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Teacher Perception Concerning the Role of  
Elementary Principals in School Culture and Climate

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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by

Robyn Michele Murray

May 2021

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Dr. Virginia Foley, Chair

Dr. Debra Bentley

Dr. John Boyd

Dr. William Flora

Keywords: school culture, school climate, teacher perceptions, principal communication,  
principal relationships, shared leadership

## ABSTRACT

### Teacher Perception Concerning the Role of Elementary Principals in School Culture and Climate

by

Robyn Michele Murray

A phenomenological research study was conducted to examine teacher perceptions of elementary principals' behaviors affecting school culture and climate. The researcher gathered data from participant interviews. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling of teachers identified by their principals as meeting study criteria. The schools in which teachers were selected were also chosen using purposeful sampling based on superintendents' perceptions of positive principal influence on school culture and climate.

Data analysis provided insight to the researcher into the phenomenon being explored in this study. Teachers were asked to participate in an individual interview with the researcher and provide answers to open ended questions regarding their perceptions of their principals' influence on culture and climate in the school.

The findings of the study were aligned with the literature regarding principal influence on school culture and climate. There was a clear relationship between principal behaviors and positive school culture and climate based on teacher perceptions. Three themes emerged as common in the data including relationships, communication, and shared leadership.

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband, Brian. Without your love, support, encouragement, and patience, I could have never accomplished anything thus far in my career including this work. Your endless hours sitting by my side as I wrote word after word and your continued dedication to sacrificially taking care of everything else provided motivation to always persevere. It will always be my greatest joy in life to be your wife. I love you.

This work is dedicated to my children, Parker and Claire. Thank you for inspiring me and being two of my biggest cheerleaders in this work and always. My love for you is forever unending, and it is my honor to be your mother. I love you.

This work is dedicated to my extended family and friends. Many words of encouragement were shared with me throughout the process that were so very appreciated and inspired me to keep going to reach my goal. With so much love and appreciation, I say thank you to all of you.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	2
DEDICATION.....	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	5
LIST OF TABLES.....	10
Chapter 1. Introduction.....	11
Context Setting and History of the Issue.....	11
Statement of Problem.....	12
Research Questions.....	13
Significance of the Study.....	13
Definition of Terms.....	14
Limitations.....	15
Delimitations.....	15
Overview of the Study.....	16
Chapter 2. Review of the Literature.....	17
Introduction.....	17
School Culture.....	17
Organizational School Climate.....	21
Historical Concepts of Organizational School Climate.....	21
Measuring School Climate.....	23
Teacher Morale.....	25
Factors Affecting Teacher Morale.....	26
Principal Behavior Affecting Teacher Morale.....	30
School Culture and Climate Affecting Student Achievement.....	33
Principal Influence on Teacher Morale Affecting Student Achievement.....	36
Principal's Role Affecting Climate and Culture.....	37
Principal Behaviors Affecting School Culture and Climate.....	48
Relationships.....	49

Communication.....	51
Shared Leadership.....	52
Summary .....	54
Chapter 3. Methodology .....	55
Introduction.....	55
Research Questions.....	56
Role of the Researcher .....	56
Ethical Considerations .....	57
Setting .....	58
Population .....	59
Sample.....	59
Sampling Strategy.....	60
Data Collection Procedures.....	60
Interviews.....	61
Data Analysis .....	61
Trustworthiness.....	61
Credibility .....	62
Triangulation.....	62
Member Checking.....	62
Transferability.....	63
Thick Description.....	63
Data Saturation.....	63
Dependability .....	64
Audit Trails .....	64
Confirmability.....	64
Summary .....	65
Chapter 4. Findings.....	66
Introduction.....	66



Description of Participants.....	67
Research Questions.....	68
Research Question 1 .....	69
Interview Findings .....	69
Research Question 2 .....	73
Interview Findings .....	73
Relationships.....	74
Communication.....	81
Shared Leadership.....	85
Research Question 3 .....	89
Interview Findings .....	89
Relationships.....	89
Communication.....	92
Shared Leadership.....	95
Summary .....	98
Chapter 5. Conclusions .....	99
Introduction.....	99
Discussion.....	100
Research Question 1 .....	100
Research Question 2 .....	101
Relationships.....	101
Communication.....	103
Shared Leadership.....	104
Research Question 3 .....	106
Relationships.....	106
Communication.....	107
Shared Leadership.....	107
Implications for Practice.....	108

Recommendations for Future Research .....	110
Chapter Summary .....	110
References .....	112
APPENDIX: Teacher Participant Interview Guide .....	136
VITA .....	137

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Codes Aligned with Teacher Codes.....	68
Table 2. Teacher Response Categories Describing School Culture and Climate.....	73
Table 3. Teacher Response Categories Describing Principal Behaviors.....	88

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

### **Context Setting and History of the Issue**

School climate and school culture have been widely accepted as components that contribute to overall school success. Positive school climate and positive school culture have continually been connected throughout research with high academic achievement, high graduation rates, positive opportunities that enhance students' personal development, and increased teacher satisfaction and retention (Kane et al., 2016). School climate has been often described as the condition and nature of the life of the school (School Climate Council, 2007). The School Climate Council also explained that school climate includes the general feel and atmosphere of the school in contrast with one person's opinion or experience. The climate encompasses the experiences, relationships, beliefs and attitudes of stakeholders within the school organization.

The role of the principal has been connected to the development of positive school climate and positive school culture. Deal and Peterson (2016) explained that school principals communicate core values through everyday actions and behaviors. Deal and Peterson also described how school leaders have the position and ability to influence all parts of the educational setting and can establish an environment that facilitates professional learning accompanied by the exchange of ideas among those they lead. According to Hoy and Smith (2007), schools must have effective school leaders in order to produce conducive school climates and cultures. Sawyer (2018) further explained the correlation between school principals and school climate and culture when he stated that principals model appropriate behaviors and support instructional activities and collaboration that set the tone for these positive components.

Additionally, Powell and Beard (2018) concluded the principal's influence is the major motivating force for positive school climate.

Wiskow (2017) linked the role of principal as having a great effect on school climate and culture. Wiskow's research showed a strong connection between successful schools and strong principal leadership. Specifically, these researchers found that strong principals increase the likelihood of teacher retention and positively influence teacher morale.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Fisher et al. (2016) connected principals' implementation of transformational leadership with significant improvement in school culture. However, Fisher et al. identified a need for further research to determine specific principal characteristics and strategies that resulted in these positive results. Through further study, principal behaviors should be studied in order to draw further conclusions regarding specific relationship building as well as day to day activities and patterns.

Fisher et al. (2016) have concluded that positive school climate and culture are closely related to school leadership. Principals have been challenged to use their influence, behaviors, and actions to positively impact all areas of school climate and culture. While Fisher et al. research has shown this strong connection, all school leaders are not perceived as positively impacting the climate and culture in the educational setting in which they lead. This study was completed to determine which behaviors elementary school principals exhibited that positively affected school climate and culture as perceived by teachers working with a principal identified as successful in this area.

## **Research Questions**

The following questions directed the research to draw conclusions regarding the connections between principal behaviors and strengthen school culture and climate.

R1: What are teacher perceptions of school culture and climate?

R2: What are teacher perceptions of the principal and positive school culture and climate?

R3: How do teachers perceive the role of the principal in school culture and climate?

## **Significance of the Study**

In this study the researcher examined teacher perceptions of school principal behaviors that positively affected school climate and culture. School leaders, school districts, and larger school support agencies continue to search for effective professional development opportunities for school leaders. The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify specific behaviors through teacher interviews that identify common themes among principal behaviors. The teachers interviewed were those who have experience working directly with an elementary principal that leads a school known to have a positive school climate and culture. The findings of this study can generate further studies examining connections between elementary principals' behaviors and positive school climate and culture as perceived by teachers. The findings of the study can also be applied to professional development opportunities to develop skills within elementary principals to increase the likelihood of positive school climate and culture in the schools they lead.

Murphy and Torre (2015) stated there was an obvious rationale for continuing and intensifying research on connections between positive school climates and cultures and behaviors of school principals. This study can provide further information for school leaders as they plan for and engage in professional development for those leading schools. The research is abundant showing correlation between principal leadership behaviors and school success specifically when organizational climate and culture are assessed (Burton & Peachey, 2009; Eboka, 2016; Eyal & Roth, 2011; Hall & Hord, 2015; Hoy & Smith, 2007; McCormick, 2017; McKinney & Labat, 2015; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Karakose, 2008). This research can add to the body of knowledge regarding the influence of principal behaviors on positive organizational climate and school culture as perceived by teachers working with a successful principal. This information is important as principals have been described as crucial to every part of the school organization and its overall success (McCormick, 2017).

### **Definition of Terms**

There are several terms that are significant to this study and are defined as follows:

*Academic Achievement.* Learned proficiency in basic skills and content knowledge (McCoy et al., 2005).

*School Climate.* School climate reflects the informal stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that shape how those in the school think, feel, and act (Deal & Peterson, 2016).

*Morale.* The attentiveness and eagerness that a person displays in his profession toward the accomplishment of individual and group goals (Werang, 2014).

*School Culture.* The guiding beliefs and values that direct the operations of a school including attitudes and behaviors of those working within the school

(Fullan, 2007).

For the purpose of this study, the terms *School Climate* and *School Culture* are used interchangeably and are defined as students', parents', and school personnel's experience of school life and its associated norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (National School Climate Center, 2021).

### **Limitations**

The limitations of the study include the possibility that the superintendents' of schools identification of schools with positive culture may be influenced by varying factors. These factors could include the superintendents' number of years in the position as well as the number of years working in the school district. The superintendents' past experiences and personal beliefs regarding leadership and the importance of school culture and school climate could also influence the selection process.

Additionally, limitations also could occur at the school level. The number of years a principal has been working as an administrator as well as number of years working in the chosen school may be a limitation. The teachers who volunteer to participate in the study may have varying years of experience, personal experiences, and attitudes toward the school and principal.

### **Delimitations**

Qualitative research that is phenomenological in nature often produces a limited focus. This applies to this study due to the limited number of school districts, schools, and teachers. Twelve teachers were interviewed from three elementary schools chosen from three different school districts in East Tennessee. The schools from which teachers were interviewed were recommended to the researcher by the superintendents of Schools. Interviews were conducted online with subjects through open ended questions in order to identify information from personal



experiences and perceptions. The delimitations present in this research inhibited the scope of the study.

### **Overview of the Study**

A study of teacher perceptions of principal behaviors that contributed to an improvement in school culture and climate was completed. The research included interviews of 12 teachers within three schools chosen from three school districts in East Tennessee. The responses of those interviewed were analyzed using qualitative methods to identify common themes within the answers given. Data were compiled in an effort to contribute to the overall body of research and offer relevant information for principals, school districts, and other education professionals as they work to improve culture and climate within schools.

## **Chapter 2. Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the study is to examine teacher perceptions of elementary principal behaviors that positively affect school climate and culture. The sections of the literature review are focused on the overall concept of school climate and school culture specifically examining the role of principals affecting teacher morale. The sections within the review of literature provided insight into a multitude of researchers' definitions and studies of organizational school climate, school culture, teacher morale, factors affecting teacher morale, connection between teacher morale and academic success of schools, and principal leadership behaviors affecting positive teacher morale through climate and culture. Literature was also researched to determine specific principal behaviors perceived by teachers affecting school culture and climate. Some of the principal behaviors researched included supportive relationships, shared leadership, and communication skills with emphasis on high expectations affecting school culture and climate. Literature within each of these sections provided a basis that supported the need for additional research that adds to the existing literature on the connection between principal behaviors and positive teacher morale.

### **School Culture**

The idea of school culture was first discussed by a sociologist named Willard Waller in 1932. According to Rajiem et al. (2012), Waller described school culture as something specific to each school and is demonstrated by a moral code as well as traditions and ways of doing things that form the behaviors and relationships within the organization. Rajiem et al. posited that school culture can be sensed upon walking through the doors of a school and included several means of detection for school culture inside a school including unwritten rules as well as norms, traditions, and procedures. Rajiem et al. explained the concept of shared leadership being

present or lacking as a view into school culture. Later, culture was simply described as “the way we do things around here” (Bower, 1966, p.9). Similarly, culture was stated as the most critical aspect of school leadership that lies with the role of school principal. Daft (2014) defined this important role of culture as encompassing the protocol for problem solving that has been found to lead to successful outcomes and positively affect members of the school community.

Beare et al. (2018) concluded that there is either a strong, functional culture or weak, dysfunctional culture present in every school. Bear et al. concluded a strong, functional culture was connected with successful schools. School culture has been described as the “intangible feel of a school” that is recognized by those who are visiting the school. Additionally, school culture was explained as encompassing the values, beliefs, and traditions of those involved in the school as well as the relationships between those people (Deal & Peterson, 2016). Similarly, Stronge et al. (2013) wrote that school culture was a result of patterns which included attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, ceremonies, values, and traditions that combined to influence how people process information and conduct themselves.

Deal and Peterson (2016) provided much insight into school culture through their work. Deal and Peterson explained the connection between school culture and how members of the school community view the meaning and purpose in their daily work. In turn, positive school culture was found to encourage those affected to voluntarily commit more of their time and energy to their work and provide an overall increase in motivation and focus. As teacher motivation increases, Deal and Peterson found that an environment can be established that supports collaboration and a belief that all students can learn. Shared norms were present in these environments that led to common dedication toward school improvement.

Deal and Peterson (2016) also defined school culture as a representation of the deep lying components that make up a school's long standing traditions and long term purpose. These were often found to be unwritten yet understood rules and procedures that exist. Similarly, Deal and Peterson stated how culture is even connected to undocumented patterns that include daily interactions between colleagues as well as simple things such as faculty dress and common topics of conversation among members of the school. Deal and Peterson were quoted in their explanation of school culture as:

This invisible, taken-for-granted flow of beliefs and assumptions gives meaning to what people say and do. It shapes how they interpret hundreds of daily transactions. The deeper structure of life in organizations is reflected and transmitted through symbolic language and expressive action. Culture consists of the stable, underlying social meaning that shape beliefs and behavior over time (2016, p.7).

Deal and Peterson (2016) described two varying kinds of school culture. These two opposite types were stated as positive school culture and toxic school culture. Positive school cultures were explained as collaborative with a shared commitment by all stakeholders to success including celebrations and a general feeling of happiness.

Alternately, a toxic school culture was characterized as having a lack of hope and unity with a general sense of sadness. According to Deal and Peterson (2016), toxic school cultures have included similar components such as norms, values, stories, and traditions. However, in

toxic cultures, these elements have a negative impact. Deal and Peterson listed characteristics of toxic school culture including:

- a focus on self interest;
- divisive subcultures;
- hostile and destructive interactions;
- a presence of villain type behavior among members of the school;
- distrust and retaliation as a result of disagreement;
- an environment of secrecy;
- students viewed as problematic;
- feelings of apathy;
- lack of positive celebrations;
- uncaring teachers with poor instructional skills;
- negativity on personal social media outlets (2016).

Deal and Peterson also identified several pathways that can lead to a toxic school culture which included:

- discontinuing cultural customs that were once important and present in the school;
- limiting or preventing opportunities for staff members to interact and participate in positive relationship building activities;
- ending treasured traditions;
- discontinuing the use of established school symbols;
- no longer sharing memories and events from school history;
- becoming discouraged from outside criticism;

- high principal turnover;
- narrow focus mainly related to test scores;
- abandonment of school's central mission.

Fullan's (2002) extensive work regarding school culture suggested five components of transformational leadership that contribute to positive change in school culture. These components include moral purpose, understanding the change process, improving relationships, knowledge creation and sharing, and coherence making. Fullan also emphasized the importance of continuous school improvement through shared leadership with the common goal of building and supporting strong positive culture.

## **Organizational School Climate**

### ***Historical Concepts of Organizational School Climate***

There has been confusion at times between school culture and school climate. Best and Kahn (2016) developed a theory of organizational climate. Best and Kahn proposed that both humans and the environment contribute to the function that constructs the organizational climate of an organization. Burke (2017) expanded on this idea to explain that organizational climate can be determined by evaluating several aspects. These included individuals' perceptions of their surroundings, individuals' perceptions of how they feel in their environment, and how their surroundings influences their performance. Litwin and Stringer concluded that the individuals working within an organization are the only ones who can accurately explain and determine the climate of organization.

