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Principal Actions That Foster Positive School Climate

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Principal Actions That Foster Positive School Climate

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Abstract

School climate has become a focus of the work of educational leaders due to the potential positive influence on student achievement. The overall climate of a school is ultimately the responsibility of the principal and requires knowledge of effective strategies to employ to support staff to ensure that student learning is maximized. This review of research synthesized current research to determine what specific actions and strategies a principal can employ to foster a positive school climate that supports student achievement. Three themes emerged in the current research to guide a principal's actions to impact school climate: shared-leadership, collaboration, and trust. The review of research revealed specific strategies that a principal should support including: teacher leadership teams, professional learning communities, faculty mentoring programs, consistent building walkthroughs focused on fostering positive relationships, and intentional support of staff when dealing with external pressures. The use of these strategies both directly and indirectly impact student achievement in schools.

Keywords: collaboration, school climate, shared leadership, trust

Principal Actions That Foster Positive School Climate

In the current, complex, work of educational leadership, school principals are required to serve as both managers and instructional leaders. The efficacy of a school principal in the educational system has historically been measured by student performance on standardized tests (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). Because the impact of school climate on student achievement has not yet been fully recognized in the evaluation of school effectiveness, intentional emphasis on climate is often overlooked (Cohen et al., 2009). It is imperative that the actions of a school principal maximize student achievement; there is evidence to support that emphasizing efforts to build a positive school climate has a positive impact on student learning (Jones & Shindler, 2016). To ensure student achievement is maximized, it is necessary to identify how the school principal can act within their role to intentionally create a positive school climate.

Student learning is supported by many factors that have varying degrees of impact, yet each piece of the student learning puzzle contributes to educating the whole child. The purpose of this review of current research is to understand what specific actions a school building leader can take to ensure a positive building climate that effectively supports student achievement. Jones and Shindler (2016) connect the dimensions of school climate: physical aspects, faculty relations, student interactions, leadership, discipline and learning environment, attitude and culture, school-community relations, and assert that a positive building climate is the most influential factor of a school's ability to support student achievement. As the leader of the school, the principal plays a key role in building this positive climate.

The need for a school principal to balance the two roles of managerial and instructional leadership can result in distractions getting in the way of adequate time being dedicated to

deciphering where to begin efforts when concerned with school climate (Dewitt, 2018). The goal of this analysis of current research is to reveal specific, actionable strategies for building principals to employ to foster positive school climate to foster student achievement.

Scope of Research

School climate is multi-faceted and includes student-centered, teacher-centered, and environmental factors. To identify specific actions and strategies for school leaders, one must narrow down the scope of the work. This review of research supported focusing on principal behaviors which include strategies that support shared leadership, collaboration, and building trusting relationships with staff. A variety of school types, sizes, and geographic locations were reviewed in order to understand how aspects of school climate vary across grade levels and school populations. The focus on specific principal behaviors, rather than exclusively the student and teacher centered factors, provides clear and attainable action items for building-level educational leaders to act upon to create a positive school climate to support student learning.

Importance of the Study

The identification of actionable items that building leadership can rely upon to ensure a positive school climate will support student learning and a healthy work environment for the adults supporting student learning. As revealed in John Hattie's landmark meta-analyses of factors that impact student achievement, the principal alone does not have a significant positive impact on student achievement (Hattie, 2009). The meta-analyses indicated the influence of aspects of the teacher domain to have a larger impact on student achievement than the principal (Hattie, 2009). Jensen's work on supporting students of poverty indicated that the classroom teacher has a significant influence on a student's daily experience at school (Jensen, 2013). Therefore, if building leadership effectively support classroom teachers, and teachers believe

they can impact students; this will lead to increased student achievement. Indirectly, the actions of the principal, through relationships with staff and attention to positive climate, will maximize positive impact on student learning.

Educational leaders that are new to a principal role may not know where to start to support the creation of a positive building climate. This review of research identifies attainable strategies for school principals and other school leaders to support the symbiotic positive relationship within a school building necessary to support student learning.

Research Questions

What actions and strategies employed by a principal foster a positive school climate that supports student achievement?

Connection to the Program Essential Question. In light of what is known about how children learn and educational policy and practice, how shall educators best lead in educational settings today to foster positive school climate in order to promote student achievement? Furthermore, what specific principal actions support a positive building climate?

Definition of Terms

Instructional leadership refers to leadership behaviors that “focus on creating a learning climate free of disruption, a system of clear teaching objectives and emphasis on high teacher expectations for teachers and students” (Hattie, 2009, p. 83).

School climate is the overall school environment which includes the domains of physical aspects, faculty relations, student interactions, leadership, discipline and learning environment, attitude and culture, and school-community relations (Jones & Schindler, 2016). In this review of research, references to school climate will focus on the human elements within a school.

Trust refers to the willingness to make oneself vulnerable to another based on the belief in that person's kindness, honesty, openness, competency, and reliability (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Trust is complex and multi-faceted (Walker, Kutsyruba, & Noonan, 2011). Trust in an educational setting is a reciprocal relationship between all stakeholders in a school including the principal, teachers and other staff, students, and the community.

