *Yes*                      *No*

Better about yourself    *Yes*                      *No*

Please explain.

15. Do you think that the SCF helps you resolve conflicts with your friends, classmates, or teachers?

*Yes*                      *No*

Please explain

16. Do you feel more control over the way problems are handled in your school because of using the Student Concern Form?

*Yes*                      *No*

If yes, please explain.

17. What would keep you from using a Student Concern Form? Select one.

*It takes too much time*

*Nothing would happen*

*My friends would make fun of me*

*I can handle it on my own*

*Other: \_\_\_\_\_*

18. Have you ever filled out a form just to get someone in trouble?

*Yes*                      *No*

If yes, how come?



## APPENDIX D

## Teacher Questionnaire

By completing this form I consent to participation in this study. If I have any questions, I know that I can contact Nicole Mangiere at [nm235@cornell.edu](mailto:nm235@cornell.edu). The study is being directed by Prof. Dawn E. Schrader at Cornell University. You may contact her regarding any questions about the study at 255-9258 or [des14@cornell.edu](mailto:des14@cornell.edu). Your answers to this questionnaire are anonymous and whether or not you complete it is up to you. Completing it or not will have no effect on your relationship with your school, the researchers, or with Cornell.

**Questionnaire for Teachers**

1. What grade do you teach?    6       7       8       (circle one)
2. Have you ever used a Student Concern Form?
 

<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>I don't know what that is</i>
------------	-----------	----------------------------------
3. How often have you used the Student Concern Form over the past year?
 

<i>Never</i>	<i>1-3 times</i>	<i>4-6 times</i>	<i>7-9times</i>	<i>more than 10</i>
--------------	------------------	------------------	-----------------	---------------------
4. If yes, what kinds of things do you report on them? (circle all that apply).

*Stealing*

*Talking about me behind my back*

*Talking about others behind their back*

*Physical fighting, ex. Hitting, punching, kicking*

*Name calling*

*Vandalism of personal property, ex. lockers*

*Fighting over a girlfriend/boyfriend*

*Personal threats, ex. "I want to fight you!"*

*Academic problems, ex. Too many tests on one day*

*Lost belongings*

*Conflict with a teacher*

*Bullying*

*Other (please explain in the space below)*

5. If no, what kinds of things would you report on them? (circle all that apply).

*Stealing*

*Talking about me behind my back*

*Talking about others behind their back*

*Physical fighting, ex. Hitting, punching, kicking*

*Name calling*

*Vandalism of personal property, ex. lockers*

*Fighting over a girlfriend/boyfriend*

*Personal threats, ex. "I want to fight you!"*

*Academic problems, ex. Too many tests on one day*

*Lost belongings*

*Conflict with a teacher*

*Bullying*

*Other ( explain)*

6. Do you consider the problems that you report on the SCF important problems for you?

*Yes*

*No*

If yes, why?

If no, why not?

7. On a scale of 1 -10, how hard is it to make a report on the form?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10  
*Easy*                                      *I don't think about it*                                      *Hard*

8. What makes it hard to turn in a form: (check or circle all that apply)

*Getting the form*

*Turning it in without being seen*

*Being afraid that you will get in more trouble with your colleagues for turning one in*

*Thinking it will not solve the problem*

*Thinking it will not change anything*

*Other (please explain)*

9. What do you think happens once you turn in the form?

10. Does a concern form help solve the problem for you?

*Yes*                      *No*

If yes, how?

11. Do you think it makes the problem better or worse?

*Better*                      *Worse*

In what way?

12. Do you feel as though the administration is listening to you when you use the Student Concern Form?

*Yes*                      *No*

13. Do you feel that your voice is heard when you use the Student Concern Form?

*Yes*                      *No*

14. Do you feel that your use of the Student Concern Form has an impact on making the school a better place to be?

*Yes*                      *No*

15. Do you feel that your use of the Student Concern Form has an impact on making the students feel:

Physically safer in school	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
----------------------------	------------	-----------

More connected with their friends	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
-----------------------------------	------------	-----------

More connected with the school community	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
--	------------	-----------

Better about themselves	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
-------------------------	------------	-----------

Please explain.

16. Do you think that the SCF helps you resolve conflicts with your students or co-workers?

*Yes*                      *No*

17. Do you feel more connected to, or a part of your school because of being able to use the SCF?

*Yes*                      *No*

18. Do you feel more control over the way problems are handled in your school because of using the Student Concern Form?

*Yes*                      *No*

19. What would keep you from using a Student Concern Form? Select one.

*It takes too much time*

*Nothing would happen*

*I can handle it on my own*

*Other: \_\_\_\_\_*

20. Have you ever filled out a form just to get someone in trouble?

*Yes*

*No*

Why?

Appendix E

**Principal Interview**

**Reason for the forms—Administrator’s view**

When did you start using the forms?

Why?

What did you hope to accomplish by using the forms?

Have you accomplished that goal? What obstacles do you see to get in the way of that?

How much time out of your day do you spend on the content of the forms?

Do you think the form saves you time, or it takes more time?

**Example of Use of Forms: (relate to you 3 parts of your analysis of the forms)**

Give an example of a time when the student concern form was most effective. What happened (the incident)? Who was involved?

What did you do?

What did the students/teacher do?

What was the result?

Evaluate how well it worked for you, for the student, the teachers, and the climate of the school.

Why do you think the student used the student concern form?

**The Form itself**

How are these used for disciplinary purposes?

Is a particular instance referred to just once as a situation, then address and discarded, or are they often referred to and brought up again? Why?

Are there situations or circumstances where you think these forms would NOT be used to report a concern? Describe:

Do you think there are abuses to the use of the forms, such as students harming others by filling them out/telling on them?

What changes in student/faculty reporting would you like to see?