Organizational climate is a broad term that encompasses many components specifically when considering school climate. According to Willis et al. (2019), the term school climate does not have a defined meaning that is agreed upon by researchers although it is widely used in

educational literature and research. Burke (2017) listed nine dimensions of organizational climate. These included structure, responsibility, reward, risk, warmth, support, standards, conflict, and identity. Burke also identified six factors of organization climate. These included flexibility, responsibility, standards, rewards, clarity, and group commitment.

Braddock (2015) defined organizational climate as the perceptions that a person within an organization has about his role in relation to his perceptions about others' roles within the organization. When discussing organizational climate regarding banks, Omole et al. (2019) similarly explained the definition as containing three variables. These variables were stated as formal organizational procedures, personal needs of those within the organization, and the complex variables stemming from an individual's effort to have his own needs met.

Ehrhart et al. (2013) provided the definition of organizational climate as the qualities that are associated with an organization that make it different from other organizations. These qualities were emphasized as being consistent over time and influencing the actions of the employees working in the organization. Kyriakides and Creemers (2016) then assigned three variables to the concept of organizational climate. The three variables were environmental, personal, and outcomes. Similarly, Thapa et al. (2013) defined organizational climate as the enduring quality of the inner environment that is felt by those in the organization, influences the behavior of members, and is described in a set of values and attitudes.

When applied to school organizations, Avolio and Walumbwa (2014) described climate as what occurs when all the members of the school community work together to establish a balance between the organizational components as well as the individual contributions of the institution. Through these efforts, a combination of shared values, beliefs and standards are reached and established. Avolio and Walumbwa elaborated that internal qualities are present that

establish the difference between one school and another. These qualities affect the behavior of those working within the school.

Avolio and Walumbwa (2014) described four conceptualizations of organizational climate based on the work of Hoy and Miskel. These included the interaction between teachers and the interactions between teachers and principals. A second conceptualization was the point a school exists on a defined continuum of participative to authoritative managerial systems. A third conceptualization was where the school lies on a continuum regarding student control from humanistic to custodial. Lastly, the conceptualization identified school climate regarding development and control processes. Later, Avolio and Walumbwa (2014) described school organizational climate as a set of characteristics forming within the school that separate it from other schools and influence the behaviors of those within the organization. Allen, Grigsby, and Peters (2015) wrote that school climate results from the experiences of those inside the organization which in turn influences their own behaviors. As these individual behaviors develop, they were explained to converge as an overall system of behaviors which work together to form the school climate.

### ***Measuring School Climate***

Researchers have used various methods to assess school climate. Braddock (2015) discussed a questionnaire that was developed in 1962 by Halpin and Croft. The questionnaire was intended to measure school climate. This descriptive questionnaire was called the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ). The checklist has been used to measure the organizational climate of schools throughout the years since then. The OCDQ identified eight subtests divided into two categories for measurement purposes. The two categories are Characteristics of the Group and Behavior of the Leader. The behaviors of the



leader included on the OCDQ are aloofness, production emphasis, trust, and consideration. The developers began by listing approximately one thousand ideas that surrounded school climate. The list was then narrowed to 68 items. Each of the 68 items was then placed into one of eight categories called subtests. The subtests were then divided into two groups which included four subtests that measured teacher to teacher interactions and four subtests that measured teacher to principal interactions.

Drawing from previous research and measurements of school climate, Hoy et al. (2002) developed the Organizational Climate Index (OCI). This instrument demonstrated an integrated approach of school openness and school health. The OCI consists of four components including institutional vulnerability, collegial leadership, professional teacher behavior, and achievement press. The OCI has been shown to be reliable and valid when assessing school climate.

Institutional vulnerability was described as the measurement of how easily influenced the school is to outside influence which could be detrimental if this vulnerability is too high. Collegial leadership was explained as the behaviors of the principal in both meeting the social needs of teachers and attending to achievement goals. Professional teacher behavior was stated as teacher actions that demonstrate support and respect for each other, commitment to student learning, and successful individual decision making. Achievement press was detailed as the expectation for students to perform academically.

Tamone (2018) reported that both direct and indirect measures of school climate exist. Indirect measures were described as data collected from school records whereas direct measures included data collected directly from those members of the school organization. These direct measures included surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Many direct school climate measures have been researched and compared to identify those that meet identified criteria that have been

associated with strong assessments. The Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI), the School Climate Instrument-Revised (SCI-R), and the Western Alliance for the Study of School Climate's School Climate Assessment Instrument (WASSC-SCAI) were found to be the most accurate and sound instruments when compared in a study by Gangi in 2009 (Thorne 2016) . Additionally, several other instruments have been used to assess school climate including the Environment Inventory (EI), Inventory of School Climate (ISC), and National School Climate Center (NSCC) scale (Kor & Opare, 2017).

Faster and Lopez (2013) provided guidelines for choosing an appropriate school climate measure for schools. Faster and Lopez explained that the instrument should have a strong research base that has proven reliability and validity. Faster and Lopez continued that instruments should be field tested, be administered efficiently and with ease, recognize all stakeholders when possible, address the needs of the school community being assessed, and provide further resources. Kohl et al. (2013) encouraged schools to use existing instruments that have been through the process of testing for validity and reliability in order to have confidence that all important factors are present.

### **Teacher Morale**

Morale was explained as a state of mind that is found to be positive when in association with favorable attitudes, relationships with coworkers, and passion for the work assigned to them (Gunter, 2016). Werang (2014) defined teacher morale as the attentiveness and eagerness that a person displays in his profession toward the accomplishment of individual and group goals. Additionally, Werang described morale as the connection between an organization's goals and an employee's understanding and contentment regarding their role in the organization.

### ***Factors Affecting Teacher Morale***

Greenberg et al. (2017) identified teaching as one of the most stressful professions. These high levels of stress were found to negatively influence personal health and caused lower satisfaction, commitment, and performance. Many factors have been determined to positively or negatively affect teacher morale. Welch (2014) explained that low morale can occur when teachers lack any power to participate in needed change or feel that their work is meaningless. Further, Welch described a decline in teacher morale when expectations are placed on them without sufficient resources provided to successfully complete their goals.

Ost and Schiman (2017) discussed several factors negatively affecting teacher morale and can therefore prohibit teacher retention. These included unproductive teaching, high teacher absenteeism, frequent policy changes, and perception of workload equity. Additionally, low motivation was listed as a factor that negatively affects teacher morale (Waheed et al., 2016). Low motivation was connected to low self-efficacy, lack of resources, personality, student discipline concerns, and other factors. In a different study, Waheed et al. (2016) found several factors that increase teacher motivation. These included a positive school climate, opportunities for collaboration, acceptable salary, school safety, contentment with location of teacher placement, supportive administration, equitable discipline, and a sense of feeling valued by those inside and outside of the school. Lack of adequate salary was listed throughout research as a factor influencing teacher morale. However, according to Rashidi and Moghadan (2014), teacher morale has continued to decline even in school districts where salaries were increased. Additionally, the real or perceived workload of teachers inside and outside of school hours was cited as having a direct effect on teacher morale (Govindarajan, 2012). Tsang and Liu (2016) identified an increase in responsibilities and the time commitment required as a contributing

factor to low teacher morale. Teachers reported that low morale can be a result of job demands that continually expand combined with feeling a lack of appreciation from leaders and colleagues (Lee et al., 2014).

Earthman and Lemasters (2009) researched to determine if a relationship exists between the physical environment of the school and teacher morale. Earthman and Lemasters found a pattern showing teacher attitude scores improving in relation to school building quality improving. Teachers' feelings of personal safety were connected to poor building quality as well. There were several results identified from poor teacher working conditions. These included higher rates of teacher absenteeism, less overall effort, low teacher morale, lower job satisfaction, and less teacher effectiveness. Didonna (2018) identified the quality and conditions of the school facilities as well as the availability of high quality resources as a factor contributing to teacher morale.

Earthman and Lemasters (2009) conducted a study which concluded that teachers working in buildings rated unsatisfactory felt the physical conditions hinder students' learning. One third of the same group of teachers surveyed felt that the unsatisfactory building caused health problems of some sort for both teachers and students. The overall conclusions from research showed a connection between teacher perceptions regarding physical school buildings and overall teacher morale.

The physical condition of the school was found to both positively and negatively affect teacher morale (Concoran et al., 1988). Again, poor physical conditions were associated with higher teacher absenteeism, lower job satisfaction, and overall low morale. In addition, Leigh (2012) found that teachers who reported satisfaction with the physical conditions of the school in

which they work also reported that students were positively affected in their learning environment which in turn encouraged higher morale in teachers.

Several factors negatively affecting teacher morale have been found in research to correlate with the likelihood that teachers will leave the profession before retirement. Hughes (2012) explained high stress as a contributing factor to low teacher morale. Additionally, Hughes identified inequity of workload, unsatisfactory salary, content area and grade level assigned, low student motivation, and lack of administrator support as factors contributing to low teacher morale and reasons given for leaving the teaching profession early.

Ingersoll (2007) presented reasons that teachers leave schools in which they are teaching with the intention to teach in another school, district, or state. This included lack of administrative support, classroom management concerns, opportunities for higher pay, lack of opportunities for collaboration, lack of community and colleague support, and low student motivation. Ingersoll added that lower teacher morale results in teachers feeling alone and often alienated from colleagues which can lead to competition within the school organizations. These feelings were reported as negatively affecting collaboration opportunities which eventually affects student achievement poorly.

Comparatively, Cheng (2014) identified teachers' opportunity for leadership and contribution to overall school decision making as factors affecting teacher morale. As teachers perceive opportunities to be involved in decisions regarding curriculum and discipline, research has found an increase in teacher morale positively influencing change in school climate (Gunter, 2016). Zembylas and Papanasatasiou (2005) concluded that outside pressures from community members affected teacher morale as well both positively and negatively.

Malinen and Savolainen (2016) named teachers' true ability as well as the confidence they have in their own ability to manage classroom discipline as factors influencing teacher morale. Klassen and Chui (2010) found that teachers with successful classroom management had greater job satisfaction. Viadero (2008) described a connection in the perceptions teachers have regarding student discipline policies with the school and overall teacher morale. Similarly, Hirsch and Emerick (2007) found student conduct to be a major contributing factor regarding morale of teachers.

Welch (2014) explained 12 factors positively affecting teacher morale including input into decision making, frequent recognition and celebration of accomplishments. The research showed that teachers added that opportunities for impactful professional development, school climate that includes acceptance and respect for differences, and effective communication among faculty members were contributing factors as well. Similarly, Welch explained the importance of clearly established common goals, strong and supportive leadership, and opportunities for collaboration with colleagues. Lastly, Welch added the significance of desirable physical environments, healthy interpersonal relationships, support for innovative teaching, and respect for professional and personal needs.

Paul (2015) found high teacher morale to be associated with several contributing factors. Teachers expressed a need to feel appreciated by administrators, as well as, sensing administrators' confidence in the teacher's abilities. Having access to appropriate and necessary resources was also listed as important for positive teacher morale. Teachers described equitable workload and duties in addition to frequent opportunities for input in school decision making practices as important in their overall morale. Lastly, high quality professional development opportunities and a sense of job security were described as contributing to high teacher morale.

Literature has also suggested that self-efficacy is a critical factor in influencing teacher morale. Bandura (1977) wrote that self efficacy is how a person evaluates their own abilities to accurately complete the tasks required in order to reach the level of performance needed or required of them. Bandura concluded that self efficacy is highest when teachers are given opportunities to practice creativity including the participation in risk taking within their work. The abundance of research regarding self efficacy has made the connection that it is tied closely with overall teacher morale and likelihood for longevity in their roles in schools (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

High levels of self efficacy were reported from teachers who identified their own personal stress levels as lower than average as well as more overall satisfaction from their work (Schwerdtfeger et al., 2008). Chen (2016) concluded that teachers who reported higher self efficacy were less likely to leave the teaching profession. Chen also stated that positive teacher morale could be increased when leaders worked to improve negative factors found to be present and limiting self efficacy and job contentment.

### ***Principal Behavior Affecting Teacher Morale***

Yeldell (2012) examined the research regarding the relationship between types of principal leadership and level of teacher morale. Yeldell's investigation into this topic found a study that was conducted in seventeen Michigan elementary schools in which teachers were asked to complete two questionnaires. The results indicated a significant relationship. Through this research, 10 dimensions of teacher morale were identified that were positively affected by principal leadership characteristics. These dimensions included:

- Satisfaction with Teaching
- Teacher Work Load

- Community Support
- School Climate
- Principal Support
- School Facilities and Services
- Teacher Rapport with Principal
- Rapport Among Other Teachers
- Production
- Principal Behavior

Previous literature has also shown that school principals who work to establish a school climate and culture where teachers are actively participating in formal collaboration, decision making, and innovation are more successful (Price et al., 2015). Additionally, teachers reported that when principals provided a high level of assistance, they were more likely to develop a greater feeling of work related satisfaction. Teachers also noted the importance of encouragement from school leaders as well as colleagues as important in their job related satisfaction. Establishing mutual trust with others working within the same school organization was also listed as a factor influencing overall teacher morale which affected teacher longevity with the school (Hulpia et al., 2009).

According to Bekir (2015), teachers listed several factors that contributed to lower teacher morale in schools. These included lack of opportunities for collaboration between teachers and administrators as well as a competitive atmosphere among colleagues. These concerns resulted in feelings of exclusion as well as a lack of mutual trust between those working within the school.



When administrators were shown to counteract these negative factors, their leadership led to an increase in overall teacher morale. Rowland (2008) explained how leaders can establish shared decision making opportunities that promote school wide involvement resulting in teachers feeling that their voice is needed and valued within the school. These actions have led to teachers feeling more appreciated and supported by their principal. As leaders empower teachers to work together with shared vision and opportunities to contribute, Sergiovanni (2005) has concluded that the results include higher levels of motivation, expectations, and commitment to common goals.

Similarly, Neumerski (2013) described four types of principal leadership. The basis for the four types included the identification of either open or closed as well as either transformational or transactional. The four types evolved from a combination of these ideas. The first type of leadership was written to be adversarial which was created from the combination of transformational and closed. Democratic leadership was stated to be a combination of transformative and open. In contrast, authoritarian leadership was a result of transactional and closed. Lastly, Neumerski described facilitative leadership as a result of the joining of transactional and open styles. Neumerski discovered that facilitative leadership was reported by teachers as the most constructive style resulting in higher teacher morale.

Through research of the facilitative leadership style, Neumerski (2013) identified specific characteristics of teachers and the school environment that positively affected teacher morale. These included participation in decision making, opportunities for risk taking in instruction, increased opportunities for collaboration, and a sense of belonging. Alternately, Neumerski listed negative contributions toward teacher morale resulting from the other types of leadership they studied. For example, authoritarian leaders were found to be unwilling to listen to varying

viewpoints different from their own as well as creating a fear based environment where teachers feel ostracized and targeted. Neumerski continued to designate several principal actions that promoted positive teacher morale within a school. These included working with others to create a common vision for the school as well as modeling the characteristics and actions needed to move toward the goals and vision established. Additionally, principals were said to positively influence teacher motivation and morale when providing resources, removing obstacles, and celebrating successes.

In a study of how principal's leadership traits affect teacher morale in National Blue Ribbon elementary schools, McKinney et al. (2015) found that both the academic and social relationships between the school leadership and the teachers were critical in the success of the school. McKinney et al. identified several qualities present in the principals of these successful schools. These characteristics included having a caring and sensitive demeanor, being knowledgeable regarding professional topics, open mindedness to current research and educational strategies, seeking ways to motivate teachers, and remaining approachable which allowed teachers to feel comfortable bringing forward both ideas and concerns.

### **School Culture and Climate Affecting Student Achievement**

Schlechty (2005) wrote that a positive school culture is the foundation for overall school success including gains in student achievement. A significant relationship has also been identified between culture affected teacher morale and student academic success (Didonna, 2018). Likewise, Urick and Bowers (2014) found positive teacher morale to be related to higher student achievement. Hughes and Kwok (2007) listed the influence of positive relationships between teachers and students as a factor not only in the level of student engagement but also directly tied to higher student achievement. According to the work of Klem and Connell (2004),

students who feel positively supported by their teachers demonstrated higher classroom engagement as well as higher academic achievement. Klem and Connell also found a connection between the level of student support offered by teachers with the achievement and engagement of the students.