Summary

The significance of positive school climate in student learning demands attention for how school leaders can effectively foster school climate. With the high demand for school principal time to address managerial duties of a school, it is necessary to synthesize current research to identify attainable and proven-effective actions for principals to focus on within a building to enhance climate.

The focus of this review of research will be to identify how principals act as instructional leaders to support collaboration and trusting environments to ensure student achievement. Chapter two is a review of current research related the factors of school climate. The literature review will encompass both quantitative and qualitative studies in a variety of school types and locations. Chapter three will summarize the review of research to identify themes and significant points about fostering school climate. Finally, chapter four will apply the research to identify actionable items for building principals to apply to their practice to support a positive school climate that fosters student achievement and address what future research is needed.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

School leaders have many instructional and managerial responsibilities that demand attention. It is necessary to give intentional focus on to how a building principal's actions can impact student achievement through development of a positive school climate. The many facets

of school climate are complex and require an understanding of research-supported practices that foster positive building climate. This review of literature will address the identification of strategies a principal can employ to support the development of a positive school climate to promote student achievement. Impactful strategies evident in current educational research were organized into three categories: shared leadership, collaboration, and trust.

Shared Leadership

The diversity of duties of a school principal can be overwhelming if seen as the responsibility of the principal on their own. The principal cannot take on all of the leadership duties in a school, but instead should act as the link for the leadership efforts of all stakeholders (Louis et al., 2010b). Sharing leadership duties includes distributing authority to stakeholders within the school to provide opportunities for shared decision-making, creating teams of teachers to work toward instructional goals, and providing professional development to enhance teacher leadership capacity (Drago-Severson, 2012; Louis et al., 2010b, Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Sebastian, Huang, & Allensworth, 2017) . Sharing leadership necessitates having all stakeholders working toward a common goal with a common understanding of expectations. The goal of every educational institution is student learning. Therefore, establishing methods for effective shared leadership must support the common goal of student achievement within the context of each individual school (Drago-Severson, 2012). Through shared-leadership strategies a principal can create a positive climate of collective responsibility for student learning (Louis et al., 2010a).

The complex job of a building principal cannot be done alone. A quantitative study of 20,853 teachers and 264,747 students in Chicago high schools over seven years investigated the interaction of principal and teacher leadership and student learning. Sebastian et al. (2017) set out to investigate the interaction of principal and teacher leadership as separate but linked

systems that impact student learning. Teacher and student survey responses to questions about organizational and climate aspects of their schools were linked to student achievement data, demographic information, and school characteristics. Through measuring leadership, organizational process, student achievement, and contextual factors, a connection between teacher leadership's impact on learning climate and student achievement was established. The results of the study indicated that giving teachers influence in decision-making within aspects of classroom instruction and instruction-planning positively influenced the relationship between perceived principal leadership traits and student achievement. Demonstrated by positive student achievement scores when teacher leadership opportunities were present, the actions of a principal indirectly influenced student learning through intentionally developing teacher leadership capacity within a school (Sebastian et al., 2017). Furthermore, when teacher leadership was emphasized in a school's work to support learning climate, factors such as school safety had a positive correlation to student achievement. This correlation indicates the need to reassess the current trend toward principals focusing on instructional leadership as potentially detrimental if it takes time away from school-wide climate work not directly related to instruction (Sebastian et al., 2017). Despite Sebastian et al.'s (2017) investigation being limited by the exclusive focus on urban public high school environments, it is clear that a principal must empower teachers to share decision-making and be intentional to support instruction improvement and school climate work simultaneously.

The school principal distributing authority to teachers for shared leadership in decision-making supports empowering teachers; this climate of teacher empowerment is linked to improved student achievement (Sebastian et al., 2017; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). To effectively share leadership with teachers, a school principal should create teacher teams and

provide intentional professional development of leadership skills for teachers. A qualitative case study of the practices of an urban high school principal by Reed and Swaminathan (2016) investigated the leadership practices that impacted student achievement. The use of shared leadership, professional learning communities, and social justice leadership by the principal intended to create contextually responsive leadership, were investigated to reveal obstacles to using these strategies in schools. Data was collected over one year of formal and informal observations, school tours, and interview data from professional development activities, supplemented with informal observations over an additional two years. The authors of the study were deeply imbedded in the school life through interviews and leadership professional development.

In the assessment of obstacles to shared leadership, teachers expressed hesitation to engage in leadership roles, which established the need to implore intentional teacher-leadership focused professional development to ensure capacity for shared leadership tasks (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). The principal created a leadership team along with collaborative structures within the school to empower teachers. The creation of the inclusive leadership team and approaching shared leadership as a piece of overall climate work proved effective to move student achievement forward. Meeting the needs of secondary students in an urban setting required the principal to understand the context of the school to effectively work on school climate issues to increase student achievement. Despite Reed and Swaminathan's (2016) study's limitation of a narrow scope of following only one urban leader, the improvement of student achievement in the school indicated shared leadership was effective in improving school climate to support learning.

