Understanding and Addressing Facility Learning Space Perspectives of Youth Served in Juvenile Corrections and Agency Supporters Before, During, and After COVID-19: A Community - Partner Perspective

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Abstract

A positive juvenile justice facility learning environment is one that promotes maximal outcomes for both youth and staff. To address facility learning environment (i.e., climate), a bi-directional community partnership was formed among juvenile justice facilities, a juvenile justice agency, and researchers to better understand how to positively strengthen facility climate through amplifying youth voice. Youth completed facility climate surveys at three timepoints (before, during, and after COVID-19) to assess their perspectives on prescribed tenets of learning environment climate (i.e., Expectations, Acknowledgement, Discipline, Safety, Respect, Connections). In between the second and third timepoint, when daily operations were returning to more typical conditions, agency-level climate supporters participated in a focus group to better understand their perspectives on facility climate (defined using the same climate tenets) and to learn how their efforts were affected by COVID-19. Youth survey responses across the three timepoints were descriptively synthesized by climate tenet. The agency-level focus group was analyzed using a constant comparative analysis, and four themes created. Behavioral learning theory and labeling theory were used as lenses for further analyses of the themes. Suggestions for strengthening facility climate are provided within the context of both survey and focus group data paired with descriptions of our partnership activities.

Secure and nonsecure juvenile justice facilities in the United States serve one of the largest school-age youth populations in the world (e.g., Barnert, 2020). Youth served in these facilities, in both detention and long-term settings, are typically remanded by the court system and are generally between the ages of 12 and 18 years old, though some facilities serve youth 19 years and older. Length of stay in these facilities varies widely from several days, to months, to years. As such, youth receive all services (e.g., education, mental health, recreation, counseling) within a 24-hour/7-day-a-week delivery model that should mirror the same opportunities that their non-incarcerated peers receive (e.g., Leone & Weinberg, 2010; The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015). Researchers have demonstrated that specific youth characteristics have higher representation within juvenile justice facilities including African-American males (Cancio et al., 2019), youth of lower socio-economic status backgrounds (Puzzanchera et al., 2022), youth who are eligible for educational disability services per the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (especially those with learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, and other health impairments; Hockenberry & Puzzanchera, 2021), and youth with past trauma (Kim et al., 2021). Some have characterized the juvenile system as a "de facto" setting for youth with mental health needs (Swank & Gagnon, 2017).

Given the unique needs of school-age youth, juvenile justice facility learning environments should be both habilitative and rehabilitative (e.g., Jolivette et al., 2022; Sprague et al., 2020). However, these facilities are often described as reactive and punitive, chaotic and inconsistent, lacking implementation of evidence-based interventions or approaches, and restrictive of youth voices (Buchanan et al., 2020; Jolivette et al., 2015; Stern et al., 2022; Trotter et al., 2024). Such descriptions suggest that the facilities and the agencies overseeing them may need assistance, resources, and evidentiary strategies to address these issues before youth habilitation and rehabilitation may occur.

Our Partnership

Some juvenile justice facilities and agencies have entered into community partnerships (reciprocal partnerships; Prewitt et al., 2025) with outside entities and people to address youth and staff

needs, support areas of priority, provide technical assistance, and/or meet selected priorities (e.g., Honeycutt et al., 2022). A community partnership may be defined as "formal and informal working arrangements or partnerships with individuals and/or organizations of the facility's choice those primarily outside the facility [agency] who may support the facility's climate, outcomes, and/or operations" (Prewitt et al., 2025). Such community partners may include peer institutions (other juvenile facilities), other state agencies, other youth-serving institutions (e.g., mentoring clubs), pastoral services (e.g., various religious entities), recreational services (e.g., sports), educational remediation (e.g., tutors), parent/guardian groups, and university researchers (e.g., those with content and/or methodological experiences in targeted priorities and areas of need). In our case, the community partnership was a juvenile justice agency and their local-level facilities partnering with university researchers to support agency priorities and provide technical assistance.

Such partnerships are typically bi-directional: Each entity benefits. For example, a juvenile facility may receive training and technical support on evidence-based practices to meet its needs and improve services and outcomes for youth, and the other community partner (e.g., university researchers) may receive internship sites or access to research populations and/or data to further scholarship in a particular field. Such community partnerships are encouraged as "a critical complement to the justice system…are essential to building protective factors" for youth (Solomon, 2024).

Our collective partnerships with juvenile justice agencies, facilities, and other restrictive entities with educational 24-hour/7-day-a-week delivery models span decades, regions of the country, and purposes. The community partnership at the center of this inquiry was initiated by a juvenile justice agency. The agency sought the university researcher's assistance in measuring, within their local-level secure facilities, youth perceptions of facility learning spaces strengthening facility climate in alignment with a number of factors:

- the behavioral framework (i.e., Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports; Jolivette et al., 2016) implemented at all facilities within the purview of the agency
- the ongoing tiered treatment, programming, and education services provided to the specific youth populations served across all domains (e.g., academic, behavior, transition)
- staff support approaches (e.g., trainings, coaching, site visits, fidelity checks)
- the expertise of their agency personnel charged with supporting facility learning spaces (i.e., cadre of agency personnel tasked with broadly supporting facility climate among their other responsibilities)
- The focus on youth perceptions was influenced in part by national calls to elevate youth voice across their involvement with and in juvenile systems (Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators, 2017; Nema et al., 2024; Stern et al., 2022), but it also stemmed from an agency priority to measure climate perceptions more systematically, starting with the youth perspective. To meet these goals, our partnership also included facility-level involvement as assistance from each facility was needed to measure facility climate specific to their facility while recognizing that each facility had their own climate and climate goals. Our agency partner coordinated facility-level relations, and we (university researchers) communicated with agency personnel climate supporters and facility-level leadership throughout these activities.

Facility Learning Spaces

With a shared goal of improving the lives of school-age youth served in juvenile justice facilities, this partnership focused on strengthening and improving the overall facility learning environment/climate by engaging and amplifying youth and agency-level personnel voice. Because our youth spend the majority of their waking hours a week in education for overall treatment and programming to build their skill sets and prepare for their reentry into the community, we borrow from the school safe and supportive learning environment and climate literature to define "facility climate." School climate has been "conceptualized to include the physical, academic, social, and disciplinary environment" (Osher & Berg, 2017, p. 3). In 2023, the U.S. Department of Education released a set of guiding principles on how schools may strengthen and improve their climates by realizing the aspects of safety, inclusivity, support, and fairness-all to promote positive learning in which youth can thrive in a safe environment that prepares them to be productive citizens. The five guiding climate principles are as follows (U.S. Department of

Education, 2023):

1. "foster[ing] a sense of belonging through a positive, safe, welcoming … environment" built on "respectful, trusting, and caring relationships" (p. 7)
2. "supporting the social, emotional, physical, and mental health needs of all [youth] through evidence-based strategies" by being proactive and "increas[ing] protective factors" and implementing a "multi-tiered system of support" (p. 9)
3. "supporting high-quality [instruction] and learning" by providing "on-going professional development, learning, and mentoring" with a focus on "child and youth development" (p. 12)
4. having "a [robust staff] workforce" by "expand[ing] the [robustness] of the … workforce" (p. 14)
5. "ensur[ing] the fair administration of student discipline policies in ways that treat [youth] with dignity and respect" by revisiting policies to ensure consistency as well as data usage (e.g., results from climate survey perceptions) for "establishing clear roles" across facility personnel in the application of discipline policies

