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# A Safe School Plan for Jefferson Elementary School

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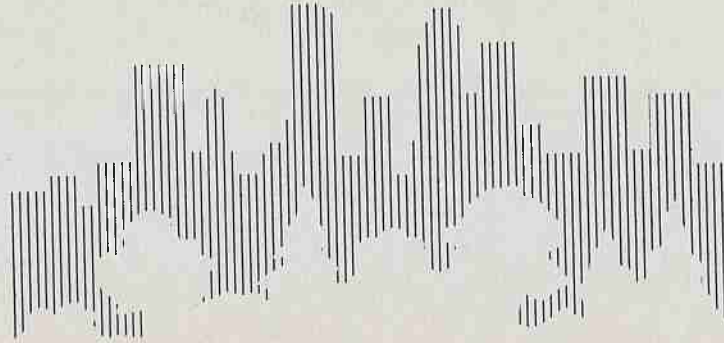
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## MASTERS IN SOCIAL WORK THESIS

**Jody Ann Kirchner**

**A Safe School Plan  
for Jefferson Elementary School**

**MSW  
Thesis**

Thesis  
Kirchn

1997

A Safe School Plan for Jefferson Elementary School

By

Jody Ann Kirchner

A thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty  
of Augsburg College  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

Minneapolis, Minnesota

May, 1997

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK  
AUGSBURG COLLEGE  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that the Master's Thesis of:


Jody Ann Kirchner

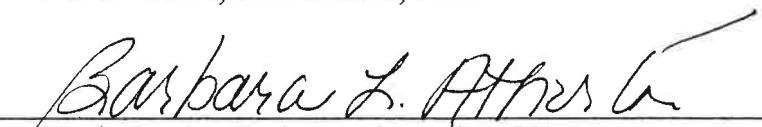
has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirements for the  
Master of Social Work Degree.

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### A SAFE SCHOOL PLAN FOR JEFFERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

JODY ANN KIRCHNER

MAY 1997

School violence has become a growing concern in the United States. Although most of the stories reported in the media focus on violence in high schools, concerns for the safety of elementary school students is increasing. Strategies used by schools to maintain safety for students include 1) zero tolerance policies, 2) conflict resolution through peer mediation, and 3) safe school planning. This descriptive research study utilizes safe school planning because of its focus on overall school environment and climate. Secondary data analysis is used to identify students' perceptions of safety at Minneapolis Public School's Jefferson Elementary. Survey questions are categorized into five areas: (a) General School Perceptions, (b) Race Relations, (c) General Interactions, (d) Safety at school, and (e) Respecting Others. The data were analyzed and interpreted by looking for data trends in race and gender. Staff and student perceptions were also compared. Recommendations which comprise the foundation of a Safe School Plan for Jefferson Elementary were proposed.

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## INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will describe the state of many schools within the United States. I will also describe the growing need for violence intervention and prevention programs to target children of elementary schools. I will discuss the purpose and rationale for this research study, along with its relevance to school social work practice. I will conclude with the research questions explored in this study.

School violence has become a growing concern throughout American society. The media has caught everyone's attention with reports of violence in schools which include shootings, gang activity, verbal aggression, physical aggression, and vandalism. Additionally, "the National Association of School Security Directors estimates that each year there are 9,000 rapes, 12,000 armed robberies, 270,000 burglaries, and 204,000 aggravated assaults in schools" (Rich, 1992, p.35). These factors are just a few of the reasons for the unstable environment in many United States schools.

Although "most of the sensational stories about gun-toting youth and rampant gang violence focus on middle and high school students, a growing number of elementary school principals are witnessing the unwelcome drama of deadly violence" (Walker, 1994/95, p.2). Astor (1994) states, "Within academia, a consensus is growing that violence intervention programs should be geared toward younger children before they become involved with 'serious' acts of violence" (p.101).

### Purpose and Rationale of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to examine a population of students' and staff perceptions of the learning environment within their Minneapolis Public Elementary School. The foundation of a violence prevention program will be developed based on the

students' and staff perceptions of the learning environment. This program will be designed to meet the needs of the students.

When students feel unsafe or threatened in their environment, it is likely some will act out aggressively to protect themselves. It is also likely some will become withdrawn due to feelings of insecurity or fear. Schools must do more than reduce school violence. "District, school, and classroom level policies and practices must promote nonviolent attitudes and foster environments of caring, respect for others, and acceptance of diversity" (Miller 1994, p.259). Safe School Plans are designed to foster this type of environment.

This research study will attempt to identify students' perceptions of safety within their learning environment at Jefferson Elementary School. It will also explore how a Safe School Plan could support and/or increase their perceptions of safety. The role of a Safe School Plan is not only to reduce school violence, but also to ensure an environment that is safe, nurturing, and peaceful for students and staff. Students will maximize their opportunity to learn and prosper in a safe and orderly environment (Morrison, Furlong, & Morrison, 1994).

This research study's relevance to school social work practice is displayed through the application an emerging violence prevention model to a Minneapolis Public School. The study will attempt to identify the needs of students at Jefferson Elementary by examining their perceptions of safety at school. The safe school planning model, which devotes attention to the schools overall environment and climate, enables students to focus

their attention on learning because they feel safe and secure. The model used in this research study may be applied by school social workers in other elementary schools.

Safe school planning's focus on creating a safe environment and climate for students to reduce and eliminate violence may also be transferred from schools to general society. Creating safe homes and neighborhoods may reduce the incidents of violence if people feel safe.

### Research Questions

This study has three research questions: 1) What are the students' perceptions of Jefferson Elementary School's learning environment? 2) What are the staffs perceptions of Jefferson Elementary School's learning environment? 3) What is the correspondence between students' and staffs perceptions of Jefferson Elementary School's learning environment? The answers to these three research questions will be used to create the foundation of a Safe School Plan for Jefferson Elementary School.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter will examine literature regarding various strategies used by schools to reduce school violence. It will also outline two models of safe school planning which are used by schools to foster a safe environment for students. Finally, this chapter will discuss stress theory as the theoretical framework for this research study.

Prominent strategies used to reduce violence in schools include zero tolerance policies and conflict resolution through peer mediation. These tactics are implemented after a peer conflict or incident of violence has occurred. Their popularity is increasing in many school systems to reduce violence.

An emerging strategy used to reduce school violence is safe school planning. Unlike zero tolerance policies and conflict resolution through peer mediation, safe school planning offers a "climate approach" to increase students' perceptions of safety at school. Safe school planning is a proactive strategy used by schools to ensure students feel secure in their school environment and therefore are able to concentrate on learning.

### Zero Tolerance Policies

The intent of "zero tolerance" policies are to keep schools safe through the non-tolerance of student misbehavior by school staff. According to Marianne Milton of Jefferson Elementary, zero tolerance refers to "learning and working environments which are free from abuse; absence from abuse or harassment" (1996, p.1).

The American Federation of Teachers, has shown their support by endorsing zero tolerance policies (Vail, 1995). The United States Congress gave its stamp of approval for zero tolerance through the passing of the Gun Free School Zone Act in 1994.

Signed by President Clinton in October of 1994, this act "requires state legislatures and individual schools to adopt a one year expulsion policy for students who tote guns" and also "requires schools to refer offenders to the criminal justice or juvenile delinquency system" (Vail, 1995, p. 38). By October of 1995 all school boards which accepted federal funds were required to automatically expel a weapon-carrying student for at least one year (Vail, 1995, p.36).

The meaning of zero tolerance varies with different school districts. The policies are also interpreted differently at each school within districts. "Although 'zero tolerance' means different things in different school districts, the approach usually requires automatic expulsion for students who bring guns, knives, or items that look like weapons onto school grounds" (Vail, 1995, p.36).

There is controversy over the application of zero tolerance policies to younger children in schools. "Some child advocates, educators, and parents say the policy does not allow enough room for exceptions, especially when younger children are involved" (Vail, 1995, p.36). Zero tolerance does not allow variation or exceptions for students in younger grades who may not fully understand the expectations which accompany the policies.

## Conflict Resolution through Peer Mediation

Many schools are using peer mediation as a method to resolve student conflicts. Peer mediation allows students to be accountable for their words and actions. Students learn they can disagree and get along with people at the same time. (Black, 1994)

Conflict resolution is a "method or strategy that enables people to interact with each other in positive ways in order to resolve their differences" (Stomfay-Stitz, 1994, p.279). The process of conflict resolution can be outlined through the following stages: a) commitment to resolution, b) definition of conflict, c) negotiation, d) agreement, e) contracting, and f) implementation of changes and evaluation (Johnson and Johnson 1994; Miller 1993; Blades, 1984; Deutsch, 1973).

Peer mediation is based on the foundation of conflict resolution. Peer mediation "empowers students to share responsibility for creating a safe, secure school environment" by learning intervention and conflict prevention skills (Stomfay-Stitz, 1994, p.279).

Peer mediation includes a third party mediator who "listens to each disputant's understanding of the situation; clarifies the issues to be resolved; helps the parties think of and evaluate possible solutions; and puts the agreement in writing" (Cutrona and Guerin, 1994, p.101).

DeCecco and Richards (1974) performed a study that included more than 8,000 students and 500 faculty members in over 60 junior and senior high schools. DeCecco and Richards found that over 90 percent of the conflicts reported by students were perceived

to be either unresolved or resolved in a destructive manner. During the time of this study there appears to have been very little open communication regarding occurring conflicts.

Johnson, Johnson, Dudley and Acikogoz (1994) conducted a study on the effects of conflict resolution training with elementary students. The results indicated that students tended to use negotiation and mediation procedures even when they were involved in an emotionally intense, serious and prolonged conflict with a classmate. There was also a reported reduction in the number of times student conflicts were referred to teachers and the principal. The most difficult part of the negotiation process for students was expressing feelings, reversing perspectives, and providing rationale for their positions (Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, & Acikogoz, 1994).

Conflict resolution through peer mediation is viewed as possessing several benefits for school staff, peer mediators, the student body, families, and society (Cutrona & Guerin, 1994). Some of the benefits include: a) school staff spend less time settling disputes among students, b) mediators develop leadership and increase languages skills and self esteem, c) students become active in the problem solving process, d) the mediation process carries over to families, and e) youth who learn to resolve conflicts peacefully are likely to do the same when they grow up (Cutrona and Guerin, 1994).

Some critics of conflict resolution believe programs need to be submitted to stringent assessment (Horowitz and Boardman, 1995). Analysis on the limited amount of literature available on conflict resolution programs indicate a consistent pattern of either

no measure of program effects or measurement seriously compromised by methodological problems (Horowitz and Boardman, 1995).

### Safe School Planning

The role of a Safe School Plan is not only to reduce school violence, but also to ensure an environment that is safe, nurturing, and peaceful for students and staff. Stephens (1994) describes a Safe School Plan as a "comprehensive and systematic process to create and maintain a safe, secure, and welcoming school climate, free of drugs, violence, and fear" (p.205).

"School policies must do more than strive for the absence of violence" (Morrison, Furlong, & Morrison, 1994, p.240). By focusing attention on discipline strategies for violent acts (i.e. suspension, expulsion), only a portion of the problem of violence is addressed. Discipline strategies alone will not erase the fear many students feel as a result of violent acts.

Two prominent models of safe school planning include Dr. Dan Olweus' model and California's Safe School Planning model. The literature on safe school planning presents several other models, but for the purpose of this research study Dr. Olweus' and California's Safe School Planning models will be outlined.