Vatthauer (2008) concluded that school culture was a crucial factor in the measurement of overall school success. The findings connected positive school culture with higher student achievement. Vatthauer stated these connections were a result of an increase in teacher collaboration which included the sharing of successful instructional strategies as well as shared mission and vision for the school and students. Similarly, Mortimore (2013) examined research on the effect of school culture on academic achievement. Mortimore found that established, common values and mission were strong indicators of higher student success.

Wilson-Seay (2015) described an increase in student achievement when teachers were identified with high morale as well as the opposite finding in which student achievement was lower when teachers demonstrated low teacher morale. Additionally, Stellmach (2018) further examined research on teacher morale and found a distinct connection between the level of teacher morale identified and the level of student achievement. Stellmach also concluded that the leadership style of the principal showed strong correlation with the level of teacher morale. This correlation revealed that teacher morale level was connected to the status of the relationship with the principal as well as their perceived quality of leadership in the school (2018).

Research has connected positive school cultures with school success especially regarding student achievement (Day et al., 2016). This research concluded by determining there was a critical impact on school academic success when strong culture was present. Day et al. also

linked the influence of the school leader on the presence of positive school culture in these instances of student achievement success.

Deal and Peterson (2016) explained the connection between school culture and student achievement in much of their work. The emphasis on collaboration and passion for teaching was associated with high student achievement and the encouragement of teachers to take the risks needed to implement teaching strategies that led to the achievement improvement. Additionally, Deal and Peterson explained the importance of the celebrations of success among students and faculty members as well as regular recognitions of these successes. The findings supported the idea that teachers who described their school environment as happy in turn felt less overall job related stress which led to positive outcomes regarding student learning.

Dotterer and Lowe (2011) concluded that teachers have a direct impact on classroom environments which in turn affects higher levels of student engagement. According to Edwards et al. (2014) teachers also affect student engagement through the way the classroom is organized as well as through the instructional strategies that are implemented within classroom lessons which in turn affects student achievement. Similarly, Edwards et al. (2014) listed the teacher's choice of curriculum materials and teaching practices as a factor influencing student engagement. Further, Edwards et al. (2014) included teachers' use of active learning strategies are connected to higher levels of student engagement. The choice of materials and instructional strategies including active roles for students implemented by the classroom teacher was shown to positively affect student engagement and achievement (Appleton et al., 2008).

Bryk et al. (2010) determined a connection between teacher morale and achievement. Specifically, Bryk et al. found that positive school culture favorably impacted teacher attendance, job satisfaction, occurrences of student misbehavior, and higher student achievement.

Likewise, Waters et al. (2004) found similar results between higher student academic success and positive school culture. Patterson (2006) also reported a strong connection between school advancement from higher student achievement and a strong school culture.

The effect of school climate on student academic success has been linked in previous research as well (Goddard et al., 2000). Goddard et al. explained how a positive school climate is listed as a critical factor influencing higher student achievement. Further, this connection was found to be more likely to influence student success than other factors studied such as socioeconomic levels and race.

### **Principal Influence on Teacher Morale Affecting Student Achievement**

Research has long supported the idea of the principal role affecting school culture which in turn influences student academic achievement (Riegel, 2012). The culture of the school has been found to be positively influenced while producing student achievement growth when principals are willing to realize a need for a change in the school culture and modify their own practices to make the needed change in school culture happen (Zmuda et al., 2004). Research has also shown a connection between transformational leadership and positive school culture affecting higher student achievement (Scope, 2006).

Burge-Tetrick (2009) described the connection between teacher morale and student achievement by emphasizing the principal's role in developing the positive culture. Burge-Tetrick explained the principal's actions including specific resource allocation and opportunities for teacher mentoring. These actions in turn raised morale which influenced higher achievement. Burge-Tetrick also found the opposite to be true. When principals did not specifically work to positively influence teacher morale, but instead focused on management only, student achievement suffered.

When studying the principal's influence on teacher morale and student achievement, Waheed et al. (2016) identified several behaviors necessary. These included creating a safe working environment, providing effective discipline, and establishing a community within the school that values the professional work of the teachers. Waheed et al. (2016) also explained the connection between teacher motivation and student motivation, and concluded when principals positively influence teacher morale, teachers are motivated which has a beneficial effect on student motivation eventually resulting in higher achievement.

### **The Principal's Role Affecting School Climate and Culture**

Many researchers studying effective schools have discussed the importance of the influence of the school principal. (Fisher et al., 2016; McCormick, 2017). Principal influence has been described as a powerful tool that affects relationship strength within a school, the professional practice of teachers, and level of student achievement. Barth (2006) described how principal influence can impact school wide behaviors such as generosity, cooperation, trust, and caring which can positively affect school climate and culture. The principal was also described as setting the overall tone for the learning organization based on his leadership style and common behaviors demonstrated in carrying out the role (Kootz et al., 1980). Prilleltensky et al. (2016) connected the leadership and management styles of principals can affect both teacher morale as well as student behavior and academic achievement.

Kershner and McQuillan (2016) conducted qualitative research centered on the relationships of principals with others in the school including daily behaviors, interactions, and support provided to teachers. Kershner and McQuillan found that the role of principal is critical to the overall success of the school. In fact, Kershner and McQuillan identified the principal role as the most important and most likely to bring about needed change in school culture.

Deal and Peterson (2016) explained the importance of school leaders including the principal in relation to school culture and stated that the most important role of principals is to ensure the culture of the school is solid. Later, Deal and Peterson conveyed the importance of varying people serving in diverse roles sharing leadership in the continuing and improvement of school culture. Deal and Peterson noted that for school culture to move in a positive direction, less emphasis should be placed on studying other schools' perceived success, but on weaving together existing values, beliefs, traditions, expectations, symbols, and ideals in order to strengthen and improve culture.

Brown and Vaughn (2015) identified principal communication as vital to a successful school culture and climate and described the importance of using communication to promote open discussion and trust between the principal and teachers. According to Mullins (1999), the various leadership styles of principals as well as daily behaviors significantly contribute to teachers' attitudes toward their work in the classroom. According to Adelson (2013), teachers have shared the positive influence principals can achieve when they show support and caring for individual teachers and their specific needs. Additionally, Day and Gu (2013) stated how principal actions set both the academic and organizational tone for the school which also influences overall school climate and culture.

Eboka (2016) researched the influence different types of leadership styles had on school culture. Eboka's findings included that transactional leaders provided teachers with rewards and support based on the teachers' success as well as enforcing discipline measures when teachers did not demonstrate success in their role. This was shown to produce a moderate level of teacher morale. In contrast, principals who exhibited behaviors of a transformational leader were described by teachers as inspirational and goal centered while taking interest in the teachers as

individuals. This leadership style was found to produce a moderately high level of teacher morale.

Extensive research has been completed that solidified the role of the principal as the critical component affecting school improvement and change within a school environment (Fullan, 1991). Fullan's work emphasized the role of principal in establishing a collaborative community among school stakeholders as well as implementing shared decision making practices. The principal has been challenged to continually balance many roles that are ever changing in the world of education. Traditionally, principals were tasked with building management, scheduling, and sometimes resource administrations. The role of principal has now been defined also as instructional leader in a continual process of personal lifelong learning. A shift has occurred from management based leadership to instructional leadership including components of servant and shared leadership (Fullan, 2007; Northouse, 2007).

Marzano et al. (2005) examined the role of the principal extensively and questioned the likelihood of success when one person is challenged to successfully carry out all responsibilities expected. Marzano et al. had identified twenty-one areas of school leadership that were assigned to the role of principal which included components of both management as well as instructional leadership. Marzano et al. encouraged those challenged with these extensive tasks to focus on a shared leadership approach in which capacity was built within teachers to make decisions while focused on common goals.

Marzano et al. (2005) conducted a meta analysis of school leadership to examine school leaders' roles in guiding school transformation and explained the role to be a situational awareness which must include being fully aware of both the positive and negative factors present in the school and between those in the school community and therefore being proactive in



avoidance of likely future difficulties. The situational awareness was connected to successful transformational leadership when the leader used the knowledge to facilitate shared leadership for decision making through teacher empowerment and support. In order to be successful with this type of transformational leadership, Bass (2000) noted a need for educational leaders to be knowledgeable regarding the school organization they lead as well as process for change. In addition, these leaders were stated as having to be proactive in building relationships and trust with members of the school community while promoting excellence. These strategies also included authenticity and individual consideration when engaging in successful transformational leadership.

Neumerski (2013) demonstrated the influence of transformational leadership in school settings. Through this study of past research, three practices of successful leaders that influenced school culture and climate were identified. The first was setting directions which involves the principal developing the vision for the school along with common goals. Secondly, Neumerski found the development of people to be an integral part of successful leadership. This requires principals to provide opportunities and practices in which teachers will have increased self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy. Thirdly, Neumerski explained the necessary practice of resigning the organization. This was described as contributing to the overall culture and climate in the school in positive ways (2013).

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) researched the importance of principal leadership focused on building trusting relationships among those within the school. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy explained how the concept of trust contains various yet equal aspects that were listed as vulnerability, benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. All of these were stated to work together to increase trust in schools. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) completed

research regarding trust in 45 schools using a survey. The studies confirmed the researchers' definition of trust containing the various aspects listed above and acknowledged that these aspects begin with the principal leadership within the school.

Sebastian and Allensworth (2012) found that successful principals who have honed their skills influence school culture and climate in many ways. Some of these included introduction and support of instructional strategies resulting in higher student achievement. Also, Sebastian and Allenworth noted that these principals provide needed resources for teachers to implement high quality curriculum and instruction. Similarly, Karakose (2008) explained the critical responsibility principals have as they must prove themselves loyal and dependable.

Much research in the area of principal leadership styles has pointed to great success of the transformational leadership style. Wang et al. (2014) stated that principals committed to transformational leadership will have greater success with leading and achieving positive change within their school organization. Factors positively affected include improvements to the overall environment, increased collaboration among stakeholders, expanded teacher input and decision making, improved professional development and teacher growth, and higher quality instructional design and delivery that positively impacts student learning.

Sergiovanni (2009) explained this type of successful leadership by stating how the leader must identify what behaviors influence both individuals' potential and personal needs so that the leader as well as others in the organization are encouraged to greater levels of dedication to their work and excellence. Leithwood (1992) researched the results of transformational leadership on school organizations and found improvements existed between relationships and interactions of principals and teachers in the schools studied. This relationship between administrators and teachers was identified as the most significant contribution to change within the school as well as

having the greatest impact on school climate and productivity (Bekir, 2015; Tamba, 2018).

Khalifa et al. (2016) also concluded that while the separation of leadership from culture could allow temporary success, the benefits of leader influenced culture would be desirable particularly regarding relationships among teachers and students as well as successful implementation of innovative teaching.

Burton and Peachey (2009) emphasized the importance of transformational leadership in their research as well and concluded that principals who employed shared leadership modeled skills needed to bring about common goal setting and eventually needed change. By encouraging teachers to be personally invested in their work, teachers were more eager to lead change and participate in strengthening culture in the school.

Likewise, Eyal and Roth (2011) studied the results as principals engaged in transformational leadership strategies and highlighted the importance of shared leadership specifically regarding developing common goals and vision in order to lead the school in a positive direction. This common vision was found to increase collaboration which resulted in improved culture and successful student achievement. Through this shared leadership development within the school, Ismail et al. (2011) explained how principals successfully affect school culture. Culture was affected as principals worked to motivate teachers to be personally invested in their work while encouraging colleagues to bring positive change resulting in improved student achievement.

Deal and Peterson (2016) connected the school principal to the role of cultural leader and described this leader as one who “acts as a symbol, a potter, a poet, an actor, and a healer in the school environment” (p.3). Deal and Peterson identified eight essential roles of the principal that influence and increase positive school culture. First, Deal and Peterson (2016) described the

principal as a historian that has an extensive understanding of the history of the school. As an anthropological sleuth, the principal was explained to be responsible for identifying current values, beliefs, traditions, and norms in the school. As a visionary, Deal and Peterson stated that principals would lead members of the school community to develop the vision of an ideal school. Further, the principal was described as an icon who models the shared values through his behavior, focus, patterns, and professional appearance. Lastly, Deal and Peterson designated the principal as the healer that both oversees the change and attends to the inevitable loss and grief that occurs during the change process.

Positive school culture has been connected to improved teacher instruction and student achievement. Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) found that the development and continued support of positive school culture was the most important factor affecting student academic performance. This connection was found when common bonds included high quality instruction, shared values between members of the organization, and a trusting environment. Louis and Wahlstrom's large research sample determined high academic performance and strong positive school culture were most often connected when teachers described a community of trust, shared leadership opportunities, and shared values and beliefs. Louis and Wahlstrom concluded positive adult interactions encouraged shared values and increased collaboration which led to improved instruction and higher academic success among students (2011).

Much research has been conducted to identify a link between high student achievement and principal leadership. Leithwood and Mascall (2008) found that principals' work to improve school culture and climate can lead to improved teaching and raised student achievement. Kythreotis et al. (2010) researched schools in Greece to identify a connection between principal leadership and student achievement and found not only a correlation between strong principal

leadership and higher student achievement, but also the opposite. The research Kythreotis conducted also linked weak principal leadership to lower student test scores (2010).

Heck and Hallinger (2009) also researched the results of principal leadership on school achievement and indicated a connection was found which was likely due more to overall improvements in school culture than to direct influence with students. Heck and Hallinger also located a connection between teacher leaders' influence in addition to principal influence in playing a role in student scores (2009).

Likewise, Valentine and Prater (2011) also searched for connections between principal leadership and achievement of students and concluded that any positive effect on student achievement was related to improvements in school culture through shared leadership and creating common goals with school staff. Seong (2019) determined that school leadership was a significant factor in the schools' overall success. Seong also explained how school principals were responsible for setting the overall tone of the school as well as being an instructional leader and resource manager. More research on school effectiveness revealed a change in focus on material components present in the school to the attitudes of the leaders within the school (Thapa et al., 2013). These attitudes of the Thapa et al. were specifically connected to school achievement. Another study that showed correlation between school leader attitudes and student achievement was conducted in London. Mortimore concluded that the school leader's influence had a considerable impact on high student achievement (2013).

Murphy and Torre (2015) examined the work of Sweeney from 1982 which summarized eight research studies that examined positive leadership behaviors. Through this research, Murphy and Torre identified six consistent leadership behaviors exemplified by school leaders that positively impacted school climate. These included placing an emphasis on achievement,

participating in instructional decision making, ensuring an orderly atmosphere that is conducive to learning, setting high expectations and evaluating student progress, coordinating instructional programs, and supporting teachers through effective communication and professional development. Murphy and Torre explained that leaders are more likely to positively impact school climate if they are assertive and focused on results while keeping high quality instruction at the forefront in a productive school atmosphere (2015).

Similarly, Hoy and Smith (2007) set forth 10 important considerations that affect how school leaders can influence their schools. The areas identified were attraction, reciprocity, collegueship, commitment, expertise, scarcity, trust, fairness, self-efficacy, and optimism. These factors were described as essential for school leaders working to positively influence school climate. Cotton (2003) also contributed school success as the principal's ability to advance teachers into leadership roles within the school.

Yeldell (2012) similarly studied principal behaviors that affect teacher morale in elementary schools. Through Yeldell's research, ten areas to measure teacher morale were identified which included satisfaction with teaching, teacher workload, community support, school climate, principal support, school facilities and services, teacher rapport with principal, rapport among other teachers, production, and principal behavior. Significant relationships were found in all dimensions except production (2012).

When examining specific principal behaviors, Andrews et al. identified the importance of the principal being highly visible in the school daily to promoting and increasing effective instruction (1986). Sallee et al. (2015) studied previous research involving case studies in five schools followed by interviews of school leaders and concluded that effective instructional

leadership involved creating a community of collegiality and opportunities for continual improvement.

Sawyer (2018) found a connection among effective schools while specifically studying the relationship between school leadership and school climate. Sawyer cited evidence that tied student success to school climate which was also related directly to school leadership and identified three leadership processes that work to create and maintain a positive school climate. These were stated to be principal modeling, effective feedback, and consensus building (Sawyer, 2018).