To account for the 24-hour/7-day-a-week learning environment and services provided to youth in juvenile facilities, we use the term "facility climate" to denote the overall learning environment where youth education, treatment, and programming occurs. Facility climate is somewhat broader than school climate; it encompasses school climate aspects and principles while accounting for the (a) residential nature of facilities whereby youth live and receive all services within one campus; and (b) influence of multiple, integrated, and influential factors that occur across waking hours, including the following:

- all youth and the interactions youth have with one another
- all staff, no matter their specific role, discipline, work shift schedule, facility area, or relationship to youth and the interactions staff and youth have with one another
- modeling of respectful and therapeutic relations between staff and youth, youth and youth, and staff and staff
- implementation and effects of such implementation of evidence-based, strengths-based, and age/developmentally appropriate youth practices by staff
- staff practices, coaching, and technical support from both their agency and a variety of external community partners
- the physicality of the environment and freedom of movement
- a need for evidence-based interventions and approaches specific to a school-age population served in restrictive settings (e.g., taking into account contextual variables impacting implementation and fidelity; Barton & Mackin, 2012; Cox et al., 2011; Jolivette et al., 2015; Jolivette et al., 2016; Marsh & Evans, 2009; Oostermeijer et al., 2022).

A community partnership (in our case, the juvenile justice agency and their local-level facilities partnering with university researchers) pursuing a shared vision and goal, coupled with evidence-based practices and alignment with national entities' call to involve youth voice and listen to agency personnel perspectives, is likely to result in improvements to the overall facility learning spaces and climate for both youth and staff, supports for the agency and local-level facilities, and information for the university researcher partners on how to better support and provide technical assistance on the topic to agency personnel and local-facility level staff (Honeycutt et al., 2022; Jolivette et al., 2020a; Mahurane, 2020).

This partnership aimed to measure daily facility conditions as a means to realize the benefits of positive learning spaces and overall facility climates for youth as well as staff. For example, more positive facility climates have resulted in higher staff job satisfaction and retention, better adherence to programming and schedules, and higher fidelity of implementation of programming (e.g., Cox et al., 2011). From a youth perspective, more positive facility climates have resulted in fewer behavioral incidents (Alonzo-Vaughn et al., 2015; Fernandez et al., 2015).

Our partnership spanned the disruptions and chaos of the COVID-19 pandemic which effected the juvenile correction system (World Health Organization, 2020). With the onset of COVID-19, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2021) called for partnerships across entities to ensure that juvenile facilities had adequate support and guidance to navigate the pandemic-related challenges without negating their obligation to serve youth in their care. Additionally, some community partnerships were formed specifically to address COVID-19, and an agency-level response "was initiated to ensure adherence to public health risk mitigation strategies

while also maximizing healthy development and well-being among a vulnerable youth population" (Tunstall et al., 2024, p. 14).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was twofold:

- Purpose 1: to learn how youth served in juvenile facilities viewed their overall learning spaces and facility climate before, during, and after COVID-19
- Purpose 2: to understand the perspectives of agency personnel during COVID-19 in relation to how they were able to support individual local-level facilities overall learning spaces and facility climate, facility staff, and youth

Two approaches were applied to address the study purposes, respectively: (a) youth climate surveys and (b) an agency personnel focus group, with both interpreted by the university research partners.

Positionality Statement

As researchers and former general and special educators for school-age populations, we are long-standing community partners with state juvenile justice agencies and local facilities across the country. Some of our partnerships have lasted a decade or longer. We have worked across the following contexts:

- We have worked directly with youth served in juvenile justice facilities to improve their overall educational learning space conditions with a particular focus on building positive behavioral, academic, and reentry skill sets.
- We have helped to develop the skill sets of facility personnel (i.e., teachers, education staff, security, mental health, behavioral health, transition services staff, recreation, facility leadership teams) to support sustained, high-fidelity implementation of evidence-based interventions adapted to match the contextual variables of facility settings across the integrated domains of behavior, academics, and reentry.
- We have worked with juvenile justice agency personnel to systemically support facility staff skill sets for improved facility-wide learning space and climate conditions for both youth and staff.
- We have assisted with systemic policy changes toward the adoption of empirically-based behavior management approaches.
- We have helped juvenile facilities and agencies (re)build and/or (re)connect to community partnerships with outside entities/persons who can positively contribute to and support efforts to improve facility and educational learning space conditions and climate for youth and staff.

We are deeply committed to providing support, resources, and trainings on facility- and agency-identified areas of need as well as being responsive to emerging needs so youth may experience the full benefit of the services provided during their residence and maximize their post-release positive outcomes across all domains. Our commitment to these youth, staff, and agencies/facilities as one of many community partners began long before COVID-19 and continues post-COVID-19. During the pandemic, many of us were deemed "essential personnel" and continued to work inside juvenile facilities alongside other community partners. Throughout this inquiry, we were in constant contact with our partners as both a resource and a sounding board. Our partners repeatedly reached out to us (a) to solicit guidance and ideas on how to maintain their existing positive learning spaces and facility climates and support youth and staff in ways consistent with their behavioral framework, (b) to learn how our other community partners were addressing COVID-19 related issues, (c) to share ideas and practices they were putting into place to continue supports, and (d) to brainstorm possible solutions as new issues arose as a result of COVID-19 and the changes and uncertainties it brought to the workplace and their responsibilities. Based on the partnership, we, as university researchers, specifically wanted to understand how COVID-19 impacted youth perspectives on their overall learning spaces and facility climate, how agency personnel's ability to support facilities and these efforts changed due to COVID-19 protocols, and what supports a community partner such as ourselves could provide.

Research Statement

The following inquiry activities were approved by a university institutional review Board and the agency entities research review processes. All collected climate survey data were summarized in real-time and provided directly to both the agency- and facility-levels so they could action plan and celebrate gains. The summarized data was a tool that agency-level climate supporters could use in their work with their assigned individual facilities and the agency at-large. Throughout all activities, we, were available to and in constant

communication with our community partners.

Theoretical Frameworks

In the context of juvenile justice facilities' mission to habilitate and rehabilitate school-age youth, the field's recognition of the need to improve the overall educational condition and facility climate, and our own focus on improving facility and educational conditions to support habilitation and rehabilitation, we approached this inquiry through the lens of two theoretical frameworks. The first, behavioral learning theory (Skinner, 1950), is rooted in how environmental stimuli (e.g., people, places, experiences), through operant conditioning of punishment and reinforcement, condition individuals' behavior as they interact with the environment. This theory has been applied widely within the field of education and special education. Behavioral learning theory aligns with (a) the interaction patterns of our inquiry (our youth population interact with numerous staff on rotating shifts and other youth who enter and exit the secure facility daily), (b) the high percentages of educational disabilities and mental health needs among the youth population, and (c) the behavioral framework implemented by our partner facilities (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports; Jolivette et al., 2016, 2020b).