### Climate Approach Models of Safe School Planning

#### Dan Olweus' Model

Dan Olweus has been researching and studying the phenomenon of bullying and victims of bullies for more than twenty years (Astor, 1995, p.107). He has shaped an



intervention program based on "a fundamental democratic principal: Every individual should have the right to be spared oppression and repeated, intentional humiliation, in school as in society at large" (Olweus, 1991, p.427).

"In the early 1980's Dr. Olweus conducted a school based violence intervention program that included 42 elementary and junior high schools in Norway" (Astor, 1995, p.107). Olweus' program included several school wide interventions that attempted to change school culture regarding violence (Astor, 1995, p.107).

Results of the study indicate the 42 schools involved in the project experienced a 50 percent reduction in bullying problems for two years following the project. There was also a decrease in theft, vandalism, and truancy with and increase in student satisfaction with school life (Astor, 1995).

Olweus' program includes a general prerequisite of awareness and involvement. The program focuses on school interventions at three different levels: 1) the school level, 2) the classroom level, and 3) the individual level (Olweus, 1993, p.64).

School level interventions include several components which focus on the overall school environment. Some school level interventions include questionnaire surveys, school conference day on bully/victim problems, appropriate supervision at recess time, an attractive playground , parent circles, and teacher groups for the development of the social milieu of the school (Olweus, 1993).

Classroom interventions concentrate on interactions within the classroom. According to Olweus, (1993), classroom level interventions include regular class meeting,

class rules against bullying (ie. clarification, praise, and sanctions), role playing, cooperative learning, and common positive activities.

Individual interventions center around actions or deeds performed by the individual. Olweus (1993) asserts that individual level interventions include having serious talks with bullies and victims, having serious talks with parents of involved students, and use of teachers' and parents' imagination.

### Cool 2B Safe.

The Wilder Research Center worked collaboratively with St. Paul Public Schools to implement Cool 2B Safe: A School Violence Reduction Project from 1993-1996.

"The Cool 2B Safe model [was] based on the belief that it is the adults' responsibility to establish and maintain a safe, respectful, and developmentally appropriate learning climate" (Wilder, 1996). The Cool 2B Safe project was an adaptation of the work Dan Olweus did in Norway (Wilder, 1996, p.1).

The school in which Cool 2B safe was implemented is a middle school, although structured like a junior high. "A junior high emphasizes academic subject areas and places less emphasis on developmental issues and teaching pro-social behaviors" (Wilder, 1996, p.4). This factor appeared to have an impact on the project.

It was found that a climate approach model, such as a safe school model, is more appropriately suited for elementary age children, rather than the middle school age children involved in Cool 2B Safe. "In an elementary school philosophy teachers are more likely to focus on the developmental needs of the child as a whole" (Wilder, 1996, p.4).

Elementary school teachers are expected to devote time and attention towards developmental issues and teaching pro-social behaviors to students. Middle school (junior high) teachers have an expectation that students should know how to conduct themselves. (Wilder, 1996)

### California's Safe School Planning Model

California's Safe School Planning model was developed jointly by the California Department of Education and the Crime and Violence Prevention Center of the Office of the California Attorney General. According to this model, a safe school is an "orderly purposeful place in which students and staff are free to learn and teach without the threat of physical or psychological harm"(Burton, 1995, p.ix-x).

The model is based on four key principals:

- (1)**Safe schools** are caring schools
- (2)**Safe schools** are built through the cooperative efforts of parents, teachers, security staff, classified staff, law enforcement, representatives, and community members
- (3)**Safe schools** communicate high standards
- (4)**Safe schools** stress prevention, and the staff and student are prepared (Burton, 1995, p.ix).

"Research indicates that a comprehensive approach to creating safe and effective schools must include four components that interact and effect safety of the whole school campus"(Burton, 1995, p.10). Those four components are: a) personal characteristics of

students and staff, b) the school's physical environment, c) the school's social environment and d) the school culture.

The four components are based on these objectives of safe school planning: (a) gain insight into and understand the way which existing personal characteristics affect a school's physical, social, and cultural environment; (b) determine how the school can positively affect those environments; and (c) develop and attitude of acceptance and mutual respect among all students and staff for the unique attributes that they bring with them (Burton, 1995, p.11).

There is a seven step planning process for the California Safe School model (see Table 2.1). The process consists of formulating a planning committee to create a vision for the school. Once the vision is created, information about the school and community is gathered and analyzed. Areas of desired change are identified, the major goal is set, and strategies are selected and implemented for each Safe School component. The final step consists of an evaluation and assessment of progress to identify strengths and weaknesses in the Safe School Plan (Burton, 1995).

Table 2.1

- 
- (1) Identify your safe school planning committee members
  - (2) Create a vision for your school
  - (3) Gather and analyze information about your school and its community
  - (4) Identify your school's and community's areas of desired change
  - (5) Set your major goal
  - (6) Select and implement strategies for each safe school component
  - (7) Evaluate and assess your progress
- 

The seven step planning process "focuses on developing a team spirit in the school and surrounding community and a willingness to engage in a continuing process of critical

evaluation and change" (Burton, 1995, p.24). The group dedication and commitment is essential for safe school planning success.

### Theoretical Framework

#### The Effects of Stress and Anxiety on Learning

The definitions of stress and anxiety are often intermingled. For the purpose of this research study, stress is defined as "that pattern of psychological, behavioral, and physiological responses of the individual to demands of the physical and social environment that exceed his capacity to cope effectively, that is, to carry out activities, realize goals, and experience satisfactions" (Kaminoff and Proshansky, 1982, p.380). Anxiety is defined as "apprehension, tension, or uneasiness that stems from the anticipation of danger, the source of which is largely unknown or unrecognized" (American Psychiatric Association, 1975, pp.16-17).

Many children are faced with both stress and anxiety daily at school. Stress and anxiety effect their relationships as well as their classroom learning. Proeger and Myrick (1980) report that "as many as 30 percent of the children in elementary schools may be experiencing excessive stress that prevents them from learning and relating effectively" (p.4).

S. Johnson (1979) assessed that 10 percent to 30 percent of students experience school-related anxiety severe enough to interfere with their performance. Phillips (1978) reported that high and low levels of school anxiety in students consistently differentiated between adaptive and maladaptive school behavior. Highly anxious youth were found to

(a) engage in more problem behavior, (b) be disliked by peers, (c) have poorer self-concepts, and (d) be lower in school achievement and school aptitude (Kiselica, Baker, Thomas, & Reedy, 1994, p.335).

### Summary

This review of the literature identified and described prominent and emerging violence prevention strategies used throughout many schools. Zero tolerance policies, conflict resolution through peer mediation, and safe school planning are methods used to decrease violent acts within schools. Safe school planning was chosen for the purpose of this research paper because of its clear focus on safety within the entire school environment.

As indicated above, Proeger and Myrick (1980) reported that “as many as 30 percent of the children in elementary schools may be experiencing excessive stress that prevents them from learning and relating effectively” (p.4). This factor alone impresses the need for students to feel safe in their school environments.

## METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will describe the procedures used to conduct this research study. It is divided into four sections: subject, instrument design, protection of human subjects, and collection of data and analysis.

This research study's primary intent is to examination of students' perceptions of safety within the learning environment at Jefferson Elementary School. This is a descriptive research study using quantitative survey data gathered by Minneapolis Public Schools Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Department. Secondary analysis will be facilitated to conduct a needs assessment based on the existing data. Results from the needs assessment will identify the essential components needed in a Safe School Plan for Jefferson Elementary to support and/or increase students perceptions of safety.

### Subjects

According to the Jefferson 1995-1996 School Information Report, Jefferson Elementary was comprised of 117 employees and 722 students. Seventy one percent of the students were of color and 76 percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Jefferson was also eligible for Title I service which is a federally funded program to provide additional resources for improving math and reading skills for students with high numbers of students who meet low-income requirements (see Table 3.1) (Minneapolis Public Schools Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Department, 1995-1996).

Table 3.1

Number of Students	724
Number of Employees	114
Students of Color	71%
Staff of Color	18%
Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch	76%
Students Eligible for Title I Services	Yes
Students Utilizing the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Program	32%

The sample used for the purpose of this research study were recruited by the Minneapolis Public Schools Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Department. The Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Department used the sample to study school and district outcomes. For the purpose of this research study, I will perform secondary data analysis on the data to determine student and staff perceptions of safety specifically at Jefferson Elementary School.

In this research study, the sample consists of two cohorts. Those cohorts are:

a) third and sixth grade students of Jefferson Elementary School, and b) staff of Jefferson Elementary School. The subjects were studied through the use of existing survey data gathered by Minneapolis Public Schools Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Department.

#### Instrument Design

The perceptions of students and teachers from Jefferson Elementary were examined as documented through the Minneapolis Public Schools Elementary Student Survey (Appendix A) and Minneapolis Public Schools Staff Survey (Appendix B). Over



the past three years these opinion surveys were distributed to third grade students, sixth grade students, and staff of Minneapolis Public Schools Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Department. The aggregate data obtained from the 1995-96 surveys will be used for the purpose of this research study.

The Likert scale opinion surveys were formulated by Minneapolis Public Schools Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Department. Both student and staff surveys demand a forced choice response from the subject. The response categories are: SD (Strongly Disagree), D (Disagree), A (Agree) and SA (Strongly Agree).

The staff survey consists of five categories of questions: (a) Curriculum and Instruction, (b) Standard and Support, (c) Demographics, (d) Family/Community Involvement, and (e) School Climate. There are a total of fifty questions on the staff survey.

Minneapolis Public Schools Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Department created two student surveys; one for elementary students and one for secondary students. The elementary student survey will be used for the purpose of this research. The elementary student survey consists of twenty six questions; four regarding demographics and twenty two regarding school climate and learning. The student survey was distributed to third and sixth graders.

There are three terms used in this research study which need to be operationally defined for the purpose of measurement. Those terms are:

(1) Student: Third and sixth grades of Jefferson Elementary School and Minneapolis Public Schools who participated in the Minneapolis Public Schools Student Opinion Survey.

(2) Perception of safety: A belief regarding feelings of safety and security.

(3) Safe School Plan: A proactive violence prevention program which fosters a secure environment for students to enhance learning.

### Collection of Data and Analysis

The use of existing data from Minneapolis Public Schools Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Department was chosen for this research study because the opinions of student and staff from Jefferson Elementary School are identified. For the purpose of analysis, the responses to survey questions will be grouped in two categories. The strongly disagree and disagree responses were consolidated into “Disagree” and the strongly agree and agree responses were consolidated into “Agree”.

The analysis and interpretation of the existing data will begin through the clustering of survey questions with similar themes. Responses to the survey questions will be analyzed by looking for data trends in several areas. Demographically, trends will be analyzed through gender and race. Trends will also be analyzed and compared between the students and staff of Jefferson Elementary.

The aggregate survey data will be analyzed, looking for patterns of safety beliefs among students and teachers. These data will be used to generate an initial list of topics and areas that need to be addressed in the Safe School Plan for Jefferson Elementary.

Based on the data collected during this study, the elements of a Safe School Plan will be identified for Jefferson Elementary. Students' perceptions of safety may be supported and/or increased through a Safe School Plan specifically designed for Jefferson Elementary.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

Minneapolis Public Schools has approved this research study. A copy of the letter of approval is located in Appendix C. The Augsburg College Institutional Review Board has also approved this research study (#96-10-01). A copy of the letter of approval is located in Appendix D.

