

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Problem matter differences of private elementary school principals by school size: An analysis

Rosemary Ustinoff-Brumbelow<sup>1</sup> John R. Slate<sup>2\*</sup> George W. Moore<sup>2</sup> Frederick C. Lunenburg<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** In this investigation, the degree to which differences were present between private elementary school principals at Small-size schools (*i.e.*, less than 250 students) and private elementary school principals at Large-size schools (*i.e.*, 250 or more students) in problem matters that occurred on their school campus was addressed. Data were acquired from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Class of 2010-2011 Principal Survey. Statistically significant differences were revealed in four of the eight areas private elementary school principals rated in frequency as a problem matter that occurred on their school campus. Principals of Large-size schools emphasized statistically significant more problem matters in children bringing in or using illegal drugs, vandalism of school property, student bullying, and class cutting than principals of Small-size schools. Suggestions for future research and implications for policy and practice were made.

**Keywords:** ECLS-K, student enrollment, small-size schools, large-size schools, problem matters

### 1 Introduction

The time and effort that teachers and principals spend in addressing problem matters within their classrooms and schools affect student outcomes. Researchers<sup>[1-4]</sup> focused on public school communities confirm that safe and supportive schools provide opportunities for student outcomes such as reduced incidences in school violence<sup>[2,4]</sup> and engagement in risky behaviors<sup>[5]</sup> along with increased academic achievement<sup>[3]</sup>.

Because the number of students enrolled in private schools in the United States exceeds 5 million students<sup>[6]</sup>, investigating the effect that problem matters affect students in private schools is warranted. Important to realize, the research literature related to problem matters addressed in private schools based as a function of school size is limited. Although some researchers<sup>[7,8]</sup> have explored the effect of school size on school climate and discipline in public schools, few researchers have focused this attention on private schools.

In recent years, widely publicized instances of school

violence<sup>[9]</sup> have resulted in concern over whether school leaders are capable of educating students in environments free of social and physical aggression. Be that as it may, concern for student safety has been an ongoing issue for educators and the subject of federal mandates for many years. For example, in 1989, one element of the National Education Goals was that U.S. citizens would have “safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools” in an “environment conducive to learning”<sup>[10]</sup>. More recently, non-academic factors that influence student learning and contribute to student success including health and safety, climate and culture, and positive behavior intervention and support were identified in the Every Student Succeeds Act<sup>[11]</sup>. As a result of these mandates, school leaders are required to implement social competencies in addition to ensuring academic achievement.

Discipline problems in an educational setting require teachers and administrators to devote excessive amounts of time and energy toward their resolution, efforts that detract from classroom instruction<sup>[12]</sup>. The manner in which problems are resolved may be dependent on several factors including: the culture and climate that permeates the school, the professional training provided to teachers to support classroom management practices, and the effectiveness of classroom management actions implemented by teachers to support student achievement<sup>[12]</sup>.

The culture and climate of a school community affects the behavior of teachers and students<sup>[13-17]</sup>. Lunenburg and Ornstein<sup>[17]</sup> contended that school culture is comprised of the shared beliefs, attitudes, motivation, leader-

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\* Correspondence to: John R. Slate, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, USA; Email: [profslate@aol.com](mailto:profslate@aol.com)

<sup>1</sup> Esprit International School, USA

<sup>2</sup> Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, USA

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ship, and communications that define the organization and establish standards within which all stakeholders function. School climate characterizes the physical and psychological aspects of a school<sup>[17]</sup>. Aspects of school climate are more responsive to change and contribute to the conditions required for effective teaching and learning to occur. Consequently, administrators and teachers who lead students in their academic development are also responsible for ensuring the school culture and climate is conducive to learning.

Stakeholders must cultivate the social, emotional, and academic aptitudes in which children learn to apply problem-solving skills, interact respectfully, and resolve conflict peacefully to accomplish the goal of ensuring a safe, supportive, favorable school climate is achieved. The National School Climate Center<sup>[18]</sup> identified the quality and character of school life as crucial to the development of school climate. A favorable school climate occurs when norms, values, and expectations support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe; students and others are engaged and respected; educators' model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning; and each person contributes to the operations of the school and the care of the physical environment<sup>[18]</sup>.