The necessity for school principals to balance the demands of instructional and managerial leadership is supported by gaining an understanding of the relevance of the specific context of a school in building positive climate. This relationship is demonstrated in a qualitative study of school climate. Drago-Severson (2012) conducted 25 semi-structured interviews of school principals with at least five years of experience, from kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) school settings with a variety of financial resources and locations, to uncover principals' successful practices and strategies for shaping school climate through teacher growth and development. Drago-Severson (2012) uncovered four themes that principals used to approach constructing a climate that was supportive of teacher learning: shared leadership, building relationships, helping people manage change, and fostering diversity. Nearly all of the principals that participated in the study prioritized respectfully involving teachers in shared decision-making to help build climate-valuing relationships among faculty. The principals in Catholic schools in the study focused on their role as spiritual leaders to foster a respectful community, while public school leaders focused on developing shared values, thus supporting the assertion of Reed and Swaminathan (2016) that understanding the specific context of a school is fundamental to implementation of successful shared leadership opportunities. A key factor in developing shared decision-making between principals and teachers across all types of schools was the focus on the development of a shared school mission and that mission's connection to the faculty's daily practices (Drago-Severson, 2012). Within the context of shared leadership, principals in the study cited the necessity to focus on supporting adult growth and learning, providing opportunities to reflect on practice, building capacity for giving feedback, treating teachers as individuals, and inviting adults to assume greater leadership (Drago-Severson, 2012). Therefore,

a principal must understand and respond to the complex adult needs within a school to ensure effective shared leadership is possible.

Relationships between adults within a school matter. The effect of shared leadership practices on a teacher's work was shown by Louis, Dretzke, and Wahlstrom (2010a) to impact student achievement by developing a climate of collective responsibility for student learning. In a qualitative study of 106 elementary and secondary teachers linked to student achievement data, Louis et al. (2010a) identified the impact of shared leadership, instructional leadership, and trust between stakeholders on student learning; district and demographic characteristics were not included in the analysis. One significant outcome of the study was a comparison of student math achievement data with teacher survey responses. The correlation of scores indicated that focused instruction, professional community, and the teacher's relationship with the principal impacted student achievement. Therefore, the relationships of the adults in a school indirectly impacted student achievement. The implications of the study of shared-leadership revealed that teachers and administrators need to act on shared work around instruction, school leaders must emphasize both emotional and behavioral aspects of leadership, and these cannot be separated. Furthermore, shared and instructional leadership are complements of one another and are not conducive to building positive climate when implemented in isolation (Louis et al., 2010a; Sebastian et al., 2017). A significant finding of Louis et al.'s (2010a) study was that the data trends indicated that the impact of leadership on student learning appears to be easier in elementary rather than secondary school settings due to the nuances of instructional leadership at the secondary level, thus potentially impacting the necessary symbiotic nature of shared and instructional leadership to impact student learning. School principals need to be intentional to build relationships with

staff prior to implementing shared leadership; special attention needs to be given to the differences between leading elementary and secondary schools.

Multiple factors of leadership influence student achievement. In a comprehensive, six-year, mixed-methods study of leadership, Louis et al. (2010b) investigated the factors of leadership that influenced learning. The analysis included surveys of 180 elementary and secondary schools in 43 school districts across nine states and interviews with legislators, senior school district leaders, school board members, teachers and administrators. By comparing teachers' responses in higher achieving schools to teachers' responses in lower achieving schools, and the presence of distributed, collective, leadership practices a correlation was made to indicate that shared leadership had a positive impact on student learning. Furthermore, the analysis of survey data linked the presence of shared-leadership between the principal and teachers to stronger working relationships and increased teacher motivation. Sharing leadership by distributing decision-making among faculty supported student achievement through empowerment of teachers to make instructional decisions. Louis et al. (2010b) assert that sharing leadership duties should not be viewed as reducing a principal's workload, rather as a context-relevant approach to collective decision-making. Demonstration of this was Louis et al.'s (2010b) identification of a solution to the high demands of instructional leadership in secondary schools; the use of departmental leadership by teachers that are experts in their content area, ensures the school is utilizing stakeholders to lead with content-specific expertise. The large scale comparison between schools revealed that higher-performing schools sought input from a wide variety of stakeholders and allowed for greater influence by teachers. The sharing of decision-making influence with stakeholders did not decrease a principals' own influence within their school; therefore principals can confidently distribute leadership and reap the benefits to

overall school climate and student achievement without fear of losing their individual impact as a leader (Louis et al., 2010b). Secondary principals should not view sharing leadership as decreasing their workload, rather as a way to support improving instruction in content areas when it is impossible to be the expert in every secondary content area.