The second theory, labeling theory (Lilly et al., 2025), posits that one's behavior in any environment is not intentional but is antecedently and consequently influenced by others' perceptions, verbalizations, and behaviors that label the individual as a criminal/deviant. In this inquiry, staff and peers' perceptions of our youth population (e.g., youth cannot be rehabilitated), verbalizations (e.g., negative statements), and behaviors (e.g., ignoring) may influence youth to engage in incidents (e.g., youth-on-staff, youth-on-youth, noncompliance, elopement) or other deviant acts that contribute to a poor/negative facility climate for self and others. Both theories posit that events prior to and after one's behavior may influence subsequent behaviors.

Purpose 1: Youth Perspectives

Design and Sample

To address Purpose 1, we employed a correlational study using a repeated cross-sectional design. We selected three archived administrations of youth climate surveys completed before COVID-19 (December 2019; Timepoint 1), during COVID-19 (January 2021; Timepoint 2), and after COVID-19 (February 2022; Timepoint 3) at facilities implementing Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports as their Tier I behavior management framework. We selected surveys from a sample of 16 facilities that had completed surveys at all three timepoints. These facilities included three long-term settings (with approximate lengths of stay lasting 14 to 20 months; post-adjudication) and 13 detention settings (with approximate lengths of stay lasting 30 to 138 days; pre-adjudication). Eight facilities served males only, and eight served both males and females. Seven facilities served youth 12 to18 years, six served youth 13 to 20 years old, and three served youth 16 to 20 years old. In terms of size, four facilities had a 100+ bed capacity, four had a 61 to 99 bed capacity, five had a 31 to 60 bed capacity, and three had a bed capacity of 30 or less. Finally, ten were in urban areas and six were in rural areas defined

Table 1: Youth Demographics by Timepoint

Characteristic	Timepoint 1 (*N*=401; %)	Timepoint 2 (*N*=354; %)	Timepoint 3 (*N*=303; %)
Sex			
Male	78.30	78.50	75.20
Female	12.00	12.10	18.50
No Response	9.73	9.32	6.27
Ethnicity			
Hispanic/Latino/a	8.48	8.47	6.60
Not Hispanic/Latino/a	39.70	30.50	32.00
No Response	51.90	61.00	61.40
Race			
African American	55.60	57.60	58.10
American Indian/Alaska Asian	0.75	1.41	1.32
White	15.20	16.40	18.50
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	1.00	1.13	0.66
Multiracial	8.73	7.91	8.91
No Response	18.70	15.50	12.50

by the 2020 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). In 94% of the facilities, a majority (>50%) of youth had at least one prior residence in a secure juvenile facility. At Timepoint 1 the youth survey sample was 401, at Timepoint 2 it was 354, and at Timepoint 3 it was 303. The youth demographics for each timepoint are found in Table 1.

Facility Climate Surveys

The climate surveys we sampled were implemented by state juvenile justice agencies and local juvenile facilities under state department oversight as part of bi-annual climate assessment procedures. The survey was co-constructed by researchers, juvenile justice personnel representing different juvenile facility types (e.g., detention, long-term), and personnel from residential treatment centers to amplify the voices of youth in a variety of restrictive out-of-home placements on their perspectives on overall facility learning spaces and climate and to identify supports that agency/facility leadership could provide to strengthen facility climate (Jolivette et al., 2020a).

The climate survey assessed youth understanding and perceptions of six climate tenets: Expectations, Acknowledgement, Discipline, Safety, Respect, and Connection. The survey accounted for youth perceptions of and experiences with, and observations of peer and staff behaviors and actions to provide both a micro and a macro lens on facility climate. The survey included demographic questions and questions associated with each aspect of the overall learning spaces and facility climate:

- Expectations: nine yes/no questions with most questions having open-ended questions that asked youth to provide examples of expectations (e.g., asking youth how staff wanted them to behave at the facility)
- Acknowledgement: seven yes/no questions with two open-ended questions that asked youth to provide details of experienced and observed acknowledgement (e.g., asking youth how staff recognize their displays of the expected behaviors)
- Discipline: two yes/no questions with three open-ended questions that asked youth to provide non-examples for discipline (e.g., asking youth if staff are fair in their responses to youth who do not adhere to the facility expectations and rules) and how to improve discipline practices
- Safety: three yes/no questions with two open-ended questions that asked youth to share examples and four open-ended questions that asked youth to describe those examples for safety (e.g., asking youth if they feel safe in the facility)
- Respect: six yes/no questions with three open-ended questions that asked youth to describe experienced or observed examples for respect (e.g., asking youth to share how youth and staff treat one another)
- Connections: five yes/no questions that asked youth whether they felt connected to the facility and people in the facility (e.g., asking youth to state their perceptions of their sense of belonging to others and the facility overall) (see Jolivette et al., 2020a for more survey details and survey questions) with no open-ended questions asked

Agency/facility staff administered the surveys to youth available (e.g., those engaged in general population activities and schedule) on the facility selected assessment day within a specified month identified by the agency. Staff read the surveys aloud to youth to account for their variable literacy abilities and youth independently selected and/or wrote their responses. Completion of the climate survey was voluntary and anonymous which is typical practice in school districts across the country that assess youth climate perceptions as part of their (bi)annual climate assessment procedures. The anonymous aspect of such surveys promoted a platform for these youth to be forthright in their responses, (non-)examples, and explanations they provided.

Data Analyses

Survey data were entered and checked for reliability by three university researchers. The youth positive ("Yes") responses for each climate tenet were the focus at each timepoint and prior to analyses the percent of missing responses was accounted for (i.e., when a youth did not circle either "Yes" or "No"). The survey data yielded descriptive percentages for each item as well as a sum percentage by tenet (Jolivette et al., 2020a; McIntosh et al., 2017).

We conducted hypothesis tests to assess whether the proportions of "Yes" responses differed at different time points. To control for the false discovery rate due to multiple comparisons (i.e., Timepoint 1 versus 2, Timepoint 2 versus 3, Timepoint 1 versus 3), the p-values were adjusted using the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995). A p-value less than 0.05 suggested that the difference across the

"Yes" responses by timepoint were statistically significant. Then, as part of the hypothesis testing, we drew line charts for the binary questions with at least one significant difference between timepoints. Also, the average score for each tenet across all tenet-specific yes/no items were calculated to test whether the three timepoints had different average scores.

What Was Learned

Youth had the highest positive ("Yes") responses for the climate tenet of Expectations across all timepoints. The percentage of "Yes" responses at each timepoint was as follows:

- Timepoint 1: 64.21%
- Timepoint 2: 68.90%
- Timepoint 3: 69.01%

Interestingly, fewer youth during Timepoint 2 and even fewer youth during Timepoint 3 could articulate what the behavioral expectations were in their answers to the open-ended questions. This suggests that there was drift in the teaching and modeling of facility-wide behavioral expectations across time, aligning with nationally reported staff shortages across facilities and disciplines that disrupted daily operations, such as those of our community partner facilities. For example, there was a downward trend across timepoints as fewer youth were able to identify staff (by discipline: education, intake, security, mental health/counseling, recreation, etc.) who taught and modeled the facility-wide behavioral expectations to them, although there was not a statistical difference when comparing the timepoints to each other.