Lashway (2001) explained how the principal of the school must be an instructional leader that works to create a positive climate. Likewise, Stripling stated as principals focus on instructional leadership, three dimensions that must be present include leading the school to construct a common mission, lead the curriculum and instruction aspects of the school, and promote a positive school climate (2019). Stripling (2019) gave specific direction for the principal's role in building positive climate and divided it into five actions. These actions included the importance of protecting instruction time, leading opportunities for teacher collaboration and professional development, recognizing and rewarding efforts of teachers, recognizing and rewarding efforts of students, and maintaining a presence in the school through involvement of daily activities.

Doll (2010) wrote about the importance of principals in setting the tone for school climate and described how the role should include relationship building between all stakeholders, creating a positive framework within all can be successful, recognizing and celebrating successes, and hiring and retaining effective teachers and support staff. Gregory et al. (2010) explained how school leaders can support positive school climate through clear communication,

fairness, consistency, and safety. Gregory et al. continued that safety is critical for positive school climate because it creates security that then affects opportunities for learning and collaboration (2010).

Zand (1972) explained that followers within an organization are more likely to feel safe to be honest when sharing personal ideas and feelings when they believe their leader is trustworthy. Therefore, the conclusion has been drawn that trusting relationships between leaders and followers allow for better collaboration coupled with shared leadership and decision making (Moolenaar et al., 2012).

Murphy and Torre (2014) emphasized the importance for leaders to exemplify fairness in treatment and decision making. This was particularly important when discussing the need for equitable distribution of resources for all members of an organization. Hoy and Smith (2007) further described fairness by stating that all people have a desire to be treated fairly, and when a lack of fairness is perceived, negative feelings can result in a loss of motivation.

Bryk et al. (2010) also researched principals' influence on school effectiveness. Bryk et al. found evidence that principals can affect the quality of teachers' instruction as well as their overall success with students when school goals are established which are consistent and specific. Further, Bryk et al. (2010) found that principals' positive affect teacher morale and overall school success when they implement shared norms and values while consciously involving teachers in school decision making regarding the reaching of goals and overall school improvement. Bryk et al. found a strong relationship between principal consistency in these actions and a positive effect on teacher morale, which then indirectly affects student achievement and discussed the importance of the principal participating in the hiring process and carefully matching candidates for employment with the school's goals for improvement (2010).



Bryk et al. (2010) also explored various principal leadership styles and their effects on school climate and culture. While there was some success noted when principals lead from an authoritarian model, most findings concluded that principals found greater success when leading from the role of facilitator. With principal as facilitator, Bryk et al. found that teachers expressed the working environment of the school to be more supportive and trusting. The emphasis on establishing trust within a school environment was at the forefront of the work of Bryk et al. as they concluded when all stakeholders share sincere trust, extensive and successful school change can occur (2010). According to Johnson (2019), the trust described by Bryk et al. (2010) is critical when a crisis within the school organization occurs or the work is found to be unpleasant and undesirable by teachers.

### **Principal Behaviors Affecting School Culture and Climate**

Existing research has identified principal behaviors that positively affect school culture and climate. According to Atasoy (2020), culture in a school can affect the leadership and leadership can affect the overall culture. Karadoag and Ozdemir (2015) described the principals' role in affecting culture as supporting and developing effective school culture which will encourage positive teaching environments and improve student achievement. Additionally, Karadoag and Ozdemir (2015) identified the need for principals to develop sincere and honest relationships among members of the school community and lead change through common vision, decision making, and collaboration. Moslehpour et al. (2019) concluded the need for school principals to take risk while raising the commitment of the school community through specific leadership behaviors that create positive school culture.

## ***Relationships***

Boies and Fiset (2019) described the successful principal as one who is relationship focused and committed to supporting, celebrating, and developing teachers and also discussed the importance of principals attending to the social emotional needs of school personnel. This included regularly praising efforts, celebrating individual and school success, supporting needs through professional development and resource provision, and mentoring teachers for professional growth. Crowley (2011) reported effective leaders intentionally make connections and form relationships with teachers to provide opportunities that align to individual strengths and interests.

Thomas et al. (2018) established leadership behaviors regarding relationships have a direct effect on relationships between members of the school community. Thomas et al. concluded the principal's ability to support and encourage teachers and other personnel effectively contributes to positive relationships being established. Thomas et al. (2018) explained the development of mutual trust and respect supported and demonstrated by the principal promotes these relationship characteristics among the rest of the school community. Additionally, Thomas et al. noted these types of relationships facilitate positive team culture which include common values and productive collaboration. Thomas et al. (2018) also studied the connection between teacher self efficacy and relationships with leaders and found teachers have a high sense of self efficacy when principals demonstrate confidence in the teachers' capabilities, exhibit sincere appreciation for efforts, and place value on the teachers' input and concerns.

Smith et al. (2020) described four tenets connected to principals' abilities to develop positive relationships with teachers and impact school climate. These included trust, fairness, self

efficacy, and optimism. Smith et al. also emphasized the importance of leaders developing influence through positive relationships by mentoring, modeling, creating common vision, and overall support. The development of the principal influence was connected to positive school climate as well (Smith et al., 2020).

Adams et al. (2017) found principals were viewed as influential by teachers when they had intentionally worked to build relationships and establish credibility specifically noting how credibility was increased when principals were attentive to teachers' interests, demonstrated fairness, established trust, and modeled respect in relationships. Additionally, Adams et al. explained successful principals recognize the impact positive relationships among staff, students, and school leaders has on the development of a positive school climate (2017).

Kalkan et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of principals developing sincere and honest relationships with and among school members. Kalkan et al. shared how these relationships help teachers understand the importance of acting in unity toward school success. Kalkan et al. also explained how administrators working to establish positive relationships must remain focused on their purpose while working to change the school into an environment which includes input and participation from all members of the school organization. Additionally, Kalkan et al. positively connected the principal relationships and commitment of teachers to their roles within the school (2020).

Lester et al. (2020) found teachers who reported having supportive relationships with principals and other staff expressed having less work related anxiety and stress. Lester et al. (2020) noted a connection exists between principal and teachers' relationships and the teachers' ability to cope with both expected and unexpected school events. Lester et al. (2020) also added

principals can encourage supportive relationships between staff by making consistent effort to demonstrate respect, ensure teachers feel valued, and offering ongoing support.

### ***Communication***

Harvey et al. (2014) concluded principals must not only establish high expectations in order to achieve school success, but the principals must also effectively communicate the shared vision with stakeholders. Harvey et al. (2014) stated high expectations must be clearly communicated by principals as well as providing the needed support for teachers and students to attain the expectations that are in place. These researchers defined high expectations as “beliefs and goals set by educational leaders for all students and staff to achieve high standards and achievement” (Harvey et al., 2014).

Hit and Meyers (2018) found principals positively influencing school culture by leading change consistently communicated the school’s vision as well as the responsibilities of all involved. Additionally, Hit and Meyers (2018) identified the importance of principals asking stakeholders for input and actively listening to all contributing voices then using the information to make necessary adjustments as needed. Tyler (2016) concluded school principals must have strong communication skills in order to build relationships within the school community. Similarly, Brown (2016) explained the principal should be the central leader for school communication and collaboration.

Adams et al. (2017) found principals were more successful when they skillfully communicated expectations while also modeling behaviors for teachers while providing ongoing support. Further, Adams et al. concluded the credibility of principals from the teachers’ perspectives was increased when open communication was established and engagement among all school members was encouraged by the principal (2017).

### *Shared Leadership*

Forman et al. (2017) defined shared leadership and decision making as involving both collaboration and communication that supports an effective team committed to shared goals for school improvement. Bedard (2014) explained the importance of school leaders supporting teacher collaboration and opportunities for shared decision making. According to Tichnor-Wagner et al. (2016), strong school leaders create a shared vision among school community members guiding overall school success. Arnold et al. (2007) described effective principals as a visionary leader committed to supporting shared leadership opportunities where teachers participate in decision making resulting in successful schools. Brown (2016) also determined the importance of principals purposely engaging teachers in collaboration and decision making while maintaining the focus on shared goals and vision for the school.

Cobanglu (2020) determined shared leadership in school organizations to be interactive and efficient while increasing the capacities of individuals and teams. Cobanglu added that within schools, shared leadership varies from other types of organizations because the focus shifts to student achievement, shared activities, identifying skills of teachers, and crossing traditional hierarchy lines by focusing on interaction between principals and teachers (2020). Cobanglu (2020) explained the necessity for principals to allow and encourage collaborative decision making instead of the traditional idea of all decision making being the responsibility of the school leader and stated this type of shared leadership should allow for all teachers to have freedom to share ideas as well as accepting responsibility as leaders to move the school toward common goals. Cobanglu (2020) concluded shared leadership emphasizing collaborative decision making as increasing feelings of value for teachers as well as deepening connection and loyalty to their schools.

Harvey et al. (2014) focused on the importance of teams and collaboration in achieving organizational goals but emphasized the need for principals to regularly acknowledge the work of the teams and continually motivate them to continue their work. According to Heck and Hallinger (2010), principals who focused on shared leadership experienced success toward school improvement by involving diverse perspectives while accomplishing teacher capacity building. Harvey et al. (2014) similarly found shared leadership to be a key component to school culture and success due to the principal led belief that all voices are important and equally responsible for success and needed change to occur.

Fonsen (2014) recognized the delegation as well as the shared leadership practices of principals improve the quality of decisions made and explained this claim by noting the individual and combined knowledge of those participating in shared decision making may exceed that of the principal in specific areas of expertise. Duif et al. (2013) determined successful leadership is a result of teachers' active participation providing support to the principal and the work of overall school improvement goals. Brasof (2017) discussed the need for shared leadership opportunities in schools to engage the members of the school community and ensure none are alienated. Likewise, Brasof emphasized the importance of teachers having the opportunity to not only share ideas but to also put the ideas into practice with leadership support (2017). Through this type of shared decision making, Juuti (2013) explained the ongoing interaction of stakeholders will increase the shared understanding of goals and practices within the school.

Erturk and Sezgin (2019) determined shared leadership creates solidarity in teachers and enhances relationships between principals and staff and stated shared leadership determines the direction for school improvement and encourages teachers to develop deeper connection with the

school community. Erturk and Sezgin (2019) also explained teachers are more likely to recognize the importance of their role in the school organization, the key component of their personal professional development leading to overall school improvement, and the development of positive teacher perceptions of school culture.

### **Summary**

Although much research has been conducted to study the relationship between principal influence and school climate and culture, there is still a need for more in depth work on the topic. The large body of research is mainly focused on school climate and culture as they relate to academic achievement. Other areas of school climate and culture have not been as widely explored including teacher and principal interactions, principal influence on school culture and climate, and overall teacher morale.

## Chapter 3. Methodology

### Introduction

Qualitative research is a broad field of research using an array of data collection methods in order to develop a better understanding of a variety of disciplines, fields, and subject matter. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Researchers utilize various data collection tools and methods of analysis to gain a better understanding of the human experience in the world. There are four basic categories of data in qualitative research. These categories are documents, categories, interviews, and audiovisual materials (Cresswell, 2014). Characteristics of the qualitative researcher such as methodological training, skill, sensitivity, and integrity play an extensive role in the quality of the data collection. Additionally, researchers should exhibit discipline, understanding, practice, and creative thinking to successfully produce significant and purposeful results (Patton, 2015).

A phenomenological approach to qualitative research was followed for this study. According to Patton, a phenomenological approach requires, “methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon; how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (2015, p. 115). The rationale for using a phenomenological approach was for the researcher to gain insight of teacher perceptions of specific elementary principal behaviors that have positively impacted school climate and school culture in the school in which they work. Ben-Eliyahu (2017) described phenomenological qualitative research as a means to gather information and gain understanding through the incorporation of groups, one-on-one interviews, and open-ended questions. Additionally, Hall and Hord (2015) reported the purpose of qualitative research to include a thorough examination of the topic using interviews and other means of investigation while identifying commonalities.



## **Research Questions**

The following questions directed the research to draw conclusions regarding the connections between principal behaviors and strengthen school culture and climate.

R1: What are teacher perceptions of school culture and climate?

R2: What are teacher perceptions of the principal and positive school culture and climate?

R3: How do teachers perceive the role of the principal in school climate and culture?

## **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher using the qualitative research method has been challenged to look for the answer to why a particular phenomenon exists. This has been shown to be different from quantitative research in which the research is most often analyzing research questions such as how many or determining statistical significance (Lee et al., 2014). In qualitative research, the researcher has been confronted with identifying themes and categories as the research is carried out instead of predetermining the categories before beginning the research as in qualitative design.

For this study, the researcher identified the phenomenon of principal influence on elementary school culture and climate. The researcher chose this topic in anticipation that the results of this study can contribute to the future work of school leadership.

The researcher determined the selection process for the teachers who participated in the interviews. Additionally, the researcher obtained all the necessary and required permissions to conduct the research. All participants were given specific information including the purpose of the research and their ongoing option for participation or withdrawal from the study at any time.

The researcher maintained the privacy of all participants and followed the outlined procedures for securing the online and paper materials used throughout the study. The researcher also identified limitations, delimitations, ethical considerations, and the measures of rigor before initiating data collection. All the identified factors in the study were given consideration during data collection and throughout the data analysis and reporting of the findings. Additionally, the researcher maintained an awareness of possible biases present in the design of the study or in the researcher's own self.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This research study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board for approval. The researcher was granted approval before initiating this phenomenological qualitative research study investigating the influence of principals on school culture and climate.

Arifin (2018) described several ethical considerations necessary in qualitative research and wrote that informed consent and voluntary participation are needed. Informed consent was acquired which provided for open and honest interactions between the participants and the researcher. The participation of those interviewed was voluntary, and they could choose to withdraw at any time. Measures were taken to ensure that all participants understood the purpose of the research. Informed consent letters were provided to participants which clearly indicated each participant's role and described the participant's right to agree to participate or withdraw from participation at any time.

Arifin (2018) also described the importance of anonymity and confidentiality. Research was carefully conducted to preserve the anonymity of the participants. Permissions were granted from the of schools and school principals involved in the study. The identity of the school systems, principals, and participants will be kept confidential. Interview participants will be

referred to as T1, T2, and so forth. Individual interview data was not shared and will only be known to the researcher. Interviews were conducted individually in an environment that ensured privacy for the participants. All documents associated with this research including research notes and transcripts were kept in a locked cabinet with only the researcher having access.

Another ethical consideration applied to this research was data protection. Arifin (2018) concluded this imperative factor in order to further protect the participants in the study. This researcher shared the data with one methodologist in order to ensure all data collection and analysis procedures were followed accurately as described. All data shared electronically with one methodologist were password protected. All paper copies of materials used for research and any data collected were housed in a locked cabinet throughout the study. While recorded conversations will be deleted when research is concluded and reported, password protected electronic data and paper data will be maintained securely for five years.

### **Setting**

Given (2008) described the setting in qualitative research as the physical, social, and cultural site in which data is being collected and research is occurring. Qualitative research is conducted in a natural setting in which the researcher purposely does not control or influence the environment in which data is being collected. This researcher collected data using google meet interviews conducted as participants were in their choice of environment. This natural setting allowed participants to freely answer interview questions with minimal interruption from the researcher. The interviews occurred on dates and times selected by the individual participants based on their preferred date and time. The interviews were conducted during a span of six months in 2020.

## **Population**

Salkind (2010) defined population in qualitative research as the larger group of people the researcher has interest in understanding. Through the understanding of the population of the research, Salkind explained that opportunity better exists for drawing inferences that can be associated to the larger population (2010). The population for this study were the Kindergarten through fifth grade teachers in three districts in Northeast Tennessee currently working in elementary schools.

## **Sample**

Khan (2014) determined that sampling in qualitative research includes data collection from a limited number of participants in order to draw conclusions about a larger, predetermined population. This researcher used purposeful sampling in this study. This allowed the researcher to better understand a phenomenon by collecting specific information related to principal influence on school culture and climate.

The sample for this study were 12 teachers from within the population currently teaching in three elementary schools in three Northeast Tennessee school districts. The schools were selected based on the recommendation of the superintendent of school from each district identified. Each superintendent of schools was asked to select an elementary school in which the current principal has been in place for a minimum of three years. Schools were specifically sought that the superintendents of schools perceived as having a positive school climate and school culture that have been contributed to by principal influence. Teachers who had been teaching in the school for a minimum of five years were invited to participate in interviews from the schools selected.

