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### Title

Perceptions of School Climate Shape Adolescent Health Behavior: A Longitudinal Multischool Study

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1bx0t7kk>

### Journal

Journal of School Health, 93(6)

### ISSN

0022-4391

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### Publication Date

2023-06-01

### DOI

10.1111/josh.13274

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Peer reviewed

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1 **TITLE: PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE SHAPE ADOLESCENT HEALTH**

2 **BEHAVIOR: A LONGITUDINAL MULTI-SCHOOL STUDY**

3 **RUNNING TITLE: SCHOOL CLIMATE AND HEALTH BEHAVIORS**

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18 **Acknowledgements**

19 This work was supported by the National Institutes of Health (R01DA033362) and the Health

20 Resources and Services Administration (UA6MC32492). The funders had no role in the study's

21 design, data collection, analysis, interpretation of the data, writing of the manuscript, or decision to

22 submit the article for publication. Furthermore, we would like to thank past and present members of

23 the RISE Up study team and Los Angeles school partners who have made this work possible.

1 **Word Count:** Abstract 212/200      Manuscript 4,000/4,000      Figures & Tables 4/5

# 1 School Climate and Adolescent Behaviors

## 1 ABSTRACT

2 **Background:** Adolescent behaviors and academic outcomes are thought to be shaped by school  
3 climate. We sought to identify longitudinal associations between school climate measures and  
4 downstream health and academic outcomes.

5 **Methods:** Data from a longitudinal survey of public high school students in Los Angeles were  
6 analyzed. Eleventh grade health and academic outcomes (dependent variables, e.g., substance use,  
7 delinquency, risky sex, bullying, standardized exams, college matriculation), were modeled as a  
8 function of 10<sup>th</sup> grade school climate measures (independent variables: institutional environment,  
9 student-teacher relationships, disciplinary style), controlling for baseline outcome measures and  
10 student/parental covariates.

11 **Results:** The 1114 student respondents (87.8% retention), were 46% male, 90% Latinx, 87% born in  
12 the USA, and 40% native English speakers. Greater school order and teacher respect for students  
13 were associated with lower odds of multiple high risk behaviors including 30-day alcohol use (OR  
14 0.81 95%CI [0.72, 0.92] and OR 0.73 [0.62, 0.85]) and 30-day cannabis use (OR 0.74 [0.59, 0.91]  
15 and OR 0.76 [0.63, 0.92]). Neglectful disciplinary style was associated with multiple poor health and  
16 academic outcomes while permissive disciplinary style was associated with favorable academic  
17 outcomes.

18 **Implications for School Health Policy, Practice, and Equity:** School health practitioners may  
19 prospectively leverage school environment, teacher-student relationships, and disciplinary style to  
20 promote health and learning.

1 **Conclusions:** Our findings identify specific modifiable aspects of the school environment with  
2 critical implications for life course health.

3 **Keywords:** school climate, adolescent health, substance use, cannabis, risk-taking, bullying,  
4 educational measurement, longitudinal studies.

5

# 1 School Climate and Adolescent Behaviors

1 Adolescence is a critical period of development marked by the formation of self-concept and  
2 identity, independence from parental guidance, and growth in cognitive and socioemotional skills  
3 such as empathy, resilience, and creativity.<sup>1</sup> However, some adolescents also begin to engage in  
4 risky behaviors, such as use of tobacco, cannabis, alcohol and other substances.<sup>2-4</sup> These behaviors  
5 are significant, as they can negatively influence this important developmental period and contribute to  
6 a vicious cycle whereby risky behaviors interfere with school engagement and academic performance  
7 and vice versa. This negative feedback loop is suggested by Richard Jessor's Theory of Problem  
8 Behavior,<sup>5,6</sup> which proposes that school climate, including the social environment of peers,  
9 contributes to adverse adolescent behaviors and outcomes including school disengagement, risky  
10 behaviors, and academic failure. These adolescent behaviors in turn influence the school climate, as  
11 when groups of students normalize delinquent behaviors, undermining academic engagement more  
12 broadly. This vicious cycle in adolescence can have significant downstream effects in adulthood,  
13 potentially affecting educational and socioeconomic opportunities as well as overall health  
14 outcomes.<sup>7,8</sup>

15 While Jessor's theory suggests reciprocal effects between a negative school climate and  
16 adolescent risky behaviors, it may also suggest that a positive school climate could create a virtuous  
17 cycle of improved academic success, greater school engagement, academically and prosocially  
18 supportive peers, and better academic and behavioral outcomes among teens.<sup>9-11</sup> This is supported by  
19 prior literature which has shown that positive school climate is linked to better academic  
20 performance,<sup>12</sup> student wellbeing, and school engagement, and lower rates of problem behaviors such  
21 as disruptive, antisocial, violent, bullying, or delinquent behavior.<sup>13-15</sup> Although there is no  
22 standardized measure of school climate, there are several domains which have been used to  
23 characterize school climate and show predictive potential,<sup>16</sup> among them: the institutional

1 environment (e.g., school chaos/order, safety),<sup>17,18</sup> student-teacher relationships (e.g., teacher respect  
2 for students, teacher support of college),<sup>19-21</sup> and disciplinary styles.<sup>22</sup> However, prior studies have  
3 primarily only examined a limited set of school climate variables and adolescent risky behaviors and  
4 most have been limited to cross-sectional designs.<sup>12,23,24</sup> As a result, it is still unknown which aspects  
5 of school climate might be targeted to improve specific academic or health outcomes.

