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EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS WITH POSITIVE CLIMATES IN THE AGE OF HIGH-STAKES TEACHER EVALUATIONS

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EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS WITH POSITIVE CLIMATES IN THE AGE OF HIGH-STAKES TEACHER EVALUATIONS

By

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ABSTRACT

EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS WITH POSITIVE

CLIMATES IN THE AGE OF HIGH-STAKES TEACHER EVALUATIONS

By

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The purpose of this research project was to understand the leadership practices and characteristics of school leaders within schools identified as having a positive school climate. In this qualitative study, three focus groups of teachers were interviewed and asked a series of questions about their principals' professional practices and characteristics. The building principals from these schools were also interviewed individually. These responses were scripted and analyzed using an open-coding model and then compared to recent educational leadership literature. Key findings from this research include professional practices and characteristics of principals in schools with positive climate, as well as recommendations for current and future school leaders and possibilities for future research.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband and children who have offered unwavering

support during my educational journey, to school leaders who continuously strive for

improvement and change, and to students everywhere.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author of this study would like to acknowledge Dr. Bethney Bergh and the countless hours she spent reading, editing, and refining this work. Dr. Bergh has been instrumental in offering support and encouragement throughout this process and in the author's school leadership journey. Additional acknowledgment goes to Drs. Betty LaPointe and Abby Cameron-Standerford for serving as members of the author's thesis committee. Their insight and suggestions improved the quality of this work.

This thesis follows the format prescribed by the APA Style Manual and the Department of Education.

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INTRODUCTION

School principals have long been thought of as important figures within a school and community. In a 1977 U.S. Senate Committee Report on Equal Educational Opportunity, the principal was identified as the single most influential person in a school. "If a school […] has a reputation for excellence in teaching, if students are performing to the best of their ability, one can almost always point to the principal's leadership as the key to success" (U.S. Congress, 1970, p. 56). Secretary of Education Arne Duncan also acknowledged the importance of school principals in a July 2009 speech stating, "Great principals lead talented instructional teams that drive student performance and close achievement gaps" (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. 4). While both statements recognize the value of principals and their leadership, neither offers specific characteristics or leadership practices to be "*successful*" or "*effective.*"

Literature also suggests the principal can affect the school climate, which has been defined and described in a variety of ways. Green (2010) described school climate as "a characterization of the atmosphere, the tone, the personality, or the ethos of the school" (Green, 2010, p. 74). Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, and Higgins-D'Alessandro (2013) stated, "School climate is based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects, norms, goals, values, and interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (p. 358). Similarly, Clifford, Menon, Gangi, Condon, and Hornung (2012) define climate as "the quality and the characteristics of school life, which includes the availability of supports for teaching and learning. It includes goals, values, interpersonal relationships, formal organizational structures, and

organizational practices" (p. 3). Stover (2005) simply defined school climate as "the attitudes and beliefs of the students, teachers, and administrators" (p. 30) about the school. Regardless of the definition utilized for school climate, factors both inside and outside of the school can impact its climate. From outside of schools, the current political and social climates have caused schools, teachers, and school leaders to be heavily scrutinized. Increased emphasis has been placed on administrator accountability, especially related to student achievement. If schools are deemed underperforming or failing, administrators and principals can be dismissed (Public Act, 2015). From the same July 2009 speech as quoted earlier, Secretary Duncan said of poor school leaders, "[I]f they're not up to the job, they need to go" (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. 4). Ineffective principals are not the only educational professionals in jeopardy of dismissal.

Teachers can also be removed from their jobs for poor performance as indicated on evaluations. Even though teacher evaluations have been conducted in the past, the purpose was usually for assignment and tenure decisions. Implications of the current evaluation systems, however, have created an environment of fear and uncertainty in schools (Conley & Glasman, 2008) both within the teaching ranks and between teachers and administrators. The purposes of the supervision and evaluation of teachers is to increase student academic outcomes and to assist teachers in the improvement of their classroom instruction (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008). In order to achieve these better outcomes for students and teachers, the school environment cannot be built upon fear, but instead requires trust, collaboration, and positive relationships (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008; Blasé & Kirby, 2009; Green, 2010).

Student achievement and educator accountability have become highly politicized; and these intensified pressures from community, state, and federal stakeholders have affected school climates. For example, Michigan's Public Act 173 of 2015, requires: annual evaluations for teachers and administrators, established methods to measure student growth, and student growth and assessment data must be part of the performance evaluation for both teachers and administrators. Public Act 173 of 2015 also includes language noting evaluations can be used to determine "promotion, retention, and development" of teachers and administrators, as well as, "removing ineffective tenured and untenured teachers and school administrators" (p. 2). With so many outside influences at play within a school, principals are in need of guidance and direction related to leadership practices in order to positively impact school climate, while still fulfilling administrative duties like teacher evaluations.

School principals are facing tremendous pressures from both inside and outside the school building to increase teacher accountability while maintaining a positive school climate. A principal's characteristics and their professional leadership practices may positively impact a school's climate; however, the balance between personal characteristics and professional leadership practices has yet to be determined. The purpose of this research is to recognize the leadership practices and characteristics of principals in schools identified as having a positive school climate. Recommendations for current and future school leaders, as well as suggestions for further research, will be provided at the conclusion of this research project.

Chapter One: Literature Review

School leaders' job duties are increasing, as is the amount of public scrutiny under which school leaders work. Many of the pressures facing principals are created outside of the school buildings, such as limited budgets and legislative mandates. Given these external stressors, principals must be aware of the elements within their schools they can affect, but may be unsure about which leadership practices would most benefit their schools. Recent educational research has indicated some components of a school are more dependent on a principal's methods of leadership than others. This review of literature will delve into research concerning school climate, teacher evaluations, and their relationships to school leadership practices and characteristics.

School Climate

The single greatest purpose of schools is the academic achievement for all students. One of the single greatest influences on student achievement is school climate (Clifford, Menon, Condon, Gangi, & Hornung, 2012; Green, 2010; Thapa, 2013; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). Leadership standards, like those adopted by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), and the Michigan Standards for the Preparation of School Principals acknowledge the importance of school climate. According to Standard 5 of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders of NPBEA, "Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student" (2015, p. 13). Michigan's Educational Leadership Constituents Council (ELCC) Standard 2 expounds upon this idea stating:

A building-level education leader applies knowledge that promotes the success of every student by sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning through collaboration, trust, and a personalized learning environment with high expectations for students; creating and evaluating a comprehensive, rigorous and coherent curricular and instructional school program; [and] developing and supervising the instructional and leadership capacity of school staff. (2012, p. 8)

Because school climate matters and is essential to a positive learning environment; principals must be aware of how factors both inside and outside the school can affect school climate.