## **Sampling Strategy**

The permission from the superintendents of schools enabled the researcher to contact the principals, send an initial email to teachers requesting their involvement, and conduct the interviews. The schools were selected by the superintendents as meeting the study criteria. The teachers were selected by the principals using purposeful sampling. The principals sent names and contact information of teachers selected to the researcher.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

Creswell (2012) explained how the use of interviews as a method of data collection is appropriate in qualitative research studies and indicated how researchers can use interviews to acquire extensive, detailed data that can be used to understand a greater phenomenon.

This researcher obtained permission from the superintendents of schools in order to conduct the study within the selected school systems. Before conducting the teacher interviews, initial emails were sent to principals informing them that their schools had been selected to participate in the study. The researcher provided an explanation of the study and a request for permission to contact teachers to solicit interview volunteers. The principals were informed that permission had been received from the superintendent of schools for the study to move forward.

The researcher was careful to insure participants' anonymity throughout the research process. All 12 teachers participating in the interviews were referred to as T1, T2, and T3 through T12. Each participant engaged in an online video interview with the researcher which was recorded through Google meet. Individual interview data were not shared with other study participants. Transcriptions from the interviews were used to analyze data for the purpose of identifying common themes among participant answers.

## **Interviews**

Peters & Halcomb (2015) reported that interviews are a common method for data collection. This researcher implemented the use of semi-structured interviews. This researcher asked each participant predetermined questions related to the topic of principal influence on school culture and climate. The researcher asked clarifying and probing questions at times to encourage the participants to elaborate on their initial responses. The researcher used this process to allow participants to develop thick descriptions which deepened the level of understanding of the identified phenomenon in this study. The participants met with the researcher on google meet calls at a time and location selected by the participants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for use in data analysis. See appendix for interview questions.

## **Data Analysis**

Manual coding was used for data analysis to determine categories. Open coding was used to identify emerging themes as the researcher analyzed the interview transcriptions line by line. This process was repeated three times to ensure accurate identification of themes based on individual participants' responses from interview transcriptions. Axial coding was then implemented to further sort categories into common themes in order to seek answers to the research questions.

## **Trustworthiness**

Newman and Clare (2016) explained how trustworthiness assists consumers of qualitative research assess the quality of a study and noted trustworthiness in a study is evident when some combination of the following is present: field engagement by the researcher, carefully determined data collection, detailed analyzation of data with accurate reporting, and assurance of credibility. The measures of rigor for qualitative research include credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability. This research utilized the following strategies to ensure trustworthiness: data triangulation, member checking, thick description, data saturation, and audit trails.

### ***Credibility***

Credibility has been widely used to determine if the conclusions drawn from qualitative research are believable based on the viewpoints of those who participated in the study (Trochin, 2006). The researcher examined multiple strategies acceptable for measuring credibility within phenomenological qualitative research and chose two to employ including data triangulation and member checking.

**Triangulation.** Korstjens and Moser (2018) explained the aspect of data triangulation as it relates to credibility. The process was explained as using more than one data source including options of time, space, and person criteria. This researcher used data triangulation as it relates to time in that data was collected at different times of the day and different days of the week. Additionally, the researcher collected data from more than one site and examined the data for consistency between sites. Lastly, triangulation was also implemented to ensure credibility through the comparison of interview transcripts and researcher observations recorded during the interview process. The data collected were analyzed and divided into categories according to common themes which emerged from the interview transcripts.

**Member Checking.** Member checking was applied as another research strategy to ensure credibility. Member checking has been described as providing those from which the data are being collected feedback to ensure clarity and understanding as well as any developing conclusions of the researcher (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This researcher completed member checking by periodically repeating back to the interviewees their responses as well as restating at

times to verify the researcher's interpretation aligned with accuracy with what the interviewee had stated. Any misinterpretations or discrepancies were corrected immediately in the researcher's notes. Additionally, the interview transcripts were sent to the individual participants to allow them to read through their responses to interview questions for accuracy.

### ***Transferability***

Creswell (2012) described transferability as the degree to which conclusions drawn from the research should be generalized to the greater field of research and knowledge. Nowell et al. (2017) described transferability as the generalizability of the study. Transferability should be considered as case to case and not as one study to a greater population.

**Thick Description.** Nowell et al. (2017) assigned the researcher the task of including thick description within the study for future researchers to assess the possibility of transferability. Thick description was used in the study by not only including detailed description of participant responses but also detailed context. Thick description was used in the study by not only including detailed description of participant responses but also detailed context. This context encompassed description of the setting sample size, interview protocol, and deviations that occurred during interviews based on participant responses.

**Data Saturation.** Data saturation has become widely accepted as a research principle within qualitative research. In fact, Fusch & Ness (2015) concluded the quality of the qualitative research conducted would be lacking without data saturation. Urquhart (2013) explained saturation as occurring as the research codes data received and realizes no new codes are emerging but only the codes already identified. This researcher reached data saturation when no new themes were emerging from the data after careful and thorough analysis.



## *Dependability*

Dependability is important for qualitative research in order to ensure that any conclusions drawn from the research are consistent and able to be repeated in replicated studies (Trochin, 2006). Trochin (2006) determined dependability to be greater when the researcher purposely checks processes in place during the research in what he referred to as an inquiry audit. Korstjens & Moser (2018) explained how dependability ensures stability of research results over time and is related to consistency. Dependability was described as often involving interview participants in the assessment of the research results as well as any recommendations that are made for future research. Nowell et al. (2017) included how dependability should validate that the process for collecting research is logical, detectable, and explicitly recorded throughout the course of the study. This researcher implemented audit trails as a source of dependability.

**Audit Trails.** Nowell et al. (2017) included a description of an audit trail in qualitative research in order to improve dependability. An audit trail was described as successful when a different researcher is able to correctly interpret the decision making process that was followed in the study. Nowell et al. (2017) continued that a researcher should be able to use the same process and data to reach very similar results and suggested several techniques for record keeping throughout the process to ensure an audit trail is adequately intact including field notes, transcripts, and organized raw data. Audit trails were also used within this study to ensure confirmability.

## *Confirmability*

Confirmability was described as the likelihood that the conclusions drawn based on the research can be confirmed by other researchers (Trochin, 2006). Trochin justified that researchers can increase the level of confirmability through the depth and accuracy of unbiased

data collection. He also stressed the need for data analysis procedures to be investigated to identify any potential concerns which can be located through proper triangulation. Nowell et al. (2017) explained the importance of the researcher clearly identifying and conveying the specific research process that was used as well as how the findings were reached. These authors concluded that confirmability is a result of the other trustworthiness criteria being reached including credibility, transferability, and dependability. Additionally, Korstjens & Moser (2018) concluded confirmability to be associated with neutrality. They added the importance of data findings coming strictly from data collected in the study and not associated with the researcher's own ideas, predictions, or preferences. This researcher included the audit trails as described above as a means for ensuring confirmability. Additionally, triangulation was also included for both dependability and confirmability assurance.

### **Summary**

The research for this study was based on the phenomenological approach which sought to develop a deeper understanding of individual's perceptions about a phenomenon. The researcher developed interview questions that addressed teachers' perceptions of their elementary school principal's influence on positive school climate and school culture. The study sought to determine why the teachers have developed their perceptions. The study also searched to identify specific behaviors the teachers perceived as contributing to the existing positive school culture as well as school climate. The use of interview questions allowed the researcher to develop an understanding of the phenomenon regarding principal influence on positive school climate and culture.

## **Chapter 4. Findings**

### **Introduction**

This research focused on identifying characteristics and actions of principals who have positively impacted school culture based on perceptions of elementary teachers in the school. This study also included interviews of elementary teachers from elementary schools identified by the superintendents of three school districts. In each district, one school was selected by the superintendent and identified as having school culture positively impacted by the current principal. This qualitative study used the phenomenological approach to gather information from the teachers who participated in each identified school. The sample of participants was purposely selected based on superintendents' perceptions of principals' positive influence in their current leadership role. The principals then provided the list of teachers who were contacted to seek participation in this study.

This study used a semi structured interview format with predetermined, open ended questions. (See Appendix A). The 12 teachers who participated met individually with the researcher. As part of the interview, participants were asked to describe their current principal's leadership style as well as the current culture and climate of their school. Additionally, the teachers were asked how the principal has contributed to the culture and climate. In order to seek insight into principal behaviors regarding different school stakeholders, the teachers were asked to specify how the principal interacts with teachers, students, and families. Lastly, the participants were asked how the culture and climate of the school changed when the current principal began the position. All participants were provided an opportunity to add any other thoughts regarding the leadership behaviors of their principals at the conclusion at the interview.

Chapter four includes the research findings and analyses of the data gathered during the teacher interviews. The data from interviews were coded by identifying emerging themes aligned with principal behaviors that positively affected school culture. All participants were assigned codes which allowed the researcher to protect their anonymity during collection, analysis, and reporting of findings. The teachers were identified as T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, T10, T11, and T12. In order to improve credibility of this research, member checking was implemented by providing all interview participants the option of reviewing their transcripts for accuracy.

### **Description of Participants**

Permission was sought from three school districts requesting their participation in this study. The researcher followed the established protocol in each district to receive permission to conduct research within the three districts. After approval was confirmed from the three districts, each superintendent of schools was asked to purposely select an elementary school in which the principal has positively affected school culture as well as having been in the principal position at the school for a minimum of three years. One school in each of the three districts was chosen for participation in the research study. The schools were identified in this study as school A, school B, and school C in order to protect anonymity of the school district, school, and principal. The principal of the school was contacted and asked to identify teachers in the school that met the study criteria of having taught in the school for a minimum of five years. The researcher contacted each name that was provided and began to seek informed consent and schedule interviews for data collection. The principal from school A provided a list of 13 teachers. Of the 13 teachers, five agree to participate. The principal from school B provided a list of six teachers to contact from which four teachers agreed to participate. The principal from school C provided a

list of three teachers, and all three agreed to participate in this study. A non identifiable code was assigned to each teacher to protect confidentiality during data collection, analyses, and reporting.

Table 1 provides a list of each teacher and school in which they teach.

**Table 1**

*School Codes Matched with Teacher Codes*

<b>School Code</b>	<b>Teacher Code</b>
A	T1
A	T2
A	T3
A	T4
A	T5
B	T6
B	T7
B	T8
B	T9
C	T10
C	T11
C	T12

### **Research Questions**

The researcher developed three research questions as the focus of this study. The researcher's purpose of the study was to identify principal behaviors that have positively affected school culture and climate as common themes emerged in the data. The following research

questions directed the development of the interview questions and guided the coding process and identification of common themes.

R1: What are teacher perceptions of school culture and climate?

R2: What are teacher perceptions of the principal and positive school culture and climate?

R3: How do teachers perceive the role of the principal in school climate and culture?

All teacher interviews were transcribed and checked line by line for accuracy by the researcher. The interviews were then coded using open coding to identify emergent themes. Axial coding was then used to identify and connect common themes that emerged during the process of open coding. Results of the data analysis were utilized to address research questions associated with this study.

### *Research Question 1*

What are the teacher perceptions of school culture and climate?

**Interview Findings.** All 12 study participants discussed the current culture and climate in their schools during their interview. The most common theme that emerged included a focus on teamwork, support, and collaboration. Additionally, many of the participants discussed a culture and climate of positivity, high expectations for all, and student centered decision making.

T1 described the school culture and climate as “very positive” and stated, “We have a welcoming environment, and we’re just very caring with each other.” Collaboration and sharing of resources were also included as an important part of the school’s culture and climate.

T2 emphasized a community feel in the school and commented, “I wouldn’t want to teacher anywhere else but here because we are just a big family.” This teacher also referenced

multiple examples of teachers enjoying time together. T2 shared, “We sit down and eat dinner together.” T2 went on to add, “We get along so well together and we end up just being, you know, friends and family and just rely so much on each other.”

When asked about school culture and climate, T3 focused on high expectations. The teacher stressed that the school is “very disciplined” by repeating the phrase twice. T3 added, “The kids know what’s expected of them and they know that they have to follow the rules and it carries over through each grade level.”

T4 detailed a positive relationship based climate and culture in the school. T4 also explained a reading focus is present throughout the school. T4 stated, “We use accelerated reader and everything that we do focuses a lot on reading.” T4 continued, “Many of the teachers inside the school read what the kids are reading so we can talk with them and build relationships that way.” In addition, T4 shared, “Parent involvement is very much valued.” T4 then added, “We have an awesome PTA that we work very closely with, and they take such great care of us.” Lastly, T4 stated, “It’s just very positive and learning is fun.”

Positivity and encouragement were highlighted by T5 when sharing about the school culture and climate. T5 also commented, “There is a culture of reading so books are in children’s hands.” T5 mentioned a “very positive” environment led by the principal who’s “very appreciative of everything we do.” T5 also mentioned clear expectations are present in the school. “So the expectations are there not only for us as teachers, but then for what the children should be doing.” T5 also added the intentionality of building positive culture and climate including the formation of a climate committee that plans special staff activities.

T6 began describing the school culture and climate by stating, “It is a very data driven school and a school with high expectations.” T6 added, “The teachers are very tight knit, so they will help each other like we did this past week.” T6 then repeated “it’s a school with very high expectations.” T6 continued, “The people who work there are very high performing, so I think that’s the defining character.”

T7 stated that the school culture and climate is “good, like a big family.” The participant also shared that “everybody gets along pretty well for the most part” with minimal “drama.” This teacher said, “Everybody has the same common goals for our students. We want to be in here, and we want to be teaching” T7 continued, “And I personally have had a really good experience just with my grade level coworkers. We all get along really well. And even though there have been some moves within my grade level in the past few years, we’ve always had a good, solid team, no matter who has been down here because we understand that working together is essential for the students.”

T8 emphasized high expectations throughout the school. The teacher added, “We know what’s expected and we know what we need to be doing.” The teacher mentioned, “We know how to get support if we need it, but we kind of have more freedom.” Additionally, T8 stated, “It’s probably one of the most relaxed schools I’ve worked in because I don’t feel like somebody is constantly breathing down my neck.”

T9 described the school climate and culture by stating, “Our school is very laid back. Um, just a happy place.” The teacher also shared, “I feel like we all get along. There’s no drama. The kids, you know, it’s fun. But also, you’ve got to get the job done.”



T10 shared how many of the students in the school have experienced trauma in their lives which directs the school's emphasis on being trauma informed and caring for the students. The teacher stated, "We have a lot of schools in our district that are easier places to teach, but our school, our teachers are there just because their heart is there. They care about these kids, where they come from, you know, and I guess I would think that would pretty much sum up the heart of our school." T10 also discussed "so much positivity" in the staff and feeling appreciated in the work completed. T11 further described the priority of keeping a "positive atmosphere" as well as being "very open with each other."

T11 stated, "Especially right now, this year, it's been a little crazy, and so when we came into this school year everybody felt uncertain." T11 continued by sharing the principal "makes a point already other than making sure our children are taken care of, was our emotional needs." T11 then added, "The culture in the school and our teachers are all very open with each other, and it's a positive atmosphere with our climate in our school building." Lastly, T11 stated, "I think most of our teachers feel very comfortable going to our principal and ask a question, or if they have a concern they go to her."

T12 used the term respect often when sharing about school culture and climate. "I believe our school this year, actually the past two or three years is now respectful. Exactly how to explain it is very respectful compared to the way it used to be. Students now respect the teachers. The teachers respect each other, which at one point it hadn't been that way. And it's all about the good of the kids now."

Table 2 provides a list of common categories of teachers' responses regarding their schools' current culture and climate.

**Table 2**

*Categories Describing School Culture and Climate*

	Positive	Encouraging	Caring	Supportive	Family	Team	High Expectation	Student Centered
T1	x		x	x				
T2				x	x	x		x
T3			x				x	
T4	x	x	x	x				
T5	x	x		x	x	x	x	
T6				x		x	x	
T7				x	x	x	x	x
T8	x		x	x				x
T9	x					x	x	
T10	x	x	x	x				x
T11	x	x	x	x		x		x
T12	x							x

*Research Question 2*

What are teacher perceptions of the principal and positive school culture and climate?

**Interview Findings.** All 12 of the interview participants listed the principals' emphasis on relationships as positively affecting school culture and climate.