6 The present study sought to identify and compare associations between school climate measures  
7 across multiple domains and multiple downstream health and academic outcomes longitudinally. We  
8 examined data from an on-going longitudinal natural experiment (the RISE-UP - Reducing Health  
9 Inequalities through Social and Educational Change Follow Up - Study), which has followed a cohort  
10 of mostly Latinx students starting at the beginning of 9<sup>th</sup> grade through age 23 currently.

11 Racial/ethnic and socioeconomic disparities exist in youth outcomes and comparative studies suggest  
12 that ethnicity may influence perception of school climate.<sup>16,25-27</sup> Furthermore, within the Latinx  
13 experience there exists a diversity of national and indigenous heritages, degrees of acculturation and  
14 integration, and immigration stories. While ethnicity was not the focus of this analysis, we believe  
15 study of this predominantly Latinx population makes a valuable contribution to the extant literature.

16 Additionally, RISE-UP examined a range of school climate characteristics, including school safety  
17 and order, student-teacher relationships and support, and disciplinary style. We examined a variety of  
18 different adolescent behaviors (alcohol and cannabis use, alcohol and cannabis misuse, delinquent  
19 behaviors, violence, high-risk sexual behaviors, bullying), and academic outcomes (truancy,  
20 changing schools, grades, standardized test scores, and matriculation into a 4-year college), so as to  
21 permit a more holistic analysis that incorporates health and behavior with cognitive development.

## 22 **METHODS**

# 1 **School Climate and Adolescent Behaviors**

## 1 **Participants**

2           This is a secondary analysis of data from the RISE-UP (Reducing Health Inequalities through  
3 Social and Educational Change Follow Up) study, a longitudinal natural experiment designed to  
4 assess the effects of high-performing high schools on health behaviors among low-income, minority  
5 adolescents in Los Angeles. Five high-performing charter high schools were selected based on: (1)  
6 enrollment of predominantly economically disadvantaged students (i.e., qualifying for free or  
7 reduced lunch), (2) academic performance in the top tertile of public schools in Los Angeles County  
8 based on 2012 Academic Performance Index derived from standardized test scores, and (3) use of an  
9 admissions lottery. Eighth grade students who were applying for 9<sup>th</sup> grade admission into high school  
10 were randomly sampled from the admissions lottery list of “winners” and “losers” during two  
11 consecutive years in the spring before entry into high school (spring 2013 and 2014). To be eligible,  
12 students had to speak English or Spanish fluently and reside in Los Angeles County. Of 1509  
13 eligible students, 1270 were enrolled and consented to participate in the study (16% refusal rate).  
14 Further details of the original study are published elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> The institutional review board of the  
15 RAND Corporation and the University of California Los Angeles approved this study. Written  
16 parental consent and student assent were obtained from all participants.

## 17 **Procedure**

18           Participants completed a baseline, face-to-face, computer-assisted survey from March of 8<sup>th</sup>  
19 grade through November of 9<sup>th</sup> (baseline 9<sup>th</sup> grade survey). Similar follow-up surveys were conducted  
20 in the spring semester of 10<sup>th</sup> grade and 11<sup>th</sup> grade (2015 to 2017). Interviews were conducted in the  
21 patient’s primary language with the aid of bilingual research assistants and in a sufficiently private  
22 location of the participant’s choice. A computer-assisted self-interview was used to minimize social  
23 desirability bias for potentially sensitive topics related to substance use and sexual and delinquent



1 behaviors.<sup>28-30</sup> A total of 1159 students completed the survey in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and 1114 students  
2 completed the survey in 11<sup>th</sup> grade for an 87.8% retention rate through 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

### 3 **Instrumentation**

4 *Adolescent behaviors and academic outcomes.* At each survey, students reported their  
5 frequency of alcohol and cannabis use in the last 30 days,<sup>31</sup> dichotomized (*no use vs any use*).  
6 Students also completed an alcohol misuse scale<sup>32</sup> and a cannabis misuse scale (alpha = 0.85), which  
7 assessed high risk substance use behaviors (use of alcohol/cannabis on school property, using by  
8 oneself, binge use) and its negative consequences (blacking out, missing school, regret, getting into  
9 trouble at school, getting into trouble at home, and poor concentration). Scale items were  
10 dichotomized (*endorsed vs not*) and summed to produce a total score with higher scores representing  
11 greater misuse characteristics. Students reported on delinquent behaviors that are associated with  
12 negative life outcomes using the delinquent behavior index from the National Longitudinal Study of  
13 Adolescent to Adult Health<sup>33</sup> and included: painting graffiti, damaging someone else's property,  
14 shoplifting or stealing, running away from home, driving a car without the owner's permission,  
15 burglary, armed robbery, selling illicit drugs, participation in a gang in the last year, and having ever  
16 participated in a gang fight. The score was dichotomized (*zero vs one or more behaviors*). Students  
17 were asked if they carried a weapon such as a real gun or knife in the last 30 days and if they had  
18 been in a physical fight in the last 12 months. These questions were combined into one dichotomous  
19 variable of any of the two behaviors (*none vs one or both behaviors*). Students responded to several  
20 questions about high-risk sex behaviors including not using contraception, ever becoming pregnant,  
21 and having multiple sexual partners (*none vs one or more high risk sex behaviors*). Students also  
22 answered two questions about bullying at school in the last 12 months, which were dichotomized: 1)

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1 whether someone had bullied or picked on them (*none vs. any*) and 2) whether they themselves had  
2 bullied or picked on someone (*none vs. any*).