School principals play a crucial role in ensuring the school environment is conducive to learning through the teachers they hire and the decisions they make that shape the school culture<sup>[19]</sup>. Researchers<sup>[20,21]</sup> confirmed active classroom engagement predicts student success; on the other hand, disruptive behavior predicts failure<sup>[22]</sup>. Disruptive student behavior is challenging for teachers and often affects the entire classroom due to the attention that is drawn from instruction to deal with the negative behavior.

The effects of principal leadership on student achievement and school climate have been extensively analyzed by numerous researchers (*e.g.*<sup>[23-25]</sup>). Specifically, researchers<sup>[26-28]</sup> have documented the direct influence that principals have on student achievement through their interactions with students, input on the arrangement of classroom-sizes, and student placements in classrooms<sup>[26-28]</sup>. Furthermore, Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson<sup>[29]</sup> documented that principals indirectly affect student achievement through the influence they exert on the school's climate and culture through teacher professional development, increased collaboration, distributed leadership, and implementation of policies and procedures. Teacher preparation is enhanced by principals who use these techniques which in turn contributes to student success.

Unfortunately for some students, teachers enter the

classroom with limited classroom management skills<sup>[19]</sup>. Gage, Scott, Hirn, and MacSuga-Gage<sup>[30]</sup> confirmed that ineffectively handling student disruptions affects the entire classroom. Principals who provide teachers with support and training to identify and prevent disruptive classroom behaviors may serve to protect and preserve the social and instructional climate in the classroom.

Gage *et al.*<sup>[30]</sup> examined the experiences of teachers as they implemented evidence-based classroom management in classrooms to determine their impact on student engagement. Effective classroom management decreases problem behavior and increases student achievement<sup>[31,32]</sup>. Gage *et al.*<sup>[30]</sup> asserted that specific practices likely to increase student engagement include active teaching, increased opportunities for students to respond, and positive feedback to students.

During periods of teaching<sup>[33]</sup>, teachers engage in activities that include explaining, demonstrating or modeling a concept, principle or activity related to an academic topic while furthering the lesson/objective of the class; this active teaching increases the probability of student engagement<sup>[33,34]</sup>. Opportunities to respond are curriculum-related prompts provided by the teacher that may result in improved student outcomes<sup>[35,36]</sup>. Rates for the occurrence of opportunities to respond within three to five minutes have been documented to increase student engagement. Feedback to students through verbal and gestural positive performance feedback is another measure of teacher engagement that increases student achievement and social behavior. Hattie<sup>[37]</sup> concluded that feedback ranked in the top 10 of all behaviors that teachers utilize to facilitate student success. According to Gage *et al.*<sup>[30]</sup>, teachers who actively engage students in classroom instruction experience increases in opportunities for student learning and reductions in student disruptions.

Another factor that may affect school climate and discipline is school size. Researchers<sup>[15,16,39,40]</sup> concluded that school size affects student behavior and academic achievement wherein higher rates of student discipline occur in larger schools. According to Coleman<sup>[41]</sup>, the size of a school affects the social capital within a school community. In larger schools, students interact less frequently with fellow students, teachers, and administrators<sup>[42]</sup> than in smaller schools. On the other hand, researchers<sup>[43,44]</sup> have contended that students in small schools have better connections with the school and other students than students in large schools.

## 1.1 Statement of the problem

Discipline and behavior problems have the potential to create chaotic environments in classrooms, and the adverse effects of disruptive and distracting student be-

aviors affect teaching and learning for all students<sup>[39,40]</sup>. Addressing the issues that result in the negative behavior is essential for the students exhibiting the problem behaviors and for their classroom peers. To maintain classroom order, teachers may utilize fundamental techniques including engaging instruction, strategic classroom management, and establishing positive relationships with students<sup>[30]</sup>. In reality, at times, students present with persistent problems including oppositional defiant, disruptive, or defiant behavior that may require the use of resources from outside of the classroom<sup>[32]</sup>. Other teachers, behavior specialists, and school administrators may provide valuable resources to classroom teachers for reducing behavior problems.