**Relationships.** T1 explained that the principal demonstrated relationship building and support by stating, “She’s very assertive and she’s very firm when it comes to things, but at the same time, she’s also approachable. We can get to her if we have questions or needs or if things arise.” Regarding relationships with students, T1 shared, “She always asks them what they’re reading, and she always wants to be positive with the kids and establish a good relationship with them.” T1 also noted that past students enjoy visiting and staying in contact with her as well. “She can remember, like in the spring we came in, we did a drive through graduation where the kids, the seniors came back and everything, and she remembered a lot of those kids. So that’s one of the things that I’ve noticed through the years that she’ll still have memories of them to where she still has that rapport for that.” When talking about the principal’s relationship with parents, T1 said, “We have parent meetings at the beginning of the year and especially with Kindergarten, she’s always there at all the meetings.”

Regarding relationships with teachers, T2 stated the principal “calls us her own kids” and “behind closed doors we know we are a loving family.” T2 also commented, “I would not want to teach anywhere else but here because we are just a big family. We all sit down and eat together. We just all get along so well together and she somehow manages to pair us to where we work so well together and we end up just being, you know, friends and family and just reply so much on each other.” T2 also noted the principal’s ongoing support of teachers by stating, “She always ensures that we are being positive. If there’s something that we have problems with, we always will bring it to her. And we know we can do that. And if there’s something that’s bothering us, we don’t have to sit and worry about it.” T2 commented that the principal also makes families feel welcome and “like they’re a part of our big one big family.”

T3 explained multiple examples of how the principal builds supportive relationships. For example, T3 shared, “She always asks how are you doing today? How’s it going today? She’s very caring. She asks personal questions too like how is your family and things like that.” T3 explained the principal’s positive interactions with students through often asking students how they are doing, giving hugs and compliments, and making a point to encourage them individually. T3 added that the principal would often say things like “I love those glasses or I heard you got a new puppy or something like that, so very personal.” Further, T3 described a relationship with families that is “welcoming” and is known as “a very tight knit community.” T3 continued by stating, “She’s always got our backs as long as she know’s what’s going on, but she’s very, very positive with parents and some of them that are difficult. Nobody walks all over her.”

T4 explained that the principal is a “true leader and she wants everybody around her to succeed.” Regarding support for teachers, T4 said, “She is very supportive. Always whatever we need, she’s going to find a way to get that for us.” With students, T4 said, “One of the best things she does is she really does build relationships with the children. One thing she truly believes and this translates to all of us in the still. We all believe this, but that all students deserve the best opportunities that they can have. We are here for them. We are their advocates.” T4 continued, “She really builds her relationships around talking to the children about what they are reading, what they’re learning in class. She reads and many of the teachers inside the school read what the kids are reading so we can talk with them and build relationships that way. She’s always in our classrooms. She’s in there every day interacting with us and interacting with the children.” When speaking about the principals’ relationships with students, T4 added, “They look up to her for guidance and advice not just while they are here, but when they move on.” When asked about the

principal's interactions with parents and families, T4 said, "She makes and builds connections with the families. She gets to know the families, and once they're what she knows them and knows the parents and knows the children, they're forever more her children." T4 included, "Parent involvement is very much valued. We have an awesome PTA that we work very closely with and they take such great care of us. She really encourages them and allows them to do different things to help inside the school."

T5 also reported evidence of the principal emphasizing the importance of relationships and supporting teachers. T5 shared, "You know you feel like you're valued. In her emails and her contacts, it's almost like she's wearing a different hat. It's a little bit more of the cheerleader type and just keeping us positive. She's very appreciative of everything we do." Specifically, T5 added, "She's looking out for the teachers, you know, and when we're kind of dragging, you know, silly things, you know, like there will be some sweet tea or there might be a jeans day." T5 shared the principal's dedication to relationships with students as well. T5 explained, "She's a bit of a celebrity when she walks in the primary grade rooms. The kids want to give her a hug or be excited to see her. She's going to praise them. She's going to be excited for their work and encourage them. She might have some sort of tidbit to say, you know, that I was reading this book or something to kind of point in that direction." T5 described the principal's efforts to build good rapport with parents as well. "She's firm, but she's still trying to make sure we're putting in place a plan that helps that child. You know, she's doing a little bit of coaching the parent as best she can. The families that are more engaged, you know, she's just singing the kid's praises."

All four participants from school B described the principal as "fun" when discussing relationships with teachers, students, and families. T6 shared how the principal is "really good to listen to us and change things if we need them to be changed and he is just very supportive of his

teachers.” T6 added, “He’s very understanding for our family situations or classroom situations. He listens. Sometimes he has to tell us no, but he does try to help the teachers in areas that need to be helped. I think he just really came in and continued that culture and he is able to let us continue to do what the teachers are good at.” T6 stated that he “plays like a big kid with them” when responding about the principal’s relationships with students. He takes them to the playground, and he gets them all riled up. He is a big kid. He rides his bicycle back and forth to work every day, and he loves Star Wars so he is like a kid with the kids.” T6 transitioned to sharing about the principal’s supportive relationships with parents by explaining, “He goes to church with these people. You’ll see him talking about everything in the community with them and just kids first. So he’s very open to listening to them as well.” T6 also acknowledged the addition of more parent involvement since the principal joined the school. “I think a lot more activities go on now that he, a lot of our community activities, that he’s there. He encourages a lot of PTA activities after school. He himself does a rocket club. He’s been doing a running club, and they have school dances, and they stay at school all night one night.”

T7 stated that the faculty and staff are “all just part of the same family” under the principal’s leadership. To show support for teachers, T7 stated, “He is very supportive of us. Anything regarding meetings with parents that we would like for him to attend. He’s always willing to do that.” When interacting with teachers, T7 described the principal as “down to business.” “He’ll listen as long as you need to talk about something, but he’s not one to sit and dwell on whatever.” T7 described the principal wearing costumes and using props, playing on the playground with students, and shooting water at the students off of the school rooftop. Specifically, T7 shared, “You might observe him in a Batman costume or Gandalf costume or sitting in a canoe reading to them. He’s definitely a good role model for them.” Further, T7

discussed the principal interacting with students in the community outside of school. “He’s got this like some kind of electric bicycle that he rides all over town. A lot of our students just love to see him coming down their street.” T7 also described how the principal makes ongoing effort to develop positive relationships with parents. “He’s very good about making families and parents all feel like they’re part of this. We have a lot of opportunities for parents to be involved.”

When asked to share about the principal’s interactions with teachers, T8 shared, “He’s more of letting you handle it, and then if you feel like you need his support, he will help you with that. He’s very much behind us on our decisions that we make.” T8 also described his teacher interactions as “professional, yet conversational, more of an equal.” T8 mentioned that students “are not afraid to go to him for anything.” T8 stressed that the principal forms relationships with students by having fun with them. “He is a jokester with the kids. He wants to make it more fun. He’s like a big kid. He’ll get on the roof and squirt the kids with the watch and this like that, so it’s definitely kind of a laid back atmosphere.” With parents, T8 shared how the principal’s relationships “kind of depend on the family”, but added, “he is professional and pretty patient with parents.”

T9 explained how the principal shows support to teachers by “popping in or sending us encouraging little emails and things like that that are really helpful to boost morale and confidence in you.” T9 shared that interactions with teachers are often “very quick” because he is busy. “We don’t have a lot of time to talk or anything like that, but it’s usually respectful and positive.” T9 then transitioned to share, “He interacts more with the kids. He is very interactive with the kids, very involved, just talking to them. He has a relationship with the children especially in the community. I’ve noticed he’ll, you know, ride his bike around the community

and he sees the kids with us within the school.” Describing his relationship with parents, T9 stated, “He is very respectful. I feel like that he can and he tries to listen to them and then also have our side. So if there’s a conflict or anything list that, he is open and very available, I guess, for them to contact him.” T9 also added, “I feel like more community involvement and just more as like a family more united when he came.”

In school C, all interview participants included comments regarding the principal’s caring and respectful demeanor when building relationships with teachers, students, and families. T10 shared how the principal immediately transformed the teacher’s restroom when accepting the position. “Our bathroom was just horrendous. I mean, we just had just a little tiny place, and it was cement bricks on the blocks on the walls. And the very first thing she did when she walked in and she’s like ‘Oh, this has got to change’. She just did a whole makeover on that little bathroom.” T10 continued, “and that sounds like such a little thing, but you know, it just kind of made you think, well, somebody notices and somebody cares enough to do that. She’s done it throughout our school, just giving us a facelift making it aesthetically nice looking place to work.” Additionally, to show support to teachers, T10 said, “She listens. She invests her time, she invests her wisdom.” To make connections with students, T10 described the principal as having a heart for where the students come from and always strives to meet them on their level. “I’ve seen her sitting on the floor with a kid that has had a moment running down the hall and just sitting on the floor trying to calm and just her wisdom of how to deal with students who have come from a background of trauma.” T10 shared how the principal forms relationships with parents by always keeping her cool and treating them with respect regardless of their background. “She’s not afraid to make tough decisions with parents, but she’s always very respectful in the way she does those things.”



T11 explained how the principal interacts with teachers through listening. “She listens. I think she listens first. I think you would definitely see her stepping back and listening. You would see her calm. She does not get flustered easily in any situation.” T11 continued with “she takes it all in and then executes a plan calmly.” T11 described the principal’s relationship with students as “very loving.” T11 then added the principal interacts with students in the same way as teachers by calmly listening and doing what is best for them. With parents, T11 stated, “She does not get flustered. She is very good at making sure that they know that their child is top priority and making them feel comfortable.”

T12 shared how the principal motivates teachers with “a random jeans day when she sees that it’s just getting to be too much.” Additionally, T12 said, “She’s really good about trying to show all of us the good in what is a bad situation, and we can overcome everything if we’re just working together.” Regarding the principal’s relationships with students, T12 said, “She actually doesn’t ask very much about the academic parts at our school.” T12 shared how the principal asks students more about their hobby or what they did over the weekend. “She will ask how a brother or sister is or she tries to keep it personal instead of academic with them.” T12 also added that the principal may also ask about a book the student is reading, if they’ve studied their timetables, but stressed how the principal “just checks on the actual child.” T12 explained how the principal “checks on how the family is doing” when she interacts with parents. “She will also ask them if there’s anything they need help with, especially with the technology.” T12 added how the principal often offers to give families a tour of the school especially of the maker space. T12 explained the principal “will take them and give them a tour of that and tell them all about the good things that are going on.”

**Communication.** A second theme that emerged from the data is how strong communication skills of the principal impact and encourage a positive school culture and climate. Through clear and consistent communication, principals were identified as both showing support to all school stakeholders and maintaining high expectations for all. All 12 participants included the principals' high expectations as a factor in positive school culture and climate which was demonstrated through strong communication. Additionally, 11 of the 12 participants included the principals' consistently demonstrated support as positively impactful to culture and climate.

T1 explained how the principal maintains eye contact when speaking and listening to others. T1 also added, "She lets us know where we stand, so she tells us her expectations up front." When asked about interactions with families, T1 stated how the principal "lets them know what she expects of them as parents and as a partner in their kids' education, not afraid to tell them what they need to be doing but still loving and makes them feel part of our family."

T2 also identified principal strengths influencing school culture and climate as strong communication skills. T2 stated, "She expects us to be on our toes. And if not, you know, sure going to let us know, ok." T2 explained that the principal clearly shared her high expectations with families as well. T2 shared, "She also lets them know what she expects of them as parents and as a partner in their kids' education, not afraid to tell them what they need to be doing, but still loving and makes them feel part of our family."

T3 described the principal as being very disciplined when communicating expectations with members of the school community. T3 stated, "The kids know what's expected of them. They do know that they have to follow the rules and it carries over through each grade level." The principal "expects a lot out of us, and in turn, she expects us to expect a lot out of our

children.” Additionally, T3 explained how the principal communicates when dealing with a teacher concern. “She’s very firm, and she listens to you. But if she doesn’t agree with what you’re saying, she’ll let you know which is fine. I mean, that what I want. We want to know what’s expected of us.” T3 also mentioned the principal “expects us to keep her informed of things, and we do. And like I said, I like working for somebody that I know that lets me know what to expect.” Similarly, T3 described how the principal communicates with families. “She does a really good job as far as being positive. Again, she’s very positive, but she’s also very firm. And like these are the rules of the school and this is what is expected. And parents are not allowed in our building right now, and there’s been a couple and she goes ‘no, no this is a rule’.”

Regarding how the principal sets high expectations for all and communicates them well, T4 said the principal “creates high expectations of first of all, herself. And then that goes to the teachers and then it goes on down to the students. So everybody has clear expectations and very high expectations.” T4 also shared the principal’s philosophy that is communicated to everyone. “One thing she truly believes and translates to all of us in the school, we all believe, this, but that all students deserve the best opportunities that they can have.” T4 stated the principal is “open and honest” with parents and communicates clearly when interacting with them.

T5 described the principal’s communication style as firm and clear. T5 said, “We know what the expectations are in the building as far as what you need to be doing for your job.” When referencing a culture of reading present in the school, T5 added the principal has high expectations for strong math instruction and communicates those to teachers and students as well. “So the expectations are there not only for us as teachers, but then for what the children should be doing. As so that makes it very easy for us.” T5 continued, “You hear certain key phrases over and over.” These included, “It never rains out reading.” When communicating with

students, T5 stated, “If I walk be her office and she’s got a friend from another classroom, you know, and she’s very much making sure they understand that this isn’t where they want to be and they need to get the things done. So she can be very firm but very fair as well with them. But, you know, again, she has the expectations for the teachers, but she also has expectations for the children in the building.” For parents, T5 explained, “If they’ve already been in the school for a couple of years, they know the expectations. The family knows expectation.” When summarizing the principal’s communication of high expectations, T5 explained, “She’s tough, and she’s no nonsense. But there is a softer side around her that, you know, she’s very good with everybody. But you also know you better do what you’re supposed to do.”

T6 connected the principal’s communication and expectations with the history of the school by explaining how the principal has continued what was already a culture of high expectations for many years in the school for everyone. Additionally, T6 emphasized the principal’s strong listening skills when communicating with teachers, students, and parents before acting and leading change in the school.

T7 also mentioned the principal’s listening skills as being a positive factor in the way he communicates with the school community members. T7 expressed the principal communicates decisions firmly and is clear in his expectations. T7 stated, the principal “doesn’t like to make people mad, but he’s not afraid to have to say this is how it has to be done.” Additionally, T7 discussed the principal “always listens and tries to give us opportunities to give our opinions.” T7 also mentioned the principal’s communication with teachers is often quick and “down to business.”

T8 stated the principal creates a relaxed school environment but still communicates high expectations for all. “We know what’s expected. We know what we need to be doing.” With

parents, T8 said the principal is professional and conversational, however with students, the principal tends to communicate more in fun, joking ways. T8 then elaborated the students “know when he means business.”

T9 described the principal’s communication style as “very quick” due to a busy schedule. However, the principal “interacts more with the kids.” T9 added the principal is “very respectful” with parents. T9 explained when parents contact the principal “gets back with them and will meet at any time.”

T10 expressed the principal’s communication skills as strong and serve as a vital role in the school’s success. T10 stated the principal “is a huge communicator and that’s across the board. She communicates with our families, our staff, our students constantly.” T10 specifically noted the change in communication of expectations since the principal assumed the position. “I think consistency would be a huge, huge part of this because we just didn’t have a lot of consistency prior to that. You could go in one classroom and the expectations would be different for the hallways or the cafeteria than it would be for another teacher. And now we have school wide expectations.” T10 also explained how the principal always communicates tough decisions with respect. “I think she’s not afraid to make tough decisions with parents, but she’s always very respectful in the way that she does those things too.”

T11 described the principal’s communication by stating “if she wants us to do something she’s very clear in her expectations of what she wants us to do, very positive.” T11 added the principal leads by example and said, “I don’t think she ever expects anything from us that she would not do herself.” When communicating with teachers, T11 stated the principal always listens first and remains calm. T11 said, “Some situations I’ve had this year, I feel flustered, she is the you know, there to be very calm and so you would definitely see her stepping back . You

know, taking is all in and then executing a plan calmly.” With students, T11 said the principal communicates in a loving way “always wanting what’s best for them.” Regarding the change in behavior expectations, T11 mentioned, “Because the behavior became under control, everybody’s attitude and our expectations are the same now throughout the school.”