Collaboration

The use of shared leadership strategies in schools requires collaboration between stakeholders. To promote a collaborative environment, a principal must employ multiple collaborative strategies including clear communication of school goals, teacher mentorship, well-designed professional learning communities, and intentional focus on valuing all stakeholders' input (McKinney, Labat, & Labat, 2015; Gray, Kruse, & Tarter, 2016; Rock, Remely, & Range, 2017). Principals should plan intentional time for teacher collaboration and provide professional development focused on collaboration skills to create a climate that supports increased student learning (Connor, 2015; Gray et al., 2016). Care must be taken to ensure implementation support is present and perceived by stakeholders to be effective so the intent of the collaborative strategies implored matches the intended impact (Mayes & Gethers, 2018; McKinney et al., 2015). Ultimately, principals need to balance positive climate work with instructional emphasis in leadership through collaboration between teachers and building leadership to build collective-efficacy for student achievement (Brown, Benkovitz, Mutillo, & Urban, 2011).

Mayes and Gethers (2018) quantitative study of 76 principals and teachers in 15 underperforming schools in Hawaii, sought to identify how teachers' and principals' perceptions of leadership align and the impact on student learning and organizational effectiveness. Despite the small sample size, survey information from elementary and middle school teachers and principals revealed that principals' perception of their ability to create common goals, use a

collaborative decision-making process, and raise their stakeholders' awareness of the importance of valued outcomes did not align with the teachers' perceptions. Principals often overestimated their influence in comparison to the teachers' perceptions of influence. This disconnect between teachers and principals identified the need for principals to develop self-awareness of their perceived effectiveness by staff to ensure a climate of collaboration is in fact in place to effectively support student achievement (Mayes & Gethers, 2018).

Further investigation into teacher perceptions of principal actions took place in seven National Blue Ribbon secondary schools in Mississippi and reinforced the impact of staff perceptions of principal actions. McKinney et al.'s (2015) quantitative study of 500 teachers and counselors, and 20 principals and assistant principals, measured the perceived effectiveness of personal and professional strategies of principals. When teachers perceived the principal to have the ability to effectively analyze, implement, and evaluate the academic and social climate of a school, there was increased teacher morale and resulted in a better school climate that positively impacted student achievement. In the high performing schools, teachers reported working in a school that embraced collaborative teamwork that resulted in a climate of academic growth. This collaborative climate required a principal that reinforced academic and social goals, promoted mentorship of new teachers, and initiated the sharing of teacher academic strategies among colleagues. Therefore, the principal's ability to understand and align with teacher perceptions of employed strategies and principal traits translated to positive impact on student achievement (Mayes & Gethers, 2018; McKinney et al., 2015).

In a comparison of 24 elementary schools with similar socio-economic, racial diversity, and teacher quality, but a discrepancy in achievement gaps, it was revealed that student academic achievement was impacted by the level of adult collaboration in schools. Brown et al.'s (2011)

study used a mixed-methods approach to uncover the impact of principal leadership by utilizing surveys and semi-structured interviews of principals, assistant principals, teachers, and parent leaders. The leaders of schools with smaller achievement gaps consistently demonstrated intentional emphasis on collaboration to create collective efficacy around student achievement. The principals in the schools with small achievement gaps communicated high expectations and were directly involved in instructional feedback that supported and fostered teacher growth; while the leaders in the schools with the larger achievement gaps were more general and less intentional in their approach to instructional feedback. Reported teacher pride in student learning resulted from a teamwork approach employed in the small achievement gap schools that was rooted in a clear, shared vision of teaching, along with well-established systems for student academic acknowledgement, and the use of achievement data to inform staff development work. The climate of academic optimism for all students created in the small achievement gap schools was that of a desire for students to enjoy learning, rather than a climate of students simply feeling happy about school that existed in the large achievement gap schools (Brown et al., 2011).

To build on Brown et al.'s (2011) study results that established the use of collaboration around improvement of instruction to improve student achievement, it is necessary to explore how to create opportunities for collaboration. Gray et al.'s (2016) research supported collaboration through the implementation of professional learning communities (PLCs) to positively impact school climate and promote student achievement. The quantitative study of 67 low-income, public, elementary, middle, and high schools in a large metropolitan school district was done through surveys of teachers and principals aggregated to school level for reporting. Limited by the small scope of studying only one school district, the study looked to understand the role that enabling school structures, collegial trust, and academic emphasis played in

developing PLCs in schools. The study was done with the assumption that PLCs are an effective tool for school improvement. The results of the surveys revealed that PLCs fostered increased teacher collaboration and increased attention to student learning outcomes, but these results were dependent on the school leaders' ability to develop and support the conditions for organization of an effective PLC structure. The principal must first ensure there is an organizational structure in place, including intentional time for meeting, prior to implementing the use of PLCs to support collaboration among teachers to impact student achievement. Gray et al.'s (2016) study revealed a reciprocal relationship between the presence of well-functioning PLCs and the development of trust and collaboration which supported a climate of change and innovation in the schools. Therefore, school principals can rely on PLCs to support achievement, but the principal must build a system to support the logistics of the PLCs prior to implementation to remove obstacles to effective teacher collaboration.

Further potential for authentic collaboration among faculty to improve school climate through the use of professional development, was studied by Conner (2015). Quantitative data was gathered in a survey of 18 elementary teachers that served on building leadership teams and participated in professional development in the areas of building trust, collegial relationships around improvement of student learning, and team development skills. Job-embedded professional development for identified teacher leaders with sessions focused on teamwork led to increased understanding of the difference between cooperation and authentic collaboration. This common understanding among faculty led to a paradigm shift to camaraderie through collaborative planning of instruction. Teacher collaboration around instruction led to an increased collective responsibility for the achievement of every child in the school (Connor, 2015).