Teachers play a crucial role in shaping children's behaviors<sup>[1]</sup> and the social climate of the classroom and the school have an impact on the interactions between students and school staff. Consequently, teachers must be cognizant of ways to guide and manage classroom behavior to enhance teaching and learning. Teachers may be more successful in creating a positive classroom environment with the support of school leadership in providing strategies and programs for behavior intervention when warranted.

Private schools typically serve a specific community of learners. Therefore, the nature of the school (*e.g.*, religious school) may define the expectations for student behavior and have an effect on the extent to which teacher support in addressing problem matters is required. Although researchers on this topic have focused on public schools, understanding the extent to which problem matters affects learning in private schools is worthy of investigation.

## 1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the extent to which differences were present in the problem matters addressed at their schools between principals of Small-size private elementary schools and principals of Large-size private elementary schools. Specifically addressed were the problems encountered by principals of Small-size private elementary schools and principals of Large-size private elementary schools regarding theft, physical conflicts among students, children bringing in or using alcohol at school, children bringing in or using illegal drugs at school, vandalism of school property, student bullying, widespread disorder in classrooms, and class cutting. The results from these investigations might reveal differences in school culture that exist between principals of Small-size private elementary schools and principals of Large-size private elementary schools.

## 1.3 Significance of the study

Researchers<sup>[30–32]</sup> have contributed to the understanding of the effect school discipline has on student learning in the public sector. Very few, if any, researchers have examined the consequences of school discipline for private school students. As such, the results of this study may be used by educational leaders to fill a void in the literature on the problem matters addressed by private elementary school principals. Consequently, insight may be obtained by stakeholders that will lead to understanding the differences that exist in the problem matters addressed between private school principals in Small-size schools and in Large-size schools. Results obtained herein may offer insight to educational leaders into the unique problem matters addressed in private schools and highlight the differences between their influence on student learning and achievement. Private school administrators may use this information to identify specific problem matters on their campus and proactively anticipate solutions to improve student achievement and overall school effectiveness.

## 1.4 Research questions

In this empirical investigation, the following research questions were addressed:

- (1) What is the difference in problems encountered with theft between principals of Small-size private elementary schools and principals of Large-size private elementary schools?
- (2) What is the difference in problems encountered with physical conflicts among students between principals of Small-size private elementary schools and principals of Large-size private elementary schools?
- (3) What is the difference in problems encountered with children bringing in or using alcohol at school between principals of Small-size private elementary schools and principals of Large-size private elementary schools?
- (4) What is the difference in problems encountered with children bringing in or using illegal drugs at school between principals of Small-size private elementary schools and principals of Large-size private elementary schools?
- (5) What is the difference in problems encountered with vandalism of school property between principals of Small-size private elementary schools and principals of Large-size private elementary schools?
- (6) What is the difference in problems encountered with student bullying between principals of Small-size private elementary schools and principals of Large-size private elementary schools?
- (7) What is the difference in problems encountered with widespread disorder in classrooms between principals of Small-size private elementary schools and principals of Large-size private elementary schools?

Large-size private elementary schools?

(8) What is the difference in problems encountered with class cutting between principals of Small-size private elementary schools and principals of Large-size private elementary schools?

## 2 Methods

### 2.1 Research design

Because the data reflect events that have already occurred, a non-experimental, ex post facto research design was present<sup>[38,45]</sup>. As such, neither the independent variables nor the dependent variables were capable of manipulation, nor could extraneous variables be controlled. In this empirical investigation, previously obtained archival data from the National Center for Education Statistics were analyzed.

In this study, the independent variable was private school principals categorized into two groups of principals: (1) principals of Small-size private elementary schools, and (2) principals of Large-size private elementary schools. Small-size private schools were defined as schools with fewer than 250 students; Large-size schools were defined as schools with 250 or more students. The dependent variables were comprised of eight items on the survey in which principals were queried to respond to the problem matters addressed at their schools in (1) theft; (2) physical conflicts among students; (3) children bringing in or using alcohol at school; (4) children bringing in or using illegal drugs at school; (5) vandalism of school property; (6) student bullying; (7) widespread disorder in classrooms; and (8) class cutting.