Teacher burnout.

Teachers are a major contributing factor when considering the climate of a school. Researchers have concluded teacher burnout can cause anger, anxiety, depression, boredom, a high absentee and/or turnover rate, cynical attitudes, decreased performance, a reduced tolerance for classroom behavior problems, and, in extreme cases, nervous breakdowns (Friedman, 1991; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). Teacher burnout can also lead to feelings that "their work is meaningless and that they are powerless, alienated, and isolated" (Howard & Johnson, 2004, p. 400). Given the influence teachers can have on a school's climate, school administrators must be aware of what factors can lead to teacher burnout and what actions could be taken to decrease or eliminate teacher burnout.

Friedman (1991) identified four school factors that contribute to teacher burnout and also noted that some teacher background variables can be connected with teacher

burnout. First, teacher background factors that can be attributed to teacher burnout are: "age, sex, level of education, and number of years teaching" (Friedman, 1991, p. 325). Male teachers were found to have higher levels of burnout than female teachers. Greater burnout was also noted with older teachers, those with higher levels of education, and those with more years of teaching experience. Of importance from Friedman's work was the finding that "although a person's characteristics and personality establish, to a certain degree, the propensity to burn out under certain work conditions, the main cause for the majority of cases of burnout is environmental" (Friedman, 1991, p. 325). The school factors Friedman (1991) delineated were: administrative imposition of achievement goals; lack of trust in teachers' abilities; unpleasant physical environment; and a school culture with rigid roles and rules for teacher behavior.

Grayson and Alvarez (2008) investigated the relationship between school climate and teacher burnout and concluded emotional exhaustion is closely connected to working relationships. This suggests student, parent, and community relationships need to be strengthened in order to decrease or limit the amount of emotional stress teachers' experience. Personal accomplishment and instructional management were closely connected, which suggests teachers feel a greater sense of pride in their work when instructional time is protected. ELCC Standard (2012) 3.5 further supports this concept for school leaders who should "ensure teacher and organizational time focuses on supporting high-quality school instruction and student learning" (p. 12). Principals can directly affect this dimension of teacher burnout by limiting interruptions to instruction, such as non-academic assemblies and announcements, limiting meetings and paperwork, and having a school-wide behavior system. Simply stated, effective principals "give

teachers time to teach" with the "deliberate reduction of extraneous demands on teachers'

time" (Blasé & Kirby, 2009, p. 73).

Depersonalization, the final dimension of teacher burnout, was most closely

associated to teacher relationships with students and administration. Principals can

encourage these relationships by offering material and financial support to teachers,

standing behind teachers with student discipline, protecting instructional time, and

tangible rewards, like food, certificates, and sponsoring social events (Blasé & Kirby,

2009). Overall, teachers who feel supported in their relationships with students and

administrators feel a greater sense of satisfaction in their work.

Howard and Johnson (2004) developed a study to examine teachers' coping

strategies for stressors in order to avoid teacher burnout. These researchers first identified

major stressors for teachers, which can ultimately lead to teacher burnout. Among these

stressors were: time pressures and workload; coping with change; being evaluated by

others; dealing with colleagues; problems dealing with administration; and poor working

conditions. Two categories of coping strategies were identified: palliative (aimed at

reducing the impact of the stressor) and direct action. Some of the palliative techniques

involved drinking, smoking, avoidance behaviors, exercise, hobbies, and relaxation

techniques (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Some direct action techniques were controlling

feelings, requesting collegial or administrative support, being organized and prepared for

work, and making time to have adult relationships outside of work (Howard & Johnson,

2004). Recommendations for school leaders made by the researchers included:

supporting staff with personal and professional issues should be a priority; veteran staff

members should mentor new staff to teach them how to depersonalize stress; promote

strong peer support; and staff should be valued and recognized for their achievements (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Such administrative actions are supported by ELCC (2012) Standard 2.1 which outlined the necessity for a school leader's actions to embody: collaboration; recognition and celebration of programs and instructional practices; consideration of personality types; and promotion of trust and respect among school staff (p. 9). Although school leaders cannot eliminate teachers' stress, some actions can be taken to provide supports for teachers to positively and directly manage stress and avoid teacher burnout.

Understanding this information, principals can foster relationships within the school building to maintain or increase a positive school climate (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; DiPaoloa & Hoy, 2008; Blasé & Kirby, 2009; Green, 2010) and therefore reduce and/or eliminate teacher burnout.

Teacher and principal attitudes.

Just as teachers' feelings about burnout can affect school climate, so too can teacher and principal attitudes. John and Taylor V (1999) identified the relationship between a principal's leadership style, the organizational climate, and the organizational commitment of teachers. These researchers concluded, "Considerate leadership of the principal makes it possible for teachers to feel socially and professionally engaged in school life" (John & Taylor V, 1999, p. 49). Additionally, Price (2012) investigated how the relationships between principals and teachers can affect attitudes within a school. Specifically, the researcher focused on the effect of the principal on teacher attitudes and found that trust, sharing a definition of expectations, and frequency of interactions

between principals and teachers resulted in high levels of satisfaction for the principals. Tshannen-Moran (2013) further supported these findings and stated, "Without trust leaders do not inspire their constituencies to go beyond minimum requirements" (p. 41). For teachers, shared expectations had an effect on teacher attitudes; however, little else from the data analysis suggested a relationship between the controls and teacher attitudes (Price, 2012).

Blasé and Kirby (2009) provided additional support for teacher attitudes and school climate. Principals must increase their level of praise to teachers in order to "promote greater esteem and satisfaction" because praise "increases teachers' sense of belonging" (p. 14). When teachers are praised their level of motivation increases, which in turn influences student learning. This practice of praise promotes an ethic of care and respect within the learning organization (Murphy, 2011). Principals increasing their level of praise to teachers is an "effective strategy for improving school climate and building school culture because it enhances teacher morale and teachers' attitudes toward students. It also enhances the amount of effort they put forth on many classroom matters" (Blasé & Kirby, 2009, p. 15).