3 We also collected information on several academic outcomes. For truancy, students reported  
4 if they had cut or skipped classes in the last 12 months, dichotomized (*never vs one or more times*).  
5 Students also responded whether they transferred to another school for any reason in the last  
6 academic year, dichotomized (*never vs one or more times*). We obtained student grade point average  
7 (GPA) from official school transcript records (1091 out of 1270 students from baseline sample). We  
8 used self-reported GPA when we could not obtain school transcripts (163 of 179 with missing  
9 transcripts). We obtained standardized test scores for each student for 8<sup>th</sup> grade and 11<sup>th</sup> grade from  
10 the California Department of Education. Math and English proficiency were determined by the  
11 California Standardized Testing and Reporting Program (8<sup>th</sup> grade) and the California Assessment of  
12 Student Performance and Progress (11<sup>th</sup> grade). We compared those who failed to meet 11<sup>th</sup> grade  
13 standard versus those who were proficient or above. We obtained data on college matriculation into a  
14 4-year college from the National Student Clearinghouse, a nonprofit organization providing  
15 enrollment and degree-verification services to colleges and universities. These data were obtained on  
16 10/30/2019 corresponding to about 1.5-2.5 years after the end of 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

17 ***Perception of school climate.*** In the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade surveys, students were asked about  
18 several aspects of their school environment. These school climate measures are not comprehensive  
19 but chosen to represent a diversity of school climate domains. School order refers to the amount of  
20 confusion and chaos in the classroom<sup>34</sup> and was assessed using a scale based on the Confusion,  
21 Hubbub, and Order Scale developed by Matheny and colleagues.<sup>35</sup> We analyzed the measure as  
22 school order, the inverse of school chaos, so that higher scores indicated a more positive school

1 climate (Cronbach alpha = 0.68, 9 items, range 1-4). School safety was assessed using the Chicago  
2 Consortium on School Research Student Perceptions of Safety Scale, a 4-item measure of self-  
3 reported safety in and around school (Cronbach alpha = 0.63 range, 0-3, with higher scores indicating  
4 greater perceived school safety).<sup>36</sup>

5         Using a modified questionnaire from the annual survey of Chicago public schools<sup>37</sup> students  
6 reported perceptions of teacher-student relationships on a four point scale from strongly disagree to  
7 strongly agree. We simply summated the responses to three questions (“my teachers always try to be  
8 fair”, “when my teachers tell me to do something, I know he/she has a good reason”, “my teachers  
9 treat me with respect”) into a single variable representing perceived teacher respect for students  
10 (Cronbach alpha = 0.72, higher scores indicating greater perceived teacher respect for students). We  
11 combined three additional questions (“teachers at this school help students plan for college outside of  
12 class time,” “teachers expect most students in this school to go to college,” and “teachers in this  
13 school feel that it is a part of their job to prepare students to succeed in college”) into a second  
14 variable representing teacher support for college (Cronbach alpha = 0.72, higher scores indicating  
15 greater perceived support for college).

16         School disciplinary style was assessed according to student ratings of school support and  
17 structure as previously described.<sup>22</sup> These two rating scales were categorized into tertiles, and then  
18 combined to create a single perceived school disciplinary style variable with five categories:  
19 authoritative (highest tertile for both support and structure), authoritarian (lowest tertile for support,  
20 highest tertile for structure), permissive (highest tertile for support, lowest tertile for structure),  
21 neglectful (lowest tertile in support and structure), and average (remainder of the sample).

## 1 **School Climate and Adolescent Behaviors**

1 *Covariates.* At the beginning of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, students reported information on their personal  
2 demographics: gender (*male vs not*), Latinx ethnicity (*Latinx vs not*), birthplace (*USA born vs not*),  
3 native language (*English vs not*), as well as parental characteristics: birthplace (*one or more parents*  
4 *born in USA vs not*), employment (*one or more parents employed full-time vs not*), level of education  
5 (*one or more parents graduated from high school vs not*) and their parent's parenting style (*normal,*  
6 *authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, neglectful*).<sup>38,39</sup> We use this measure of parenting style as a  
7 gross approximation for potential parental behavioral confounders, understanding that parenting  
8 effects may be moderated by child-, environment-, and culture-specific factors which make validation  
9 of this scale in diverse populations challenging.<sup>40</sup>

## 10 **Data Analysis**

11 We conducted linear and logistic regression analyses to examine the relationship between  
12 each school climate variable and each adolescent health, behavioral, and academic outcome  
13 separately. For these analyses, the continuous school climate variables (school order, school safety,  
14 teacher respect and teacher support for college) were standardized so that a 1-point change in each  
15 scale equaled one standard deviation. All models were adjusted for student gender, Latinx ethnicity,  
16 USA birthplace, native English language, parental birthplace, parental employment, parental  
17 education and parenting style. In each model, we also controlled for the outcome measures at  
18 baseline (end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade/beginning of 9<sup>th</sup> grade). For models examining GPA and standardized test  
19 scores, we controlled for these outcomes from middle school. All models used generalized  
20 estimating equations with a random effect for school to adjust for clustering of outcomes at the  
21 school-level. The analyses were restricted to the sample of respondents who completed baseline, 10<sup>th</sup>  
22 grade and 11<sup>th</sup> grade surveys. Among this analytic sample, values were missing for 2.3% or less of  
23 the sample for any single measure. 5.1% of the sample were missing data for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade

1 standardized test scores, 11.7% were missing 11<sup>th</sup> grade standardized test scores, 2.3% were missing  
2 transcript and self-reported GPA from middle school, and 0.3% were missing transcript and self-  
3 reported GPA from high school. Missing values were multiply imputed using 100 replicates so as to  
4 maximize the use of available data across a large number of variables. Sensitivity analyses using  
5 listwise deletion produced similar results. STATA 14.0 (College Station, TX) was used for all  
6 analyses.