An additional opportunity for collaboration within schools exists between school counselors and principals. Rock et al. (2017), examined whether overall school climate and the principal-counselor relationship were related. A quantitative study of 419 high school counselors that were members of the American School Counselors Association was done through anonymous surveys. The counselor survey responses indicated a high correlation between the principal-counselor relationship and four dimensions of school climate: collegial leadership, professional teacher behavior, high academic achievement expectations, and institutional vulnerability. The results of the Rock et al.'s (2017) study indicated that when counselors perceived there to be an environment of collaboration between the counselors and principals, there was also an overall positive school climate indicated, thus establishing a reciprocal relationship between the two. Principals played the key role in creating positive school climate through leadership and holding high standards, while the counselors helped sustain the school climate by supporting student social-emotional and academic needs. In this way, the principal and counselor collaborated to combine skill sets to influence academic outcomes for students. Therefore, the school principal should implore the expertise of all staff members, not limit collaborative strategies to only classroom teachers, to support a collaborative school climate (Rock et al., 2017).

Trust

“Leadership behaviors and trust behaviors are a means to an end, namely, student learning” (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015, p.85). In order to support the implementation of shared-leadership strategies and effective collaboration among faculty, it is necessary to ensure that trust is present in the relationships between stakeholders in a school community (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). School principals must take special care to act ethically, protect their

staff from external factors, and develop relationships with staff beyond the required duties of leadership, to ensure trust is at the core of their practice (Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Price, 2015). Time spent on intentional social interactions with staff will benefit overall trust.

Principals should focus on: being visible in their buildings, using established routines for the management of the school, involving teachers in the selection of professional development, recognizing all stakeholders for their contribution to the school climate, and ensure their actions support their words to build trust to create positive school climate (Balyer, 2017; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Rock et al., 2017; Walker et al., 2011).

A quantitative study of 3,215 teachers in 64 elementary, middle, and high schools from one urban and one suburban district used anonymous surveys to capture data on faculty trust in their principals (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). The investigation focused on the impact of collaborative leadership and instructional leadership behaviors of principals, teacher professionalism, academic press, and community engagement on school climate. The survey data revealed that faculty trust in the principal was strongly correlated with the presence of collaborative and instructional leadership behaviors and teacher professionalism. In addition, student achievement was strongly correlated with reported trust in the principal, with a stronger correlation with instructional than collaborative leadership practices. Therefore, trust between faculty and the principal must be present to support student achievement. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015), assert that a principal's competence in instructional duties fosters a trust-building climate to support student achievement. Further supporting the need to spend time developing trust is the reciprocal relationship between the presence of trust and the ability of a principal to support shared leadership and collaboration in schools (Louis et al., 2010a; Gray et al., 2016; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Despite the absence of rural school environments in

Tschannen-Moran & Gareis' (2015) study, it is evident that trust precedes effective collaboration in schools.

The interactions between principals and teachers directly influenced the climate of a school. The link between social interactions of teachers and principals and the teachers' perception of students' engagement in 15 Indianapolis charter schools was studied by Price (2015) through surveys of 257 teachers and 15 principals. The quantitative study was limited by the exclusive focus on charter schools, but the limitation is mitigated for this analysis of literature due to this study providing the opportunity to explore a different school-type perspective than the other studies reviewed. Survey results showed a positive correlation between teachers' perception of trust and support by their principal and perceptions of student engagement, thus indicating a principals' indirect influence on student engagement and learning. Teachers that reported their principal to be socially orientated inward toward the teachers and the school, rather than to parents and the community, indicated positive perceptions of their students and a perceived trust among their colleagues. When trust was present in the teacher-principal relationship, student achievement was supported; principals needed the tools to be able to form positive relationships with teachers to ensure a climate of student achievement (Price, 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Therefore, school principals must be intentional with their words and actions to show teachers that their input is valued more than the external community to ensure a trusting relationship.

In an effort to expand the scope of this review of research, a qualitative study of 30 teachers from Istanbul, Turkey added support for the necessity of trust in schools. Balyer (2017) set out to gain in-depth knowledge about teacher perceptions of their principal's trustworthiness through semi-structured interviews. Despite the small sample size, there was a strong trend of the

participants in the study overwhelmingly not trusting their school principals. The participants reported about their principals' a perceived lack of experience, being unreliable, the presence of leadership factors that did not employ collaborative decision-making, and exhibiting behaviors that demonstrated a lack of respect for teachers. Teachers in the study reported that their principals demonstrated authoritative behaviors; there was a lack of a required principal preparation program, and the principals' inability to form and lead teams of teachers were obstacles to trusting relationships with their principals. Applying these observations from the Turkish school system revealed some obstacles to trust that school principals should work to avoid. The use of authoritative behaviors by a school principal should be minimized in order to build trust with staff; thus further supporting the need for implementation of opportunities for collaboration and shared decision-making between teachers and principals (Balyer, 2017; Louis et al., 2010a; Gray et al., 2016; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