These findings suggest that clearly defining expectations for teachers positively affects both teacher and principal attitudes, which in turn may affect the school climate. Principal attitudes can be affected by leadership practices, like building relationships and communicating with staff, particularly communicating praise. Sharing expectations can affect both principal and teacher attitudes, which can have a positive effect on school climate (Green, 2009; Green, 2010; Tschannen-Moran, 2013).

Outside influences.

Actions of individuals and interactions between people within a school are not the only elements affecting a school's climate. Outside influences can also alter the environment within a school. Caruso (2013) conducted a year-long qualitative study with two novice middle school principals to investigate the effects of both the micropolitics and macropolitics on change within a school. The findings from Caruso (2013) suggest macropolitical influences can affect micropolitical structures within a school, that is, decisions made by people outside of the school can affect the climate inside the school.

Smith and Gallagher (2008) defined macropolitics as "state and nation […] values to be taught at school" (p. 285). One of these values, as suggested by Smith and Gallagher (2008), is utilizing public funds for school programs deemed effective. The effectiveness is determined by the political interests of those in power. Two examples given include evidence-based interventions and whole-language vs. phonics instruction (Smith & Gallagher, 2008). These concepts were deemed appropriate or effective by political leaders and schools adopted and adapted their micropolitical systems to incorporate them. Given the macropolitical influences at play in education (budget cuts, parent pressures, academic expectations, curricular influence, etc.), some leadership practices should not be discarded in favor of autocratic or authoritative approaches. Further evidence for this concept is found in the work of Green (2009) who found, a leader "must be democratic, driving fear out of the workplace, and fostering a community of learners who collaborate on all major issues" (p. 27).

School climate is impacted by factors both inside and outside of the school. School principals must be aware of how their actions and leadership practices can shape the climate and affect student achievement.

Teacher Evaluations

One of the primary responsibilities of school principals has become the supervision and evaluation of teachers. Of evaluation, Firestone (2014) stated because it "contributes to the selective retention and removal of teachers, it is fundamental to human capital management in education" (p. 105). DiPaola and Hoy (2008) suggested supervision as the most likely method to improve teacher performance and student outcomes. However, these researchers also indicated that teacher evaluation can result in outcomes unachievable through supervision. Evaluation can meet state requirements, document performance of staff, get the attention of staff performing less than expected, and provide data needed to make retention and termination decisions (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008).

Many states have adopted legislation related to teacher evaluations and have included language related to frequency and duration of the observations, scheduled versus pop-in observations, and the weight of student growth data in the teachers' overall evaluation scores. School districts throughout the country are using the information from the principal-completed teacher evaluations to determine tenure status, professional development opportunities, and whether a teacher will remain employed or not (Mead, Rotherham, & Brown, 2012). Firestone (2014) stated, "Because teacher evaluation contributes to the selective retention and removal of teachers, it is fundamental to human

capital management in education" (p. 105). These high-stakes evaluations have had an impact on principal-teacher relationships, school climate, and on many districts' hiring and teacher development policies. According to Sawchuk, "The policy frenzy to establish new methods for evaluating teachers over the past few years has led to an unintended byproduct: lots of litigation" (2015, para. 1). At least seven states currently have pending lawsuits related to evaluation systems, student growth measures, and/or implementation issues (Sawchuk, 2015).

Michigan's ELCC standards reference supervision and evaluation in several different areas. First, ELCC (2012) Standard 2.3 denotes a school leader will "understand hiring practices of qualified and appropriate certification areas, foster, develop, and supervise the instructional and leadership capacity of school staff" (p. 8). Next, ELCC (2012) Standard 3.1 indicates a school leader will "understand and can monitor and evaluate teacher instruction" (p. 12). Additionally, ELCC (2012) Standard 5.1 describes how school leaders must "understand and can act with integrity and fairness to ensure a school system of accountability for every student's academic and social success" (p. 20). These expectations are a significant part of a current principal's responsibilities within the school.

Implementation.

Because of recently adopted legislation throughout the country, many principals have been required to implement a new teacher evaluation system within their schools with little direction or training. To investigate the implementation of new teacher evaluation policies and procedures, Tuytens and Devos (2013) worked with 37 schools in

a qualitative study. Results from the interviews revealed some commonalities and differences, especially related to the characteristics of the school leaders. Schools were classified as either positive perceiving or negative perceiving, based on teachers' perceptions of the new teacher evaluation procedures. Tuytens and Devos (2013) concluded teachers' perceptions of the evaluation system are based on the principals' implementation of the program and such implementation can both negatively and positively impact teacher perceptions. Building trust, communicating high expectations, focusing the evaluations on development rather than dismissal, and integrating the evaluation system into the school framework to support teaching and learning were all identified as positive practices of principals in reference to implementing new evaluation systems.

The practices of trust-building, quality communication, focusing on teacher development, and supporting teaching and learning through the evaluation process have also been supported by others. Hart, Healey, and Sporte (2014) recommended school districts look beyond teacher evaluations as a method to rate and rank teachers. Rather, districts should focus on three key areas. First, growth and evaluation are goals of the system, and these goals must be clearly communicated with all. Communication about goals and evaluation procedures aid in fostering trust. Next, a common language about teaching and learning is developed using the evaluation framework. Finally, training for both teachers and school leaders would be beneficial to the evaluation process. Some instruction should be devoted to teachers and principals learning how to effectively discuss teaching and learning.

Ritter and Barnett (2016) determined essential themes for the implementation of a teacher evaluation system. First, evaluations should be utilized to provide teachers with meaningful feedback about their teaching practices. The previous systems were described as "meaningless" and "proforma exercises" which resulted in little or no improvement in teaching practices (Ritter & Barnett, 2016, p. 50). When implementing a new evaluation system, educational leaders should focus on high quality feedback for teachers. Next, professional learning opportunities should be developed based on data gathered during a teacher's evaluation. By basing professional learning on individual teachers' needs, evaluations were viewed as positive and not punitive. Another theme Ritter and Barnett (2016) identified was: through implementing the evaluation, a common language developed among teachers and between teachers and the principal. These conversations focused on instructional practices and student learning and utilized language from the evaluation rubric. Finally, teachers welcomed the evaluation when there was "an environment of trust and shared responsibility" (Ritter & Barnett, 2016, p. 51). Such findings underscore the importance of trust, communication, teacher development, and focusing on teaching and learning when implementing a teacher evaluation system.