## 7 **RESULTS**

8         The original RISE-Up sample was comprised of 1270 students at baseline (9<sup>th</sup> grade), 91%  
9 (1159) of whom completed the 10<sup>th</sup> grade survey. This study was limited to the 1114 students (88%)  
10 who completed the baseline through 11<sup>th</sup> grade surveys. Table 1 summarizes student and parental  
11 demographic characteristics. Just under half of the sample were males (46%), 90% were Latinx, 87%  
12 were born in the USA, and 40% were native English speakers. One-quarter of students reported  
13 having at least one parent born in the USA, 89% had one or more parent working full-time, and 52%  
14 had one or more parents graduate from high school. Compared to those in the analytic sample,  
15 subjects who were lost to follow up before the 11<sup>th</sup> grade survey were more likely to be male (55% vs  
16 46%,  $p=0.04$ ), white (18% v 10%  $p=0.002$ ), native English speaker (49% vs. 40%,  $p=0.02$ ), and have  
17 at least 1 parent born in the USA (36% vs 25%,  $p=0.003$ ). Those who were lost to follow up were  
18 less likely to have at least 1 parent working full-time (81% vs 88%,  $p=0.02$ ). There were no  
19 differences between the analytic sample and those lost to follow-up in parental education, birth in the  
20 USA, and parenting style.

21         ***Prevalence of outcomes.*** A minority of the sample reported engaging in risky behaviors  
22 (Table 2). At 11<sup>th</sup> grade, 15% reported using alcohol and 11% reported using cannabis in the last 30  
23 days. One-fifth (22%) reported engaging in one or more alcohol misuse behaviors in the past year,

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1 such as drinking alcohol at school, getting into trouble because of alcohol, or missing school because  
2 of alcohol use (mean score 1.02, SD 2.72). Sixteen percent reported engaging in similar cannabis  
3 misuse behaviors (mean score 0.67, SD 2.22). One-fifth (22%) of the sample also reported engaging  
4 in one or more delinquent behaviors in the last year such as stealing, graffiti, selling drugs or being in  
5 a gang. One in eight students (13%) reported either carrying a weapon in the last 30 days or being in  
6 a physical fight in the last 12 months. Approximately 9% of students reported engaging in high-risk  
7 sex. Nearly one in five (19%) reported being the victim of bullying and 15% reported bullying others  
8 in the last 12 months.

9       Among respondents, 22% of students reported being truant. From the start of 9<sup>th</sup> grade to the  
10 time of 11<sup>th</sup> grade survey, 23% of students reported changing schools at least once. Mean high  
11 school GPA was 2.83 (SD 0.68), 35% and 71% of students were proficient in Math and English on  
12 11<sup>th</sup> grade standardized tests respectively, and 43% matriculated at a 4-year college after high school.

13       *Associations between school climate and adolescent health and behaviors.* After controlling  
14 for baseline (9<sup>th</sup> grade) variables including student covariates, parental covariates, and the relevant  
15 outcome measure, perceived elements of school climate at 10<sup>th</sup> grade were associated with health and  
16 behavioral outcomes reported in 11<sup>th</sup> grade (Table 3). Greater perceived school order was associated  
17 with lower odds of 30-day alcohol and cannabis use (OR 0.81 95%CI [0.72, 0.92] and OR 0.74 [0.59,  
18 0.91], respectively), lower scores on both alcohol and cannabis misuse scales ( $\beta$  -0.22 [-0.44, 0] and  $\beta$   
19 -0.23 [-0.39, -0.07], respectively), and lower odds of reporting a delinquent behavior (OR 0.79 [0.68,  
20 0.93]), high risk sex (OR 0.65 [0.54, 0.78]), being a victim of bullying (OR 0.8 [0.71, 0.9]), and  
21 bullying others (0.79 [0.68, 0.91]). Greater perceived school safety was associated with lower odds of

1 being a victim of bullying (OR 0.79 [0.70, 0.89]) as well as bullying others (OR 0.76 [0.67, 0.87]),  
2 but none of the other risky behaviors.

3 In regard to student-teacher relationships, teacher respect for students was protective for 30-  
4 day alcohol use (OR 0.73 [0.62, 0.85], 30-day cannabis use (OR 0.76 [0.63, 0.92]), alcohol misuse ( $\beta$   
5 -0.34 [-0.54, -0.15]), cannabis misuse ( $\beta$  -0.23 [-0.35, -0.12]), delinquent behaviors (OR 0.75 [0.64,  
6 0.88]), violence (OR 0.85 [0.73, 0.99]), high risk sex (OR 0.80 [0.66, 0.97]), and bullying others (OR  
7 0.82 [0.69, 0.97]). Perceived teacher support for college was protective for 30-day alcohol use (OR  
8 0.82 [0.70, 0.97]) and alcohol and cannabis misuse ( $\beta$  -0.24 [-0.43, -0.05] and  $\beta$  -0.22 [-0.43, -0.02],  
9 respectively).