**School Climate/Student Voice (your thesis/hypothesis):**

Who or what benefits most from the use of the forms? (students, teachers, administrators, school climate?)

Do you see any change in students or school climate from before you started using them?

What kind of change?

How would you attribute this change to the SCFs specifically, instead of just to your leadership?

Do you think that students feel a greater sense of agency/voice/school and authorship in the situation and in the school because of the forms?

## Appendix F

**Nikki Mangiere Interview with [Principal]**

3/12/08

I ...and like you were saying you just dealt with them a lot more as in Assistant Principal or Associate Principal?

R Associate Principal.

I As an Associate Principal. So hopefully it will help, I think this will be helpful. So when did you officially start using the form?

R We, five years ago to answer the question, when I came on as Associate Principal and I did not invent the forms, the forms were here. They were called Student Concern Forms. When I talked to staff about their use, many of them were used as, as a means to record information. For example if there was a fight they might use Student Concern Forms to describe the events of the fight or what led up to the fight. So it was used more as a recording device. When I came in as Associate Principal and looked at the forms, I thought this is a nice avenue for students to be able to let us know frankly anything that concerned them. So we left the name Concern and we emphasized that at the beginning of each school year, the first week, and we have what we call Expectations Assemblies. And my expectations for students here at Boynton are number one, you listen to every adult request in the building whether you know them or not. Number two is that you use Student Concern Forms when you're concerned about anything. And number three frankly is that you be honest. That you're going to make mistakes in life, but you be honest about those mistakes. Okay. So those are really our big expectations here at Boynton. We like to keep it simple, but we like to keep our expectations high. I don't want a situation or a school climate that's established on rules. We have a student handbook that's very comprehensive. Teachers review the highlights of those with students that first week as well but it's important for myself and Mr. \*(9) the Associate Principal to come in and review those expectations. But I like to keep them very simple. Why? Because students have them, my hope is that it drives their every day actions. And like I said, as I say to students all the time, you don't behave out in society because you're afraid to go to prison. You don't behave in society because you're afraid you're going to get pulled over by the police. The same in the school, you don't behave because you don't want to get in trouble, you behave because people expect you to behave. You behave because you want good things to happen to you in school, just like you want good things to happen to you in society. So you don't behave in school because you're afraid to go to in-school suspension or have out of school suspension. There is a clear thought process there. So we started like I said about five years ago because we wanted an opportunity for students to have a voice. Okay.

I That sounds fantastic. And I know you touched a lot upon it, kind of setting expectations in the beginning and opportunities for students to have a voice, but what did



you hope to accomplish? Is there anything in addition to that or do you think that that really sums it up?

R Well no, I think, I think what I hoped to accomplish using the forms kind of came or developed and has continued to shape my thinking for the last five years. The first three years as Associate Principal and now in my second year as Principal. And I pose the question this way, as an administrator in a building and the person responsible for all that goes on in a building, would you prefer that students and staff came to you and said I see a problem or I'm concerned with something. Or would you rather deal with the fall out of problems. So I think there's a simple philosophy we're working on. We can be proactive and be busy all day long, frankly trying to work through others problems and help them come to a good result so kids feel good. Or we can sit and wait and be in the reactive all the time. And if we get a Student Concern Form describing a verbal disagreement or interaction that took place over the weekend or a school dance and it carries over into Monday morning, I would much prefer to sit with two students and say alright, tell me what happened, let's work this out. And the conclusion being at the end of that meeting, both shaking hands or even giving each other a hug and saying look, I'm sorry about that and moving forward. Rather than the students being tense all Monday morning waiting for something to happen. And then frankly when there's a physical altercation or verbal altercation, me as the administrator and the Associate Principal coming in and saying that well here's what we found out so you both have out of school suspension or you both have in school suspension. Okay. So I think there's a philosophical, fundamental piece that says we'd rather help kids learn life lessons and help them work through their issues and their problems, and have them be critical partners in that so they feel the sense that they're controlling their own destiny, but their not doing it by themselves. I say this to parents, I say it to kids all the time, I think, I think in society we do a pretty good job of saying to kids when they're in kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, when you have a problem in school, the advice that we give to kids is, tell an adult. That gets a bit muddled when they come to 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I don't know if it's a feeling that the kids have from 5<sup>th</sup> grade to 6<sup>th</sup> grade over the summer saying well I need to grow up and handle my own problems. Likewise the family that's saying well maybe I should back off and not micromanage my child or help them make every decision or make the decisions for them. So I think there's some gray areas there that Student Concern Forms fill that niche so that kids can say this is what's happening, I'm not sure what to do about it. Or this is what's happening and this is how I've tried to settle the matter, I need some help. So those are real positive things.

I Definitely. So kind of looking at it, you talked about being the proactive approach and if something happened over the weekend, taking care of it on Monday. And I think you really touched upon it, but overall do you think that these forms save you time in the end or that it's taking more of your time?

R I think it, it certainly, I think it takes more time but it's more rewarding time, it's more worthwhile time. If you avert a physical altercation or if you helped two folks that disagree resolve an issue, through talking, you just taught children a life lesson. That's what schools should be focused on, helping kids learn life lessons. By the time it results

in physical altercation, I'll be honest with you, nobody wins. Both kids get consequences. You still then have to resolve their difference but now it's at a new level. Kids put their hands on each other. So it changes the dynamic. It becomes well we need to resolve this issue because we don't want it to be physical again. Or it became physical so we need to resolve this issue. With the Student Concern Forms it says somebody is concerned about an issue,....

(Tape goes off)

R So the question was, do we accomplish that goal? Yeah.

I The saving time or taking more time?