Jiang, Sporte, and Luppescu (2015) identified challenges to the implementation of teacher evaluation systems. Among these challenges were: the design of the evaluation, the execution of the evaluation system, and the side effects of how the evaluation was put into place. Measures of student growth and score miscalculations contributed to the negative perceptions of the implementation of teacher evaluations. Teachers reported an increased level of stress related to the evaluations, while school leaders noted evaluations were time consuming. Jiang et al. (2015) determined that,

despite these challenges, school leaders could influence teacher perceptions of the evaluation process. Positive teacher perceptions of trusting principal-teacher relationships correlated to positive viewpoints of both evaluation and feedback (Jiang, Sporte, & Luppescu, 2015).

Ramirez, Clouse, and Davis (2014) also discovered potential barriers to successfully implementing a teacher evaluation system. Of these identified barriers, most were related to the school leader's actions or inactions. First, the administrator's motivation was a potential barrier. If administrators are not committed to the intended outcomes of the process, teacher improvement, they may not implement the evaluation process with fidelity. Another potential barrier was seeking a time-saving approach to the evaluation process. Given the extensive demands on school leaders' time, some administrators may choose to complete evaluations quickly or do the minimal amount of work expected. Such approaches lead to ineffective implementation. Yet another barrier to the implementation of a new teacher evaluation system is lack of teacher buy in. The value of the evaluation must be communicated to teachers.

As evidenced by these studies, principals play an important role in the implementation of an evaluation system. Donaldson concluded, "Principals shape the culture and interpersonal dynamics of their school" therefore, "have the most leverage to create the conditions for cultural change" (Donaldson, 2013, p. 872). Barth (2013) noted, "It takes moral outrage at ineffective practices, confidence that there is a better way, and the courage and invention to find it and put it into the place of what needs to be scrapped" (p. 203). Deal and Peterson (2013) described the process of cultural change as a "nudge" through "actions, conversations, decisions, and public pronouncements" (p. 274). A

school leader has the ability to shape the school's culture related to evaluations by recognizing the current culture and bringing about change in the school.

Effective School Leadership

Principals are tasked with a lengthy list of responsibilities related to the leadership of a school. This list may include completing and filing state or federal reports, supervising students, teachers, and other staff members, managing the school's budget, and attending numerous meetings. Simply managing a school is no longer enough. Today's principals are accountable for the oversight of teaching, curriculum, and assessment cycles, evaluation of teachers, fostering relationships with teachers and other stakeholders, evaluating and implementing discipline plans, developing a multi-year plan for needed resources, all while still managing the school building (Döş & Savaş, 2015; Michigan, 2013). The extensive responsibilities of today's school leaders require a depth of understanding in finance, curriculum, child development, human resource management, time management, community and public relations, and effective communication skills. Some leadership traits and practices may be more effective than others when guiding a school through these challenging times.

Trust.

Most people would maintain one of the primary purposes of a school is to educate students in order to increase the likelihood of success once they are out of school (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). In order to achieve this objective, principals depend on teachers and teachers depend on principals. The interdependent nature of schools relies heavily on positive relationships between individuals. This relationship is

most often grounded in trust. "Trust is the essential link between leader and led, vital to people's job satisfaction and loyalty, vital to followership" (Evans, 2007, p. 135). Trust and trust building are essential foundations to effective relationships within a school (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008; Green, 2009; Green, 2010; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

Collegial principal leadership is significant to the development of trust between faculty and principals. Treating teachers with respect and consideration, setting clear and reasonable expectations, and being open with teachers could result in high levels of trust between principals and teachers (Tschannen-Moran, 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; DiPaola & Hoy, 2008; Green, 2009). Trust serves as the foundation for communication, collaborative decision-making, and building a common vision (Tschannen-Moran, 2013). Stakeholders in schools rely on trust between other stakeholders. Teachers, principals, parents, and students need some level of trust between each group in order for the school to be productive and affect student outcomes. Ultimately, "trust matters to successful leaders and their schools" (Tschannen-Moran, 2013, p. 52).

Kouzes and Posner (2006) also examined the importance of trust in relationships. Leaders must "ante up first" (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, p. 76), meaning leaders have to take the initial steps to model trust to others. Such actions include building relationships by taking risks, being vulnerable, listening, and being clear with performance expectations and the treatment of others (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Barth, 2013). Although not written directly for school leaders, Kouzes and Posner's description of trust and its importance for leaders is applicable to school administrators and their relationships with school stakeholders.

Tshannen-Moran expounded upon her previous work and concluded "teachers demonstrate greater professionalism where leaders demonstrate a professional orientation and where greater trust is evident throughout the organization" (2009, p. 239). Implications for school leaders, based on this conclusion, may include a need to cultivate relationship of trust to set and communicate teacher expectations, and to share leadership with teachers (Michigan, 2013).

Trust has been identified as one of the foundations for positive relationships within a school. Teacher and principal relationships built on trust have a positive impact on the school's climate. In order to establish and build trust in a school, administrators must consider their leadership practices and how these practices cultivate a climate of trust.

Managing the instructional program.

School leaders have a responsibility to cultivate an environment for learning (Michigan, 2013). To fulfill this responsibility, principals must be aware of what is being taught in classrooms and how instruction is taking place. Michigan (2013) Standard 3.1 indicates school leaders should "observe and evaluate teacher instruction to provide valid feedback" (p. 13). Classroom walkthroughs and observations are two methods for principals to gain insight into the instructional program within their schools (DiPaola & Hoy, 2009). Once principals have a grasp of the instructional program, they may choose to make adjustments in their leadership practices to enhance the educational opportunities for teachers and students in their schools.

One way for principals to manage the instructional programs within their schools is through professional development offerings and coherence of programs. Principal leadership and instruction have a relationship which is affected by quality of professional development, professional community, and partnerships with parents (Sabastian & Allensworth, 2012). Another conclusion from these researchers is school climate can also affect quality of instruction and student achievement. Such conclusions may motivate a principal to focus on the development of teachers to affect both the quality of instruction within the school and its climate.