10 Associations with school disciplinary style used the average category as reference. The  
11 authoritative style (high support and structure) was protective against reporting delinquent behaviors  
12 (OR 0.62 [0.39, 1.00]) and being a victim of bullying (OR 0.62 [0.42, 0.93]). In contrast, the  
13 authoritarian style (low support, high structure) was a strong risk factor for 30-day cannabis use (OR  
14 3.26 [1.63, 6.52]). The permissive disciplinary style was not significantly associated with any health  
15 or behavioral outcomes but was positively associated with some academic outcomes (see below).  
16 Finally, the neglectful style was a risk factor for 30-day cannabis use (OR 2.71 [1.79, 4.12]), alcohol  
17 misuse ( $\beta$  0.43 [0.01, 0.85]), cannabis misuse ( $\beta$  0.47 [0.16, 0.77]), delinquent behaviors (OR 1.99  
18 [1.34, 2.97]), and high risk sex (OR 1.75 [1.09, 2.81]).

19 ***Association between school climate and adolescent academic outcomes.*** Perceived school  
20 climate variables were also associated with academic outcomes (Table 4). Greater school order was  
21 associated with lower odds of truancy (OR 0.72 [0.61, 0.86]) and greater odds of matriculating in a 4-  
22 year college (1.14 [1.00, 1.31]). Greater perceived school safety was associated with lower odds of

## 1 **School Climate and Adolescent Behaviors**

1 truancy (OR 0.83 [0.72, 0.96]). Teacher respect for students was associated with lower odds of  
2 truancy (OR 0.84 [0.72, 0.99]), as well as slightly higher GPA ( $\beta$  0.03 [0, 0.06]) and greater odds of  
3 Math and English proficiency (OR 1.16 [1.02, 1.31], OR 1.19 [1.04, 1.37], respectively). Perceived  
4 school disciplinary style was also associated with academic outcomes. Authoritative disciplinary  
5 style was associated with lower truancy (OR 0.67 [0.46, 0.97]). Permissive style was associated with  
6 lower odds of truancy (OR 0.43 [0.23, 0.82]), higher GPA ( $\beta$  0.24 [0.11, 0.36]), higher odds of  
7 English proficiency (OR 2.86 [1.12, 7.33]), and greater odds of matriculation in a 4-year college (OR  
8 3.31 [1.38, 7.96]). Neglectful disciplinary style was associated with increased truancy (OR 1.75  
9 [1.23, 2.49]), increased odds of changing schools (OR 1.29 [1.04, 1.61]) and lower GPA ( $\beta$  -0.08 [-  
10 0.15, -0.01]).

## 11 **DISCUSSION**

12 In the process of displacing millions of adolescents from school settings across the nation and  
13 the world, SARS-CoV-2 has reminded parents and policymakers alike of the irreplaceable role  
14 schools have in adolescent growth and health. It has also reinvigorated interest in the importance of  
15 the social climate that each school cultivates. These findings add longitudinal evidence that student-  
16 reported metrics of school climate – including an orderly environment, teacher-student relationships,  
17 and disciplinary style – are important upstream predictors of both health and academic outcomes in  
18 subsequent years. Departing from the current literature that tends to isolate one or two school climate  
19 variables and outcomes, this analysis took a comprehensive approach in analyzing the longitudinal  
20 relationship between multiple school climate variables and an array of both health and academic  
21 outcomes. This permits a more holistic analysis that better captures the effect of a multifaceted  
22 school climate not just on cognitive development but also on health and behavioral development.



1           The findings support some widely held beliefs about school climate and challenge others.  
2 While perceptions of school order and teacher respect for students were protective for nearly all risky  
3 behaviors, perceptions of safety were surprisingly only associated with less bullying. This supports  
4 some researchers' assertion that, except in the case of bullying, school safety is only inconsistently  
5 protective for many outcomes.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, perceptions of order and teacher respect for students was  
6 beneficial for a number of academic outcomes. Yet surprisingly, teacher support for college was not  
7 linked to any of our objective academic outcomes. Other authors have attributed such divergences to  
8 variations in measurement,<sup>13</sup> however, as yet unidentified modifiers such as cultural norms cannot be  
9 excluded. Aligning well with the literature,<sup>14,22,24</sup> neglectful disciplinary style (low structure, low  
10 support) was associated with several serious and concerning behaviors (i.e., cannabis use and misuse,  
11 alcohol misuse, delinquent behaviors, and high-risk sex) as well as poor academic outcomes (truancy,  
12 changing schools, and GPA). In contrast, permissive disciplinary style (low structure, high support)  
13 was strongly predictive of English proficiency and college matriculation, providing additional  
14 evidence for the critical role of teacher support.<sup>14,42-45</sup> These findings are notably different than a  
15 previous study in which perceptions of school safety, respect, and authoritative disciplinary style  
16 (high structure and high support) were each consistently predictive of beneficial social-emotional  
17 health outcomes including depression, stress, self-efficacy, grit, and hopelessness,<sup>46</sup> which may hint at  
18 important differences between the determinants of these outcomes.