T12 also repeatedly described the principal’s interactions as respectful and calm with an emphasis on listening well. T12 focused on encouraging students to communicate well through restorative circles. The principal communicated the expectations by saying “I just want for you all to try this and then we’re going to come back together after a few weeks. And if it’s not working, then we’re going to work through it. So she made it so that we weren’t you know, some people re scared to talk to the bosses.” T12 then stated, “At one point, I walked into her office and I was like, ‘Ok, everyone upstairs, we just need a break, there’s too many new things. We need nothing else new for a while so that we can just get comfortable with what we’re doing. And so she listened to that. And so she went and talked to everybody else and found out, ok so we really everyone’s overwhelmed. So just the fact that she does listen and is respectful about that.”

***Shared Leadership.*** As interview participants shared answers surrounding principal influence on school culture and climate, the theme of shared leadership emerged with contributing factors such as supportive teamwork, modeling servant leadership, and delegation of responsibilities. T1 described how the principal is involved in all decision making while also building team camaraderie. The teacher stated how the principal divides the teachers into various teams to accomplish goals or participate in collaborative opportunities. T1 shared, “She likes to build a lot of team building strategies. So like for instance, last year, when we came back in January, she set up an axe throwing thing in our gym. And so we did it. She divided us into

teams. Sometimes we are with our grade level and sometimes do across the school. That way she builds the team camaraderie within the whole building. And like our AD day this time is this Friday, but it's at Watauga Lake. So we're asking her if we needed any special shoes or clothing just to get there because we never know what she's going to do."

T6 described the principal's leadership by stating, "I think he really follows like a servant leadership and a mentor." T6 added, "I feel like he definitely likes to delegate duties and develop leaders within leaders. He's not someone that has to do everything." T6 continued, "He likes to develop people to be in charge of different things. So that is the impact of the school because I feel like it allows us to be successful in so many more areas that just what he can manage himself. He's not power hungry or feels like he has to have the glory of everything. He is very comfortable getting your opinions and then letting us lead in the areas he feels we have strengths in."

T7 explained, "He has certain people that he consults with on certain things, you just kind of, 'Hey, what do you think about this'." T7 then added, "He's very good at delegating responsibilities. He knew I need these things, and I've got this committee and all of that. So he knew he needed help, and he was really good at asking for it."

All the participants in school C stressed the principal's commitment to shared leadership contributing to a positive change in school culture and climate. T10 explained, "She really involves us in leadership and that's so greatly appreciated. There's not any decisions that she really makes that she doesn't run through like our leadership team and her staff as much as possible. She's just fantastic at what she does."

T11 stated the principal encourages everyone to be a lead in the building. Additionally, T11 described how the principal included the entire faculty on decision making when she first arrived at the school. “And in her very first day there, when we had our faculty meeting, she asked us what our number one thing was that we wanted. And all of the consensus was we have to get this behavior under control. She automatically executed a plan.”

T12 also discussed the principal’s shared leadership philosophy and how it has positively impacted the school. “She likes to have a set leadership team, and she wants to get input from the leadership team for all of the decisions that she makes, a lot of times, she’ll come up with a couple of topics, or she’ll have something that she thinks is best. But then she brings it to the leadership team and explains all of our options and then we take a vote on it.” T12 added, “So she and our leadership team is actually pretty large for our school. I think because she wants to make sure it represents our special areas, special education, and the lower grades and the upper grades.” Additionally, T12 explained how the principal allows the leadership team to lead in professional development. “A lot of times she will start off the meeting, but then she usually has the leadership team members. She delegates the tasks out to them so that it’s people who are actually doing these jobs and doing those types of things that will actually teach everyone else how to do it. So she’s delegating the leadership to people who she knows could be good leaders. She definitely pushes everyone to be a leader. So she wants not to be the only one in charge. She wants to make sure that there are other leaders in the school.”

Table 3 provides common categories found from teachers’ responses when answering interview questions regarding the principals’ influence on school culture and climate.



**Table 3***Categories Describing Principal Behaviors Influencing School Culture and Climate*

	Communication	Teamwork	Supportive	High Expectations	Respect	Presence	Relationship	Student Centered	Servant Leadership
T 1	x	x	x	x		x	x		x
T 2			x	x			x	x	
T 3	x		x	x		x	x	x	
T 4	x	x		x		x	x		x
T 5	x	x	x	x			x		
T 6	x	x	x	x		x	x		x
T 7	x	x	x	x		x	x		
T 8	x	x	x	x			x		
T 9	x		x	x	x	x	x		
T 10	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
T 11	x	x	x	x			x	x	x
T 12	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x

### ***Research Question 3***

*How do teachers perceive the role of the principal in school climate and culture?*

**Interview Findings.** The participants in this research study shared their perceptions regarding the principal's role in school climate and culture. Based on their responses, three themes emerged including relationships, communication, and shared leadership. Other behaviors mentioned that contributed to these three themes include supportive, team building, and high expectations. Interview participants indicated principal behaviors identified in their responses were linked to their role in improving school culture and climate.

**Relationships.** Participants in this study indicated through their interview responses how principal behaviors associated with supportive relationship building were a critical part of the role of the principal in positive school culture and climate. T1 described the principal's behaviors as remaining positive and supportive while allowing frequent opportunities to build team camaraderie within the school. The principal not only encourages teamwork within grade levels, but also provides opportunities for teachers to interact and support those working in different areas of the school. T1 explained how this behavior contributes to positive school culture and climate as the faculty feels more like a family as they work together. The responses from T1 also included evidence of the principal being visible in the school, discussing academics with students, providing opportunities for parents to be involved in the school, and demonstrating care when approached with concerns of teachers, students, and families.

T2 used the word "family" six times when sharing about the culture and climate in the school. T2 explained how this family environment is a result of the principal's behaviors when interacting with school members. For example, T2 stated the principal demonstrates loving

behaviors with everyone and even takes on a motherly role by demonstrating concern about teachers' families and making connections with students through what they are reading.

T3 described how the principal takes time on the announcements every day to brag on students who have received compliments that day from teachers. T3 also explained how the principal asked personal questions of teachers to get to know them better and demonstrate care and concern. Additionally, T3 stated the principal often hugs the students, compliments them on something personal such as their glasses, and is always present in the building and hands on with the students throughout the day.

T4 explained how the principal builds relationships with students by asking them often about what they are reading. The principal also purposefully reads what students are reading so that she can discuss the books with them and deepen relationships through book discussions. T4 described how the principal finds opportunities in the building for parents to help with and encourages them to participate in their child's education.

T5 shared how the principal used her leadership role to build relationships which strengthens school culture and climate by being accessible in the school and visiting classrooms daily. The principal walks through and stops to have personal conversations with students and helps them as needed with their academic work. Additionally, the principal praises students' efforts and shows excitement when she sees the students and interacts with them. T5 also described specific behaviors the principal demonstrates to deeper relationships and show support to teachers. These include adding an unexpected jeans day and providing a treat for teachers such as sweet tea in the lounge.

T6 focused on the principal's behaviors interacting with students and families at school as well as in the community as contributing to positive school culture and climate. The principal purposely plans fun activities that deepen relationships within the school. T6 noted the principal plays with students on the playground and being intentional with making connections with parents about community and school events.

T7 described the principal's willingness to support teachers including attending parent meetings as promoting teacher morale as an important role the principal plays which positively impacts school culture and climate. T7 explained how the principal dresses in costumes and uses multiple props to engage students in learning which encourages students to want to come to school. Additionally, the principal rides his bike all over the community and visits with students and families outside their homes to deepen relationships with students and families.

T8 described the principal's behaviors impacting school culture and climate as focused on fun for the students. T8 specifically discussed the principal getting on the roof to squirt water at students as they enter or leave school which made the students excited to be there. Through these intentional behaviors, T8 indicated the principal deepens relationships with students.

T9 explained the principal often sends teachers encouraging notes and seeks opportunities to acknowledge efforts and build confidence. The principal also is present in classrooms often in order to interact with students and demonstrate his interest in their learning. Additionally, T9 noted the principal rides his bike in the community in order to interact with students outside of school as well as their parents.

T10 explained the principal's role with improving the physical environment for teachers to have a more aesthetically pleasing place to work contributed to school culture and climate.

T10 added the principal is intentional about listening while always remaining calm which has had a positive effect on the school culture and climate. T10 also described the principal always getting down on the level of the students to interact, help them calm down, and meet behavior expectations has also been a crucial part of the principal's role in the school.

T11 stated the principal demonstrates love, care, and fairness when interacting with others in the school. T12 added the principal adds jeans days for teachers to boost morale. With students, T12 described the principal as asking personal questions about the students' siblings, books they are reading, or what they did over the weekend. T12 shared these behaviors strengthen overall school culture and climate and are important in the role of the principal.

***Communication.*** Participants in this study included how the principal's role should include communication skills to help high expectations be clearly conveyed to all members of the school community. T1 described how the principal shares her expectations with teachers, students, and families up front to prevent any confusion. The principal also establishes non negotiable expectations and speaks with teachers directly if they are not followed.

T2 explained how the principal intentionally communicates in a more relaxed fashion in faculty meetings in order to allow teachers to interact with each other and deepen relationships. T2 added the principal clearly conveys expectations to everyone and is loving yet also quick to address any areas where she does not feel expectations are being met.

T3 described the principal's clear discipline procedures allows students to know what is expected of them. T3 explained the principal always lets teachers know if she does not agree with them which is received positively. T3 shared the teachers appreciate the clear guidance so

they never have to worry about what is expected of them and felt this was an important part of the principal's role in the school.

T4 stressed how the principal is open and honest in communications which builds strong connections between the principal and parents. T5 added the principal maintains a focus for the school on reading and communicates it through familiar phrases and conversations daily with students. Several of these phrases have become traditions to be expected in the principal's behaviors which positive affect school culture and climate especially because some of the phrases are specific to only their school. Additionally, T5 explained how the principal's role as a cheerleader has been especially important for school culture and climate during the pandemic.

T6 explained the principal is visible and spends time checking in with teachers and students throughout the day. T6 also explained how the principal is quick in conversations but listens well to teachers. Additionally, T6 described how the principal sets high expectations and shares them most often through emails sent to teachers. Regarding families, T6 shared how the principal often asks a lot of questions to understand their perspective before acting.

T7 explained the principal's role should include support for teachers when interacting with parents. T7 explained the principal often attends parent meetings to listen and offer input regarding students' needs. The participant stated how the principal demonstrates quick interactions with people most of the time but gives the amount of time necessary to show support and help resolve issues. To communicate with students and families, T7 discussed the principal's presence at school events as well as in the community. T7 also mentioned how the principal has planned new opportunities for parents to be involved in the school both during and after school hours where he interacts with students and their families.

T8 shared the principal communicates clearly and sets high expectations through face to face conversations but also has created an atmosphere of teacher freedom to make professional choices without fear. T8 stated the principal jokes around to make teachers, students, and families feel more at ease and is dedicated to a positive, fun environment for the school. T8 also discussed the principal's behavior of patiently listening to parent concerns while remaining professional.

T9 described the principal's behaviors when communicating as hands on with students and being physically present in classrooms often. Additionally, T9 shared how the principal greets the students as they arrive and demonstrates excitement in the interactions with students. T9 mentioned when the principal enters classrooms, the students are immediately distracted because they are so happy to see him. T9 also stated the principal communicates through email with both expectations but also encouraging and helpful words to improve teacher morale. T9 explained how the principal has implemented family involvement events in which he is always present and interacting with students and families which has had a positive effect on school culture and climate.

T10 explained how the principal interacts with teachers, students, and families in a similar way which includes listening well, always demonstrating respect, taking time to fully understand the concern, remaining calm at all times, and then swiftly executing a plan. T10 described the behavior of the principal with students includes sitting down to be at the same level with the student and using a calm voice to support them. T10 also stated the principal speaks to everyone with respect and positively regardless of their background and makes effort to make everyone feel welcome through words and actions. T10 shared how the principal clearly communicates through individual interactions and school wide interactions regarding the

behavior expectations. Similarly, T10 described the principal's behavior as consistent in both expectations, positivity, and respect and how these behaviors were vital in supporting school culture and climate.

T11 stated the principal communicates her expectations clearly and positively. T11 added how important it is for the principal leads by example and participates in completing tasks that she has also asked others to do. T11 listed the principal has strong listening skills, demonstrates a calm demeanor even in difficult situations, and showing love and concern to everyone. When communicating with families, T11 described how the principal uses words and attitude to ensure the parents know that their child is a high priority.

T12 discussed the principal's role regarding communication included always maintaining respect for others, expressing herself positively in all communications, and being an example for all by modeling for others the behaviors she expects for all. T12 described the principal as communicating with teachers by reminding them how anything can be overcome as long as they are committed to working together. T12 described how the principal communicates with students more regarding their hobbies or families instead of focusing on academics in her interactions. T12 elaborated how this behavior shows interest in the individual child, how he may be feeling, and how she can better show support.

***Shared Leadership.*** Throughout the interview process, participants often described behaviors of principals that provided evidence of shared leadership particularly in Schools B and C. When talking about shared leadership behaviors, participants expressed appreciation for leadership opportunities as well as being asked for input in decision making. Participants shared how this role of the principal was important in making them feel valued as well as developing their own capacity for leadership. T1 described the principal's behaviors in promoting teamwork



are evident through the types of staff development she plans. For example, T1 mentioned an axe throwing competition with the principal determining the teams as well as team activities at the lake. T1 shared how the principal's role in designing and implementing these type of activities supports positive school culture and climate.

T2 explained how the principal reminds the teachers often in team meetings how they must remain focused and work together to accomplish what is best for students. T4 mentioned how the principal is committed to a team environment. Specifically, T4 shared how the principal expects and joins in on team planning for lessons and grade level activities and how this support has improved school culture and climate.

T5 commented how the principal's role in the school included developing committees to assist in leading. Specifically, T5 stated the principal had developed a climate committee to plan special activities for faculty and staff. T5 also shared how the principal seeks input from others regarding financial decisions for the school by asking teachers what they need and aligning the budget to provide resources.

T6 described the principal's behavior as actively seeking opportunities for others in the school to lead. For example, the principal often asks others for input often when making decisions, as well as identifying teachers' strengths and placing them in leadership roles which align to those strengths. T6 shared how these behaviors have allowed the school to be more successful than if he managed everything alone.

T7 explained how the principal often pulls an informal group together to provide input on whatever topic in which he is making a decision. T8 stated the principal develops committees to assist with different areas and needs within the school. Also, the interview participant shared

how the principal often delegates to individuals based on their identified strengths and interests tasks he would otherwise complete alone.

T10 spoke in depth regarding the principal's behaviors which demonstrate shared leadership and how these behaviors have positively influenced school culture and climate. T10 stated the principal includes the leadership team in all school decision making and noted this behavior is much appreciated by teachers. T11 shared how the principal leads by example but always pushes others to be leaders. The interview participant shared that she is now considering pursuing an administration degree due to the principal's influence and encouragement for her personal professional development. T11 also described how the principal allowed all teachers to provide input in determining what areas were in most need of improvement and then acted based on the shared decision making.

T12 emphasized the principal's commitment to shared leadership. T12 discussed how she is thankful the principal includes shared leadership in her role, and how the principal believes she should include the leadership team in all decision making. T12 added the principal often develops ideas and researches options, then brings them to the team to consider and make a final decision. T12 stated the principal purposely included teachers from all grade levels and other areas of the school to be on the team in order to provide representation for all. T12 also commented how the principal delegates tasks aligned with teachers' strengths while pushing everyone to be a leader. T12 mentioned how the principal plans professional development and faculty meetings that are led members of the leadership team depending on their areas of expertise. Lastly, T12 explained how the principal designs different teams to encourage upper and lower grade teachers to work together and form bonds which was lacking before the principal joined the school.

## **Summary**

This qualitative research study collected data using a phenomenological approach. The data were gathered in order to identify behaviors of elementary principals that positively affect school culture and climate. The sample of participants was purposely selected as teachers teaching a minimum of 5 years in the school. The schools were selected by the superintendent of the school district based on each superintendent's identification of a school in which the school culture and climate has been positively influenced by the principal. Twelve teachers participated in this study and took part in individual interviews with the researcher. Each participant was asked eight open ended interview questions. Each interview was transcribed and coded to identify categories within the data. The data were studied in depth to identify emerging themes within the categories as well as to seek answers for the study's research questions. The findings of the research study are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 includes conclusions based on this study.