This research study will protect human subjects through the use of anonymous existing survey data. The vital opinions of students, (vulnerable population), and staff were collected by the Minneapolis Public Schools Research, Evaluation, and Assessment Department. Consents were given to Minneapolis Public Schools prior to their data collection. Through accessing existing data, the vulnerable population will be protected in this research study.

The subjects' confidentiality will also be protected in several manners. This researcher will not have access to student or staff names or any other identifying information. The data will be presented in aggregate form. Therefore, single subjects will not be identified.

There are no incentives or rewards being offered to Jefferson Elementary School, Minneapolis Public Schools or the subjects of this research. A copy of this thesis will be made available to Jefferson Elementary School upon its completion.

## FINDINGS

In this chapter I will present the findings of this research study. I will present descriptive statistics of the demographics and responses to survey questions. Since not all questions asked of the population on the Minneapolis Public Schools Student Survey or the Minneapolis Public Schools Staff Survey are relevant to this particular research study, I will only present the results which pertain to perceptions of school safety. The pertinent questions were categorized into five general topics: a) general school perceptions, b) race relations, c) general interactions, d) safe at school, and e) respecting others.

For the purpose of analysis, the responses of the survey questions were grouped in two categories. The strongly disagree and disagree responses were consolidated into “Disagree” and the strongly agree and agree responses were consolidated into “Agree”.

### Survey Return Rate

During the 1995-96 school year, Jefferson Elementary had an enrollment of 104 third graders, 78 sixth graders, as well as 117 staff. The survey return rate consisted of 74 third graders, 54 sixth graders, and 36 staff members.

The response rate for students was 70 percent and the response rate for staff was 31 percent (see Table 4.1 and Table 4.2). As Rubin and Babbie (1993) indicate, “If a high response rate is achieved, there is less chance of significant response bias than if a low rate is achieved” (p.340). The fact that students achieved a high response rate and the staff achieved a low response rate should be taken into consideration when analyzing data because the student results are more representative than the staffs’.

Table 4.1 Student Participants

	Third Graders	Sixth Graders	Total
Sample Size	104	78	182
Participants	74	54	128

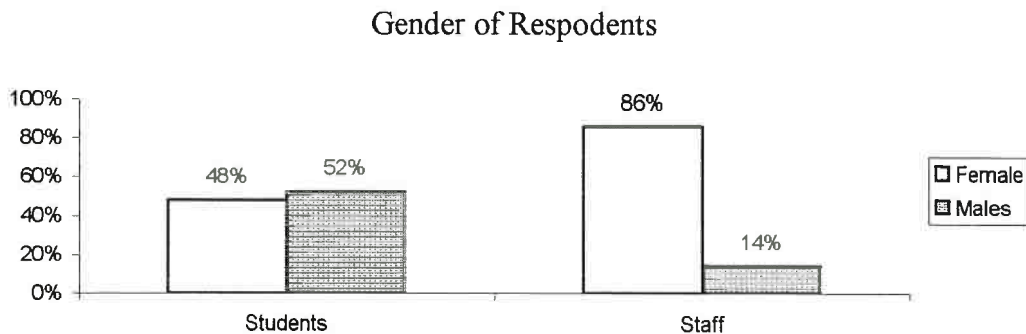
Table 4.2 Staff Participants

	Staff
Sample Size	117
Participants	36

### Demographics

As indicated above, there were a total of 128 student respondents and 36 staff respondents. All respondents were asked questions regarding their race and gender. Forty eight percent (n=61) of the student respondents were female, 52 percent (n=66) of the student respondents were male, 14 percent (n=5) of the staff respondents were male and 86 percent (n=31) of the staff respondents were female (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3



Seventy one percent of the students at Jefferson Elementary School are students of color. In this research study, 27% of the student respondents indicated they were African American, 5% indicated they were Asian American, 32% indicated they were Hispanic American, 33% indicated they were European American, 1% indicated they were American Indian, and 2% did not report their race (see Table 4.4). Due to the low number in American Indian responses, this population was not considered in further data analysis. Of the staff respondents, 6 percent reported they were African American, 92 percent reported they were European American, and 2 percent did not report their race (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.4

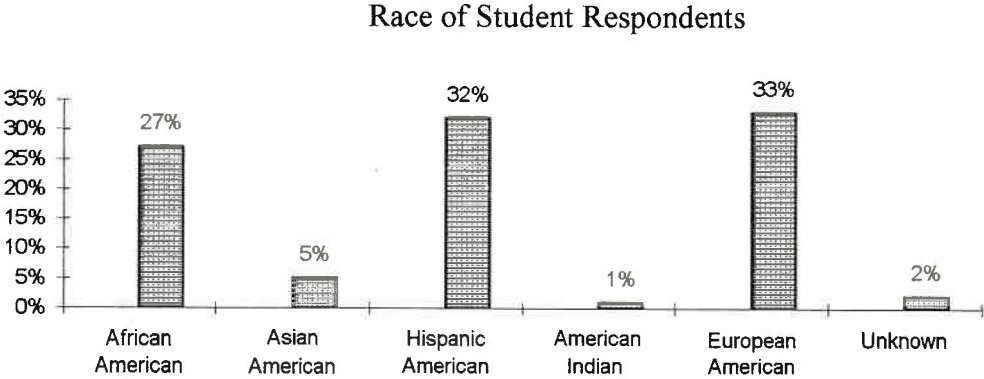
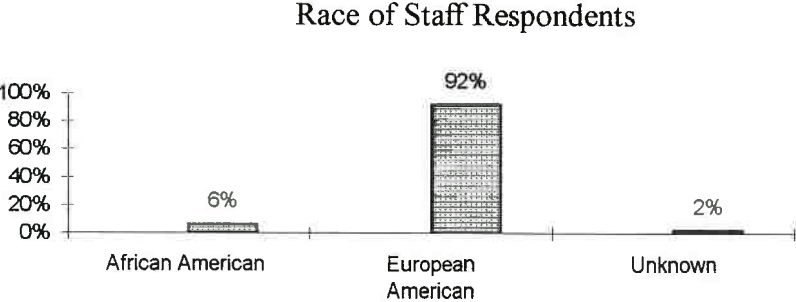


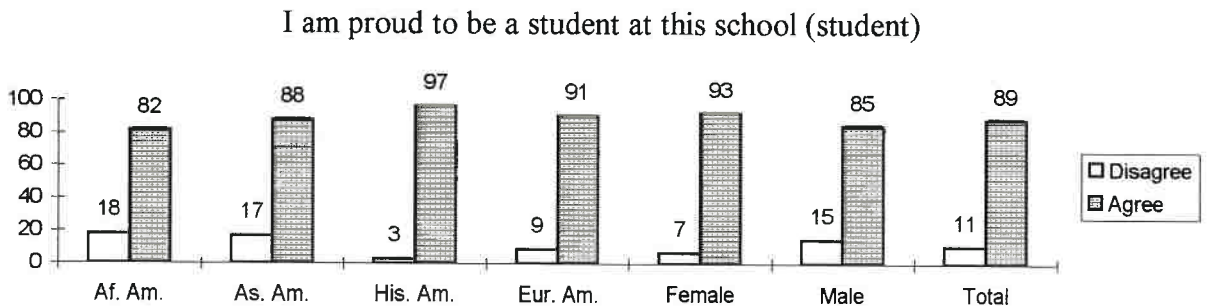
Table 4.5



## General Perceptions of Jefferson Elementary

In the survey, students were asked to respond to the statement, “I am proud to be a student at this school. Eighty nine percent of the students agreed with this statement and 11% of the students disagreed. There are a significant range of responses when analyzed by race. Ninety seven percent of the Hispanic American students agreed, while 82 percent of the African American students agreed (see Table 4.6). The staff were also asked to respond to a similar statement, “I like working at this school”. One hundred percent of the staff surveyed agreed with this statement.

Table 4.6



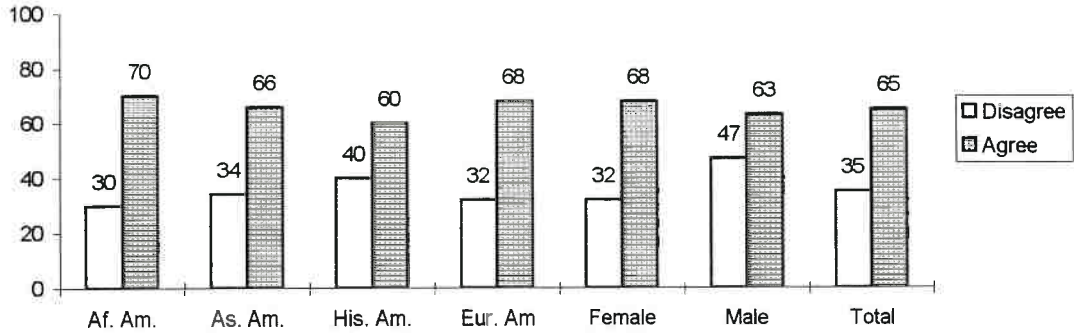
## Race Relations

Staff and students were both asked to respond to the statement, “Students of different races get along well in my [this] school”. Sixty five percent of the students agreed with this statement and 35 percent disagreed. The male and female students provided a generally consistent response (68% of females agreed, 63% of males agreed) (see Table 4.7).



Table 4.7

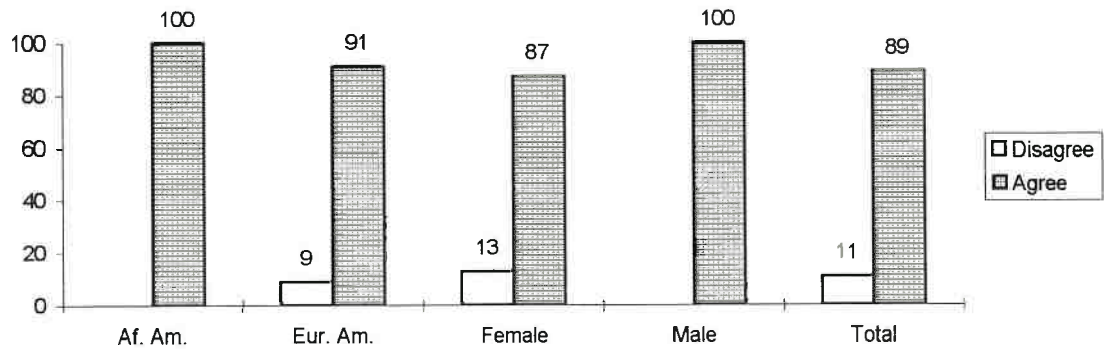
Students of different races get along well in my school. (students)



Eighty nine percent of the staff agreed with the statement, “Students of different races get along well in this school”. When analyzed by gender, 87 percent of the female staff agreed and 100 percent of the male staff agreed (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8

Students of different races get along well in this school. (staff)