19           There are several potential mechanisms for these findings interpreted through the lens of  
20 Jessor's theory of problem behavior, which framed problem behavior as the developmental result of  
21 three systems: personality, perceived environment, and behavior.<sup>5</sup> School order may be protective for  
22 most problem behaviors by permitting students greater personal control and elevating expectations  
23 for academic achievement. Teacher respect for students validates prior literature on the importance of

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1 social support and quality of positive social relationships, but the more limited significance of teacher  
2 support for college suggests that this school climate measure may either be overly specific or  
3 otherwise does not reflect an important contextual factor for student behaviors and decision-making.  
4 Interestingly, the data revealed a far less robust association between an authoritative disciplinary  
5 style (high structure and support) and outcomes than anticipated. This could be due to several  
6 reasons including: 1) study design bias (e.g., insufficient lag between exposure and outcomes, sample  
7 size, imprecise measurement of disciplinary style) or 2) true lack of an association indicating that  
8 high risk behaviors are less subject to authoritative school disciplinary style than mental health  
9 outcomes. That estimates were qualitatively concordant with a protective effect but not statistically  
10 significant, suggests the former as a more likely explanation. Authoritarian disciplinary style (low  
11 support, high structure) was associated with increased cannabis use and the neglectful disciplinary  
12 style (low support and low structure) was associated with increased risky behavior and worsened  
13 academic outcomes. Meanwhile the permissive disciplinary style (high support, low structure) had  
14 the opposite effect for academic outcomes. Together these findings add additional evidence that  
15 teachers can be a key source of social support for adolescent development and that relationships with  
16 teachers influence both academic outcomes and engagement in risky behaviors.

## 17 **Limitations**

18 The study results should be considered within the following limitations. Measures of school  
19 climate were based upon student report. Thus it is possible that the student's behaviors influenced  
20 their perceptions of school climate rather than vice versa. We tried to mitigate this reverse causal  
21 relationship by examining the relationship of school climate perceptions measured at 10<sup>th</sup> grade with  
22 outcomes measured at 11<sup>th</sup> grade, controlling for the outcome at baseline. Nevertheless, the field of  
23 school climate is moving toward multidimensional measures which include student self-report and

1 studies have confirmed high internal validity of many student-reported variables when examined at  
2 the school level.<sup>21</sup> Behavioral outcomes were also obtained via student self-report. Some outcomes  
3 were dichotomized to aid interpretability and because some outcomes are relatively rare, however,  
4 dichotomizing can introduce measurement bias, reduce statistical power, and underestimate  
5 variability between groups. The parental disciplinary style used as a covariate grossly approximated  
6 potential confounders such as parental monitoring, however, this measure may introduce  
7 measurement bias as these questions may not align well with commonly held conceptions of  
8 parenting in Latinx communities.<sup>47,48</sup> This study was observational in nature so we cannot draw  
9 conclusions about causality. The generalizability of this study is further hampered by the great  
10 heterogeneity of school climate definitions in the literature.<sup>49,50</sup> The baseline differences between the  
11 analytic sample and those lost to follow-up were relatively minor but could indicate the possibility of  
12 attrition bias. Lastly, the student population was mostly Latinx. While the sample was roughly  
13 similar to the population of students in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the results may not  
14 be generalizable to other student populations. Future studies may delve deeper into the Latinx  
15 experience and how school climate may better promote adolescent health and development.

## 16 **Implications for School Health Policy, Practice, and Equity**

17 Our findings support ongoing reform initiatives to measure student perspectives and intervene on  
18 school climate with the expectation of downstream benefits to student health and academic  
19 achievement, with reaffirmation in a predominantly Latinx student population. Such interventions  
20 have become more common including social-emotional learning interventions, school-wide positive  
21 behavioral interventions and supports, bullying prevention, community development programs, and  
22 interventions to improve teacher working conditions.<sup>51</sup> These interventions are understandably cross-

## 1 **School Climate and Adolescent Behaviors**

1 disciplinary. Therefore our findings also reaffirm school health practitioners' use of the CDC's  
2 Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child framework and direct engagement with youth  
3 toward cross-disciplinary systems change.<sup>52,53</sup>

## 4 **CONCLUSIONS**

5 As the isolation of SARS-CoV-2 has reminded us, the settings in which youth study and  
6 create relationships with peers and adults outside the home shape their long-term health and  
7 educational trajectories with consequences that reverberate throughout the life course. Adolescents  
8 are at the threshold of transitioning to adulthood from a developmental and social perspective and  
9 hence the potential consequences of risky health behaviors such as substance use or poor academic  
10 performance can be highly impactful on their long-term health trajectories. School climate is a  
11 measurable and changeable construct<sup>17,50</sup> and could be a valuable public health target, particularly  
12 relevant during adolescence when youth are especially sensitive to social influences.<sup>54</sup> To the extent  
13 that school climate drives health, such an approach may broaden the scope of schools from centers  
14 for academic learning to platforms for human thriving, transforming vicious cycles to virtuous ones.

## 15 **HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL STATEMENT**

16 The institutional review board of the RAND Corporation and the University of California Los  
17 Angeles have approved this study and all methods were performed in accordance with the relevant  
18 guidelines and regulations. Written parental consent and student assent were obtained from all  
19 participants.

## 20 **CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**

21 The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial  
22 relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.