Teacher development.

The development of teachers and its importance in principal leadership practices is supported by Grissom, Loeb, and Master (2013). In this three-year study of nearly 100 school principals within the Miami-Dade County Public School system, the researchers investigated the associations between leadership practices and student achievement.

Based on these results, Grissom et al. concluded, "Time spent directly on coaching teachers is positively associated with achievement gains and school improvement" (2013, p. 440). Principals may note two key points: direct coaching of teachers can impact student achievement and information from walk-throughs should be used to develop learning opportunities for teachers.

Day, Gu, and Sammons (2016) sought to determine and enumerate the strategies employed by principals which resulted in school improvement. Of the identified strategies, two are related to the development of teachers. Day et al. (2016) found successful principals "built the leadership capacities of colleagues through the

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progressive distribution of responsibility with accountability" and "placed emphasis on creating a range of learning and development opportunities for all staff and students" (p. 251). These findings suggest that sharing leadership responsibilities with teachers and supporting them with tailored learning opportunities result in improved outcomes within the school environment.

Principals are able to provide support for the development of teachers through other methods, as well. Blasé and Blasé (1999) recommended several principal practices that could benefit teachers, including: refining teachers' coaching and reflective conversation skills, modeling effective teaching, and providing resources for teacher development that are designed to meet the needs of adult learners. In addition to these principal practices, McCarley, Peters, and Decman (2016) outlined the importance of a principal understanding teacher "abilities, needs, and goals" (p. 326) and building upon an individual teacher's strengths. Teachers, regardless of experience or training, are in need of their principals' support and efforts related to teacher development. As Danielson (2012) stated, "Because teaching is so demanding and complex, all teaching can be improved" (p. 35).

As managers of the instructional program, principals must be able to recognize quality teaching, provide professional development and learning opportunities for teachers, build curriculum coherence, and clarify instructional objectives. Through these efforts, a positive change may occur in the quality of instruction and the overall learning environment within a school.

These studies examined the effect specific leadership practices can have within a school. According to this collective body of research, principals' methods of leadership can positively influence school climate, the effective implementation of teacher evaluation systems, and student achievement. When considering this compilation of studies, principals may ascertain the communication of expectations, teacher development, building trust, and the management of instructional programs as valuable and effective leadership practices.

Chapter Two: Methodology

A number of educational leadership practices and characteristics have been identified to have an impact on a school's climate. This research project was designed to investigate which principal practices and characteristics can be identified in schools with positive school climates. Additionally, the influence of evaluations in connection with administrative practices and characteristics will be explored. Two essential research questions have been identified as the basis for this research. The methodological design for this research project is outlined in detail including the interview process for teachers and principals, potential researcher bias, and the setting in which the interviews took place.

Research Questions

What are the characteristics and professional practices of effective school leaders in schools identified as having a positive school climate?

What characteristics and professional practices do these same school leaders employ to meet expectations for teacher and administrator accountability?

Methodological Design

The researcher sought to understand the leadership practices and characteristics of principals who work in schools identified as having a positive school climate. For the purposes of this research, a qualitative research method was utilized. Creswell (2012) noted "qualitative research is best suited to address a research problem in which you do not know the variables and need to explore" (p. 16). Practices and characteristics for effective school leaders are clearly delineated in recent educational leadership literature.

Specific characteristics and practices of principals in schools with a positive climate, however, are in need of further exploration, therefore, a qualitative method of research best fit this project.

Each year, as part of Michigan's School Improvement Process, groups of stakeholders complete surveys using the AdvancED (http://www.advanc-ed.org/) system. Through these survey results, schools recognized for exhibiting a positive school climate were first identified. The AdvancED survey results, are not public information, but are available to the general education directors of local Intermediate School Districts (ISDs). School names were removed and assigned a number. An ISD General Education Director sent the surveys to the researcher, who analyzed the results to determine the three schools with the highest scores related to school climate. Initial plans for this research project were to send consent forms, noting the number of the school, to the General Education Director at an ISD, who would then forward them on to the appropriate school principals. These signed and returned consent forms would indicate the name of the principal and the name of the school. This initial plan was altered during the research project due to other professional responsibilities for the Director, who asked that the researcher be the primary contact for future phases of the project.

All teachers within the identified schools were invited, via email, to participate in the focus group. Had more than four teachers volunteered, the names would have been entered alphabetically into randomization software from random.org. Once the list had been randomized, the first four names would have been selected as the focus group participants. For each school identified, only four teachers responded to the invitation to participate, so the randomization process was neither needed nor used. Instead, the groups were comprised of

individuals willing and able to participate in this research by answering the interview questions.

Teacher participants answered questions as part of a focus group, because "the interaction among the interviewees will likely yield the best information" (Creswell, 2012, p. 218). The focus groups met one time for up to one hour and 15 minutes, depending on the amount of discussion. The researcher made notes during the discussions and recorded the audio of the interviews which was then transcribed. Individual focus group participants were assigned participant numbers, which were carried over into the transcribed interviews. These transcribed interviews were then coded using an open coding model to determine the emerging themes. Creswell (2012) defines open coding as "the process used by the grounded theorist to form initial categories of information about the phenomenon being studied" (p. 624). Open coding allowed the researcher to identify categories of principal characteristics and practices (Creswell, 2012).

Principal interviews were conducted in a similar manner; however, principals were interviewed individually. The principals were assigned a number when the audio from the interviews was transcribed. An open coding model for the transcripts from the principal interviews was also utilized (Creswell, 2012).

The coded data was analyzed for themes and then compared to the characteristics and professional practices of effective school leaders as described in recent educational leadership literature. Recommendations for current and future school leaders, as well as suggestions for further research, are provided at the conclusion of this research project.

Researcher and Researcher Bias

The researcher is a white female who, at the time of the study, was also an elementary school principal within the Intermediate School District selected for this research. Survey data from schools within this ISD were examined and analyzed to identify schools with positive school climate. Once schools were identified, the building principals and teachers within those schools were contacted and invited to be a part of the research project. The researcher is familiar and has worked closely with the three building principals and many of the teachers interviewed for this study. One of the teachers interviewed was a former co-worker of the researcher. Two of the teachers interviewed had worked on and presented another project with the researcher. Research for this study was conducted in partial fulfillment of an Education Specialist Degree through Northern Michigan University.