R Like I said, it, I think it's time well spent okay. Like I said, it's helping kids learn life lessons versus again, acting in the reactionary trying to resolve a conflict through consequences. And that's not a comfortable place to be in and it's a difficult one and a lot of times it takes the focus off the conflict. Once kids come to physical blows or it really gets pretty nasty, nasty emailing to one another or something like that, then it becomes more about what kind of consequences the kids get or I feel stung by this or this wasn't fair. Versus going back to originally, well what happened? Why is there disagreement? So the other part I was going to say is often time it's been my experience with Student Concern Forms, when you bring the two parties together, the other party might not know and often times will say oh well I was just joking. Or I thought we were fooling around. And so it gives kids a mechanism to say you know what, I really prefer that you stop teasing me at home base in the morning. So it gives them assurances that their voices are going to be heard.

I Awesome. This is kind of back tracking a little, but when we talked about goals and being proactive, have you seen, do you think that you've accomplished that goal and really been like seeing a change?

R We've seen some changes. You know one of the things I'm very curious to see are the results of your data analysis. On some levels when I see teachers using Student Concern Forms versus an administrative referral, that's another philosophical shift that's another example of a teacher saying, look I saw something, I'd like to help be part of the solution. I saw a kid acting in a mean way towards another child, I wanted to bring it to the administrator's attention so that you can get these kids together to solve it. Too often times or at least before I think we really changed the focus here in the building, it was teachers writing a referral. I saw so and so whack somebody in the back so therefore there needs to be consequences to teach them. Versus saying, like I said I saw so and so get hit in the back, sounds like they need to resolve some issue. Or a lot of times teachers will say can you call me down, I've been seeing this in class, I'd really like to help it be stopped. So I'm seeing teachers use it in a proactive stance as well. And I think there's also a belief that when we use Student Concern Forms, that we're going to talk through the issue. That it's not going to result in consequence. I think when you get a triplicate form as an Administrative Referral, it's an official document that warrants there should

be a consequence. So have we seen it change things? Again I see a lot of folks using them. My hope is, by simple virtue that we have them available, it gives folks an assurance that things are going, that they have an opportunity to voice their concerns because if I do have two students that really come into conflict or it lands on my desk and we're sitting there talking to the kids and one child says well this has been going on for three weeks, my first question is, well why didn't you tell us? Why didn't you write a Student Concern Form? You have them. Well I didn't know it would do any good or I thought I could handle it on my own. Would have, should have, could have, I really, I think we work hard not to be in that position.

I Do you think a lot of students say, like you were saying, would have, should have, could have, do you think a lot of students who have that conflict, say that they didn't know what would happen or I could handle it on my own, do you hear that often in those situations where it comes to consequence versus a proactive?

R Yeah absolutely. I think that's, I think that goes hand in hand, well I should have told somebody or yeah now I know or I could have done it this way. Because that's a big part is you know we don't, philosophically you know we give out consequences, it's not so much about the consequence, it's about the education around it. How could you have better handled that situation? So and the student, we try to drive the Student Concern Form in there all the time to say had you filled out a Student Concern Form, we'd be sitting right now talking about this rather than me saying to you you're going home for a few days. Okay. So that's where we try to be there.

I Afterward do you see those students then fill out a form in another situation? Like does that change their perspective?

R Yeah. I think there's a, I don't know what percentage of the population uses Student Concern Forms. We did a survey a couple of years ago that the Tompkins Coalition for Youth puts out and it focuses mostly on drug and alcohol because that's where the federal funding comes from. But we asked them to put the question you know if you have conflict in school do you use Student Concern Forms? And I think it was less than 20% of kids, this is just off the top of my head, less than 20% of kids filled out Student Concern Forms. There's still a lot of, when we say to parents look we have these forms, parents will say well my child is afraid of retaliation. Or my kid felt like they were ratting on somebody or being a snitch. And the kids use the same language, well I didn't want to rat somebody out, I didn't want to be a snitch, I thought it would make it worse if I came to an adult. I felt like I was telling on somebody. And so the kids that use them, and use them faithfully I think have found a new sense of trust in the school. We tend not to, I'll be honest with you, there is a class division that I see in terms of who uses Student Concern Forms and who does not. I think our lower income children use Student Concern Forms. Does that mean they're involved in my conflict? I don't have the data or information to share that or to make that estimation. But I do know that the kids that we've been able, like I said any time a Student Concern Form is filled out, we jump right on it. We've helped a couple of kids, what we've done is empower them to say I have this mechanism. So it's hard to say oh yes they're highly effective. I'll tell you, we're busy all

the time working through those and like I said we can't say well jeez we avoided a fight or we avoided bullying or we avoided harassment, we can assume that we have. And if we touch base with kids a couple of weeks later, how are things going? Well they're going better. Well then we kind of chalk it up as well that we were successful. So we see it as a mechanism. It's not an end all, be all. I'd love a situation where we had the school just exclusively use the Student Concern Forms and that was the mechanism that you used. But you know we as an institution and as a school district, just like any other school district, have the Administrative Referrals which are legal documents that something is happening and that this is how it was tracked, this is how it was, this is how we carried things out.

I So now I know that you can't use names, but I was wondering if there was a specific incident like you said with being the low income students it's effective in that way, is there a specific instance where you saw them being the most effective, without using anyone's names or that something, it really had an impact, maybe was really empowering and led to a series of other events?

R I think the most effective ones are the ones where we say wow is when one child will fill out a Student Concern Form saying they're being bothered by three or four children and we'll start pulling kids together and what we find out is that the larger network of students, that it's bigger than we ever thought it was but we're able to whether it's a full mediation or getting the kids together, or deconstructing one child at a time, to really kind of set the record straight. And a lot of times that might be this will, these actions will stop. You can see a kid walk a little taller, you can see them say hey thanks a lot, this seems better. And a lot of times we will, the administrative staff, say wow that was pretty big. But we're able to move forward from there and realize that and wonder how bad it was for the particular child that felt victimized. So that's kind of a general answer to your specific question. I don't have one that just pops into my head and oh yeah we had this and this is how it was carried out.