The lack of trust in school principals can be compounded by the fragility of maintaining a climate of trust even when present. Walker et al., (2011) examined the perceptions of 177 Canadian school principals' ability to establish, maintain, and recover trust in a quantitative study. Open-ended surveys administered to principals in ten provinces and three territories in Canada revealed that principals felt that trust was a fragile component of their leadership impacted by their own moral agency and external factors. Principal perception data revealed that trust issues existed between the central office and school level leadership, between principals and staff, between teachers and students, and between school and community. The impact of these trust issues created an unpleasant and uncomfortable working environment and undermined the effectiveness and efficiency of the schools. The principals surveyed attributed the breakdown in trust in their organizations to a variety of reasons including breach of confidentiality, actions of

stakeholders that undermined authority, the perception that people take advantage of each other, misalignment of the agendas of stakeholders, and people that put themselves first at a disadvantage to others. Once trust was broken, the person that committed the trust-breaking act was less likely to be trusted in the future, thus indicating the need for explicit effort to maintain trust when present in relationships among stakeholders in schools (Walker et al., 2011). Teachers do not inherently trust their principals, yet principals identified the need for trust to be present to have an effective school; therefore principals must ensure they act in ways that do not undermine trust by building strong interpersonal relationships within their buildings and using good judgement in decision-making (Balyer, 2017; Walker et al., 2011). The impact of trust in leadership in schools was present globally and not limited to schools in the United States.

It has been established that trust is fragile and not implicitly present in school environments (Balyer, 2017; Walker et al., 2011). Handford and Leithwood (2013) investigated why teachers trusted their school leaders. In a mixed-methods study, interviews of teachers from six schools classified as high-trust and low-trust environments were used to determine what principal traits were interpreted by teachers as signs of trustworthiness. The interviews revealed the presence of common characteristics that supported teachers trust in principals: competence, consistency and reliability, openness, respect, and integrity in both high and low trust schools. These characteristics were evident in both types of schools, but the frequency of teachers noticing the traits being employed varied. Specific practices that were associated with each trust-supporting characteristic provide guidance for actions principals can take to ensure a trusting school climate. Competence was perceived when principals were visible in their buildings and classrooms, engaged in instructional planning with teachers, and supported teachers when working with parents. Consistency and reliability were perceived to be strong when principals'

actions were predictable, feedback was timely, there were established routines around discipline, materials and supplies were readily available, and student data was used in a constructive manner. Openness was demonstrated by teacher involvement in selection of professional development, delegation of important tasks to teachers, and principal recognition of teacher skills, thus aligning with the need for shared leadership and collaboration to build trust (Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Brown et al., 2011; Sebastian et al., 2017). Respect and integrity were perceived through principals recognizing that each role in the school was important to student learning and the principal acted ethically by supporting their words by their actions (Handford & Leithwood, 2013).

Shared leadership, collaboration among staff, and the presence of trusting relationships fostered a positive school climate that supported student learning. The examination of both quantitative and qualitative, current, educational research, in a variety of school settings, across multiple countries, revealed specific ways principals have successfully supported student achievement through positive climate-building intentions. Chapter three will summarize the key findings of the literature review that will provide actionable strategies for school principals to employ for the development of the human-centered facets of positive school climate.

Chapter Three: Summary

The review of current educational research revealed key findings to answer the research question, what actions and strategies employed by a school principal foster a positive building climate that supports student achievement? To answer this question it is necessary to understand why climate is important and how a building principal can be intentional with their actions to ensure positive learning environment to promote student achievement. School climate is multi-faceted; this research revealed human-centered themes to help school principals focus their work.

Review of the Proposed Problem

The effectiveness of a school depends on the school principal's ability to ensure a positive learning climate that supports student achievement. This review of research attempts to determine what actions and strategies employed by a principal create a positive school climate that supports student learning. There were essential questions that helped guide the research. In light of what is known about how children learn and educational policy and practice, how shall educators best lead in educational settings today to foster positive school climate in order to promote student achievement? Furthermore, what specific principal actions support a positive school climate?

Importance of the Principal's Role in School Climate

A positive school climate contributes to increased student achievement (Jones & Shindler, 2016). Educational leaders are charged with both managerial and instructional leadership duties that play a role in overall school climate. The increasing complexity of K-12 education creates high demand on school leaders' time, requiring efficiency in both managerial and instructional areas to ensure climate work is not derailed by managerial distractions (Dewitt, 2018). An understanding of what research has been done can create efficiency in time on task and time spent planning for school climate work. Research-proven, actionable strategies support the ability of a school principal to effectively develop a healthy working relationship with the teachers and staff to ensure adequate capacity for all stakeholders to support student achievement.

Summary of the Main Points of the Literature Review

A review of current literature relating school climate and principal actions revealed themes within the human-centered facets of positive school climate. These themes were shared-

leadership, collaboration, and trust. The use of intentional strategies that addressed these factors of school climate supported the necessary symbiotic relationship required in schools to support a positive learning environment that promotes student achievement.