Setting

The interviews for this research took place over the span of two weeks. Both one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews were conducted. Building principals were interviewed one-on-one. Two of the three principals were interviewed in their school buildings. One of the principals elected to be interviewed in the researcher's office. Focus group interviews were conducted in the school where the teachers are employed. During one of the focus group interviews, one of the teachers was unable to report to the school, but participated in the focus group through FaceTime. This allowed the teacher to see the other participants and researcher and fully participate in answering questions as part of the focus group interview.

This chapter establishes the purpose and methodology for this research project. Two clearly defined questions will serve as the basis for this research. The researcher will investigate principal practices and characteristics within schools identified as having a positive school climate, the impact teacher evaluations may have on both leadership practices and climate, and if there are commonalities between these practices and current leadership literature. Interviews will be conducted with both principals and teachers. Through an open-coding process, themes from the scripted and coded interviews will be analyzed to answer the research questions.

Chapter Three: Data Collection and Analysis

In an attempt to answer two research questions related to principal practices and characteristics within schools with positive climates, sets of survey data and interview were gathered and analyzed. This chapter describes both the data sets and acquisition methods utilized to collect the information. Additionally, analysis of both principal and focus group interviews, along with connections between the two groups is shared.

Data were collected through two separate processes. First, AdvancED survey data from schools within an Intermediate School District (ISD) were gathered through a cooperative agreement between the researcher and the Director of General Education. The ISD chosen for this research serves rural schools in two contiguous counties from seven K-12 schools, one public school academy, and three private/parochial schools. Raw survey data was sent to the researcher from thirteen schools within this Intermediate School District. Of the 52 closed-ended questions on the survey, four specific questions related to characteristics of positive school climate. Respondents used a five-point Likert scale rating (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to indicate their level of agreement with statements from the survey. Tables 1 through 4 note the responses from each school to the four questions related to characteristics of school climate. Mean scores for each question, along with an overall mean score, were utilized in determining schools with a positive school climate. Mean scores ≥4 were considered "positive," while scores ≥3 were "neutral." Any mean score <3 was considered "negative." Schools with any "negative" question scores were removed from consideration as having a positive school climate. Overall school mean scores were then determined by averaging all of the question scores. Table 5 illustrates the individual question scores and overall scores by

school. Based on the closed-ended survey question scores, four schools were considered to have a positive school climate: School 2, School 6, School 7, and School 11. Initially, three schools were to be included in this research; however, the similarities in scores necessitated the inclusion of four schools. These data sets were then compared to the open-ended survey questions from the same AdvancED survey. Tables 6 through 9 include the open-ended responses to the question, "What do you like best about our school?" for the four schools with positive climate.

Table 1: School Leaders and Culture

Our school's leaders support an innovative and collaborative culture.							
	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	No Response	Mean
School 1	1	3	5	4	0	0	2.9
School 2	0	0	3	13	9	0	4.2
School 3	1	1	4	8	7	0	3.9
School 4	1	3	7	25	10	0	3.9
School 5	0	6	11	9	1	0	3.2
School 6	0	1	3	14	4	0	4
School 7	0	0	1	3	1	1	4
School 8	1	8	11	3	0	0	2.7
School 9	0	5	2	8	0	0	3.2
School 10	1	1	4	9	4	0	3.7
School 11	0	1	2	11	7	0	4.1
School 12	0	3	1	1	0	0	2.6
School 13	0	0	3	8	2	0	3.9

Table 2: Teacher Collaboration

All teachers in our school participate in collaborative learning communities that meet both informally and formally across grade levels and content areas.							
	Strongly Disagree (1)	**Disagree (2)**	**Neutral (3)**	**Agree (4)**	**Strongly Agree (5)**	**No Response**	**Mean**
School 1	0	0	3	6	4	0	4.1
School 2	0	2	3	6	14	0	4.3
School 3	0	3	4	9	3	0	3.6
School 4	0	4	5	24	7	3	3.9
School 5	1	9	9	5	2	1	2.9
School 6	0	1	1	9	8	2	4.3
School 7	0	0	0	2	3	1	4.6
School 8	0	3	8	10	1	0	3.4
School 9	0	3	2	5	4	0	3.7
School 10	1	1	3	8	5	0	3.8
School 11	0	0	2	10	7	0	4.3
School 12	0	3	1	1	0	0	2.6
School 13	0	2	3	4	2	0	3.5

Table 3: Student Relationships and Advocacy

In our school, a formal structure exists so that each student is well known by at least one adult advocate in the school who supports that student's educational experience.							
	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	No Response	Mean
School 1	1	0	4	5	3	0	3.7
School 2	0	0	3	11	11	0	4.3
School 3	1	0	5	9	4	0	3.8
School 4	0	4	12	19	8	0	3.7
School 5	3	5	10	7	2	0	3
School 6	0	2	4	8	6	1	3.9
School 7	0	1	0	4	1	0	3.8
School 8	0	1	7	11	3	0	3.7
School 9	0	3	6	5	0	0	3.1
School 10	0	2	5	7	4	0	3.7
School 11	0	1	3	8	7	0	4.1
School 12	0	0	2	2	1	0	3.8
School 13	0	2	3	5	1	0	3.5

Table 4: Peer Coaching

In our school, staff members provide peer coaching to teachers.							
	Strongly Disagree (1)	**Disagree (2)**	**Neutral (3)**	**Agree (4)**	**Strongly Agree (5)**	**No Response**	**Mean**
School 1	0	0	6	4	3	0	3.8
School 2	0	1	8	11	5	0	3.8
School 3	1	3	3	8	3	0	3.5
School 4	0	3	12	23	4	1	3.7
School 5	1	8	4	13	0	1	3.1
School 6	0	1	4	10	4	2	3.9
School 7	0	1	1	3	0	1	3.4
School 8	0	4	7	9	2	0	3.4
School 9	0	3	2	7	2	0	3.6
School 10	1	0	3	13	1	0	3.2
School 11	0	1	1	13	4	0	3.5
School 12	0	1	1	3	0	0	3.4
School 13	0	1	4	4	2	0	3.6

Table 5: Question Scores and Overall Mean Scores

	Question 1 Score	Question 2 Score	Question 3 Score	Question 4 Score	Overall Score
School 1	2.9	4.1	3.7	3.8	3.6
School 2	4.2	4.3	4.3	3.8	4.2
School 3	3.9	3.6	3.8	3.5	3.7
School 4	3.9	3.9	3.7	3.7	3.8
School 5	3.2	2.9	3.0	3.1	3.1
School 6	4.0	4.3	3.9	3.9	4.0
School 7	4.0	4.6	3.8	3.4	4.0
School 8	2.7	3.4	3.7	3.4	3.3
School 9	3.2	3.7	3.1	3.6	3.4
School 10	3.7	3.8	3.7	3.2	3.6
School 11	4.1	4.3	4.1	3.5	4.0
School 12	2.6	2.6	3.8	3.4	3.1
School 13	3.9	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.6

Table 6: School 2: Open-ended Responses

What do you like best about our school?