I But I mean if those are the situations where they're most effective, I think it really does pull a lot out about the levels of mediation and then the result and really having that impact on the student. So I think that definitely works. And sorry to jump back again, but I wanted to follow up on how you, ideally it would be all Student Concern Forms, but there are those administrative needs for the referrals. Are there a lot of times where a Student Concern Form if it's a, I don't know a severe concern, did those have to, have they ever had to get mapped into or like changed to an Administrative Referral?

R Where there needs to be a consequence?

I Yeah.

R Yes, yeah. You know strong cases of harassment. I think the harassment is probably the largest level because it sounds like well we can't go beyond, we're going to talk it through, we're going to make sure all the kids are fine, but maybe results in some, the main figure for instance having the cafeteria, you're not going to be in the cafeteria

for lunch for the next two weeks. So they don't always end with shake hands, we're going to stop doing it. It's shake hands, apologize, tell them it's never going to happen again, and then we let the victim go and say to the child, you're getting two weeks of lunch detention because this child is going to see that he's okay and they're also going to see that this isn't going to happen.

I So in a lot of times, to me it's almost a two fold approach but you're still taking that proactive even if they've gotten the consequence?

R That's right. The proactive piece is the biggest part okay and that's where we need to be.

I That sounds great. So now going back to the situation you were talking about where it's really that larger network of students, do you think that that has an overall impact on the climate of the school when you can speak with all of those students one on one or as a large group?

R Well I think, I think again it's about expectations. And the expectation is when you have conflict, when you have concern, we expect that you're going to let us know. We expect that you're going to fill out a Student Concern Form because we created this mechanism for you. We're not going to hold it over your head if you didn't do it, but we are going to say you know you need to let us know these things. The other part is about the being honest and moving forward. So we see those as natural pieces that fit together, saying you need to tell us this and again you have this mechanism, this is what this thing is for. So when we bring kids together for mediation or to get something clear, we've already gone through those expectations. And then a lot of times, and we'll say here's our understanding. You three guys are going to stay away from these two, that's the way it goes, you've agreed to disagree, but you are going to respect each other and folks we need to know if that changes. And if it does, you fill out a Student Concern Form, you let us know and then we'll move forward with the consequences or try to go back to the drawing board. So if we have a little bit of a, we have some leverage there that says it could result in non-school suspension next time or something like that they say whoa. So it's more than just sometimes you've got to say to people look this is the suspendable behavior and we're giving you a warning now, this will not happen. And if it does, you're out. So that gives us some leverage there, the threat of a suspension because you know better and we've gone through this and we've told you, then maybe a lot of times that's more effective than just saying well jeez Mr. Trumble got us together and we all agreed to be friends or not to be friends. So sometimes we do it that way.

I Now why do you think those students in the group went and used the Student Concern Form to, do you see a reason why? I don't know if there's another general reason why? Especially in a large group they might....

R We'll see folks that will say I'm going to fill out a Student Concern Form on you and they'll say well I'm going to fill one out on you. And we get them at the same time. So we'll see that so and so has been picking on so and so but yet this other person they've

been picking on, and we say okay guys, what's going on? Well they filled out a Student Concern Form on me and I wanted to make sure you had, so in that point I mean that's really where you want it to be. So we say alright, well let's work it through, let's figure it out. And they walk out saying, because we'll say to them, look you're not filling out a Student Concern Form to get somebody in trouble, you're filling a Student Concern Form out so we know what's going on and we have, we've had people say you know I think they should get out of school suspension and we'll walk them through and sit and say let's talk about this and this is what's going to happen. And once they start seeing that we're working with them, talking with them, getting things worked out, they can move forward.

I So kind of along those lines, do you think there are students who are abusing the form and trying to harm others or filling them out to tell on them?

R That, we've had some discussions about that. They're not abusing them, so to speak. There's always some kind of truth in them. Something is happening okay and if somebody fills out a Student Concern Form, and it's not true, then we address that person right there. So it's a no, we don't have that activity. Where our concern is, and it's really only been maybe one or two kids in the five years we've had them, we've had some kids who have just been so overwhelmed by social stuff and getting so emotionally involved they can't do their academics. We've met as a mental health team one particular student who is in 7<sup>th</sup> grade now named Justin. I remember meeting about him two months ago because a concerned nurse said well I see Justin in the halls a lot. And the social worker said I see him in the halls a lot too and the Associate Principal said well he's filling out Student Concern Forms left and right and this is the stuff he's filling out. And we don't ever want to say to a kid what you're filling a Student Concern Form out on is a minor thing, we're never going to send that message. But what was happening was he was missing all kinds of class. I can't do social studies, I've got to go down and see Ms. Razzaro. I can't do math, I've got to fill out a Student Concern Form because so and so is calling me this. I can't do my science. But yet the child is in lunch and the child is in study hall. So what we did is we sat down with him and said look, everything that has happened to you is very real, we're going to work it out, we're going to help you out with it, here is five Student Concern Forms, put them in your backpack, have them with you, fill them out, don't fill them out during class time, you only fill them out during study halls and during your lunch and we will call you down, if it takes every day to resolve these issues, we'll call you down during lunch and lunch only, to work on it. Well we've seen less Student Concern Forms. Now what that leads us to say is, was he blowing things out of proportion? Which I think there's a little bit of truth there. Was he doing it to get out of class? Could be, to avoid the work. Did he sincerely need help with his issues? Yep. Okay so all of those pieces, so what we dealt with we said hey Justin you know we're here, we're going to work through it. If you feel threatened, if you feel someone is going to hit you, you come running as fast as you can but if you had an altercation on the bus this morning, someone called you a name, and you're not in physical harm, we'll work through it at lunch. It seemed to have worked out pretty well for him. So I don't want to think that oh gees it was all just made up, but we did say to him, look you're, the message was you need to be in class, in school, focused on that.

