

1 Classroom Learning Environment & Student Motivational Differences between Exemplary, Recognized, & Acceptable Urban Middle Level Schools

Hersh C. Waxman
Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas

Lisa L. Read
University of Houston
Houston, Texas

Andres García
University of Houston
Houston, Texas

ABSTRACT

One of the essential principles for improving middle grade education is to establish a safe and healthy school environment (Jackson & Davis, 2000; Price & Waxman, 2005). The overall quality of the school climate or school environment has been argued to be one of the central problems of urban schools (Waxman & Huang, 1997). Several studies, for example, have found various measures of success in middle school to be related to school climate (Goodenow & Grady, 1995; Seidman et al. 1994). The present study examines differences on students' perceptions of their classroom learning environment between urban middle level schools that were classified by the statewide assessment criteria as "exemplary," "recognized," or "acceptable." Differences between these three types of schools' on students' background characteristics, attendance, out-of-school activities, and student aspirations also were examined.

A random sample of about 400 sixth- and seventh-grade students from each type of school completed an adapted version of the My Class Inventory (Fraser, 1998) and background questions from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey. The results indicated that students in the exemplary school had significantly higher ($p < .001$) perceptions for the scales of Satisfaction, Teacher Support, Cohesion, and Equity, than students in the recognized and acceptable school. Students in the exemplary and recognized school also had higher self-esteem in reading scores than students in the acceptable school. On the other hand, students in the recognized and acceptable schools had significantly higher perceptions of Friction and Difficulty than students from the exemplary school.