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## 13 TABLES AND FIGURES

**Table 1. Student and parental characteristics reported by participants in the RISE-Up Study, Los Angeles, CA (N = 1114)**

	<b>Percent of students</b>
<b><u>Student demographics</u></b>	
Male	46.3%
Latinx	90.3%
USA Born	87.3%
Native English speaker	39.7%
<b><u>Parental characteristics</u></b>	
Born in the USA, one or more parents	25.1%
Full-time employed, one or more parents	88.0%
Graduated high school, one or more parents	
No	43.5%
Yes	51.6%
Unsure	4.8%
<b>Parenting style*</b>	
Normal	50.0%
Authoritative	20.2%
Authoritarian	9.4%
Indulgent	8.9%
Neglectful	11.5%

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\*Parenting style scale developed by Lamborn et al  
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1 School Climate and Adolescent Behaviors

**Table 2. Health, behavioral, and academic outcomes of participants in the RISE-Up study, Los Angeles, CA (N = 1114)**

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<b>Health and behavior outcomes</b>	
<b>30-day alcohol use, %</b>	15.3%
<b>30-day cannabis use, %</b>	11.4%
	1.02
<b>Alcohol misuse, mean (sd)</b>	(2.72)
	0.67
<b>Cannabis misuse, mean (sd)</b>	(2.22)
<b>Delinquent behaviors, one or more, %</b>	21.6%
<b>Violence, %</b>	12.8%
<b>High risk sex, %</b>	8.6%
<b>Victim of bullying, %</b>	18.8%
<b>Bullied others, %</b>	15.2%
<b>Academic outcomes</b>	
<b>Truancy, %</b>	21.8%
<b>Changed schools since 9<sup>th</sup> grade, %</b>	23.0%
	2.83
<b>GPA, mean (sd)</b>	(0.68)
<b>Proficient in Math,* %</b>	34.7%
<b>Proficient in English,* %</b>	70.6%
<b>Matriculated in a 4-year College, %</b>	43.1%

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\*Proficient or above 11<sup>th</sup> grade standard on California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress, a state-wide standardized exam.

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1**Table 3. Associations Between School Climate (10<sup>th</sup> grade) and Health Outcomes (11<sup>th</sup> grade), Los Angeles, CA (N=1114).**

	<b>30-day Alcohol Use [OR, 95%CI]</b>	<b>30-day Cannabis Use [OR, 95%CI]</b>	<b>Alcohol Misuse [β, 95%CI]</b>	<b>Cannabis Misuse [β, 95%CI]</b>	<b>Delinquent Behaviors [OR, 95%CI]</b>	<b>Violence [OR, 95%CI]</b>	<b>High Risk Sex [OR, 95%CI]</b>	<b>Victim of Bullying [OR, 95%CI]</b>	<b>Bullied Others [OR, 95%CI]</b>
<b>School environment</b>									
Order*	<b>0.81</b> [ <b>0.72, 0.92</b> ]	<b>0.74</b> [ <b>0.59, 0.91</b> ]	<b>-0.22</b> [- <b>0.44, 0</b> ]	<b>-0.23</b> [- <b>0.39, -0.07</b> ]	<b>0.79</b> [ <b>0.68, 0.93</b> ]	0.83 [0.68, 1.01]	<b>0.65</b> [ <b>0.54, 0.78</b> ]	<b>0.80</b> [ <b>0.71, 0.90</b> ]	<b>0.79</b> [ <b>0.68, 0.91</b> ]
Safety**	0.92 [0.77, 1.10]	0.91 [0.74, 1.12]	-0.17 [-0.39, 0.05]	-0.14 [-0.30, 0.02]	0.92 [0.8, 1.06]	0.95 [0.79, 1.14]	0.98 [0.81, 1.20]	<b>0.79</b> [ <b>0.70, 0.89</b> ]	<b>0.76</b> [ <b>0.67, 0.87</b> ]
<b>Teacher relationship</b>									
Teacher respect for students	<b>0.73</b> [ <b>0.62, 0.85</b> ]	<b>0.76</b> [ <b>0.63, 0.92</b> ]	<b>-0.34</b> [- <b>0.54, -0.15</b> ]	<b>-0.23</b> [- <b>0.35, -0.12</b> ]	<b>0.75</b> [ <b>0.64, 0.88</b> ]	<b>0.85</b> [ <b>0.73, 0.99</b> ]	<b>0.80</b> [ <b>0.66, 0.97</b> ]	0.88 [0.73, 1.05]	<b>0.82</b> [ <b>0.69, 0.97</b> ]
Teacher support for college	<b>0.82</b> [ <b>0.70, 0.97</b> ]	0.90 [0.75, 1.08]	<b>-0.24</b> [- <b>0.43, -0.05</b> ]	<b>-0.22</b> [- <b>0.43, -0.02</b> ]	0.90 [0.78, 1.04]	0.88 [0.74, 1.06]	0.86 [0.68, 1.09]	0.97 [0.82, 1.14]	0.95 [0.81, 1.10]
<b>Disciplinary Style***</b>									
Average	reference 0.70	reference 0.65	reference -0.33	reference -0.13	reference <b>0.62</b>	reference 0.99	reference 0.62	reference <b>0.62</b>	reference 0.86
Authoritative	[0.44, 1.11]	[0.32, 1.33]	[-0.66, 0.01]	[-0.47, 0.21]	[ <b>0.39, 1.00</b> ]	[0.60, 1.63]	[0.36, 1.07]	[ <b>0.42, 0.93</b> ]	[0.57, 1.30]
Authoritarian	1.45 [0.80, 2.62]	<b>3.26</b> [ <b>1.63, 6.52</b> ]	0.42 [-0.38, 1.22]	0.5 [-0.45, 1.45]	1.36 [0.71, 2.63]	1.22 [0.58, 2.55]	0.44 [0.11, 1.73]	0.84 [0.44, 1.60]	0.63 [0.23, 1.72]
Permissive	0.30 [0.08, 1.05]	1.15 [0.34, 3.87]	0.02 [-1.32, 1.36]	0.11 [-0.51, 0.73]	0.48 [0.11, 2.12]	1.34 [0.40, 4.46]	0.63 [0.13, 3.00]	1.32 [0.62, 2.83]	0.56 [0.18, 1.76]
Neglectful	1.30 [0.90, 1.88]	<b>2.71</b> [ <b>1.79, 4.12</b> ]	<b>0.43</b> [ <b>0.01, 0.85</b> ]	<b>0.47</b> [ <b>0.16, 0.77</b> ]	<b>1.99</b> [ <b>1.34, 2.97</b> ]	1.36 [0.83, 2.23]	<b>1.75</b> [ <b>1.09, 2.81</b> ]	0.77 [0.56, 1.05]	1.02 [0.74, 1.42]