You always have the out, we'll always support you, you always use these forms, you're doing it the right way, but school first. So that's a pretty good example.

I Yeah definitely. Overall, I think we've kind of touched on this a little bit, but do you often see that a situation is addressed and the discarded, like you know it happened and we resolved it? Or do you see the same situation kind of manifesting itself again, maybe the same groups of people coming back?

R All of the above. All of the above, yeah. Some we do a mediation. We say oh jeez we got that all worked out, they're back three hours later. The ones that were always, not be fun, would be the most frustrating were the girls where we had four girls versus one at 9:00 in the morning. Resolved everything. So we had five girls in a mediation, got it all done and then at 1:00 in the afternoon it was, folks were switching sides, these three versus these two. And we're saying wait a minute, wait a minute. So what we'll do with those situations we'll kind of play good cop, bad cop and I'm jumping to conclusions but well let's say Mr. Baker sat with a group of five girls first thing in the morning and they missed part of social studies class. But he got it to a point where it was resolved and then it kind of exploded again into finger pointing and stuff like that, nothing physical but something erupted again during lunch which is where it all happens and they're back in the conference room. And he'll say I'm back in the conference room with these five girls and I'll say, so what will happen is he'll start the mediation and I'll come storming in saying Mr. Baker, you've spent enough time on this, you've told the girls we can resolve this but you know what they're missing classes, they're not understanding what the point is, you have 10 minutes to get this solved and everyone goes back to class and I don't want to hear another word about this or I'm going to start suspending kids. Well they get it resolved in about 8 ½ minutes, they're back in class and we've got it resolved. We've also had some where we've mediated and said jeez I'm not really sure about that and then we never heard another thing about it. We've had some where we've mediated, check with the kids, how is everything? Things are fine, things are fine, things are fine. We get a phone call from the parent a month later saying things are not fine, she's still complaining about this one and we go back to the child and say I thought things, well they were kind of okay but you know it got worse after I filled out the Student Concern Form. So I didn't want to fill out another form. So they're complicated, they're complicated answers that we're working on but the point is to work through them and try to resolve them. So there's no perfect system, there's no magic bullet but I don't ever want to get hit with information that we could have known. And also like I said it puts us in that proactive piece to say well we tried to resolve it this way, and if it's not resolved fill out another form, we'll come back to the table. So like I said the answer really is all of the above. We've seen all those scenarios. We've seen, we don't get a lot of incidents of retaliation. You might get a kid saying well you snitch, why did you tell? And the kids says well look you know you've got to knock it off and it ends there. We've had little flare ups afterwards but nothing to the point where we've said gees these forms aren't worth it.

I Okay.

R Ten out of ten times, if we get hit with information from a family or somebody else, we already know the history behind it, we already know kind of what's happening. I want to go back to the class structure. We find most of the kids aren't using them. Often times we'll have a situation where we're sitting there and it's why didn't you let us know, you know I don't fill those out, other kids fill those things out. So I can't explain why, but there is more of a, I don't want to say social pressures. It appears as if there's more social pressure. Well I don't do those things, my friends don't do those. I can't imagine that rich kids don't have the same problems as poor kids. And why the messages get to the poor kids, I'm not sure. But I do find that we're dealing with lower socio economic kids on these forms more than we are the more affluent children.

I Interesting.

R I don't know why that is and I don't know that we could measure that, that's just my perception.

I I don't know if it's a measurable thing but I wonder, there must be, I mean theories when you look at education that kind of pull that in or a family like type but almost would be what would jump out to me but I don't know.

R Yeah. Yeah I don't know either and I don't know that it's a cultural piece. I don't know. But I do know that I don't have our wealthiest kids that are involved in everything under the sun down with Student Concern Forms. You know we don't tend to have kids that are overly involved in sports or overly involved in drama, overly involved in the arts. We don't tend to have that. Kids that aren't doing after school activities, maybe doing some intramural stuff but not really engaged in the school setting, that's who we're dealing with the most.

I That's definitely interesting. I was just wondering if there were any situations or circumstance where you think the form wouldn't be used? When I was going through them I did notice one where a student reported a lost backpack which seemed interesting to me. But do you think that, are we really spanning the whole spectrum when it comes to concerns?

R And that's why we spend a lot of time with, if you're concerned about it, and I tell kids you know the first week and I'll tell the incoming 5<sup>th</sup> graders this spring when they come to visit, I'll say now look, if you're concerned about something you let us know. And I say to them, if you're concerned about a quiz, if you're concerned about a test, those are natural concerns, those are natural worries. But if you're concerned about somebody pushing you from behind, tripping you moving up the stairs, calling you a fag, the way your teacher talks to you. If your teacher says well that was a stupid thing to say, and you felt bad about that, fill out a Student Concern Form. I've had kids come to me in the office and say I lost my backpack, I can't find it. I'll say fill out a Student Concern Form then we have it on record that you lost your backpack at this time, we're looking for a silver bag. That piece of paper gives us something to grab. A lot of times kids will move each other's backpacks or books during lunch as a joke and if a kid comes back



well I found my backpack, so and so moved it, well then we might talk to so and so and say hey that's not funny, we don't do it that way. You wouldn't like it if somebody did that to you so you need to stop. So those are the things.

I Is there anything it wouldn't be used for or really anything goes?