So, although youth were most favorable about the importance of having behavioral expectations, as evidenced in the high positive ratings across the Expectation questions, it is unclear what behavioral expectations they were held accountable to and/or if those were linked to the facility-wide behavioral framework policies. Our agency partner reached out to us for ideas on how to maintain youth knowledge of and staff use of facility-specific behavioral expectations throughout Timepoints 2 and 3. We had many virtual meetings and phone conversations to share ideas, listen to what was and was not working, and learn about staffing protocols that affected the brainstormed ideas. Aligned with our partnership focus, most of our time was spent on how best to support positive learning spaces and overall facility climate. Linked in behavior learning theory, this focused time centered on why facility-wide behavioral expectations which anchored most of the daily practices of teaching, modeling, and reinforcing prosocial behaviors to support were or were not being activated.

Across all timepoints, the Safety climate tenet received the fewest "Yes" responses, with a decreasing trend from Timepoint 1 (44.13%) to Timepoint 2 (41.30%) to Timepoint 3 (40.67). The lowest of these Safety percentages represents almost a 10% difference from the next lowest positive response percentage (to the climate tenet Discipline). These consistently low positive responses may be due to several factors. First, COVID-19 notwithstanding, youth have stated that safety and fairness of disciplinary practices are of concern in juvenile facilities (e.g., Jolivette et al., 2015; Sedlak & McPherson, 2010). However, the Safety responses in this study were much lower across all timepoints than those reported in a previous study using the same climate survey with, but different, youth residing in juvenile facilities (Jolivette et al., 2020a). Second, the changing landscape that COVID-19 brought to juvenile correctional facilities, such as youth spending more time in their cells (Green, 2020) and having limited/inconsistent contact with other youth, staff, and families (Buchanan et al., 2020), could have affected youths' perceptions and experiences related to sense of safety as isolation may make one feel unsafe. Finally, unpredictability related to changing, suspending, and/or altering typical treatment and programming daily schedules (Buchanan et al., 2020) during both Timepoints 2 and 3 may have influenced youth climate perceptions of the Safety and Discipline tenets.

Overall and across the three timepoints, the percentage of positive youth responses for the climate tenets of Expectations, Respect, and Connectedness improved from Timepoint 1 to Timepoint 3. The Respect tenet showed the greatest improvement. This, paired with improved perceptions of Connectedness, may be due to two reasons:

- Youth and the classified "essential" staff who served them experienced the unknowns, unpredictability, and trauma of COVID-19 together, especially given the staffing shortages reported at that time
- Both youth and staff had shared trauma experiences related to COVID-19 during this time as youth lived in the facility and staff provided services that other "non-essential" staff did not experience.

The increasing positive response to the Expectations tenet was unexpected given the

knowledge degradation around behavioral expectations (e.g., teaching, modeling, and reinforcing them).

Responses for the climate tenets of Acknowledgement and Discipline exhibited the same pattern with the highest percentage of positive responses at Timepoint 2 with Acknowledgement responses decreasing at Timepoint 3 and Discipline returning to Timepoint 1 (before). The increases at Timepoint 2 for both tenets may have been a factor of COVID-19 movement/contact protocols. For example, youth received more one-on-one staff attention since youth were not allowed to be in groups and spent more hours than typical in their housing rooms alone with fewer programming options. In this context, fewer opportunities for misbehavior between youth existed than before COVID-19. Thus, youth may have perceived that they were receiving more acknowledgement for expected behaviors by staff and less disciplinary actions.

When comparing the findings from Timepoints 1 to 2, eight items were significant across climate tenets:

(a) Expectations, both for whether youth and staff display the behavioral expectations (p-value 0.046 and 0.006, respectively)

(b) Acknowledgment, both for whether youth and their peers were reinforced for engaging in the behavioral expectations and if such praise and reinforcement were both meaningful to them (p-values 0.005, 0.038, 0.031, and 0.004, respectively)

(c) Safety, for whether they observed any bullying (p-value 0.017)

(d) Respect, for whether youth are respectful to staff (p-value 0.025)

When comparing the findings from Timepoints 2 to 3, no items showed statistically significant change. This was not surprising, given that per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Zviedrite et al., 2024), closures of schools and other youth-serving entities continued at similar and high rates through the 2021-2022 school year within our Timepoint 3 range, the geographic region of these facilities. Also, according to our agency personnel partner, disruptions to schedules, agency personnel access to facilities/staff/youth, and COVID-19 protocols during these two timepoints differed in intensity and frequency across facilities.

When comparing Timepoints 1 to 3, four items showed statistical significance:

(a) Expectations, the same two items as in Timepoints 1 to 2 were significant (p-values 0.001 and 0.048, respectively) along with if the behavioral expectations were meaningful/important to youth (p-value of 0.050)

(b) Respect, the same item as in Timepoints 1 to 2 was significant (p-value 0.028)

After summing the percentage of "Yes" responses within each tenet and applying the same approach for each timepoint comparison, only the Acknowledgement tenet summed item responses showed statistical significance between Timepoints 1 and 2 (p-value 0.045). The timepoint plots for the significant tenet items are in Figure 1 (Expectations), Figure 2 (Acknowledgement),