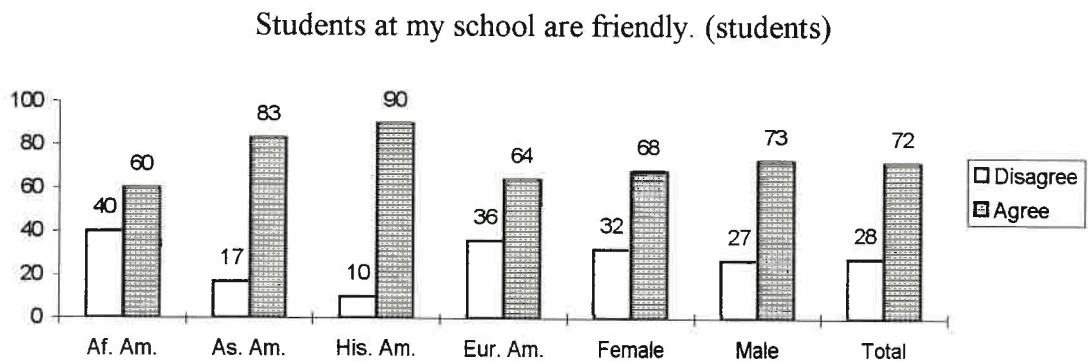


### General Interactions

A total of four different questions were grouped under the “general interactions” category. Students were asked to respond to the statement, “Students at my school are

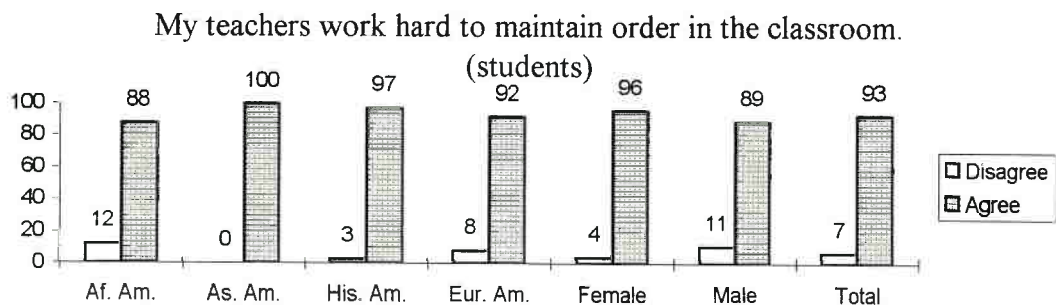
friendly”. Seventy two percent agreed with this statement and 28 percent disagreed. The data shows a fairly large range of responses when analyzed by race. Ninety percent of the Hispanic American students (n=35) agreed with this statement while only 60 percent of the African American students (n=21) agreed (see Table 4.9).

Table 4.9



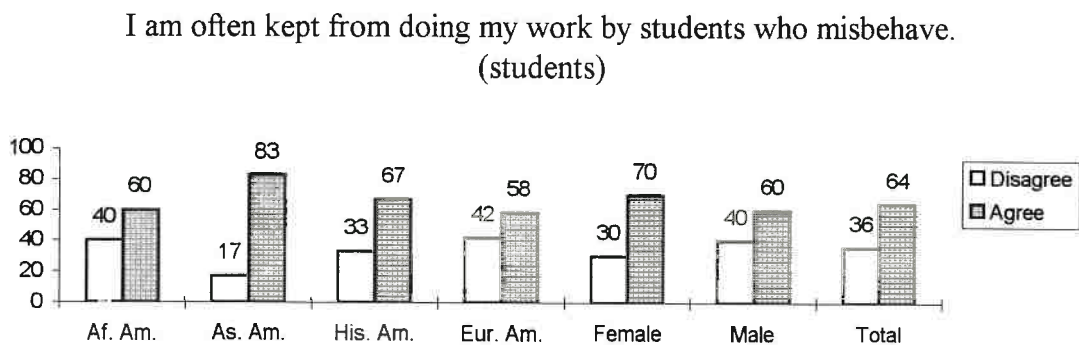
Students were also asked to respond to the statement, “My teachers work hard to maintain order in the classroom. Ninety three percent of the students agreed with this statement and 7 percent disagreed. One hundred percent (n=6) of the Asian American students agreed with this statement and 88 percent (n=31) of the African American students agreed (see Table 4.10).

Table 4.10



The next statement clustered in the general interactions category asked of the student respondents was, “I am often kept from doing my work by students who misbehave”. Sixty four percent of the students agreed with this statement and 36 percent disagreed. The Asian American students reported the highest agreement at 83 percent (n=5), while the African American students reported the lowest at 60 percent agreeing (n=21) (see Table 4.11).

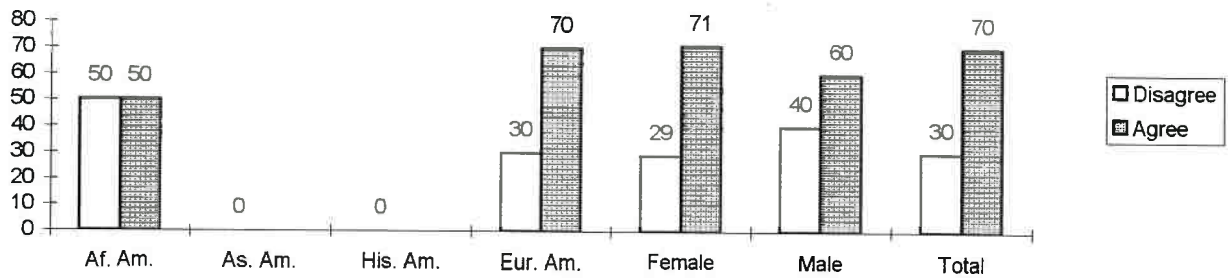
Table 4.11



Staff were asked to respond to the statement, “Our school staff deals effectively with discipline problems”. 70 percent of the staff agreed with this statement and 30 percent disagreed. Analyzed by race, 70 percent (n=23) of the European American staff agreed with this statement and 50 percent (n=1) of the African American staff agreed (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.12

Our school staff deals effectively with discipline problems. (staff)

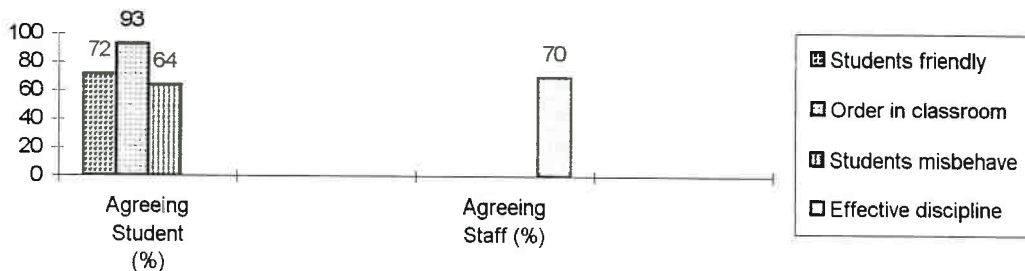


Summary:

A total of four statements were grouped under the “general interactions” category. Ninety three percent of the student respondents agreed that their teachers work hard to maintain order in the class room and 64 percent of the students agreed that they are kept from doing their work by students who misbehave. Seventy percent of the staff agreed that the school deals effectively with discipline problems (see Table 4.13).

Table 4.13

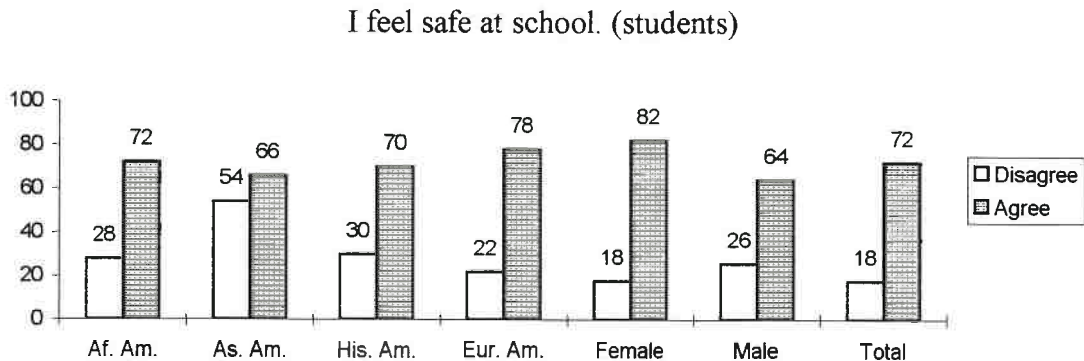
General Interactions



## Safe at School

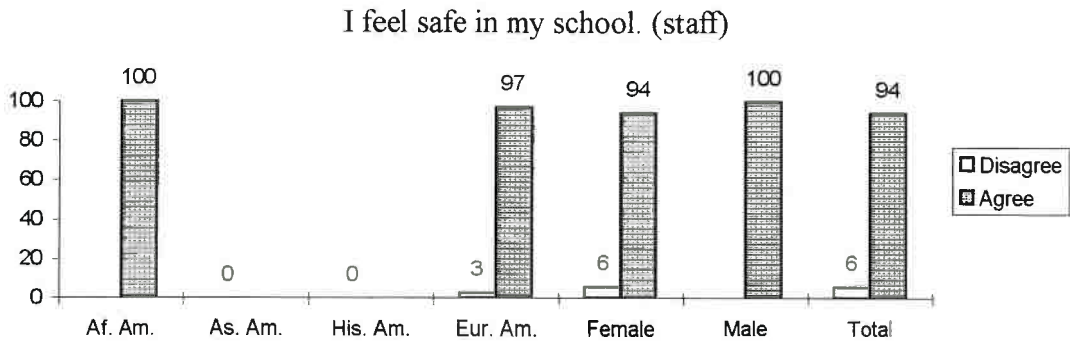
A total of seven questions were grouped under the “safe at school” category. Students were asked to respond to the statement, “I feel safe in my school”. Seventy two percent of the students agreed with this statement and 18 percent disagreed. The responses were similar for students when analyzed by race, although the European American students reported the highest agreement. Seventy two percent (n=25) of the African American students agreed, 66 percent (n=4) of the Asian American students agreed, 70 percent (n=29) of the Hispanic American students agreed, and 78 (n=33) percent of the European American students agreed that they feel safe in their school (see Table 4.14).

Table 4.14



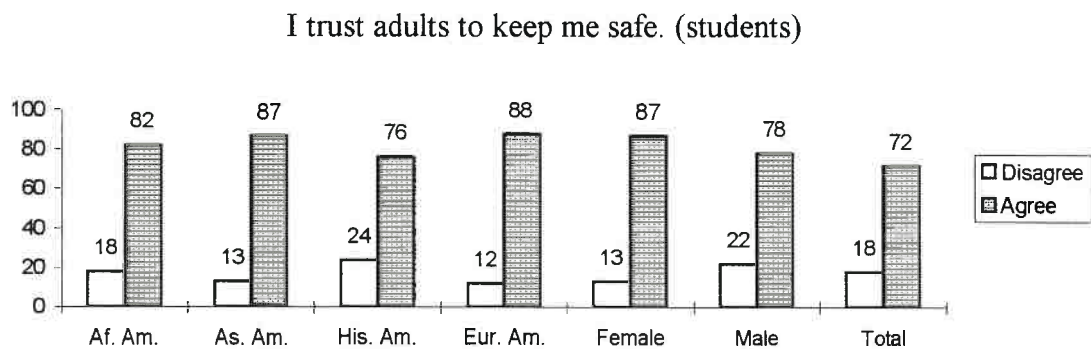
The staff were also asked to respond to, “I feel safe in my school”. Ninety four percent of the staff agreed with this statement and 6 percent disagreed. When analyzed by gender, 100 percent (n=5) of the male staff agreed and 94 percent (n=29) of the female staff agreed (see Table 4.15).