Shared-leadership that supported a positive school climate was evident in studies of teacher, principal, and student perceptions and academic achievement data (Drago-Severson 2012; Louis et al., 2010a; Louis et al., 2010b; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Sebastian et al., 2017). Using strategies of shared-decision making with faculty did not decrease the influence of the building principal's leadership and improved student achievement (Louis et al., 2010b; Sebastian et al., 2017; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). The connection of shared leadership to student achievement was evident in the positive impact on feelings of empowerment on teachers' motivation in their jobs (Louis et al., 2010b). Therefore, shared-leadership should not be viewed as decreasing the workload of a principal, but rather as a strategy to improve climate, instruction, and student achievement through adult development with the focus on a common mission (Drago-Severson, 2012; Louis et al., 2010b). Specific, successful, shared-leadership strategies supported by research included: intentional, teacher input-driven, and leadership-focused professional development for teachers, establishment of a shared school mission and vision inclusive of the input of all stakeholders, connection of the principal's instructional leadership to shared-leadership, and establishment of context-relevant teacher teams (Drago-Severson, 2012; Louis et al., 2010a; Louis et al., 2010b; Reed and Swaminathan, 2016; Sebastian et al., 2017).

Impactful shared-leadership requires the collaboration of stakeholders within the school community. For shared-leadership to be effective, the school stakeholders and principal must have aligned perceptions of what strategies are in place and how they are being supported (Mayes & Gethers, 2018; McKinney et al., 2015). In addition, for a collaborative culture to be

evident, multiple opportunities for stakeholders to collaborate must be present (Brown et al., 2011; Connor, 2015; Gray et al., 2016; McKinney et al., 2015; Rock et al., 2017). Leadership traits that fostered collaboration to support student achievement included a principal's ability to communicate meaningful instructional feedback to teachers and the ability to involve all stakeholders in meaningful collaboration in decision-making (Rock et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2017). Successful collaborative strategies implemented by building principals included implementation of well-structured professional learning communities focused on improving instruction, staff mentoring programs, clear communication and attention to school goals, validation of the expertise of all staff members and intentionally planned professional development (Brown et al., 2011; Connor, 2015; Gray et al., 2016, McKinney et al., 2015; Rock et al., 2017).

Collaboration and shared-leadership depend on trust, and reciprocally trust was created through collaboration and shared-leadership strategies (Louis et al., 2010a; Gray et al., 2016; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Perceived trust in the principal supported teacher efficacy which in turn supported student achievement which indicated the importance of the indirect influence of a principal's actions (Price, 2017; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). A principal that invested time in building relationships with staff, was visible in the building, was predictable and consistent, and avoided overuse of authoritative behaviors was trusted by staff (Balyer 2017; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Price, 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Walker et al., 2011). The use of strategies that shared decision-making power, supported collaboration with teachers around instruction that included timely and useful feedback, along with ensuring teachers were supported when working with parents fostered trust among staff (Balyer 2017;

Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Price, 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Walker et al., 2011).

A positive climate that supports student achievement, the purpose of the education system, requires staff that are engaged and supported in the continual improvement of instruction. The presence of strategies for shared-leadership and collaboration, along with a perceived trust in leadership, creates the capacity for a school to best support student learning. Chapter four provides further discussion and application of the outcome of the review of literature to the job of a school principal. Suggestions for implications of this synthesis of research on educational leadership practice and areas of additional study will be presented.

Chapter Four: Discussion/Application and Future Studies

Insights Gained from the Review of Research

The analysis of literature to understand what actions and strategies employed by a principal foster a positive school climate that supports student achievement revealed three themes of shared-leadership, collaboration, and building trusting relationships. These themes helped answer the essential questions that guided the review of research. In light of what is known about how children learn and educational policy and practice, how shall educators best lead in educational settings today to foster positive school climate in order to promote student achievement? Furthermore, what specific principal actions support a positive school building climate?

Jones and Shindler set the stage for why a positive school climate is important to promote student achievement. When climate is positive, students feel a sense of belonging and acceptance which support a “psychological orientation toward success” (2016, p.39). Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015), connect that student mindset to the efficacy of the classroom teacher by asserting

that a trusting relationship between student and teacher supports student achievement. Furthermore, the principal plays a fundamental role in supporting teachers to ensure they have the capacity to create these relationships with students. This relationship from student to teacher to principal, and the principal being ultimately responsible for the overall school climate, necessitates that the building principal have specific strategies in place for promoting a positive school climate that is focused on a collective responsibility for student learning .

When considering school climate, the presence of a feeling of collaboration and trust among stakeholders are logical connections to an overall positive human experience. Not as obvious prior to the review of current research, was how intentional sharing of leadership duties within a school supports both collaboration and trust. Throughout the research the reciprocal relationship between the three identified themes indicated that a principal must be able to implore multiple strategies simultaneously, take care of adult relationships, and understand that there is not one magical solution to creating a positive school climate.