Figure 1. Expectations

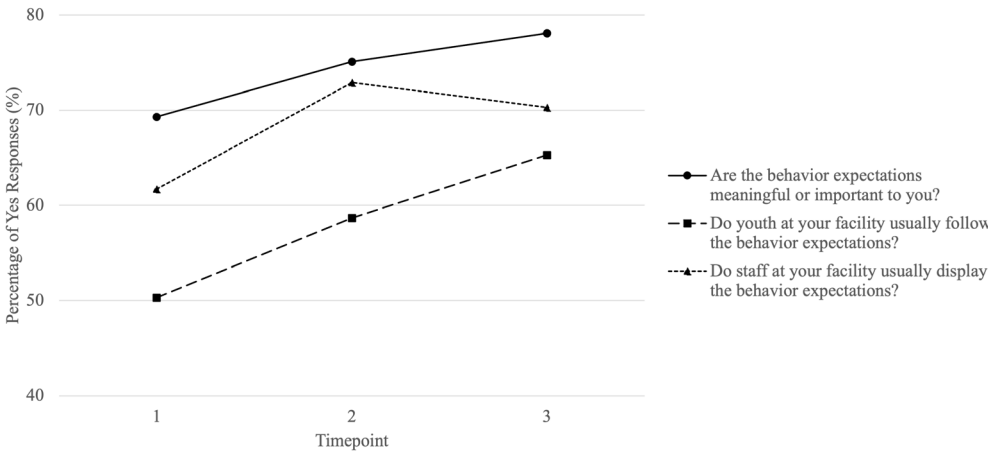

Figure 2. Acknowledgement

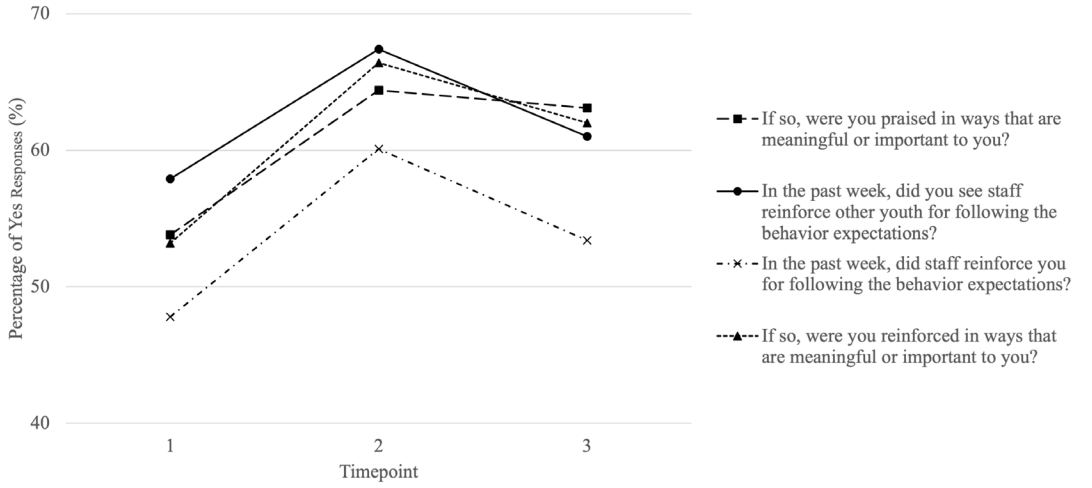

Figure 3. Safety

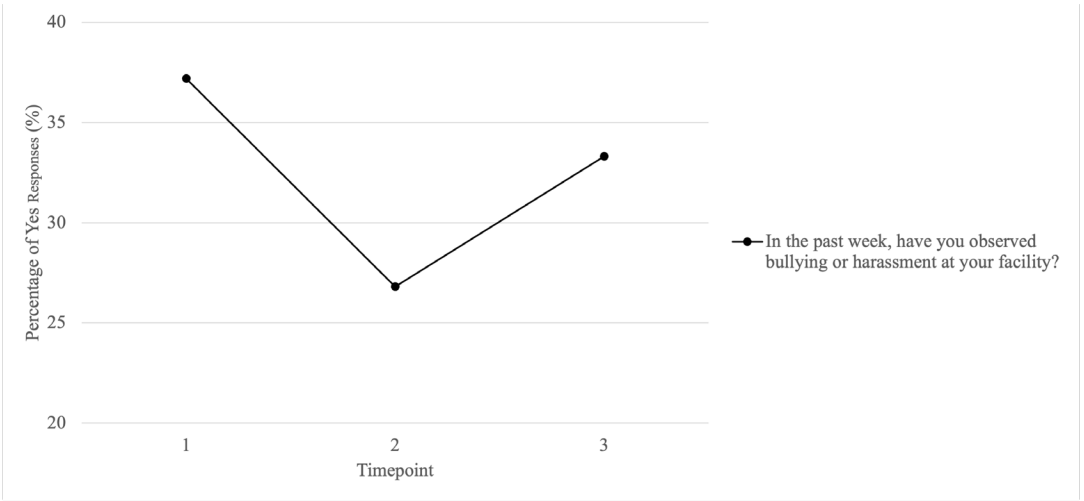

Figure 4. Respect

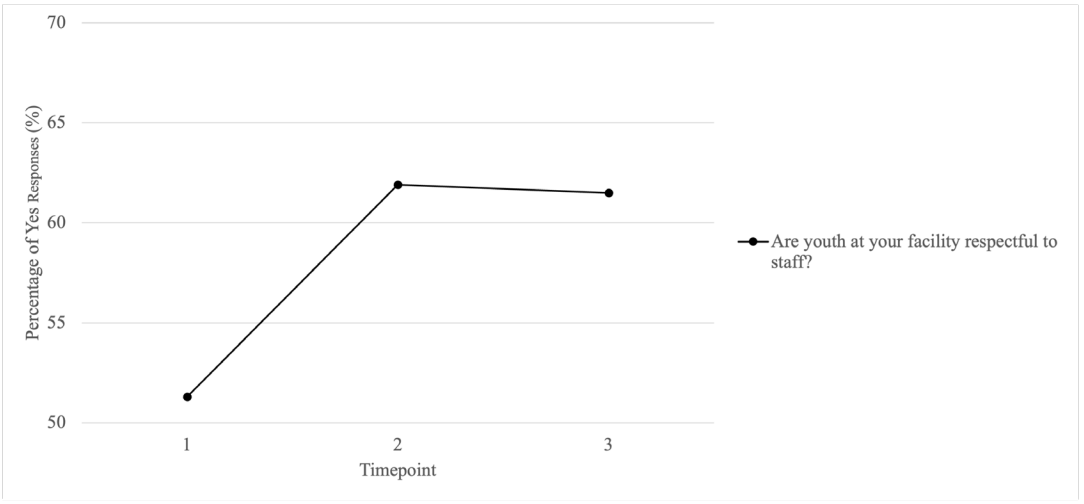

Figure 3 (Safety), and Figure 4 (Respect). Throughout the administration of the climate survey and sharing of the data summaries, we worked with our community partner to assist with data interpretation and action planning at both the agency and facility levels, answer questions about youth responses in the context of the climate tenets, report themes across survey administrations, and provide resources linked to climate trainings of facility staff as well as for professional development. We also held joint conversations about how to continue to encourage youth voice in the behavioral framework and facility climate with ideas generated to maximize youth engagement in programming for improved outcomes. At this same time, we brainstormed about how to measure staff perceptions of facility climate to gain a more comprehensive picture of how agency and facility leadership could continue to support positive facility climate for both youth and staff.

As with any inquiry, several limitations should be considered. First, the surveys relied on youth self-reports of their perspectives on facility climate. Even though survey completion was voluntary and anonymous, it is unclear if the youth responded honestly, a common issue with self-report data of any kind. Second, the three timepoints served as snapshots of the perspectives of those who completed the survey on the day it was given. Third, with youth entering and exiting the facility on a daily basis we were unable to conduct analyses on any change in youth perspectives on facility climate across the three timepoints. Fourth, the findings of our inquiry may not be generalizable to other facilities given that responses to COVID-19 varied across states, agencies, and facilities.

Purpose 2: Agency Personnel Focus Group

Design and Sample

To address Purpose 2, we employed a qualitative design using a focus group. Agency personnel whose primary responsibilities included supporting and strengthening facility climate (as well as other job duties) across facilities were invited to participate in a focus group in June 2021 after Timepoint 2. This temporal context was selected as the pre-COVID-19 youth climate schedule was postponed due to continued COVID-19 disruptions in staffing (e.g., shortages), programming changes due to youth/staff illness, and changes in who from the agency could access facilities due to changing "essential" or "non-essential" classifications.

Three agency personnel agreed to participate in the focus group; however, on the day of the scheduled focus group one could not attend due to illness. Michael and Mary (pseudonyms) participated in the focus group. Michael was a male, African American with a bachelor's degree who had worked for 8 years at the facility- and agency-levels with the last 3 years in his current role. Mary was a White female with a master's degree who had worked for 13 years both at the facility- and agency-levels with the last 5 years in her current role. Both were assigned to six or more detention and long-term facilities and provided specific on-site and virtual support, worked directly with facility leadership teams on climate activities, interfaced with staff and youth, conducted fidelity of implementation visits, and provided coaching, in addition to other job responsibilities.