### 2.2 Participants and instrumentation

Principals in public and private schools nationwide participated in this study by responding to a survey administered by The National Center for Education Statistics<sup>[28]</sup>, an agency within the Institute of Education Sciences of the U.S. Department of Education. The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010-2011 (ECLS-K:2011) was utilized to compile information from multiple sources to identify rich data on a diverse group of students in both public and private elementary schools. Parents, teachers, caregivers and school personnel voluntarily provided descriptive information on children's progress from their entry to school through their progression through elementary school.

The ECLS-K: 2011 self-administered questionnaires are analyzed by researchers and provide information about a wide range of factors that affect children's school performance over time<sup>[28]</sup>. Consequently, a comprehen-

sive picture of the children's experiences and development may be obtained by researchers<sup>[28]</sup>. Students who participated in the study attended both full-day and part-day programs upon entry into the Kindergarten Class of 2010-2011<sup>[28]</sup>.

The school administrator questionnaire is comprised of the following eight sections: (1) School characteristics; (2) School facilities and resources; (3) School-community-family connections; (4) School policies and practices; (5) School programs for particular populations; (6) Federal Programs: Title I, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), and Title III (if applicable); (7) Staffing and teacher characteristics; and (8) School administrator characteristics. The item in section (3), School-community-family connections, specifically related to this study was: To the best of your knowledge how often do the following types of problems occur at your school? Administrators responded to a Likert-type scale by marking how frequently specific problems occur, ranging from Happens daily to Never happens. The specific problem matters about which they were asked were: (1) theft; (2) physical conflicts among students; (3) children bringing in or using alcohol at school; (4) children bringing in or using illegal drugs at school; (5) vandalism of school property; (6) student bullying; (7) widespread disorder in classrooms; and (8) class cutting.

Archival data from the Spring 2012 School Administrators Questionnaire were obtained from the ECLS-K: 2011 database, and then imported into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software program. Administrator responses to the questions concerning problem matters addressed in their schools were used for this study. Labels were given to variables used in this investigation after the ECLS-K: 2011 data file was converted into a SPSS data file. Minimal errors in the data are assumed to be present because data were reported to the National Center for Education Statistics directly from participating schools. For technical information regarding score reliability and validity of the ECLS-K: 2011 testing instruments, readers are directed to the National Center for Education Statistics website.

## 3 Results

To ascertain whether differences were present in the problem matters addressed between private elementary school principals on their school campus in (1) theft; (2) physical conflicts among students; (3) children bringing in or using alcohol at school; (4) children bringing in or using illegal drugs at school; (5) vandalism of school property; (6) student bullying; (7) widespread disorder in classrooms; and (8) class cutting based on school-

size status (*i.e.*, Small-size schools, Large-size schools), Pearson chi-square analyses were conducted. This statistical procedure was viewed as the optimal statistical procedure to use because frequency data were present for problem matters addressed in schools and for both private school principal groups<sup>[47]</sup>. As such, chi-squares are the statistical procedure of choice when both variables are categorical (*i.e.*, problem matters addressed in schools, school-size status). In addition, with the large sample size, the available sample size per cell was more than five. Therefore, the assumptions for utilizing a chi-square were met. Because the same statistical procedure was used eight times in this study, the Bonferroni method of adjustment<sup>[48]</sup> was used to correct for experiment-wise error. The conventional level of statistical significance (*i.e.*, .05) was divided by 8 to yield an adjusted level of .006 that had to be reached for a result to be viewed as being statistically significant.

With respect to the first research question, a statistically significant difference was not yielded,  $\chi^2(1) = 3.26$ ,  $p = 0.07$ , between Small-size and Large-size private elementary school principals in how often theft was reported as a problem on their campus. As revealed in Table 1, similar percentages, approximately 65.00%, of Large-size and of Small-size private elementary principals reported that theft was a problem on occasion. Of importance to readers is that 29.50% of the Large-size and 35.40% of the Small-size private elementary school principals responded that theft never happened on their school campus.