Table 4.15



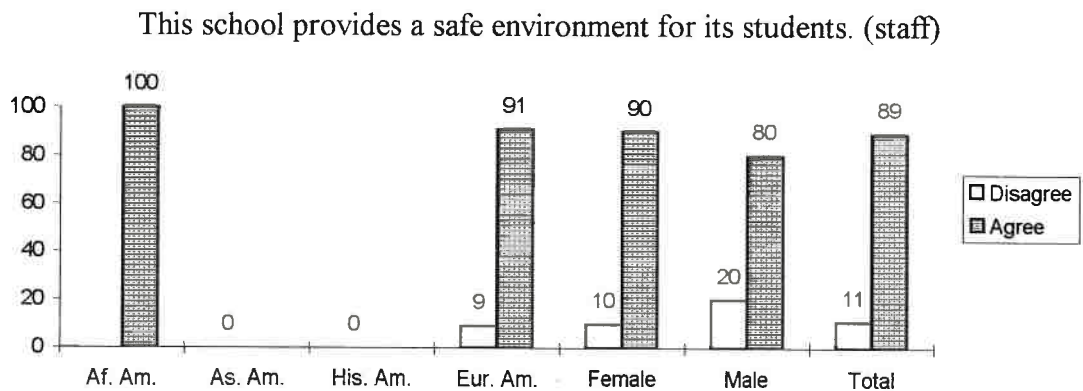
The students were asked to respond to, “I trust adults to keep me safe”. Seventy two percent of the students agreed with this statement and 18 percent disagreed. The range of responses when analyzed by race shows 76 percent of the Hispanic American students trust adults to keep them safe and 88 percent of the European American students trusts adults to keep them safe (see Table 4.16).

Table 4.16



The staff responded to the statement, “This school provides a safe environment for its students”. Eighty nine percent of the staff agreed with this statement and 11 percent disagreed. The range between male and female respondents indicates 90% (n=28) of the female staff agreed and 80% (n=4) of the male staff agreed (see Table 4.17).

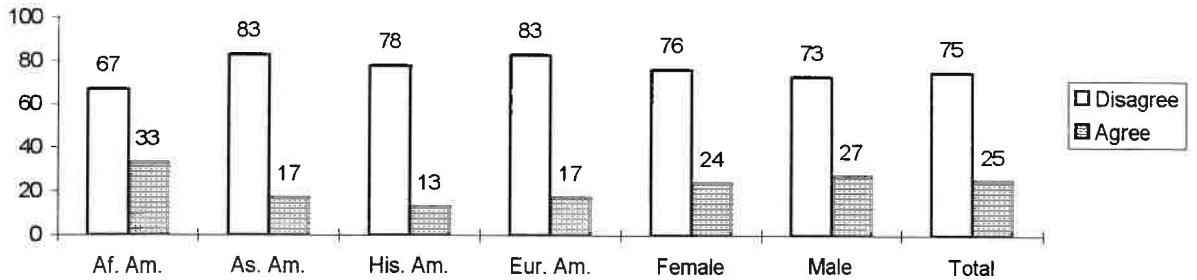
Table 4.17



The students were asked to respond to this statement, “Student use of alcohol or illegal drugs is a problem at my school”. Twenty five percent of the students agreed with this statement and 75 percent disagreed. Analysis by race indicates 13 percent (n=9) of the Hispanic American respondents agreed and 33 percent (n=11) of the African American respondents agreed that student use of alcohol or illegal drugs was a problem at Jefferson Elementary (see Table 4.18).

Table 4.18

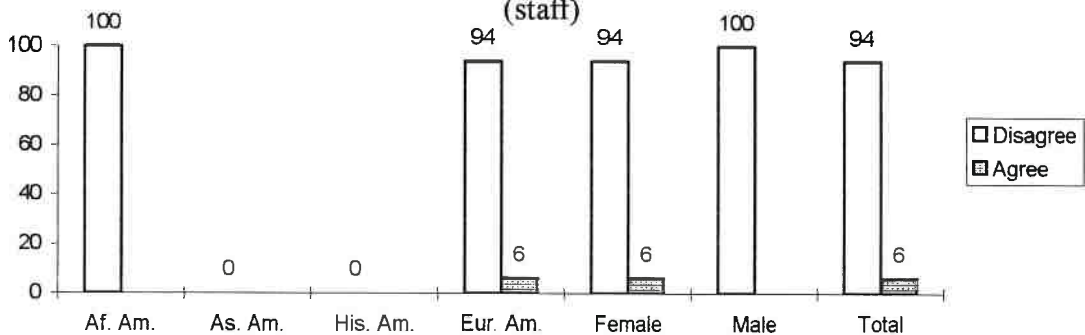
Student use of alcohol or illegal drugs is a problem at my school. (students)



The staff of Jefferson Elementary were also asked to respond to this statement, “Student use of alcohol or illegal drugs is a problem at this school”. Six percent of the staff agreed with this statement and 94 percent disagreed. Analysis by race demonstrates that 0 percent of the African American staff agreed and 6 percent of the European American staff agreed that use of alcohol or illegal drugs is a problem at Jefferson (see Table 4.19).

Table 4.19

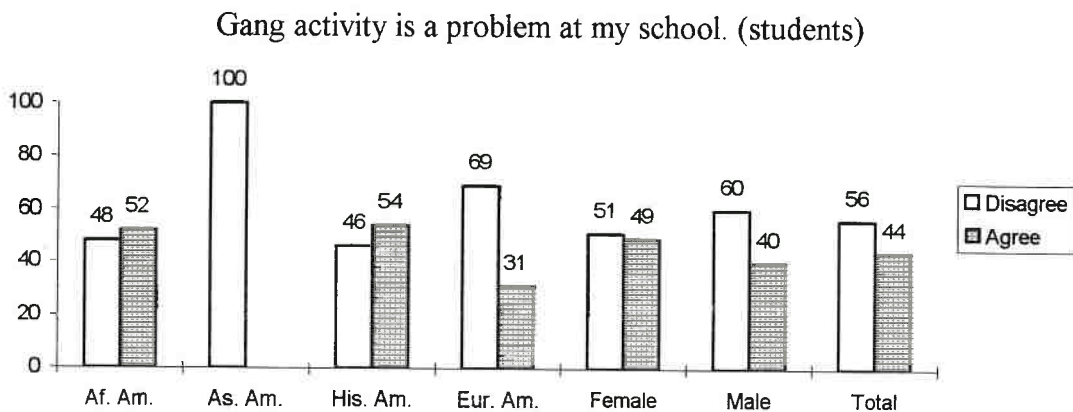
Student use of alcohol or illegal drugs is a problem at this school.  
(staff)





Finally, students were asked to respond to, “Gang activity is a problem at my school”. Forty four percent of the students agreed with this statement and 56 percent of the students disagreed. Analysis by race indicates that 100 percent (n=6) of the Asian American students disagreed and 46 percent (n=18) of the Hispanic American students disagreed (see Table 4.20).

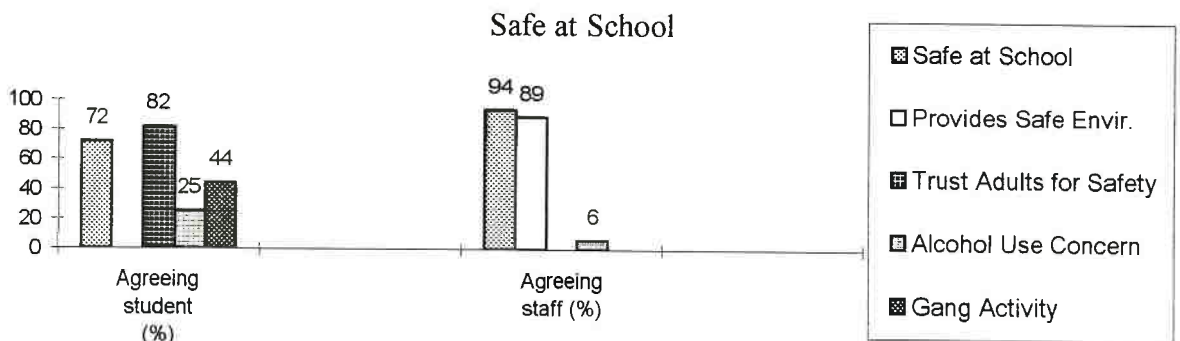
Table 4.20



Summary:

A total of seven questions were clustered under the “safe at school” category. Four were asked of students and three were asked of staff (see Table 4.21).

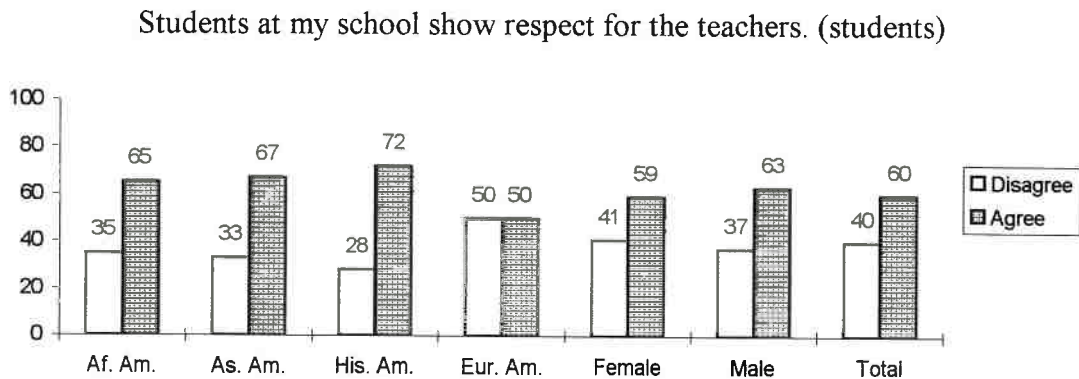
Table 4.21



## Respecting Others

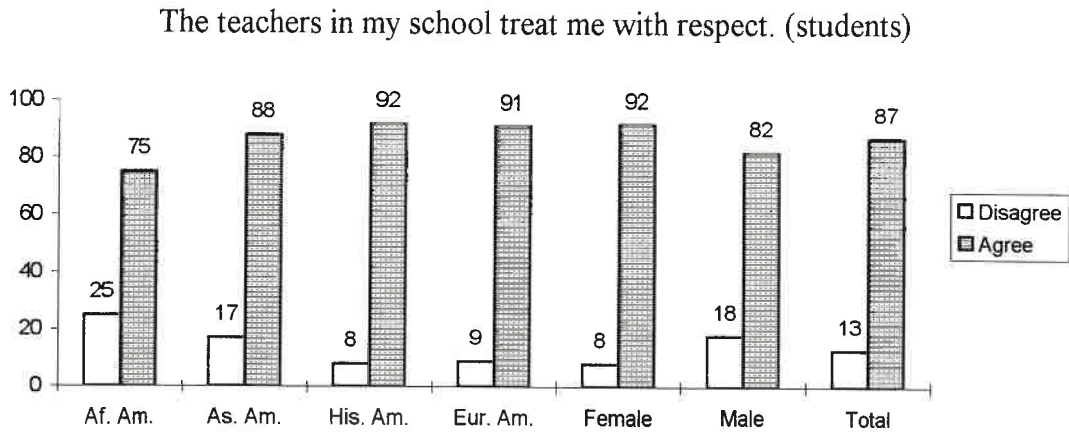
A total of four questions regarding “respecting others” were asked of the students and staff of Jefferson Elementary. Students were asked to respond to the statement, “Students in my school show respect for the teachers”. Sixty percent of the students agreed with this statement and 40 percent of the students disagreed. Analysis by gender indicates similar responses with 59 percent (n=34) of the females agreeing and 63 percent (n=42) of the male students agreeing (see Table 4.22).