R Anything, anything goes. Often times I might look at something and say oh gees here's so and so again and it's not fair, but I might say you know we've really got, actually that's, my actually really firmly is no. There's no situation where, there's nothing too small or too big. And I say to kids, there really isn't anything too small or too big. If we can help you out, I would rather you fill it out and we try to help you out. We've never said to a kid, are you serious. We've never said to a kid, well that seems kind of minor. We've never said to a kid, try to ignore it. We've never said that. If we get a lot of them, my friend Justin who used to fill out a lot of them, we'd say lets schedule a weekly visit for him to the social worker's office. Because it looks like he needs to connect somewhere. It looks like he needs some shoring up. And we might say within our mental health team or administrative team so and so is really struggling, they're really feeling like the teacher is coming down on them, they feel like their friends are coming down on them it's really always me, let's get the school psychologist involved. So again that gets us, let's plug this kid into something. Lets get him out as a manager for the team. So if we can build a real positive piece in the child's life we see less of this coming. So those, so the Student Concern Form in that sense act as warning flags for us, as red flags to say so and so needs some help.

I That's great. And then we touched upon this a little bit in the beginning but with the students and faculty, have you seen faculty reporting now than in the past, like over the years some more concerns?

R I've seen, over my five years here I saw a shift probably around year three or so. More staff using Student Concern Forms. Not using more Student Concern Forms than they were Administrative Referrals. I don't, I didn't track that data. But I did start to see more staff saying could you speak to so and so they're acting up in class. So and so and so and so seem to have a disagreement, you might want to look into it. Heads up, this is what's going on. Or could you and I meet with this child because the attitude they're showing at home base really needs to be adjusted. You know versus saying Administrative Referral, so and so was acting this way and needs two days lunch detention. Like I say, I've seen that philosophical shift. Not everybody's there but I do see people pulling it that way. We also have students that will fill them out regarding teachers. Could you tell Ms. So and so to stop yelling at us. You've probably seen a few of those so far. You know I don't like the way Mr. so and so talks to me or my friends. It gives them an opportunity. Then I'll sit with the teacher and say talk to me about this. Oh you know I didn't mean that. And it really is a good mechanism. Why don't we bring the child down and let the child know that you feel this way about him. Oh absolutely. So I, so those are some of the most rewarding pieces too. A family might call and say my child feels this way because a teacher is really coming down on them. So it gives a mechanism to, and we say to the kids you can always come to us and let us know. And like I said to

see kids walk out and say thanks a lot and feel better about themselves because they've been carrying this around for three weeks. Because they shouldn't feel like the teacher is coming down on them. I've never seen a teacher intentionally come down on a child. It's ten out of ten times a misunderstanding you know. Charlie I was frustrated with you, this is what I said, I truly don't believe that, I really apologize. I think you're great, I think this, I think that, but I've got to tell you when you act this way, I really need you to do this.

I Definitely. Who do you think benefits most from the use of the forms? Where maybe it's students or teachers or administrators or even the school climate?

R I think it depends on the situation, but all of the above. Again, because we rely on them, because our expectation is that folks use them, because of the mechanism there, our expectation is that kids are using them, that they know they can come to us. So we put that in our favor. We're not just people that sit around and wait for something bad to happen. We expect good things to happen and if good things aren't happening, we expect that you're going to tell us. We hope that there's a climate piece. It's another tool for teachers for use and give us a heads up for something that's going on. It's a mechanism for kids to communicate with us. If my door is shut, I might open the door and have three Student Concern Forms on my door. It's a mechanism for a kid to say, I've got this off my chest, I've got some help. You know those kind of pieces.

(Interruption – tape goes off)

R I guess in that example though you could see. There was an issue that happened in the cafeteria. Baker is standing there talking to the young man saying you could have walked away, you could have, and what fired him up is that she filled out a Student Concern Form. So you know we never want it to end up that way but frankly that young man needs to say hey she filled out a Student Concern Form, hey I have my side too, I can fill one out as well and explain where I'm at.

I Instead of getting into the physical dispute.

R That's right.

I Well that was very apropos.

R And so I guess my point is you can see how entrenched it is.

I Into the school climate.

R Absolutely.

I Definitely. So do you see any changes in students, in the students or the school climate from when before you started use the form? I guess its difficult because some of the students are probably in high school now.

R Well but and I can only give my perception and from what I understand from folks it was, I won't say it was nuts here, it was chaotic but I think it, from what I understand we don't have the extreme kind of violence pieces. In the five years I've been here I know of one legit fight. Two guys squaring off and knocking each other around. Now you say that to anybody else that you're in a middle school with 600 kids and there's one fist fight, that's pretty astonishing. That doesn't mean a kid hasn't been pushed, that doesn't mean a kid hasn't been kicked, doesn't mean a kid hasn't been knocked around and stuff like that, but I think there's, I think folks are going to have a sense of calm, a sense of assurance, not only the student body but the faculty when they fill out a Student Concern Form and it's dealt with okay. Folks know that they're supported, children know that they're supported. Children know that they can appeal to adults, families know that they can appeal to adults. Staff know that things are going to happen. Staff are coming around I think in a more global sense that it's not about consequences, it's about changing behaviors, it's about changing attitudes. So we have a situation here where folks, where kids listen to adults because that's part of the expectation. But I think that Student Concern Forms helps support that philosophy. You know you see and oh we've got a lot going on and lunch time is a difficult time, well it is because we've got a lot of students moving and of course when something happens in one lunch, it carries over to the other things happening. We reversed the schedules today because the State Math Testing that we're giving, so that's where that stuff comes from.

I Interesting. And I know these are kind of difficult things, they're difficult to kind of extract from one another, but how do you attribute the change, the changes that have been taking place through the use of the Forms, versus your leadership? And I know that you really started pushing the use of the Forms when you became the principal, but do you think, how do those differ?

R Say that again.

I So how much would you attribute to actually students using the forms versus maybe your leadership style?