- The entire staff of the [school name]. Very easy to work with, supportive, friendly.
- The support services available to students.
- The technology department.
- The extra-curricular activities and events planned and offered to students.
- Staff supports each other.
- I like the teachers I work with on a daily basis. We make a good team and support our students' learning on a variety of levels. Our students are respectful of adults and each other. We have a supportive administrator who is firm and fair.
- Teachers and principals are actively involved in students' education.
- staff
- I love the devotion of our staff. The teachers, in general, put in so much of their own time & money so that the kids can have a wonderful school experience...even in the times of very large class sizes & challenging behaviors.
- The staff and principal work together and have a team environment
- The staff is wonderful to work with. I feel supported in my decisions and comfortable approaching leadership with concerns.
- The openness and willingness of staff to develop curriculum and integrate technology.
- I work with the best team EVER!
- Good community
- Everyone works together for the betterment of our students.
- I like having all of the grade levels together, it provides for more collaboration between teachers.
- I love the environment because of the leadership, staff, students and their parents.
- Our school environment is warm and inviting and supports students at all level. Staff is supportive towards colleagues and students alike.
- The building itself creates a great learning environment.
- How everyone gets along and are all treated with respect.
- I really enjoy how the staff gets along so well. I also enjoy how some members of the staff seem to work together and collaborate really well.

Table 7: School 6: Open-ended Responses

What do you like best about our school?
- Professional teachers and awesome students.   - Climate of support and safety for all students.   - It is a pleasant place to spend your time. Can walk down the halls and will get a friendly hello or good morning. Smiles on most of the students.   - Safe and Orderly environment that allows for student academic and social success   - The size of the student body is just right.   - The Facilities, they are up to date, and the technology is up to date.   - students   - I like our staff the best.   - the community atmosphere   - Everyone is very helpful and they provide a great environment for students.   - The staff, size and atmosphere.   - Climate and kids   - Leadership of Principal, Discipline, Time for Professional development, Great atmosphere   - Amount of activities available for students.   - students and staff   environment   - The positive atmosphere, our high standards, the feeling of family that exists   - The student interaction and the inviting atmosphere.   - Our school provides an environment where students do not fall through the cracks. We treat each student with respect and when a student seems to be struggling, we do a good job of trying to find out what the problem is and resolving it.

Table 8: School 7: Open-ended Responses

What do you like best about our school?
- The staff caring attitude towards students and concern for the whole child.   - The staff works with one another well. We are flexible and supportive....and FUN!   - I love working with a great group of teachers!   - Our staff and closeness of us all.

Table 9: School 11: Open-ended Responses

What do you like best about our school?
- The willingness to go beyond to achieve a place of learning for our students. Our school employees all get along and work together as a team.   - It has a family like atmosphere. Teachers support each other, and parents/students feel welcome and cared about.   - The majority of people in this school are very helpful and positive to be around. This is critical to a work place and I am glad to have some people around me who genuinely care.   - Very progressive, we work well together, friendly staff.   - The staff.   - The friendly atmosphere   - We provide a warm, nurturing environment for young students.   - The physical surroundings of our school and our wonderful principal and outstanding secretary make [school name] a super place to work..   [School name] has a very positive environment.   - The community and environment of the school and its employees that makes for a very warm, welcoming, and friendly place to work.   - The staff at our school is hard working, dedicated, caring, and has high expectations for our students. We want each and every student to succeed and we will do everything in our power to make that happen!   [School name] has very high scores in math and reading.   - Title One is there to ""catch"" any kids falling between the cracks.   - It is safe.   [School name] looks like a great school with student work hanging in the halls."   - All staff members at [School name] truly care about our students. We strive to make learning fun for students, incorporating arts and crafts, science, and other activities in the classroom. The community supports the learners as well, and parents (among other stakeholders) are quick to be involved.   - The atmosphere at [School name] promotes safety, responsibility, and respect.   - Clean, enjoyable staff to work with.   - The dedication of the staff. They are continually looking for ways to improve their skills and support students to the fullest extent.

Based on both open- and closed-ended survey responses for Schools 2, 6, 7, and 11, these schools were considered to have a positive school climate and were included in the next phase of data collection. The researcher contacted the General Education Director of the ISD once again. In the preliminary plan for this research, the General

Education Director was to contact the individual schools; however, due to other professional responsibilities, the Director asked the researcher to be the primary contact for future phases of the project. The identities of the four schools were revealed to the researcher, who then emailed each of the building principals inviting them to participate in the research project. Within the initial email to principals (see example – Appendix F) was a brief explanation of the project, a request for participation, and an email attachment of the "Informed Consent" document (Appendix D). Three of the four principals responded within one to two days. A reminder email was sent to the remaining principal one week after the initial email. The building principal from School 7 ultimately declined the invitation for participation, which resulted in reverting back to the original plan of including three schools for this research project.

Upon receiving consent from the building principals of schools 2, 6, and 11, each member of their respective teaching staff was emailed (see example – Appendix G). The initial teachers' email contained similar information to that of the building principal: a brief explanation of the project, a request for participation, assurances of confidentiality, and an email of the "Informed Consent" document (Appendix E). Four teachers from schools 2 and 11 responded to the initial email within two to three days. Teachers from school 11 were sent two reminder emails; one after one week, a second ten days after the initial email. Teacher consent was eventually received from four teachers.