Table 4.22



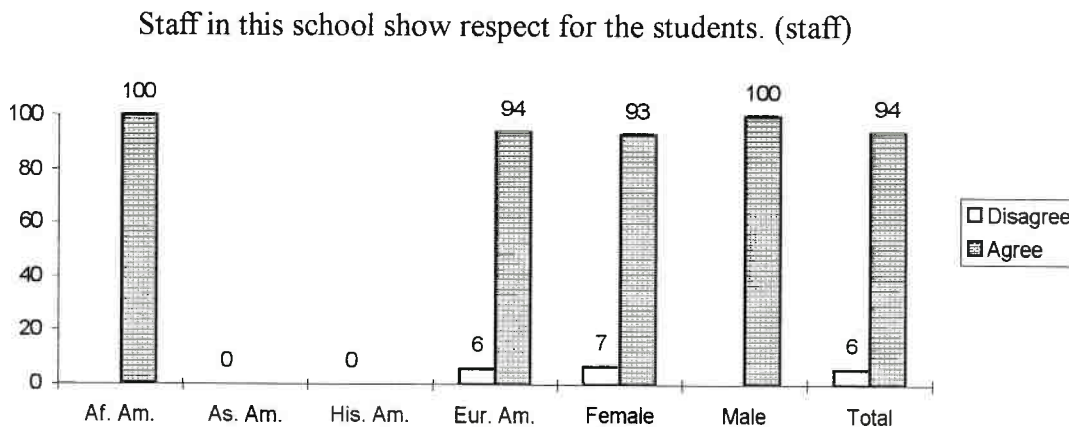
Students were also asked to respond to the statement, “The teachers in my school treat me with respect”. Eighty seven percent of the students agreed with this statement and 13 percent disagreed. Analysis by race indicates that 92 percent (n=37) of the Hispanic American students agreed and 75 percent (n=24) of the African American students agreed that the teachers at Jefferson treat them with respect (see Table 4.23).

Table 4.23



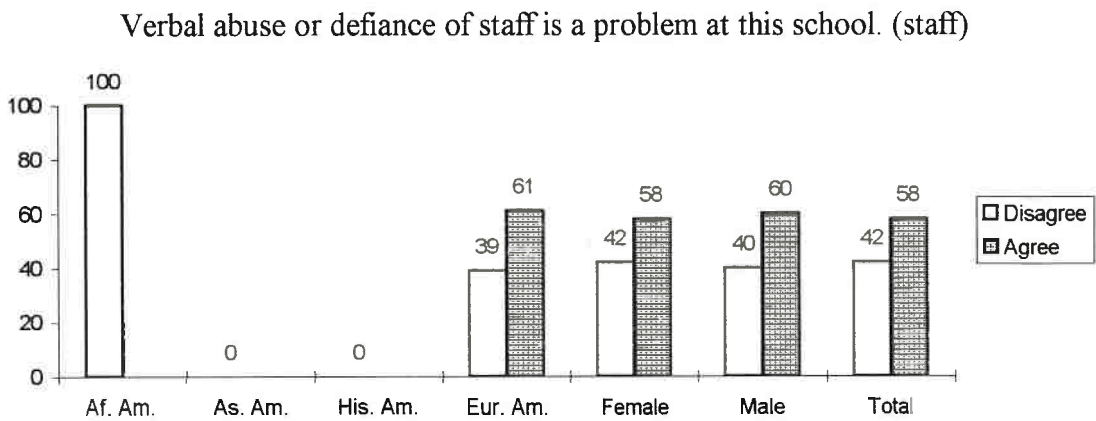
The staff were asked to respond to the statement, “Staff in this school show respect for the students. Ninety four percent of the staff agreed with this statement and 6 percent disagreed. Analysis by gender states that 100 percent (n=2) of the male staff agreed and 93 percent (n=28) of the female staff agreed that staff at Jefferson show respect for the students (see Table 4.24).

Table 4.24



Staff were also asked to respond to the statement, “Verbal abuse or defiance of staff is a problem at this school”. Fifty eight percent of the staff agreed with this statement and 42 percent disagreed. The range presented when analyzed by race indicates that 100 percent (n=2) of the African American staff disagreed and 61 percent (n=20) of the European American staff disagreed that verbal abuse or defiance of staff is a problem at Jefferson (see Table 4.25).

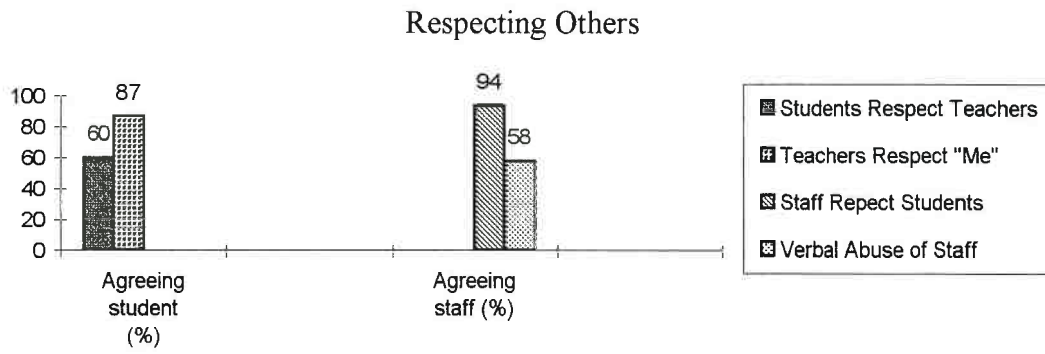
Table 4.25



Summary:

A total of four questions were clustered under the “respecting others” category. Two questions were asked of students and two questions were asked of staff (see Table 4.26)

Table 4.26



## DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter I will summarize, highlight, and discuss the key findings of this research study. Information will be presented on the five topics evaluated in the previous chapter: a) General School Perceptions, b) Race Relations, c) General Interactions, d) Safety at School, and e) Respecting Others. Three levels of recommendations will be made to create the foundation of a Safe School Plan for Jefferson Elementary: a) implementation, b) implementation with further research, and c) further research.

### General School Perceptions

There were two survey questions categorized under “General School Perceptions”. The data indicate staff and students of Jefferson Elementary highly regard their school. One hundred percent of the staff reported that they liked working at Jefferson Elementary and 89 percent of the students reported they were proud to be a student at Jefferson Elementary.

The range of responses by race show Hispanic students on the high end at 97 percent agreeing (or strongly agreeing) with the statement, and African American students at the low end at 82 percent agreeing (or strongly agreeing).

The student responses by gender were close in range. Ninety three percent of the females agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement, “I am proud to be a student at this school” and 85 percent of the males agreed (or strongly agreed).

## Recommendations

The overall school climate is an important component of a Safe School Plan. As indicated through the staff and student responses, Jefferson Elementary is a school where the students generally feel proud to attend and staff like working. Based on these data, I recommend that Jefferson continue to support these perceptions of students and staff.

To assure a positive environment is maintained , it may be helpful to identify and assess the specific components of Jefferson which make-up an environment where 89 percent of the students indicated they felt proud of their school and 100 percent of the staff reported they liked working there. Some of these components may include building up-keep and development, curriculum, extra curricular activities, and parents' and community attitudes of the school.

Jefferson's' positive environment may also be enhanced through a school community night. A recreation night celebrating the community of staff and students at Jefferson could be held at the YWCA or a neighborhood community center. A recreation night may enhance the development of relationships within the school environment. If student and staff continue to support school unity and spirit, the perceptions of Jefferson's overall environment will remain positive. A positive and safe school environment will reduce students' stress and fears regarding their safety at school.

Further investigation is recommended to discover the reason why Hispanic and female students feel prouder of their school than African American and male students. The staff of Jefferson need to know what can be done to improve African American and male students' perceptions of the school.

## Race Relation

“Students of different races get along well in my [this] school” was the index used to evaluate race relations at Jefferson Elementary School. The student and staff responses to this statement were very different.

The survey data indicated 65 percent of the students agreed (or strongly agreed) with this statement and 89 percent of staff agreed (or strongly agreed) with this statement. This indicates a discrepancy between student and staff perceptions of student race relations within Jefferson Elementary.

With regards to gender, the male and female student responses were very similar with 63 percent of male students agreeing (or strongly agreeing) and 68 percent of female students agreeing (or strongly agreeing). There was a larger range between male and female staff with 100 percent of male staff agreeing (or strongly agreeing) and 87 percent of female staff agreeing or strongly agreeing. This indicates the female staffs’ perceptions may be closer than male staff regarding the students’ perceptions of race relations at Jefferson Elementary.

Analysis by race indicated 30 percent of the African American students disagreed (or strongly disagreed) and 40 percent of Hispanic students disagreed (or strongly disagreed) that students of different races get along well at Jefferson Elementary. These data suggest many students, especially the Hispanic students, believe there are problems between the different racial groups.

Staff analysis by race indicates a very different perceptions of student race relations. One hundred percent of the African American staff reported they agreed (or



strongly agreed) that students of different races got along well at Jefferson and 91 percent of the European American staff agreed (or strongly agreed). These findings continue to support staffs' high perception of student race relations at Jefferson Elementary. These findings also clearly display the divergence between staff and student perceptions of race relations.

### Recommendations

According to Safe School Planning, the cultural climate of a school has direct impact on the school's social environment. As indicated through the research findings, there is a discrepancy between student and staff perceptions of race relations at Jefferson Elementary School. The staff and students' perceptions are clearly incongruent. The research findings indicate 40 percent of the Hispanic students disagreed (or strongly disagreed) that students of different races get along well at Jefferson.

The stressors attached to uneasy race relations may be reduced through increased discussion in classroom activities. It is recommended that Jefferson integrate cultural learning into all classrooms. Students could support and/or increase their knowledge regarding the difference and similarity of cultures. For example, during "African American Month" the art teacher could teach students about African art, the gym teacher could play African games with students, the math teacher could hand out word problems about Harriet Tubman or Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and the reading teacher could teach students about famous African American authors. Students may feel more comfortable regarding race relations if the "language" becomes a part of daily classroom learning.

Strong and consistent communication may increase staffs' understanding of student concerns. This could be obtained through a "Student Counsel on Relations". The counsel could function as a channel between students and staff. The students would have an opportunity to freely and confidentially express their concerns to the counsel which would be responsible for passing all information on to staff. The "Student Counsel on Relations" would be a reliable and ongoing outlet for students which may reduce the stress surrounding the issues to race relations.

Race relations may also improve at Jefferson if a festival was held to celebrate diversity among students. A 'Festival of Nations' may give students an opportunity to learn more about the music, food, dance, art, and history of the various ethnic groups represented at Jefferson. If students gain a respect for the differences among them, conflict among races may decline.

Another way to improve race relations may be through a diversity program held by the students. The staff of Jefferson may gain a better understanding of student concerns regarding race relations and students may benefit from problems solving ideas offered during the show.