Focus Group

As our partnership with the agency continued throughout COVID-19 and youth climate surveys were being collected, we wanted to understand from an agency personnel perspective (e.g., their voice) how they were able to support facility climate and facility staff and youth during this tumultuous time. The semi-structured focus group (e.g., pre-planned, open-ended questions; Katz-Buonincontro, 2022) focused on COVID-19's impact on facility climate:

- the broad and specific integration of participants' responsibilities/scope of work and the impact of COVID-19 impact on a personal level, at the facility-level (staff), and with youth
- any influence of COVID-19 disruptions on facility staff and youth behavior
- their thoughts on the agency's behavioral framework, facility climate, and COVID-19 influences
- each of the climate tenets (Expectations, Acknowledgements, Discipline, Safety, Respect, Connections) per the youth climate survey data and with regard to COVID-19
- any suggestions they had for further strengthening facility climate at either the facility- or agency-level

We conducted the focus group virtually through video conferencing. One researcher facilitated the focus group discussion while a second researcher, also visible, took notes. The facilitator began the semi-structured focus group with a priori questions. As the discussion continued, the facilitator purposefully practiced

reflexivity by guiding the discussion in a way that accounted for potential trauma experiences related to COVID-19 (Shelton et al., 2025). Reflexivity is "increased attention to researcher subjectivity in the research process—a focus of how does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel affect data collection and analysis" (Pillow, 2003, p. 176). Reflexivity "demands a continuous self-analysis and self-awareness" (Shelton & Flint, 2019, p. 3) that requires researchers to constantly examine how their own views, assumptions, and experiences may affect the research process. For example, during the focus group, the facilitator asked follow-up questions and changed the order of questions as the discussion unfolded. Because agency personnel and researchers maintained ongoing contact before and during COVID-19, the facilitator was cognizant of the challenges COVID-19 was presenting both personally and professionally for Michael and Mary. In light of this context, some of the a priori questions were rephrased, presented out of order, used as follow-up questions, and summarized in language the participants used and the facilitator sometimes requested examples or further explanations.

A third researcher transcribed the 1-hour and 23-minute focus group audio-recording, and a fourth researcher assessed reliability between the transcription and the audio. All researchers had prior training and experience transcribing focus groups as well as assessing the reliability of transcriptions with recordings.

Data Analyses

Two researchers analyzed the transcript data corpus through the lens of their partnership with the agency and the behavioral learning and labeling theories. Using a multi-step constant comparative approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the two researchers engaged in the following:

First, both, independently read, the transcript and began creating recurrent themes. Researchers drafted theme names and underlined text in the transcript to support each.

Second, both researchers met to discuss their findings. One shared their themes first, how they arrived at the themes, and provided supportive text examples. The second shared theirs in the same manner.

Third, they discussed commonalities and differences, merged and/or created new themes based on the discussion and text examples, and finalized the themes.

Fourth, using the agreed upon themes, they jointly reviewed the transcript and selected supportive text while consulting their initial, independent coding.

Fifth, they jointly reviewed and finalized the themes and supportive text, including the specific length of the supportive text.

What Was Learned

Throughout the focus group and outside of their responses to the a priori protocol questions, both participants experienced a common identity shift during the COVID-19 pandemic related to their work with maintaining and improving facility climate. From the first agency COVID-19 protocol, their roles shifted from leaders and supporters of facility climate, with presence and voice at both the facility- and agency-levels to non-essential staff. This meant that their access to facilities, staff, and youth fundamentally changed (e.g., "can't go in"). This coincided with direct care staff being classified as essential staff. Such a role shift influenced not only their behavior but also their ability to identify facility climate needs, provide necessary supports, and maintain relations with facility staff. For example, they described the state of facility climate efforts as "know it's not being implemented," they can "only rely on what they are told on the phone" as to facility climate status and needs, and "a lot of people who didn't necessarily buy-in" means we are "having to do a lot of reeducation of staff." The climate supporter's physical presence was shifted to virtual and verbal communications (e.g., "teleworking" approach). This communication was, inconsistent at times (e.g., "on the fly phone conversations") and with different personnel given staffing shortages and changes in staff roles and shifts within facilities.

The participants described how being classified as non-essential was difficult to process and, made it challenging to offer the facility climate supports staff and youth needed, both voiced and unvoiced during such a crisis. Their job responsibilities were difficult to near-impossible to perform at times. For example, one stated "[I] can't do my job" and the other concurred. A lack of Connectedness with the ones they were charged with supporting contributed to fewer opportunities to teach, model, and reinforce facility staff implementation of climate strategies.

At the same time, participants described how as COVID-19 continued their relations with facility staff eroded; facility staff were upset that they were classified as "essential" while their agency supporters were not. For example,

participants shared that the classifications brought "conflict" to the working relationship, and some staff "felt slighted in some way." Such conflict would contribute to less mutual Respect between the climate supporters and facility staff. One shared that it was "difficult to engage staff and youth" during these times.

The identity shift from being an integral "inside" supporter to an "outside" supporter was linked to the perception that others viewed them as community partners/supporters rather than an agency conduit of assistance and resources. Consequently, they were dismissed as someone who could not/would not help. Participants stated: "I feel discouraged because I feel helpless," "it definitely took its toll," and "it really challenged us to try to provide more support but also provide different ways of going about it."

Additionally, they shared that when they were allowed to enter facilities and offer assistance, access was often fleeting and unproductive as access was closed off when COVID-19 cases in the area increased, and time with facility staff was not always productive given the "many hats" staff were asked to wear on any given day due to staff shortages. Such examples highlight the difficulties the facility climate supporters faced during COVID-19. However, they said "trying to keep ourselves motivated…moving forward and encouraging [other facility climate supporters] and looking for what we can do rather than focusing on what we can't do."

From our analyses of the transcripts, we identified four themes through the theoretical lens of behavioral learning theory and labeling theory:

1. staff and agency sense of hopelessness and burnout
2. discontinuity between daily practice and the behavioral framework used to influence facility climate
3. steady erosion to "old ways" and non-evidence-based practices
4. evolution of youth perceptions and reactions

Staff Sense of Hopelessness and Burnout

The facility climate supporters acknowledged how the agency's decision to classify them as non-essential staff contributed to facility staff's sense of hopelessness and burnout which aligns directly with behavioral learning theory and its emphasis on how environmental stimuli (e.g., people's experiences) impact one's behavior. For example, one shared that there were continued "unresolved tensions on who was deemed essential versus non-essential staff across the agency." Such tension would have a negative impact in relations between the facilities and the agency, between staff and between facility staff and climate supporters. It also would affect staff to youth relations (e.g., "they are not really thinking about the rapport part"), related to the climate tenets of Connectedness and Respect. For example, it was shared that with the classification of agency staff as non-essential and facility staff as essential, "oh you care about you but don't care about us – you don't respect us… they [facility staff] a huge lack of respect from [the agency]…that bled out into the facility." This in turn had "staff felt[feeling] disrespected by upper leadership…[and them being like] I don't have the energy to be respectful."

In addition, Connectedness was further compromised when the climate supporters provided virtual supports/trainings for staff. Staff participants in training were evidently disengaged (e.g., "lose that engagement in the training… [staff] were not really participating…they were just there on the screen doing…other things in the background") which meant facility staff "didn't really get necessarily what they need[ed]." The climate supporters also reported that they and "staff were trying…they were genuine" in their facility climate efforts. Both shared that "a lot of staff are burnt out…worn out…taken an emotional toll…you can't create bodies" in relation to staffing shortages. They said, "incredible staff shortages… huge impact on youth," and such shortages have continued.