R Oh okay.

I I know that's difficult because you really pushed the use of the Forms, but do you see a difference there?

R Well I think, my hope is they go hand in hand. Okay. I think it's impossible to have one without the other. You can push whatever notion or concept you can upon kids and until they use it and see its effectiveness and believe in it, if I said to kids you have to fill out Student Concern Forms or why don't you use Student Concern Forms and they came in and I did a mediation and that made it ten times worse, or I didn't listen to one side, or kids got suspended, whatever else, and I wasn't approachable, it wouldn't work. So again, I think they go hand in hand. Part of what we have, you know I wanted to have Student Concern Forms used by school counselors as well, and we do, we do have

student counselors kind of using them to support kids. But it's in essence Ms. Razarro and Mr. Baker that are processing them and frankly me for three years for a while, and I still will do them. Actually I should say sometimes kids have done a Student Concern Form and Ms. Razarro worked with them, not to point a finger at her but to give an example, and they said well I didn't really feel comfortable talking to Ms. Razarro, I'd rather talk to you. I'm sure the same happens with me. Ms. Razarro, I spoke with Mr. Trumble last time and I'd feel more comfortable if I spoke to you. A lot of those have to do with gender, and it's fine. As long as they have somebody to go to. And the other part is not only the way we react and how we react, but also reaction time. A child fills out a Student Concern Form Monday morning, if we wait until Friday to look at, they're going to say why the heck did I do this. Well that got worked through last Wednesday or it resulted in this. I think like anyone else, if they have a real life human being, somebody in authority listening to their side, and say okay this is what we're going to do, I think that's a reassurance. And I think you're 80-90% home. A lot of times we'll take a Student Concern Form and sit and talk with the child and they'll say I don't want you talking to the other student or I don't want to face the other student. And I'll say hey about, I'll give you a good example. A kid says I'm being picked on on the bus but I don't want you to say anything to the other student. And I'll say well how are we going to stop it? Well I don't know. And I'll say well what's the chances that the bus driver saw it? Well I don't know. And I'll say well how about I call the other student down after you leave and I say the bus driver saw this happen, it needs to stop. Oh okay, okay. And I say well I'll tell you what, that's the way I'm going to do it, and in a couple of days I want you to walk by me and give me a thumbs up or a thumbs down. Thumbs down means it's not getting any better. A thumbs up means it's getting better. And I said okay kiddo I'll see you later. She leaves and I call the other student down and I say hey, did anything happen on the bus this morning. Oh no. Well why are you in my office? I don't know. I say well the bus driver called, they thought they saw something. Oh, oh I was just messing around. Well why is that okay? Well you know I guess it's not. So tell me what you did. I licked so and so's ear. Did you hurt her? I don't think so. And I'll say what's her name again? Oh it's Susie. Alright. Well what does she look like? Oh blonde hair. See you get into that, now there's no connection with the other child and I'll say well I'll tell you what we're going to do, I only give you one warning. You should apologize to the child and I'm going to find her in a couple days and I'm going to say, did anybody apologize to you? Okay, okay yeah no problem, no problem. Well that afternoon I'll see her again and she'll give me a thumbs up and I'll say alright good. That's the way it should work. Okay do we got to tell a little white lie, a little fib? Yeah, but I'm okay with that. I'm okay with it. So a lot of times I'll kind of hunt around, often times if a student says you know I'm being picked on in class, nobody has seen it. I say well I'm going to put a note out to all of your teachers and I'm going to say I want you to keep an eye, well I don't want my name used. And that's fine. I'm going to put a note out to all of your teachers saying keep an eye on so and so. Oh okay. And then if the teacher sees Susie Snowflake whacking somebody in the back at social studies, Susie go down to Mr. Trumble's office. Oh but I was just, nope go. So little Janet who had complained earlier or given us her concern, sees that the teacher is on top of this. Now they're experiencing safety

I That's great. So overall and I think we really did touch upon this, but do you think that these students do feel, and maybe even that 20%, that they have voice and agency within this school using these forms?

R Yeah, yeah I do. Because like I said whether it's a thumbs up or whether you see the kids sitting together in the cafeteria, or whether you notice that one group is getting along with another group, or you never hear about the drama again, you don't have a suspension, you have a situation where potential harassment is stopped. Yeah I think we have real live things. And I think the data that you're collecting and where you'll see you know results, what I can say with assurance is we've always come to some kind of conclusion. We always have an action plan. This is what we're going to try to do. We've never walked away from one saying geez what do we do here? Or what do we do now? You know I might go to Mr. Baker and say hey tell me about this. And he'll say oh I dealt with this about a month ago. And I'll say well where did you leave it off. So that's where a lot of the consultation will happen as you Ms. Razarro coming in and saying where's Mr. Baker and I've got Mr. Baker kind of working through some stuff. That's part of being a team but it's also the kind of communication that we confidentially take every single Student Concern Form and whether we resolve something or had to come back to the table, it's always been dealt with. And overwhelmingly we've gotten somewhere with it. And like I said, my instincts tell me that kids are walking around smiling and we're not having fights, and we're not having kids calling each other names, to the degree that I hear other places are happening, that shows me that we're getting through. When Student Concern Forms keep coming in, the day I'll worry is when we don't have the Student Concern Forms, let me put it that way. I would rather deal with you know, I would rather have a stack of those right there and we're pouring through them, than those stupid triplicate forms that say so and so did so and so to that. And we're busy, as you can see.

I Yeah.

R Well coming in at lunch time isn't the greatest time, well there's no good time to grab a principal. And we are, we're hopping all the time. But like I said, it's a good hop and if we can do a mediation for an hour and get them to a place where they can both move forward, then I'm happy. Versus taking two hours to bring families in and saying well this is what happened, this is where it should be, ....., those kinds of things.