### General Interactions

There were a total of four questions grouped under the "General Interactions" category. Seventy two percent of the student respondents reported they agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement, "Students at my school are friendly". Ninety percent of the Hispanic American and 83 percent of the Asian American students agreed (or strongly agreed), while only 60 percent of the African American and 64 percent of the

European American students agreed (or strongly agreed). These findings portray a discrepancy in the perceptions of student friendliness when analyzing by race. The Hispanic American and Asian American students indicated that they perceive students at Jefferson are more friendly than the African American and European American students perceive.

The next three questions in the “General Interactions” category focused on distractions from student misbehavior as well as staff effectiveness regarding discipline and keeping order in the classroom. According to the research findings, the student respondents reported that they generally perceive staff as working hard to maintain order in the classrooms (93% agreed or strongly agreed). At the same time, 64% of the students reported they were often kept from doing their work by students who misbehave.

The Asian American and female students had the highest agree (or strongly agree) responses. Eighty three percent of the Asian American students and 70 percent of the female students agreed or strongly agreed that they were often kept from doing their work by students who misbehave. These findings suggest that although the students generally feel their teachers work hard to maintain order in the classroom, there are many students who are kept from doing their work due to student misbehavior.

The final question in the “General Interaction” category pertains to staff effectiveness regarding discipline. Thirty percent of the staff disagreed (or strongly disagreed), while 70 percent agreed (or strongly agreed) that school staff deal effectively with discipline problems.

### Recommendation

The research findings suggest a fair amount of students (72%) perceive other students at Jefferson Elementary to be friendly. This is a positive perception although the 28 percent of students who disagreed (or strongly disagreed) cannot be disregarded.

The facilitation of student friendship groups has been occurring at Jefferson for several years. It is strongly recommended that friendship groups at Jefferson be continued to enhance an environment where students can learn about the qualities of friendship. If students learn how to develop and maintain friendships they will benefit by being able to depend on their friends during good times, as well as stressful moments. Friendship provides people with support and companionship which are vital elements to feeling safe and secure.

Additional research is recommended to examine the large gap between the African American students' and the Hispanic American students' perceptions of school friendliness. The African American students' low response (60% agreed/strongly agreed) compared to the Hispanic American students' high response (90% agreed/strongly agreed) merits further investigation.

The research data imply students perceive their teachers work hard to maintain order in the classroom. Unfortunately, the research also implies many students were kept from doing their work by students who misbehave. It concerning that 30 percent of the staff disagreed (or strongly disagreed) with the statement, "Our school staff deals effectively with discipline problems". Although the students clearly perceive the teachers

work hard to maintain order in the classrooms, a large percentage of students and staff feel the school staff do not deal effectively with discipline problems.

It is recommended that staff evaluate the effectiveness of discipline strategies used in the classrooms. An evaluation may uncover which strategies students' are most responsive to and which strategies are less effective. Although general guidelines are needed to maintain order and safety within the school, discipline strategies should also be tailored to meet the needs of individual students.

### Safe at School

A total of seven questions were grouped under the "Safe at School" category. The first four questions discuss student and staff perceptions of safety at school. Seventy two percent of the student respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) that they felt safe at Jefferson Elementary. Analyzed by gender, 82 percent of females and 64 percent of males agreed (or strongly agreed). The discrepancy between males and females suggest that female students of Jefferson feel more safe than male students.

Seventy two percent of the students also indicated they agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement, "I trust adults to keep me safe". The discrepancy between males and females was also demonstrated with this survey question: Eighty seven percent of female students agreed (or strongly agreed), while 78 percent of male students agreed (or strongly agreed). These data suggest that the male students do not trust adults as much as the females students do to keep them safe.

Eighty nine percent of staff indicated they perceive Jefferson Elementary provides a safe environment for its students. Ninety four percent of staff also reported they feel

safe in their school. This infers that the staff of Jefferson generally perceive the school environment is safe for themselves as well as the students. Contrary to the male student respondents, the male staff generally feel safer at school than the female staff. The male staff also reported stronger agreement with the conviction that Jefferson provides a safe environment for its students.

The next grouping of three questions pertain to alcohol, illegal drug use, and gang activity at Jefferson. The staff and students were both asked to respond to the statement, "Student use of alcohol or illegal drugs is a problem at my [this] school". The responses were quite incongruent. Twenty five percent of student respondents reported they agreed (or strongly agreed) with this statement, while 6 percent of staff respondents reported they agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement. These data imply the staff and students have very different perceptions regarding alcohol and illegal drug use at Jefferson.

Students were also asked to respond to the statement, "Gang activity is a problem at my school". The research findings indicate 44 percent of the students agreed (or strongly agreed) with this statement. These data clearly indicate many students at Jefferson perceive gang activity is present in their school.

### Recommendations

Safe School Planning asserts that if students feel safe in their environment they will be less likely to act out aggressively. The findings in this study indicate 72 percent of students feel safe at Jefferson and 72 percent of students trust adults to keep them safe. At the same time, 94 percent of the staff reported they feel safe at Jefferson and 89 percent of the staff indicated they feel the school provides a safe environment for its

students. These data suggest a discordance between student and staff perceptions of safety at Jefferson. As indicated above, there was also a discrepancy between perceptions of safety reported by male and female respondents (staff and student). The female students reported they feel safer at school than male students.

As reported above, an astonishing 28 percent of the student respondents reported they did not feel safe at school or trust adults to keep them safe. An increase in staff awareness regarding student safety concerns at school is recommended. This may be achieved through a staff school safety committee to focus directly on the needs and concerns of students. An ongoing staff facilitated student group is also recommended to gain ideas from students on how to make Jefferson a safer school. The student safety group could also teach students what to do in an unsafe situation (i.e. offered drugs or bullied). This knowledge may reduce the stress and anxiety of students during frightening and unsafe situation.

Student respondents also perceived gang activity to be a problem at Jefferson with 44 percent agreeing (or strongly agreeing). It is urged that further research be facilitated regarding the actual occurrence of gang activity at Jefferson. It is also recommended that discussions occur with students to teach them the dangers involved in gang activity, what to do if approach by a gang member, and alternatives to gang involvement.

If fear and anxiety is reduced in students they will benefit from an increased sense of comfort and security. Students will not feel they need to become aggressive or withdrawn to protect themselves in a safe environment.

## Respecting Others

A total of four questions were categorized in the “Respecting Others” cluster. These questions pertain to relations between the students, and staff of Jefferson Elementary. The first questions were clustered with a focus on staff respecting students. Eighty seven percent of student respondents reported they agreed (or strongly agreed) that teachers treat them with respect. The African American students responded the lowest with 75 percent agreeing (or strongly agreeing) and the males also responded lower than the females (males 82% and females 92%). Ninety four percent of the staff reported they agreed (or strongly agreed) that staff show respect for the students. These data suggest the students of Jefferson Elementary were generally treated with respect.

The last statements were clustered with a focus on students respecting staff. The students responded to the statement, “Students at my school show respect for the teachers”. Forty percent disagreed (or strongly disagreed). European Americans evenly agreed and disagreed and 72 percent of Hispanic American students agreed (or strongly agreed). This information indicates lack of respect for staff by students may be a problem.

Fifty eighty percent of staff respondents reported they agreed (or strongly agreed) that verbal abuse or defiance of staff is a problem at Jefferson. Analyzed by gender, the male and female staff responses were very congruent. Analysis by race indicates a large discrepancy. One hundred percent of the African American staff disagreed (or strongly disagreed) that verbal abuse or defiance of staff is a problem at Jefferson. On the contrary, 61 percent of European American staff agreed (or strongly agreed) it is a problem.



### Recommendations

Acceptance and mutual respect are the attributes students and staff bring to a school to enable a safe and secure school environment. As indicated above, there is a congruency between staff and student perceptions of respect toward students. The positive interactions which occur between staff and students are encouraged to continue.

Although most of the students at Jefferson feel respected by staff, it is concerning that 25 percent of the African American students reported they disagreed (or strongly disagreed) with the notion that teachers at Jefferson treat them with respect. Discussion between the staff and African American students is encouraged to identify what students' specific concerns are and how the staff could make them feel more respected.

The issue of verbal abuse or defiance of staff is also concern according to the data. Fifty eight percent of the staff agreed (or strongly agreed) that it is a problem. This is supported by the fact that 60 percent of the students reported they agreed (or strongly agreed) that students show respect for teachers. The data clearly indicate that staff and students both perceive a concern regarding student respect for teachers.

An evaluation of discipline strategies used in situations of disrespect and verbal defiance towards teachers is recommended. Specific components of the evaluation could explore the consistency of teachers when implementing a consequences after an incident of disrespect or verbal defiance has occurred. The evaluation could also attempt to identify if the consequences given to students are effective. Do students with consistent patterns of disrespect towards teachers have a behavior plan in place?

## CONCLUSION

I will summarize the key elements which comprise the foundation of a Safe School Plan for Jefferson Elementary in this concluding chapter. The implications for school social work practice will be discussed and the limitations of this study will also be addressed.

### Summary

The three violence prevention strategies examined during the review of literature were zero tolerance, conflict resolution through peer mediation, and safe school planning. The method of safe school planning was chosen as the focus of this research due to its concentration on the overall school environment and climate.

When students feel unsafe or threatened in their environment, it is likely some will act out aggressively to protect themselves. It is also likely some will become withdrawn due to feelings of insecurity, fear, or anxiety. Schools must do more than reduce school violence; schools must create an environment where students feel safe and secure. A safe school environment will reduce stress in students which will allow them to focus their attention on learning instead of keeping safe. This is the goal of Safe School Planning.

This research study examined a specific population of students (third and sixth graders) and staff at Jefferson Elementary School. The students' perceptions of safety at school were analyzed and staff data were used to compare and contrast data trends. The foundation of a Safe School Plan for Jefferson Elementary was established through the key elements identified in this study.

Survey questions were clustered into five different data topics: (a) General School Perceptions, (b) Race Relations, (c) General Interactions, (d) Safety at School, and (e) Respecting Others. Recommendations were suggested for each data topic to form the base of Jefferson Elementary's Safe School Plan.

#### Jefferson Elementary's Safe School Plan

According to the data, eighty nine percent of the student respondents reported they were proud of their school and 100% of the staff respondents reported they liked working at Jefferson. Continued support of Jefferson positive environment is recommended. This may be achieved by identifying the specific components of Jefferson which create such an environment. The staff and students of Jefferson are also encouraged to partake in a community outing to the YWCA or a neighborhood center. A recreational outing may enhance school spirit and unity. A Jefferson recreation night may also support a positive and safe school environment which would reduce students fears and stress regarding their safety at school.

This research study found significant discrepancies between staff and student perceptions of student race relations at Jefferson. It is suggested that staff gain a clearer understanding of students' concerns regarding race relations. This may be achieved through one on one discussions with students or race relation focus groups. A school 'Festival of Nations' and diversity program held by students are also recommended to celebrate and learn about the differences of all races.

A continuum of education regarding different cultures is highly suggest. The stress attached to uneasy race relations may be reduced through increased and ongoing

discussion in the classrooms. A curriculum dedicated to supporting and increasing students knowledge regarding the differences and similarities between races is vital. An overall commitment by ALL school staff is needed to integrate cultural learning at school on an ongoing basis. Student race relations will become stronger through support of the entire school.