**Table 1.** Frequencies and percentages of problems in theft between private elementary school principals by school size status

School Size Status	Happens on Occasion	Never Happens
Small-size	( <i>n</i> = 268) 64.60%	( <i>n</i> = 147) 35.40%
Large-size	( <i>n</i> = 282) 70.50%	( <i>n</i> = 118) 29.50%

Concerning the second research question, a statistically significant difference was present between Small-size and Large-size private elementary school principals in how often physical conflicts among students was reported as a problem on their campus,  $\chi^2(1) = 13.72$ ,  $p = 0.003$ . As delineated in Table 2, principals reported the frequency of the incidence of physical conflicts to occur at least once a week, at least once a month, on occasion and never happens. Principals in Small-size schools reported that physical conflicts happened on the campus at a rate of 0.50% weekly and at a rate of 1.90% monthly. In comparison, principals of Large-size schools reported that bullying did not happen weekly or monthly on campus. Of note to readers is 19.00% of Large-size and 14.30% of Small-size private elementary school principals responded that problems with physical conflict among students never happened on their school campus.

**Table 2.** Frequencies and percentages of problems in physical conflicts between private elementary school principals by school size status

School Size Status	Small-size	Large-size
Happens at Least <i>Once</i> a Week	( <i>n</i> = 2) 0.50%	( <i>n</i> = 0) 0.00%
Happens at Least <i>Once</i> a Month	( <i>n</i> = 8) 1.90%	( <i>n</i> = 0) 0.00%
Happens on Occasion	( <i>n</i> = 326) 78.60%	( <i>n</i> = 343) 85.80%
Never Happens	( <i>n</i> = 79) 19.00%	( <i>n</i> = 57) 14.30%

With respect to the third research question, a statistically significant difference was revealed between Small-size and Large-size private elementary school principals in how often children bringing in or using alcohol at school was reported as a problem on their campus,  $\chi^2(1) = 9.88$ ,  $p = 0.002$ . As delineated in Table 3, a higher percentage, 3.00%, of Large-size private elementary school principals reported that children bringing in or using alcohol at school occurred on occasion than was reported by Small-size private elementary school principals, 0.20%. A high percentage, 97% of Large-size and 99.80% of Small-size private elementary school principals, reported that children bringing in or using alcohol at school never happened on their campus.

**Table 3.** Frequencies and percentages of problems with alcohol use between private elementary school principals by school size status

School Size Status	Happens on Occasion	Never Happens
Small-size	( <i>n</i> = 1) 0.20%	( <i>n</i> = 414) 99.80%
Large-size	( <i>n</i> = 12) 3.00%	( <i>n</i> = 388) 97.00%

In regard to the fourth research question, a statistically significant difference was present,  $\chi^2(1) = 21.93$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , between Small-size and Large-size private elementary school principals in how often children bringing in or using illegal drugs at school was reported as a problem on their school campus. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was .16, a small effect size<sup>[49]</sup>. As revealed in Table 4, a higher percentage, 7.00%, of Large-size private elementary school principals reported that children bringing in or using illegal drugs on their campus than was reported by Small-size school principals, 0.70%. Readers should note the high percentage of principals, 93.00%, of Large-size and 99.30% of Small-size private elementary school principals, who reported that children bringing in or using illegal drugs at school never happened on their school campus.

**Table 4.** Frequencies and percentages of problems with illegal drug use between private elementary school principals by school-size status

School Size Status	Happens on Occasion	Never Happens
Small-size	( <i>n</i> = 3) 0.70%	( <i>n</i> = 412) 99.30%
Large-size	( <i>n</i> = 28) 7.00%	( <i>n</i> = 372) 93.00%

Concerning the fifth research question, how often vandalism of school property was reported as a problem on their campus, a statistically significant difference,  $\chi^2(1) = 59.65$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , was revealed between Small-size and Large-size private elementary school principals. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was .27, a small effect size<sup>[49]</sup>. As presented in Table 5, Principals of Large-size elementary schools reported a higher percentage, 69.80%, of vandalism of school property on their campus than was reported by principals of Small-size elementary schools, 42.90%. Of importance to readers is 57.10% of Small-size private elementary schools principals reported that vandalism of school property never happens on their campus. In comparison, 30.30% of Large-size private elementary school principals reported that vandalism of school property never happens on their campus.