I Definitely. I have two more things I wanted to follow up on. One was the reaction time. How long does it usually, how long was the turnover if someone for example dropped it off at 9:00am?

R We like to shoot for a day okay. I mean it depends on what's happening in the school but we like to try to do it in a day. I also like to have the expectation there that if we get a few and I can't get to the kids, try to call them down at the end of the day and say look Tommy, I got your Student Concern Form, I'm going to call you down tomorrow, we're going to get on this. So at least there's assurance there that we got it and we're going to move forward. I Got it. And then you had touched upon kind of the

differences between your leadership and actually only having one actual fist fight which I definitely think is really commendable. In before like before your five years here, was there a lot more of that?

R From what I hear there was. Yeah from what I hear there was. And again the Student Concern Form was here and I'm going to have you talk to Mr. Baker next actually. Yeah he should have some time to come over. Because he's very insightful, he's the one, like I said he is the driver in this and really worked on all these pieces. And again it was there but it wasn't pushed like it is now. It wasn't the expectation to use it now. There's another middle school in town that are kind of using them but they're using them more for recording incidents. They're using them more to say hey tell me what happened, fill this form out. Versus saying this form is in the nurse's office, it's in the main office, it's in your classrooms, it's here. When you have a concern grab it, go for it, fill these things out.

I Well thank you so much. Did you have anything you wanted to add? I got so much great information that's helped me understand a lot more.

R No, like I said I think we really feel good about the opportunity that we have to work within the kids lives. I think the most powerful statement on the Student Concern Form, the most powerful question is what did you try to do to solve this? And what would you like to have happen? That gets us right at the level of where it is for the child. When a child says, can you please talk to them and tell them to stop. That's enough. That an authentic, real response. I need some help, please tell them to stop. When you get the one that says, five days \*(243), you say whoa hang on a second, now we've got to really work on what perceptions are and say you know, it's such a high level. A lot of times it's a student misunderstanding or whatever else, but I really think that speaks a lot about human nature and the optimism that kids have each day that we're fostering and cultivating to say we're going to get you guys together and we're going to work through this, thank you. You know so I don't, I don't have an indication as to how deep and how you know because you have ten Student Concern Forms over a period of a week, doesn't mean it was a quiet week. It doesn't mean there were only ten issues in this school. It doesn't mean that everyone is getting along. It doesn't mean any of those things and we know that. It means that ten folks took the opportunity to say I need some help. And at the end of the week we can say we helped ten individuals. Okay that much we do know okay. So we look forward to hearing what you guys come up with in terms of research but we know what we're doing is effective. We're not so sure, it's hard to say we've got a perfect school. But boy I'd really like to believe that if a kid needs help, they're going to ask for it. And we don't pretend ourselves to say that all kids who need help are asking for it. We know that kids are fearful, we know that kids don't want things to get worse, we know that as much as we say use the orange forms, kids are saying never, I think it's going to get worse, or you can't help me. We know those pieces are out there. Especially when we say to kids how come you didn't use the form and they say well I don't know. That shows us that they're not trusting in it. So not a perfect system. It's just another piece to enable kids and adults to reach out to us and for us to actively get involved. I think we'd be less busy to a degree during the day, the day to day, minute to minute, see

Ms. Razarro and Mr. Baker, we'd be less busy minute by minute. I think we would. Or like I said, or we could be dealing with high level crap, digging, well what happened? Well who do I need to talk to now? Versus kids coming forward saying so and so saw it, so and so saw it, so and so saw it. Okay, we'll talk to them, hang on, hang on. So when kids, you need to talk to so and so, you need to you know, those kind of pieces need to be there.

I Definitely.

R Okay.

I Well thank you so much I appreciate it.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

\*Indistinguishable word/phrase

## Appendix G

**Thesis Coding****What Happened**

## Threats (T)

- Beat me up
- To personal safety

## Disobedience of authority (DA)

- Student is rude to teacher

## Verbal Abuse (VA)

- sexual
- sexist
- racist
- weight oriented
- cursing
- annoyance
- teasing (as identified by student)
- false accusations

## Personal (P)

- lost belongings
  - misplaced items
- Stealing
- SES

## Non-verbal aggression (NA)

- hitting
  - hand
  - with object
- pushing
  - basic behavior
  - into object
- touching
  - sexual
  - physical
- tripping
- crude behavior
  - sexual
  - hand cursing
- staring



- written
  - cyber
  - images
  - note-passing

#### Miscellaneous (M)

- lunch
- bus
- out-side school

#### Relational aggression (RA)

- pointing and laughing
- talking about me behind my back
- rumors
- completion of SCF
  - retaliation – completing a form because another student did

#### Teacher and Administration Behaviors (TAB)

- unfair treatment
- too much work
- unfair punishments

Student identified harassment (operational definition – students who label the act as harassment, whether or not it would be considered harassment in the general sense of the word) (SIH)

- sexual
- verbal

#### **How you tried to settle – the actions students have taken themselves**

- yes
  - verbal
    - told him to stop
    - talked to teacher
    - talked to administrator
    - tried to reason
  - non-verbal
    - fighting
    - completed SCF
    - removing yourself from the situation
- no
  - I don't know how

#### **Ideal Solution – emotional component**

- punishment
  - lunch detention

- ISS
  - OSS
  - ET
- Meeting
  - Separate
  - With admin
  - With aggressor
- Verbal
  - Apology
- Non-verbal
  - Stop

**Resolution**

- Punishment
  - Lunch detention
  - ISS
  - OSS
  - ET
- Meeting
  - Shook hands
  - Agreed to give one another space
- Not reported
- Verbal
  - Apology
- Other
  - Item found
  - Custodial
  - Bus arrangements
  - Lunch arrangements