The data indicated seventy two percent of the students reported they perceived students at Jefferson to be friendly. The continuation of friendship groups is recommended to further enhance an environment where students can learn about the qualities of friendship. Students will benefit from the support and security of friendships during good times, as well as stressful and frightening moments. Additional research is recommended to examine the large gap between African American students' and Hispanic American students' perceptions of school friendliness. The African American student's concerns merit further investigation.

An evaluation of the effectiveness of discipline strategies used at Jefferson Elementary is also recommended. Although students feel staff work hard to maintain order in the classroom, many students reported they were kept from doing their work by students who misbehave. Though general discipline guidelines are need to maintain order and safety, strategies should also be tailored to meet the needs of individual students.

Staff and student perceptions of safety at school were very different according to the data. Eighty nine percent of the staff reported they feel Jefferson provides a safe environment for the students and 72 percent of the students reported they feel safe at school. An increase in staff awareness regarding student safety concerns is recommended.

This may be obtained through a staff safety committee focusing on the needs and concerns of students. A student safety group could also offer staff ideas on how to make Jefferson a safer place and provide an environment for students to learn what to do in unsafe situations (ie. approached by a gang member, offered drugs, or bullied). If students have an plan of action developed, their stress and anxiety may be reduced during an unsafe situation.

The students of Jefferson reported they feel generally respected by staff. These positive interactions are encouraged to continue. Further research is recommended regarding the high percentage (25%) of African American students who feel they were not respected by the staff. Discussion between African American students and staff is suggested to identify the specific concerns and how staff could make them feel more respected.

Verbal abuse and disrespect of staff is also a concern according to the data. An evaluation of discipline strategies used in situations of disrespect and verbal defiance is recommended. Once these questions are answered, an intervention strategy to increase student respect for teachers can be implemented.

The above recommendations are the framework of Jefferson Elementary's Safe School Plan. The overall goal of Safe School Planing is to reduce students' fears, stress, and anxiety at school so they can devote their attention to learning. A commitment by the entire school (staff, students, parents, community members) is essential to create and maintain an environment where students can feel safe and secure.

## Limitations

The main limitation in this research study is that existing data was utilized. I had no input on the survey questions asked of the students and staff of Jefferson Elementary. This limitation confined me to a extremely broad range of questions asked in the student and staff surveys. As a result, this research study provides the reader with more questions than answers. On a positive note, the reader and Jefferson Elementary are also provided with many areas which merit further investigation regarding the student environment at Jefferson Elementary School. This study provides a solid foundation of planning and direction for further research.

The small sample size of male staff at Jefferson is also a limitation in this research study. Nineteen percent (n=22) of the staff at Jefferson Elementary were male. Fourteen percent (n=5) of the respondents in this research study were male. The small male sample size needs to be taken into account when considering staff and student analysis.

Another limitation is that this study does not access the valuable opinions of community members and students' parents. These opinions would help identify key areas which need to be addressed in Jefferson Elementary's Safe School Plan. In the creation of a successful safe school plan, the support of community members and parents is vital.

## Implications for School Social Work Practice

This research study provides school social workers with a model of an emerging violence prevention program: Safe School Planning. The Safe School Planning model, which devotes attention to the school's overall environment and climate, provides students with safety and security which allows them to focus their attention on academics.

During the needs assessment facilitated in this research study, some discrepancies were found between students and staff perceptions of the school environment. In this situation, the role of the school social worker may be to provide a bridging of ideas and perceptions between students and staff. The school staff will be better prepared to meet the needs of students academically and emotionally if they possess a clear understanding of how students perceive their school environment. Intervention strategies will also be more effective if students needs are thoroughly understood.

Another implication for school social work practice is in the area of service delivery for students. The data suggest further research is needed in some areas studied before intervention strategies can be implemented. Staff and student groups, as well as one on one discussions between students and staff are recommended in the Safe School Plan.

The process of creating appropriate interventions and services for students requires a clear and focused assessment by the school social worker and a committee of staff. Safe School Plans cannot be implemented solely by the school social work staff. A commitment by the entire school is required to create and maintain an environment where students feel safe and secure.

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## APPENDIX A

0	0	0
1	1	1
2	2	2
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4	4	4
5	5	5
6	6	6
7	7	7
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9	9	9

# MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## Elementary Student Opinion Survey 1995-96

Please use a #2 pencil and fill in the bubble completely.

Please tell us about yourself:

Your sex:     Male     Female

Your grade:     3     6

Your racial/ethnic group:

American Indian     African American     Asian American     Hispanic American     White American

I ride the bus to and from school:     Yes     No

SD - Strongly Disagree with the statement  
 D - Disagree with the statement, but not strongly  
 A - Agree with the statement, but not strongly  
 SA - Strongly Agree with the statement

	SD	D	A	SA
I am proud to be a student at this school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students at my school are friendly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My teachers work hard to keep order in the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am often kept from doing my work by students who misbehave.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel safe in my school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I trust adults in my school to keep me safe.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student use of alcohol or illegal drugs is a problem at my school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gang activity is a problem at my school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel safe on the way to and from school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel I travel a long distance to school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students of different races get along well in my school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students of different races work well together in my school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students in my school show respect for the teachers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The teachers in my school treat me with respect.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My parents usually make sure I do my homework.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My teachers try to make their classes interesting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am learning a lot in my school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My teachers challenge me to really think.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My teachers care about how much I am learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
At my school, the rules are enforced fairly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My teachers are always well prepared for class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
At my school, students often tease each other in a mean way.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special question A:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special question B:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special question C:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special question D:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special question E:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## APPENDIX B

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9
10	11	12
13	14	15
16	17	18
19	20	21
22	23	24
25	26	27
28	29	30

# MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## Staff Survey 1995-96

Side 1

Please use a #2 pencil and fill in the bubble completely.

- SD - Strongly Disagree with the statement
- D - Disagree with the statement, but not strongly
- A - Agree with the statement, but not strongly
- SA - Strongly Agree with the statement

	SD	D	A	SA
<b>CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION</b>				
My instruction accommodates the diversity of culture.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When I plan curriculum for my students, I use:				
networking with colleagues in my field.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
district exit and supportive outcomes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
district subject area goals and objectives.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
research on current trends within subject-area disciplines.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
affective student outcomes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
standardized test results.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
multi-cultural, gender-fair, disability-aware resources.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I teach in a way that meets the individual needs of students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel able to deliver the curriculum in a way that is inclusive of all learners.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have a repertoire of instructional strategies to:				
adapt my instruction based on individual student cognitive and social needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
design appropriate interventions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
develop positive attitudes about learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The curriculum I teach:				
helps prepare my students adequately for post-secondary education or employment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
is appropriately challenging for all students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
meets the needs of my diverse students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I use strategies designed to reduce the gap in performance between high and low achieving students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I assess my effectiveness as a teacher by working with a colleague in a coaching relationship.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>TANDARDS AND SUPPORT</b>				
I understand the District's curriculum content standards.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I support the District's curriculum content standards.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I use the District's curriculum content standards.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have the support I need to teach the curriculum content standards.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am satisfied with the level of services I receive from the District's Central office.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am satisfied with the quality of services I receive from the District's Central office.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

# MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## Staff Survey 1995-96

Side 2

Please use a #2 pencil and fill in the bubble completely.

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

What is your position?  classroom teacher  other staff  
 What grade levels represent the students with whom you do most of your work?  
 Check only one.  K-3  4-6  7-8  9-12

How long have you been a teacher?  0-3 years  4 or more years

What is your gender?  Female  Male

With what racial/ethnic group do you most closely identify?  
 American Indian  African American  Asian American  Hispanic American  White American  
 I am willing to have my responses reported by racial/ethnic group or gender, even if I am the only one in the group. I am aware that this could cause my responses to be singled out.  Yes  No

SD - Strongly Disagree with the statement  
 D - Disagree with the statement, but not strongly  
 A - Agree with the statement, but not strongly  
 SA - Strongly Agree with the statement

**FAMILY/COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

	SD	D	A	SA
I am satisfied with the amount of direct involvement of families in the education of their children in this school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I assess my effectiveness as a teacher by regularly using parent/guardian feedback.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My instruction includes opportunities for students to provide service to people in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am satisfied with the amount of support that parents give to this school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am satisfied with the amount of contact I have with the families of my students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**SCHOOL CLIMATE**

Staff in this school work well together.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students of different races get along well in this school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication within my school is open and honest.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff in this school show respect for the students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students' use of alcohol or illegal drugs is a problem at this school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am satisfied overall with the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like working at this school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
School staff work well together to solve problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Verbal abuse or defiance of staff is a problem at this school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our school leadership team is inclusive of all groups in our school community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
This school's mission/vision reflects what I believe the school should become.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am satisfied overall with the way that decisions are made at this school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel safe in my school building.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our school staff deals effectively with discipline problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
This school provides a safe environment for its students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Special question A:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special question B:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special question C:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special question D:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special question E:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## APPENDIX C





## RESEARCH, EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

807 Northeast Broadway  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55413-2398  
(612) 627-2195  
FAX: (612) 627-2277

An equal opportunity school district

November 13, 1996

Jody Kirchner  
3050 Sumter Ave. N. #210  
Crystal MN 55427

Dear Jody,

The Minneapolis Public School District's research staff has reviewed your proposal, "A 'Safe School' Plan for Jefferson Elementary."

It is my privilege to inform you that we have approved your research project. You may use this letter as confirmation of the fact that we have approved your work, and that you are thereby authorized to proceed, as outlined in your research proposal.

We wish you the best in your endeavor. We believe that your research will benefit the Minneapolis Public Schools staff and students, and we eagerly await the results.

Sincerely,

William L. Brown, Director  
Research, Evaluation & Assessment

CC: Executive Director, PASS

**NOTICE:** The Board of Education **has not** granted blanket authority for the release of directory information to researchers. Directory information is defined by U. S. C. Title 20 Section 1232g, to include "the student's name, address, telephone listing, date and place of birth, major field of study, participation in officially recognized activities and sports, weight and height of members of athletic teams, dates of attendance, degrees and awards received, and the most recent previous educational agency or institution attended by the student." Requests for such information must be made to me or to Dennis Lander of the MPS Student Accounting Office, 807 NE Broadway, Minneapolis, MN 55413. We will take the steps required to obtain approval from the Minneapolis Public Schools Board of Education to release to you information needed to carry out your research.

## APPENDIX D

AUGSBURG



C • O • L • L • E • G • E

October 17, 1997

TO: Jody A. Kirchner  
3050 Sumter Ave. N. # 210  
Crystal MN 55427

FROM: Rita R. Weisbrod, Ph.D.  
Chair  
Institutional Review Board  
612-330-1227 or FAX 330-1649  
E-mail: weisbrod@augsborg.edu

RE: Your recent IRB application: "A Safe School Plan for Jefferson Elementary"

Your application qualifies under category 4 as exempt from full board review. Hence, I have reviewed it personally and approve it with these conditions at this time:

1. You must submit your phase two plan, as indicated, following the completion of your records review and needs assessment (phase one). You will need to enclose your key informant questionnaire or interview guide and a recruitment script or cover letter/consent form for it.
2. You must submit a letter of approval from the Minneapolis Public Schools for your project.

Your Augsburg IRB approval number is 96-10-1.  
This number will change for the second phase of your project.

If there are substantive changes to your project which change your procedures regarding the use of human subjects, you should report them to me by phone or in writing so that they may be reviewed for possible increased risk.

I wish you well in your project!

Copy: Michael Schock, Thesis Advisor