Throughout the inquiry into school climate, instructional leadership duties of a principal were cited. Brown et al. (2011) found that collaboration with an instructional emphasis was conducive to smaller achievement gaps. Sebastian et al. (2017) emphasized that the current trend in leadership focusing on instructional aspects could potentially come at the expense of overall climate work. While this does not necessarily contradict each other, it does raise questions about how principals can balance the emphasis of their instructional and non-instructional related climate work to insure they are not jumping into current trends at the expense of research-proven, necessary work.

Application to the Principal Role

This review of research revealed strategies new and established building principals can use to ensure positive building climate. Identified strategies within the broader categories of shared-leadership, collaboration, and trust, will build positive relationships between all school stakeholders and support optimizing student achievement. The key to applying the review of research to practice, and implementing these strategies within a school building, will be ensuring that the context of the specific school is clearly understood and honored before applying a strategy.

As a principal, climate work begins with the establishment of a common understanding of the mission and vision of the school. The creation of a school mission and vision affords an opportunity for collaboration of all stakeholders to give input based on their individual perspective in the school system. Once established, this inclusive mission and vision can act as the filter through which instructional and managerial decisions are made. The principal must ensure that the integrity of the mission and vision are upheld and aligned with district-wide priorities to increase trust between district level leadership and the school.

The development of teacher teams to support instruction and logistical elements of a school supports teacher empowerment and a collaborative school climate. Prior to creating these teacher teams, a building principal should ensure that there is teacher-leadership capacity by providing professional development specific to leadership. Collaborative teams provide an opportunity to create accountability for the established school mission and vision. PLCs can be used to support instructional practices, but also require intentional, content relevant professional development designed with teacher input, prior to and throughout implementation. The effective use of collaborative teams in a school requires an intentional structure to be in place. A principal should establish agreed upon, common meeting times that are respected and enforced to ensure

the climate supports the collaboration. Building leadership teams should be separate from instruction-focused PLCs and the role of each group needs to be explicitly communicated to ensure teachers are effectively supported in their work. The principal must be an active participant in both types of teacher teams, giving meaningful input and feedback to promote growth and ongoing improvement within the school.

Principals can share leadership duties through smaller scale collaboration between teachers when a strong mentorship program is established within a school. The potential for impact on instructional practice lies in teachers supporting and learning from each other. Similar to the use of teacher leadership teams, the role of the principal is to create a structure for the program to ensure time is honored for the mentoring work to happen. In addition, the principal must be engaged in the improvement of instruction that is happening as a result of the mentoring relationships.

The foundation of the collaborative and shared-leadership strategies mentioned thus far lies in the ability of the principal to foster trusting relationships with staff. A principal can apply the current research to practice by being intentional in fostering relationships with staff. This can be done by scheduling a predictable and consistent time each week for building walkthroughs. In these walkthroughs the principal should focus on positive interactions with staff and students to reinforce that they are a part of the school-wide team working toward the common mission and vision. While it is important that the principal engage in strategies to improve instruction, separating a time for more social interactions and celebrating the staff and students will indirectly support an ongoing collaborative environment to foster student achievement. In addition, a principal would be well-served to create a consistent and reliable system for accepting and responding to parent feedback about teachers to protect the integrity of the principal-teacher

relationship. Teachers are vulnerable in their profession and need to be assured that they will be valued as professionals when conflict with families happens. The principal should take care to communicate and demonstrate trust in their staff when communicating with external stakeholders; this will protect the reciprocal trust relationship in a school.

Recommendations for Future Research

The review of research to understand how a principal can foster positive school climate revealed some actionable strategies to employ shared-leadership, collaboration, and build trusting relationships. The actionable strategies identified require further research to effectively move the strategies forward in a school. The first of the identified strategies that build school climate requiring further research is how to establish a shared mission and vision. It would benefit the current review to add research-supported methods for developing an inclusive school mission and vision.

Also requiring further study is the need to identify PLC and mentorship program models that have been successfully implemented in schools. These future studies would need to be specific to the demographics and context of the school in which a principal would like to apply the research. In-depth qualitative research following the creation and implementation of PLCs and mentorship programs in a variety of school settings would help support the successful design and implementation for school principals. Additionally, this investigation focused primarily on the internal relationships and function of schools. Schools are a part of a greater and complex community; the community must also trust the school to ensure a symbiotic relationship between the school and external stakeholders. Another future research study is needed to help school principals understand how to build collaborative and trusting relationships with these stakeholders as well as staff to fully support student achievement.

The goal of this review of current research was to gain specific strategies a school principal can use to foster a positive building climate that promotes student achievement. The synthesis of research revealed three themes to guide a principal's actions: shared-leadership, collaboration, and trust. The relationships between the principal and faculty are a strong indicator of positive school climate. The principal is responsible for the overall school climate and must have the tools necessary to build and maintain a positive climate. As Cohen et al. assert, "...too often school climate improvement efforts are fragmented, short-lived, and not aligned with research-based guidelines" (2009, p. 15). This synthesis of research serves as a resource for current and future school principals to determine how to start school climate work using proven-effective strategies; maintaining the strategies will require ongoing passion and fortitude with attention to ongoing relationship building.

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