Because of staff fatigue, facility climate efforts were not being implemented as intended per facility procedures, especially the teaching of Expectations, consistency of Acknowledgements, and relation building between staff and youth (e.g., Connectedness). Overall, this sense of hopelessness related to facility climate implementation, as it "created a storm that just really made it hard for everybody."

Discontinuity Between Daily Practice and Behavioral Framework Used to Influence Facility Climate

With so many disruptions to daily operations (e.g., activities, schedules, interactions, protocol enactment) over the course of COVID-19, the facility climate supporters shared that "if we're not there to support them, they can get off-track very easily" and that they needed to "retrack and retrain…refocus them" in relation to facility staff

behaviors – key tenets to behavioral learning theory. Participants shared many examples of how the climate tenets were not being met in daily practice. In relation to labeling theory, the climate supporters linked this discontinuity to the facility environment as a whole (e.g., "[they] can't succeed…in this environment"). Facility staff came to believe that they could not influence the facility climate nor implement pre-COVID-19 climate approaches.

However, from a behavioral learning lens, the climate supporters stated that their role in each facility environment was to "help rebuild that culture" alongside staff. They employed several behavioral learning approaches centered on antecedent and consequent strategies to influence facility staff behavior (i.e., implementing facility climate supports with youth). They did so by providing "encouragement" (e.g., reinforcement), "letting them know the good things that they've done" related to implementation fidelity of climate strategies (e.g., acknowledgement, behavior specific praise), and taking approaches in "build[ing] on what they've already established" (e.g., shaping behaviors, setting higher goals). These strategies were needed given many climate tenets were not being implemented daily by facility staff:

- Expectations – these were not being taught to youth or being used using the agreed upon common language to cue youth to engage in prosocial behaviors (e.g., "not actually being taught," "disconnect between the acronym and matrix," "based on their own interpretations")
- Acknowledgement – reinforcement was not used for youth engaged in prosocial behaviors (e.g., "the reinforcement was not being…consistently used," "less verbal praise," not "defin[ing] the specific behaviors we're reinforcing," "not as many events as they used to do")
- Discipline – disciplinary practices were not being implemented consistently (e.g., "a lot more reactive rather than proactive," "misusing some of the tools," "fairness has been lost")
- Safety – staff stress and burnout compromised facility safety and climate (e.g., "staff are just exhausted…not able to have time for …self-care…because we're so short [staffed]")
- Connectedness – there was a lack or decrease of relation building focused on prosocial behaviors (e.g., "more engaged with the kids that are doing wrong," "work on the rapport piece…and how that will help manage behavior")
- Respect – this fluctuated during COVID-19. Paticipants shared that "the staff that have been around throughout this pandemic have built a great rapport with youth…the youth have looked up to them because they know they was consistent in being there." One shared that "we have lost some respect… people are in survival mode…we [staff] are not as respectful when we're tired" and that "when we have staff respecting youth, we see a lot more respect between youth – when there's not a lot of respect from staff then we see a lot less respect even between youth."

The climate supporters hoped that facility staff "recognize these people [them] are here to help" with daily implementation of facility climate strategies anchored to the agency's behavioral framework. They shared that they could "teach them it's a framework…something they can weave through their everyday job duties" to promote a healthier facility climate for the benefit of themselves and for the youth served.

Steady Erosion to "Old Ways" and Non-Evidence-Based Practices

Throughout the focus group discussion, both participants repeatedly explained that COVID-19 provided the context for facility staff to slowly revert to old policy practices or practices that had no evidentiary basis for supporting or strengthening facility climate. This observation relates to behavioral learning theory and how environmental stimuli (e.g., COVID-19) may impact one's behavior. For example, the participants described facility staff as "going rogue." They shared that the agency behavioral framework became a "mutation…over the year" in facilities, with each facility's erosion unique. They linked this erosion to their own inability to be there directly and in-person (e.g., due to COVID-19 protocols and being deemed non-essential staff for periods of time) to provide ongoing professional development and other forms of coaching (e.g., reinforcement for implementing the framework with fidelity) and technical support (e.g., modeling all aspects of framework implementation per the facility's unique procedures).

Erosion of fidelity to the framework aligns with our behavioral learning theory perspective: without modeling of appropriate implementation and/or reinforcement of implementation fidelity efforts, staff behavior changed as the COVID-19

pandemic progress and its associated, changing protocols and expectations evolved. This erosion also aligned with reported staff shortages, changes in shift patterns, and disruptions in programming all of which were not unique to our partner and were experienced across the juvenile system and other youth-serving sectors (e.g., public school systems). Due to the stresses of COVID-19, staff also may have experienced cognitive default whereby they lowered their cognitive load to what was known and possibly viewed as easier to implement (e.g., going back to the old ways, viewing new things/contexts too difficult).

Related to reinforcement, both participants referred to "lack of verbal praise" as something that when they spoke with facility staff, they were not hearing reported examples of staff using immediate, positive verbal praise when interacting with youth engaged in the expected behaviors. The lack of praise from staff to youth also may have changed youth's behaviors per behavioral learning theory. Without some sort of verbal acknowledgement of youth engaged in positive behaviors aligned with the behavioral framework expectations, then it is possible youth behaviors would also erode into negative forms (e.g., noncompliance, aggression). Overall, both participants thought that throughout COVID-19 "a lot of our facilities put so much emphasis in doing things the wrong way." Without consistent external climate supports and supporters, they believed the climate tenets of Expectations (modeling) and Acknowledgement (reinforcement) were not as strong as they were before COVID-19 in most facilities.

Evolution of Youth Perceptions and Reactions

Both participants discussed how facility climate was affected as youth perceptions and reactions evolved from before, during, and beyond COVID-19. One described how staff and youth contributed positively to the facility climate early in the COVID-19 pandemic, when facilities were contending with new agency protocols and the climate supporters faced unpredictability in how they could interact, visit, communicate, and support facility staff in their climate efforts. One shared, "I think our kids stepped up and were rock stars and they were all scared together, and they were all learning this together and supporting one another and respecting each other." The other participant agreed and shared that staff displayed the same types of behaviors, at least initially. From a behavioral learning theory perspective, this demonstrates how the environment (e.g., COVID-19 protocols and uncertainty), at least initially, positively impacted the behaviors of youth and staff. Given that no one, either staff or youth, had experienced a pandemic before, this element of mutual respect and bonding may have first served as a connection to one another and to the facility as a whole. Such Connectedness may be linked to a form of "trauma-bonding." Both staff and youth were on an equal playing field as neither had voice in COVID-19 protocols and the inconsistency that resulted. In this example, both participants provided evidence that the climate tenets of Respect and Connectedness were positive.

However, participants described other behavioral evolutions over time. One shared how there was a shift over time with "kids saying – hey, it's time to move on, and get back out of this dorm." This was in reference to not only scheduling disruptions and freedom of movement (e.g., youth spending more time in their rooms/by themselves) even though agency COVID-19 protocols were in place. Because youth were spending more time in their rooms, typical programming was disrupted and rehabilitation and habilitation efforts were not maximal, including teaching and modeling of the expectations and interactions with staff. Participants also shared how "as time grew, they [youth] grew weary, they began to become more irritated and annoyed" with the lack of staff focus on improving their climate. This eventually resulted in youth becoming "disrespectful…aggressive…irritated…those emotions have started to pour into how they engage staff and interact with each other." Participants also shared their belief that negative youth behavioral incidents would begin to rise. From a labeling theory lens, facility staff's abandonment of facility climate efforts, interactions with youth, and teaching of prosocial expectations communicated, unconsciously or consciously, that youth were not worth habilitating and/or rehabilitating since they were detained. Participants mentioned how youth behavior changed as staff behavior changed, with one saying there was a "mutation of [climate efforts] over the year" that negatively affected youth perceptions and behaviors toward others and the facility as whole.