## **Chapter 5. Conclusions**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 5 includes discussion regarding the study findings reported in Chapter 4. In addition, this chapter incorporates implications for practical recommendations for future research and a summary of this research study. This study applied qualitative phenomenological research design through individual interviews with research participants. The constant comparative method was used to code interview question responses into groupings reflecting similar topics. The data were further analyzed employing axial coding to cluster and identify themes. Chapter 1 includes the introduction of the study topic as well as the statement of the problem. As Fisher et al. (2016) concluded, research has shown this strong connection, all school leaders are not perceived as positively impacting the climate and culture in the educational setting in which they lead. This study was completed to examine which behaviors elementary school principals exhibited that positively affected school climate and culture as perceived by teachers working with a principal identified as successful in this area. Data collection and analysis occurred during a pandemic. Interviews had to be completed virtually. At times, participants dealt with distractions that may not have been present for in person interviews. The researcher concluded the pandemic setting did not impact major themes but could have been influential in participant responses. Chapter 2 presents the review of literature associated with this research topic. Chapter 3 explains the research methodology for this study. Chapter 4 describes the findings from the analysis of the data.

## **Discussion**

Deal and Peterson (2016) explained that school principals communicate core values through everyday actions and behaviors. Sawyer (2018) also concluded a connection exists between school principals and school culture and climate. Wiskow (2017) linked the principal role as having a great effect on school culture and climate.

### ***Research Question 1***

What are the teacher perceptions of school culture and climate?

Waheed et al. (2016) determined several factors that influence teachers' perception of positive school culture and climate. These included principal support, resources, opportunities to collaborate, school safety, and a sense of feeling valued. Similarly, Welch (2014) found multiple factors that teachers perceive as influencing positive school culture and climate. These included acceptance, respect for differences, effective communication, clearly established common goals, strong and supportive leadership, and opportunities for collaboration with colleagues.

In this research study, teachers reported multiple characteristics in description of their current schools' positive culture and climate. All the study participants except two discussed their schools' culture and climate as supportive in regard to both the principal as well as colleagues. Kershner and McQuillan (2016) conducted research that supported the participants' placement of importance on support within the school and specifically noted that support provided to teachers by principals improved relationships and contributed to positive school culture and climate.

Four of the participants in this study shared the importance of student centered common goals while five stressed the importance of high expectations in place as contributing to positive

culture and climate. Murphy and Torre (2015) conducted research that supports the importance of setting high expectations and provided results demonstrating how positive school climate is more likely when the focus within the school is on high quality instruction and high expectations. Welch (2014) emphasized the importance of clearly established common goals in his research. Additionally, Werang (2014) explained the connection between common goals and positive teacher perceptions as well as the importance of resources provided to reach the common goals established.

Five participants used the word “positive” in their discussions regarding school culture and climate. Similarly, 11 participants commented with related words such as “happy”, “caring”, “family”, “fun” and “respectful.” Deal and Peterson (2016) supported these factors that teachers attributed to their current school’s culture and climate and explained how positive school cultures should include a shared commitment and a general feeling of happiness. Likewise, Deal and Peterson also determined positive norms from school to school affecting school culture. These norms supported the participants’ comments by including respect, encouragement, enthusiasm, fun, and care in the list of factors contributing to positive culture.

### ***Research Question 2***

What are teacher perceptions of the principal and positive school culture and climate?

**Relationships.** Price et al. (2015) reported positive school culture and climate is connected to relationship building skills of the principal. Teachers noted the importance of encouragement and mutual trust from school leaders. McKinney et al. (2015) found that the social relationship between school leaders and teachers were critical in positive school culture and climate and the overall success of the school and listed characteristics of positively impactful

principals. These included having a caring and sensitive demeanor, seeking ways to motivate teachers, and remaining approachable. Tshannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) focused their research on the importance of principal leadership building trusting relationships with those in the school and concluded the factors exhibited by principals contributing to positive school culture and climate worked together to increase trust and improve relationships with teachers.

The topic of relationships was one of the three themes that emerged from the data analysis of this study. Relationship skills of the principal were prevalent in findings from this research. All 12 teacher participants discussed the importance of the principal having strong, positive relationship building skills in their responses. The teachers discussed the evidence of the principals' commitment to positive relationships with teachers, students, and families. In their interview responses, teachers described how they observe positive interactions often between their principals and school stakeholders. For example, T7 contributed a family type atmosphere to the leadership of the current principal. All teachers from school B also commented on the principal's consistent and intentional interactions with students. They shared many examples of the principal playing on the playground with students, asking questions of students to get to know them individually, and creating exciting opportunities for the principal to celebrate and encourage student success. Regarding this same principal, T9 contributed a positive change in school culture and climate has occurred since the principal took on the current role.

All interview participants from school C also attributed the school's current positive culture and climate to the leadership of the principal. The teachers discussed how the principal places high emphasis on relationships with teachers, students, and families by making all feel comfortable and welcome. These participants also frequently commented on the principal's calm and respectful presence with everyone at all times. McKinney et al. (2015) supported this

approach by finding a connection between school success and principals demonstrating a caring and sensitive demeanor.

The researcher determined that the principal's dedication and focus on building constructive relationships with teachers, students, and families to be a key factor in positive school culture and climate. The overwhelming majority of teacher participants emphasized this theme and its contribution toward successful culture and climate.

**Communication.** The second theme that emerged in response to the second research question of this study is clear, consistent, communication coupled with high expectations. Research supports these findings as critical to positive culture and climate. Brown and Vaughn (2015) described the importance of principal communication to promote open discussion and trust between principals and teachers. Murphy and Torre (2015) reported findings from their research that included the principal's support of teachers through effective communication as the forefront in a productive school atmosphere. Welch (2014) also included effective communication among all faculty members as one of 12 contributing factors teachers listed as positively affecting climate.

Participants in this research study consistently added clear communication with specific expectations as important for their schools' culture and climate. All except one teacher reported the principals they work with demonstrate support to teachers through communication. All twelve participants listed high expectations that are explicit and easily understandable as helpful with encouraging a positive environment. In all three schools in which interview participants were teaching, teachers mentioned the principals' efforts to give clear, direct guidelines to follow that align with the principals' vision for the schools they lead.



The teachers also described the principals' use of direct, easy to understand communication with students and families as well as with teachers. T5 explained that everyone regardless of their role in the school knows the expectations that continue year after year. The teacher noted that those new to the school learn the expectations quickly and adhere to them in order to be successful. T1 shared how the principal directly explains expectations and will individually communicate with teachers, students, and families who may demonstrate lack of commitment to those same expectations.

The researcher concluded that clear communication among principals, teachers, students, and families greatly impacts school success. It is apparent to the researcher that part of successful communication should include consistent reminders of high expectations for all. Additionally, the findings show the principals' willingness to respectfully address those not meeting expectations as critical as well in order to maintain high standards in all areas of the school.

**Shared Leadership.** A third theme emerged from the data in this research study. This theme was shared leadership including the principals' emphasis on teamwork, collaboration, and servant leadership. Deal and Peterson (2016) described positive school culture as collaborative and emphasized the importance of continuous school improvement through shared leadership. Waheed et al. (2016) included opportunities for collaboration as necessary for a positive school climate to exist. Similarly, Cheng (2014) identified teachers' opportunity for leadership and contribution to decision making as a factor influencing positive change in school climate. Welch (2014) also added teacher input into decision making as one of 12 factors impacting positive culture and climate. Price et al. (2015) found that principals who work to establish school culture and climate where teachers actively participate in formal collaboration and decision making are more successful. Likewise, Neumershi (2013) also identified a positive impact on school climate

when teachers were included in decision making. Fullan (2007) highlighted the need for the principal's leadership to include servant leadership, shared leadership, and principal modeling of expectations. Wang et al. (2014) stated that principals committed to shared leadership including the aspect of servant leadership are more successful in leading and achieving positive change in school culture and climate. Sawyer (2018) added the component of principal modeling of expectations as part of effective instructional leadership leading to positive change.

Interview participants commented frequently throughout the interviews in reference to the principals' leadership style including the component of shared leadership. Five interview participants specifically mentioned their principals' strong emphasis on shared leadership. Nine teachers included the topic of teamwork and working together toward common goals while five teachers specifically mentioned their principals' commitment to servant leadership. T5 discussed how their principal makes sure that "everyone plays a part" and places an emphasis on teamwork across grade levels, within grade levels, and with families. T7 expressed the principal's strong delegation skills in which teachers are matched with opportunities to lead and strengthen their own leadership skills. The principal's focus on shared leadership was shared by all three teachers in school C when describing their principal. The teachers described how the principal led positive change in school culture and climate by creating a leadership team with representatives from all areas of the school. Additionally, the participants stated the principal encourages teachers to take on leadership roles and models servant leadership often. T11 explained how the principal leads by example and never expects teachers to do something she is unwilling to do herself.

The researcher concluded that the principal's commitment to shared leadership including decision making, leadership opportunities in faculty meetings and professional development, and

overseeing committees within the school plays a significant role in positive culture and climate. The researcher also concluded that the principal's modeling of expectations and taking on the role of a servant leader contributes to positive change in culture and climate as well. Teachers described feeling valued and encouraged when offered opportunities to lead, share ideas, and make decisions collaboratively.

### ***Research Question 3***

How do teachers perceive the role of the principal in school culture and climate?

The interview participants described specific behaviors they believe their principals exhibit in their leadership roles that have positively affected school culture and climate. The three themes that emerged from participant interviews associated with the principal's role in school culture and climate were relationships, communication, and shared leadership.

**Relationships.** Boies and Fiset (2019) found the principal's role should include relationship components including supporting, celebrating, and developing teachers professionally. Similarly, Crowley (2011) reported the importance of the principal's role in school culture and climate and should include the development of relationships with school staff in order to plan opportunities that align with teachers' professional growth needs. Adams et al. (2017) found teachers are more likely to perceive principals as positively influencing the school when the principals intentionally develop relationships with members of the school community. These behaviors included being attentive to teachers' interests, establishing trust, demonstrating fairness, and modeling respect in relationships. All participants in the study referenced the role their principals' relationship skills contributed to positive school culture and climate. In School B, all participants discussed the importance of the role the principal has of encouraging fun and

increasing students' excitement surrounding being at school. These participants contributed the principals' behaviors to positively influencing school culture and climate. In School C, all participants also discussed the strong relationship skills demonstrated in the principal and contributed to a fundamental change in school culture and climate. Specifically, the participants explained how the principal uses the leadership role to consistently model behaviors which encourage teachers, students, and families to mirror the principal's example.

**Communication.** Harvey et al. (2014) concluded principals must establish high expectations and communicate them effectively with all members of the school community to achieve school success. Hit and Meyers (2018) found the role of the principal must include clear communication of the school's vision as well as the responsibilities of all stakeholders to reach that vision. Adams et al. (2017) also reported the role of the principal should include skillful communication paired with leading by example and providing needed resources to successfully lead schools. In School A, four of the five participants described the principal's role as including consistent, clear communication of expectations both school wide and for individuals. All twelve participants mentioned the need for high expectations to be in place and communicated clearly by the principal in order to have positive school culture and climate. All twelve participants also used the word "positive" when describing the principal's communication with all school stakeholders.

**Shared Leadership.** Bedard (2014) explained the importance with school leadership for the principal to design opportunities for shared leadership to allow for collaboration regarding important school decisions. Arnold et al. (2007) described how the role of the principal must include commitment to supporting school leadership opportunities in which teachers participate in decision making. Cobanglu (2020) concluded shared leadership including collaborative

decision making increased feelings of value for teachers which positively influenced school culture and climate. Nine participants discussed the commitment to a team environment and connected this behavior to an increase in positive culture and climate. Additionally, five participants representing all three schools described their principals as servant leaders who modeled behaviors and participated often in tasks leading to school success. Specifically, in School C, all three participants discussed how the principal led change in the school by developing a leadership team and consistently meeting with the team to establish a common vision, make collaborative decisions, and seek input from other leaders as the school moves through the change process to reach goals including positive culture and climate.

### **Implications for Practice**

After analysis of the data and review of literature connected to this research study, the researcher makes the following recommendations for practice. Principals should maintain a constant focus on building and supporting positive relationships with teachers, students, and families. According to the results of the research, principals who are attentive and intentional regarding relationships with stakeholders are likely to contribute to a positive school culture and climate. Reig and Marcoline (2008) reported that the principal must be a builder of relationships including teachers, students, families, and community members and added that positive relationships are the central component of school success. Reig and Marcoline (2008) continued by explaining how the best principals spend significant time investing, supporting, and growing positive relationships with school stakeholders.

Principals should invest in improving their communication skills in order to develop an environment of open, clear, and consistent communication. Within this communication, principals should share established high expectations for teachers, students, and families. When

expectations are both instituted and modeled by the principal, school culture and climate will be positively affected according to the research in this study. The findings from the data analysis of this study are supported by past research as well. Mousena and Raptis (2020) found that communication among all school stakeholders is a vital element in improving school culture and climate. The researchers also explained how the communication skills of the principal are critical to the success of school improvement. The research of Brown and Vaughn (2015) also supported these research findings. The researchers identified principal communication as vital to successful culture and climate. Brown and Vaughn also explained the importance of the principal using communication to establish trust. Further, Murphy and Torre (2015) emphasized the importance of setting high expectations and supporting teachers through effective communication.

Lastly, the researcher recommends for principals to engage and support shared leadership in their schools. The research findings of this study attributed positive school culture and climate in part to school leadership that includes opportunities for shared decision making as well as freedom for teachers to strengthen their leadership skills and put those into practice within the school. Similarly, the researcher found principal mentorship and willingness to work alongside teachers, students, and parents in servant leadership as positively contributing to school culture and climate. A review of associated literature showed support of this recommendation as well. Burton and Peachey (2009) concluded that principals who employed shared leadership also modeled skills needed to bring about common goal setting resulting in needed change. Eyal and Roth (2011) reported similar findings in their research which explained how principals successfully affected school culture by providing collaborative opportunities and encouraged leadership development for teachers. Fullan (2007) described the shift of the principal role to including instructional leadership that must include components of servant and shared leadership.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Through data analysis and conclusions in this research study, the researcher recommends the following suggestions for future research.

- A qualitative study could be conducted to analyze principals' perceptions on their personal influence on positive school culture and climate.
- A qualitative study could be conducted to identify middle school and high school teacher perceptions of principal influence on school culture and climate.
- A qualitative study could be conducted to analyze parents' perceptions of the principal's influence on school climate and culture.
- A qualitative study could be conducted to specifically research the principal's influence on school culture and climate with varying years of leadership at the school.

## **Chapter Summary**

This qualitative phenomenological research study was directed by three research questions. After the completion of 12 interviews, an in depth analysis of the data, and emergence of common themes, the researcher gained understanding into the phenomenon of principal influence on positive school culture and climate. Several conclusions were established as a result of the findings of this study.

The researcher concluded that principals who positively impact school culture and climate have a commitment to building and maintaining strong, positive relationships with teachers, students, and families. Teachers reported examples of principals making personal connections with all and working to create an inclusive, welcoming environment in the school.

Participants also described principals being present and engaged with teachers, students, and families while seeking to meet their needs and encourage school success.

Other findings in the data allowed the researcher to also conclude that principals who positively impact culture and climate are successful communicators. Several factors contributed to this conclusion including principals establishing open, ongoing opportunities for communication. Additionally, principals asked questions and listened to input and concerns from stakeholders. Principals were found to be supportive of teachers in multiple ways while remaining calm, focused, and positive. Principals were found to set forth clear expectations for all. This occurred by principals who were willing to address unmet expectations while also celebrating successes within the expectations.

The third theme identified through the research findings of this study was the importance of the principal's leadership to include shared leadership opportunities. Within this theme, data also pointed to the principal mentoring others in developing leadership skills as well as modeling servant leadership with teachers, students, and families. Principals who have contributed to positive culture and climate sought opportunities to delegate responsibilities while supporting shared decision making. In conclusion, the researcher determined the importance of relationships, communication, and shared leadership and the implications of each in the success of a principal in positively influencing school culture and climate.



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## APPENDIX: Teacher Participant Interview Guide

### Teacher Interview Questions:

1. How would you describe your principal's leadership style?
2. Describe the culture and climate of your school.
3. How does your principal positively affect school culture and climate?
4. What would I observe when watching your principal interact with teachers?
5. What would I observe when watching your principal interact with students?
6. What would I observe when watching your principal interact with families?
7. How did the school culture and climate change when your current principal came to your school?
8. What other thoughts do you have about the leadership behaviors of your principal?
9. Is there anyone else I should talk to about your principal's influence on school culture and climate?

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