**Table 5.** Frequencies and percentages of problems in vandalism between private elementary school principals by school-size status

School Size Status	Happens on Occasion	Never Happens
Small-size	( <i>n</i> = 178) 42.90%	( <i>n</i> = 237) 57.10%
Large-size	( <i>n</i> = 279) 69.80%	( <i>n</i> = 121) 30.30%

A statistically significant difference,  $\chi^2(1) = 48.85$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , was present between Small-size and Large-size private elementary school principals with respect to the sixth research question, how often student bullying was reported as a problem on their campus. Cramer's V, for this finding, was .23, a small effect size<sup>[49]</sup>. As revealed in Table 6, Principals of Large-size elementary schools reported the problem of student bullying happened on occasion at a higher percentage, 83.0%, than did principals of Small-size elementary schools, 73.0%. Principals reported the frequency of the incidence of student bullying to occur at least once a week, at least once a month, on occasion and never happens. Principals in Small-size schools reported that bullying happened weekly on the campus at a rate of 4.30% weekly and at a rate of 10.40% monthly. In comparison, principals of Large-size schools reported that bullying happened weekly on the campus at a rate of 0.00% and at a monthly rate of 14.50%. Readers should note the higher percentage, 12.30%, reported by Small-size private elementary school principals that student bullying never happens on their campus than the percentage, 2.50%, reported by Large-size private elementary school principals.

In regard to the seventh research question, how often widespread disorder in the classroom occurred on their campus, a statistically significant finding was not present between Large-size and Small-size private elementary school principals,  $\chi^2(1) = 0.69$ ,  $p = 0.41$ . Revealed in Table 7 are similar percentages, 20.50% of Large-size and

**Table 6.** Frequencies and percentages of problems in bullying between private elementary school principals by school-size status

School Size Status	Small-size	Large-size
Happens at Least Once a Week	( <i>n</i> = 18) 4.30%	( <i>n</i> = 0) 0.00%
Happens at Least Once a Month	( <i>n</i> = 43) 10.40%	( <i>n</i> = 58) 14.50%
Happens on Occasion	( <i>n</i> = 303) 73.00%	( <i>n</i> = 332) 83.00%
Never Happens	( <i>n</i> = 51) 12.30%	( <i>n</i> = 10) 02.50%

22.90% of Small-size private elementary school principals who reported that problems in widespread disorder in the classroom happened on occasion on their school campus. Interestingly, 79.50% of Large-size and 77.10% of Small-size private elementary school principals reported that problems with widespread disorder in the classroom never happened on their school campus.

**Table 7.** Frequencies and percentages of problems in classroom disorder between private elementary school principals by school-size status

School Size Status	Happens on Occasion	Never Happens
Small-size	( <i>n</i> = 95) 22.90%	( <i>n</i> = 320) 77.10%
Large-size	( <i>n</i> = 82) 20.50%	( <i>n</i> = 318) 79.50%

Concerning the eighth research question, a statistically significant difference,  $\chi^2(1) = 154.38$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , was revealed between Small-size and Large-size private elementary school principals in how often class cutting was a problem on their campus. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was .44, a moderate effect size<sup>[49]</sup>. A higher percentage, 36.30%, of principals of Large-size private elementary school principals reported that class cutting happened on occasion on their campus than reported by principals of Small-size private elementary schools, 2.20%. As revealed in Table 8, readers should note the high percentage, 97.80%, reported by principals of Small-size private schools that class cutting never happened on their campus. In comparison, 63.80% of principals of Large-size private schools reported that class cutting never happened on their campus.