Final Thoughts

Given all the disruptions that COVID-19 brought to the daily operations of juvenile facilities, we have only begun to understand the effects such disruptions have had, in both the short- and long-term, on all aspects of facility functioning, including

the overall facility climate. Facility climate is the universal anchor to daily interactions between and across facility staff and youth, programming and treatment opportunities, and the environment in which habilitation and rehabilitation of school-age youth occurs. Our inquiry found some areas of focus for agency climate supporters to pursue with our support as a community partner, as well as many areas for celebration.

Before, during, and after COVID-19 and even amid a professional identity shift, the agency climate supporters remained positive and hopeful that their efforts would continue to reap benefits for youth and staff at the facility level. They found ways to celebrate facility staff climate implementation efforts, and they focused on meeting facility staff where they were and incrementally building from there. The climate supporters intent to "focus on the basics" as one shared was instrumental in following actions:

- (re)building and (re)pairing their relations with facility leadership, facility staff, and youth (e.g., climate tenets of Respect and Connectedness)
- making decisions and action plans based on youth climate survey data (e.g., addressing climate tenets which may have not or minimally maintained at pre-COVID-19 levels, Safety and Discipline)
- focusing on (re)teaching the elements of the agency's behavioral framework with specific links between teaching and reinforcing facility-level behavioral expectations paired with coaching and technical assistance both virtually and in-person (e.g., climate tenets of Expectations, Acknowledgement, and Connectedness)
- (re)framing facility staff perceptions that facility climate efforts benefit them too (e.g., addressing their stress, burnout, self-care) when the environment proactively and positively addresses all climate tenets
- giving facility staff opportunities to share their voice on current climate practices and the supports they viewed as needed to increase staff buy-in and fidelity of implementation

Overall, the climate supporters leaned into behavioral learning theory with emphasis on their efforts to (1) teach, (2) model, and (3) reinforce facility staff climate practice implementation efforts but also embedding all three into their trainings and technical support for facility staff to transfer what they learned into their daily practice and interactions with youth.

At the same time, our role as the climate supports' community partner evolved across the inquiry timespan to meet their needs, as did others partnerships with other juvenile agencies (e.g., Tunstall et al., 2024). On the onset, our community partner had an integral voice in adaptations to the climate survey; they provided suggestions and edits, reviewed the adapted version, and piloted the survey. They also collaborated in creating the climate summary format to ensure that it was clear and easy to use for both themselves and facility-level personnel, who would use the results to plan further actions and celebrations. Once the youth climate survey schedule and processes were agreed upon and built into the assessment schedule, our role in the partnership moved from one of logistical support (e.g., providing all survey materials and processes, training climate supporters to administer the surveys), to that of data summarizer/synthesizer (e.g., entered all data, provided summary reports to agency and facility) to co-data interpreter per climate supporter queries (e.g., responding to emails/phone calls, providing clarifications and context to youth responses) to brainstormer/solution-offerer (e.g., making suggestions on pathways forward, sharing how other facilities may address the concern) to technical assistance resourcer to idea sharer for future planning (e.g., mapping out training foci, sharing evidence-based climate practices for consideration). An outgrowth of this partnership as it continued was a project to adapt a staff climate survey for future use so both facility staff and youth voice could be measured.

Our partnership met its goal with new goals identified (i.e., staff climate survey) and as researchers, we suggest several future directions for this inquiry. First, with the advent of calls to include youth voice in juvenile correctional programming and overall facility climate (Stern et al., 2022), this partnership focused on understanding youth perspectives related to facility climate. Future partnerships may consider blending youth and facility staff voice in the form of (bi)annual climate surveys completed by both paired with youth and facility staff focus groups to give agencies, facility leadership, and those charged with supporting facility climate efforts a more comprehensive snapshot of effective climate strategies, areas for celebration, areas of focus, and ideas for continued professional development and advancement for facility staff who are implementing climate efforts.

Second, this partnership looked at three timepoints to better understand the impact

COVID-19 may have had on facility climate efforts from a youth perspective and mid-point from an agency personnel perspective. Future partnerships may consider expanding the archived analyses to timepoints beyond the years included here to span several timepoints in the years following COVID-19. Such expansion may permit an understanding of patterns or themes over time related to facility climate strengthening efforts, as daily operations become more stable and staffing issues become less prominent.

Third, this partnership looked broadly at created themes from the aggregated youth climate survey data by timepoint. Future partnerships may explore such data at the facility-level to identify any unique themes, trends in data, and areas for celebration/focus.

Fourth, this partnership aimed to gather agency personnel's perspectives on facility climate efforts during COVID-19. Future partnerships may consider additional agency personnel/climate supporter focus groups to understand the current status of facility climate efforts, including facility staff professional development, specific climate practices being implemented and/or considered, and agency strategic plans related to strengthening facility climate for youth and staff benefit.

Fifth, this inquiry centered on youth and agency personnel voice. Future partnerships may want to bi-angulate youth voice with archived youth behavioral incident data (e.g., youth-on-youth, youth-on-staff, bullying, noncompliance, disrespect) to determine if the reported climate tenet areas of strength and focus across the timepoints remain the same.

Sixth, as juvenile agencies and facilities continue to partner with community entities to explore the long-term effects of COVID-19 on their facility staff and youth, future partnerships may continue to target facility climate along with mental health, health and wellbeing, and overall outcomes of and for staff and youth.

Seventh, as this partnership has existed prior to, during, and after COVID-19 to improve both facility climate efforts and other targeted areas, we may examine the strengths and areas for focus of the partnership. The partnership weathered all that COVID-19 brought with it from disruptions to planned trainings, supports, and resources, to climate supporter personnel changes to changing agency priorities to newly identified areas of focus specific to facility climate supports and practices. As our and others' partnerships evolve based on needs and mutually beneficial outcomes, future inquiries are warranted on effective partnerships to improve facility climate for youth and staff in a post-COVID-19 environment.

Even with the immediacy of change that COVID-19 brought to the daily functioning of juvenile facilities and with juvenile agencies/facilities still recalibrating from these changes and changing needs per data of their youth and staff paired with new science on evidence-based practices and frameworks, facility climate/juvenile condition strengthening efforts should persist (Ackerman et al., 2024; U.S. Departments of Education, 2023). To fully meet this charge, agencies and facilities should continue to collaborate with community partners. Community partners can offer them additional and needed resources, expertise outside the scope of their own personnel, and technical support networks structured to provide long-term supports. Such partnerships may make agency/facility strategic plan goals and objectives more feasible and facilitate sharing of the workload, accountability, and data interpretations. Focus on strengthening juvenile facility climate provides the foundation for a safe, healthy, and productive learning environment in which youth may thrive across all domains and in which facility staff may experience work satisfaction and success.

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