Abbreviations: OR – Odds Ratio, β – regression coefficient. **Bold font** indicates estimate significant to p<0.05. All models adjusted for: student gender, Latinx ethnicity, USA birthplace, native English language, parental birthplace, parental employment, parental

## 1 School Climate and Adolescent Behaviors

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education, parenting style, outcome measure at 9<sup>th</sup> grade. \*Wong et al.'s measure of school order with higher scores indicates a more positive school climate <sup>34</sup>. \*\*Chicago Consortium on School Research Student Perceptions of Safety Scale, higher scores indicating greater perceived safety <sup>36</sup>. \*\*\*School Disciplinary Style Score <sup>22</sup>.

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**Table 4. Associations Between School Climate (10<sup>th</sup> grade) and Academic Outcomes (11<sup>th</sup> grade), Los Angeles, CA (N=1114).**

	<b>Truancy</b> [OR, 95%CI]	<b>School change</b> [OR, 95%CI]	<b>GPA</b> [ $\beta$ , 95%CI]	<b>Math proficient</b> [OR, 95%CI]	<b>English proficient</b> [OR, 95%CI]	<b>4-year College matriculation</b> [OR, 95%CI]
<b>School environment</b>						
Order*	<b>0.72 [0.61, 0.86]</b>	1.02 [0.93, 1.13]	0.02 [-0.01, 0.06]	1.05 [0.92, 1.20]	1.06 [0.93, 1.20]	<b>1.14 [1.00, 1.31]</b>
Safety**	<b>0.83 [0.72, 0.96]</b>	0.96 [0.87, 1.07]	0.01 [-0.01, 0.04]	1.10 [0.96, 1.27]	1.04 [0.93, 1.15]	1.04 [0.95, 1.14]
<b>Teacher relationship</b>						
Teacher respect for students	<b>0.84 [0.72, 0.99]</b>	0.98 [0.90, 1.06]	<b>0.03 [0, 0.06]</b>	<b>1.16 [1.02, 1.31]</b>	<b>1.19 [1.04, 1.37]</b>	1.06 [0.93, 1.21]
Teacher support for college	0.88 [0.75, 1.02]	0.94 [0.85, 1.03]	0 [-0.04, 0.04]	1.00 [0.84, 1.18]	1.13 [0.96, 1.32]	1.04 [0.93, 1.15]
<b>Disciplinary Style***</b>						
Average	Reference	reference	reference	Reference	reference	reference
Authoritative	<b>0.67 [0.46, 0.97]</b>	1.07 [0.78, 1.46]	0.02 [-0.05, 0.10]	0.95 [0.65, 1.40]	1.37 [0.82, 2.30]	1.19 [0.79, 1.80]
Authoritarian	0.82 [0.44, 1.54]	1.17 [0.82, 1.68]	-0.04 [-0.15, 0.08]	0.58 [0.29, 1.15]	0.95 [0.53, 1.70]	0.87 [0.45, 1.68]
Permissive	<b>0.43 [0.23, 0.82]</b>	0.80 [0.50, 1.29]	<b>0.24 [0.11, 0.36]</b>	1.00 [0.47, 2.14]	<b>2.86 [1.12, 7.33]</b>	<b>3.31 [1.38, 7.96]</b>
Neglectful	<b>1.75 [1.23, 2.49]</b>	<b>1.29 [1.04, 1.61]</b>	<b>-0.08 [-0.15, -0.01]</b>	0.76 [0.53, 1.10]	1.04 [0.74, 1.47]	1.03 [0.79, 1.35]

Abbreviations: OR – Odds Ratio,  $\beta$  – regression coefficient. **Bold font** indicates estimate significant to  $p < 0.05$ . All models adjusted for: student gender, Latinx ethnicity, USA birthplace, native English language, parental birthplace, parental employment, parental education, parenting style, outcome measure at 9<sup>th</sup> grade. \*Wong et al.'s measure of school order with higher scores indicates a more positive school climate<sup>34</sup>. \*\*Chicago Consortium on School Research Student Perceptions of Safety Scale, higher scores indicating greater perceived safety<sup>36</sup>. \*\*\*School Disciplinary Style Score<sup>22</sup>.

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