**Table 8.** Frequencies and percentages of problems in class cutting between private elementary school principals by school-size status

School Size Status	Happens on Occasion	Never Happens
Small-size	( <i>n</i> = 9) 2.20%	( <i>n</i> = 406) 97.80%
Large-size	( <i>n</i> = 145) 36.30%	( <i>n</i> = 255) 63.80%

## 4 Discussion

In this study, the extent to which differences were present in the problem matters addressed by private elementary school principals as a function of school size based on student enrollment was examined. Analyses were conducted of principals' responses obtained from

a national dataset. Results were that private elementary school principals of Large-size schools reported that they had statistically significantly greater problem matters in children bringing in or using illegal drugs at school, vandalism of school property, student bullying, and class cutting than was reported by private elementary school principals of Small-size schools. Principals differed most in the problem matter of class cutting followed by student bullying, vandalism of school property, and children bringing in or using illegal drugs at school. In contrast, principals of Large-size schools and Small-size schools had similar experiences with problem matters of theft, physical conflicts among students, children bringing in or using alcohol at school, and in widespread disorder in classrooms.

#### 4.1 Connection with existing literature

The culture and climate of a school have an effect on the quality of school life and the characteristics of behaviors displayed by the students<sup>[18]</sup>. Supportive school communities typically result in positive outcomes for children wherein disruptive behavior predicts failure<sup>[2,4]</sup>. The findings of this study are aligned with the findings of researchers<sup>[15,16,40]</sup> who asserted that higher rates of discipline occur in larger schools. Revealed in this investigation were the problem matters addressed by private elementary school principals as a function of school-size. Specifically, private elementary school principals in Large-size schools addressed problem matters of children bringing in or using illegal drugs, vandalism of school property, student bullying, and class cutting more frequently than principals of Small-size schools.

Relationships between discipline and school size were revealed in this study. As such, the results for this study are congruent with the results of other researchers<sup>[15,16,39,40]</sup> who emphasized that higher rates of discipline occur in larger schools. Of the problem matters addressed for which private elementary school principals rated the frequency of occurrence on their school campus, seven out of eight of the problem matters addressed were reported as occurring more frequently in Large-size schools than in Small-size schools. Widespread disorder was the only problem matter that was reported as occurring more frequently in Small-size schools.

#### 4.2 Implications for policy and practice

In this investigation, private elementary school principals of Large-size schools addressed more problem matters on their school campus than private elementary school principals of Small-size schools. As such, an implication is that private elementary school principals of Large-size schools should examine the processes and structures in

place on their campus to address problem matters adequately. In turn, this insight may be used to determine best practices to create a more supportive school environment.

Interestingly, problem matters of theft, physical conflicts among students, and student bullying were reported as occurring at a high rate by principals of both Large-size and of Small-size private elementary schools. Accordingly, private elementary school stakeholders should examine their school culture. This examination may provide feedback to support the development of aptitudes that could positively enhance students' social, emotional, and physical development.

#### 4.3 Recommendations for future research

A number of recommendations for future research can be made based on the results of this empirical investigation. First, only one year of data was analyzed in this investigation. Examining additional years of data and replication of this study may provide insight into trends in problem matters addressed in schools. Second, in this study, school-size was defined based on student enrollment by dividing the database into two categories. Because student enrollment for the majority of private schools in the United States is comprised of 50 or few students<sup>[6]</sup> researchers are encouraged to restructure the definition of school-size in a manner that reflects actual student enrollments in private schools. Third, a research investigation into the differences that may exist in the problem matters addressed by private school principals by school size could provide relevant data concerning how they address these problems. Finally, researchers are encouraged to examine whether differences might be present in the problem matters private school principals address at the middle and high school level.

### 5 Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to determine the extent to which differences were present in the problem matters addressed by private elementary school principals based on school size. A dataset obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics was downloaded and two school categories, Large-size and Small-size, were generated in which the frequency of problem matters addressed by student enrollment size was analyzed. Statistically significant differences were revealed in the problem matters addressed between private elementary school principals of Large-size schools and of Small-size schools in children bringing in or using illegal drugs; of vandalism of school property; in student bullying; and in class cutting. Principals of Large-size schools addressed problem matters in each area statistically significantly

more frequently than principals of Small-size schools. Private elementary school principals in both categories reported similar percentages of frequencies addressing problem matters in several categories including theft; with physical conflicts among students; in children bringing in our using alcohol; and of widespread disorder.

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