Each of the selected schools is from the same county within the ISD. School 2 is a rural upper elementary school with approximately 570 students whose principal has more than ten years of administrative experience. With a similarly-sized population, School 6 has nearly 530 students in ninth through twelfth grades. The principal of School 6 also

has more than ten years of educational leadership experience. Both student population and school leadership experience differ for the principal of School 11. This school leader of four years guides nearly 400 early elementary students each day. Despite the differences in the age of students served, the process for interviewing the teachers and principals from these schools remained constant.

Interviews were conducted with the three building principals and four teachers from each of these three schools. Principals were interviewed individually, while teachers from each school were interviewed in focus groups. Each interview consisted of nine open-ended questions (Principal Questions – Appendix C; Focus Group Questions – Appendix B). Three of the questions related specifically to the aforementioned research questions, while the remaining six questions allowed the researcher to make observations and gather impressions about the participants and their perceptions about their school leaders.

Interviews ranged from 14 minutes to 75 minutes in length and were recorded using an audio recording device. The researcher took notes during the interviews using paper and pencil. All participants met with the researcher face-to-face, with the exception of one teacher, who participated in the focus group interview via FaceTime. This allowed for the teacher to clearly see the other focus group participants and the researcher, while fully participating in the interview.

Audio recordings of each interview were transcribed into an electronic document. Following transcription, all principal interviews were read together in their entirety as part of the preliminary exploratory analysis in order to gain an overall understanding

(Creswell, 2012) of the principals' responses. After this initial read-through, individual principal interviews were then read through again and analyzed. Key phrases were highlighted and memos were jotted in the margins and then coded. Text segments, or "sentences or paragraphs that all relate to a single code" (Creswell, 2012, p. 629), were then identified and clustered into themes. This same process was followed for the teacher focus group interview data analysis. Themes from the interviews are presented in the next section.

Findings – School Leaders

Three building principals in schools considered to have a positive school climate were interviewed individually. Analysis of the scripts from these interviews suggested these school leaders shared common practices related to feedback, professional priorities, communication of these priorities, and their level of involvement within the school.

Feedback.

Each of the building principals interviewed provided feedback to their teachers and utilizes multiple methods to do so. Two of the principals indicated that Pivot was one of their primary methods for giving teachers feedback. Pivot is an electronic platform connected to the University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership's 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning teacher evaluation tool, which all DSISD schools have implemented. Once a classroom observation has been completed, the principal's electronic feedback is emailed directly to the teacher, who can then respond to the principal's questions or comments. Additionally, principals meet with individual teachers three times per year to discuss the teacher's goals, progress toward the goals, and any

feedback the principal has for the teacher. In reference to Pivot, the principal of School 2 stated, "That's one thing I've tried to do quite a bit this year was have those Pivot conversations."

In addition to the electronic feedback provided through Pivot, all principals indicated that they also provide informal feedback. One principal referred to using informal feedback through "an open door policy" in which people can "come in and talk." Similarly, another principal stated, "There's always some kind of feedback or discussion that takes place, just, I guess most of it's probably informal." While another noted "the less formal, I guess, my feedback is the better response I get from my staff." This same principal described the feedback given to staff members as "often," "frequent", and "transparent." The combination of both formal and informal feedback methods was common to each of the three building principals.

Priorities.

Despite the wide range of potential priorities a school principal could have, three major priorities were shared amongst the three interviewed principals. Students, providing a safe, orderly environment, and attending to classroom instruction were top of these principals' lists. One principal shared a priority which was to ensure "the student is physically doing the best that they can, emotionally doing the best they can and supporting the heck out of them." Another simply stated, "Kids are first." Yet another principal maintained, "We're going to make sure we're doing what we need to do for kids." Along with students as a priority, the interviews revealed how these principals prioritize the school environment. "Running a safe and orderly environment" allows test

scores and student achievement to "fall into place" according to the principal of School 6. School 2's principal claimed, "You always want to make sure kids are first and safe, cared for."   Thoughts from the principal of School 11 paralleled those of the other two principals. "PBIS [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports] is a huge priority for […] our school." Along with students and school safety, these principals make instruction a priority. Each of the principals incorporated phrases like "uninterrupted instruction," "uninterrupted learning times," and "teaching kids to the best of your ability."   Three common priorities were identified by the interviewed principals including students, school safety, and instruction.

Communication of priorities.

Shared priorities were identified by the principals included in this research; however, these school leaders differ in how they communicate these priorities to staff. Building principals from Schools 2 and 6 employ similar strategies, while the principal of School 11 differs in the approach to communication of priorities. Principals from Schools 2 and 6 disclosed an indirect form of communication of their priorities. One explained, "You might not lay that right out there […] It's just almost like an implied thing."   The principal from School 6 espouses the same philosophy. "It's not a formal communication. […] We lead by example. […] It's just the way we do that."   Conversely, the principal of School 11 is more explicit in communicating priorities. This principal listed multiple ways the priorities are communicated to staff directly. Among these are: "staff meetings," "emails," "grade level teams," "a data team," and "a PBIS team."   Although these administrators utilize varying approaches to communicating priorities, each expected that teachers within the building knew what his/her priorities were.

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School Involvement.

A principal has a plethora of responsibilities throughout the school building, which was evident in the responses from the building principals in this study. When asked specifically, "In what ways are you involved throughout the school?" each principal enumerated a number of places he/she could be found. Responses included: "the lunch room," "hallways," "in front of the building in the morning and at dismissal," "classrooms," and "meetings." Other ways these principals are involved in their buildings varied. One principal noted involvement in school teams, "Whether it's a PLC [Professional Learning Community], grade level PLC, or a School Improvement Team or something like that." Yet another observed, "the PTO," "Foster Grandparents," and Reading Buddies" as other ways to be involved in that particular school. A distinction between the principal of School 6 and the others was related to shared leadership. "As I get longer toothed in what I do, I think I'm doing a better job of, of supporting people being leaders. Um, I think I do a better job of, of not having my hands on everything." Both visibility and participation in initiatives were shared between the principals, while one principal noted involvement in the school as shared leadership.

Through the analysis of the scripts from the principal interviews, some commonalities were discovered related to these school leaders' professional practices. First, these principals provided multiple forms of feedback to their teachers. Additionally, shared professional priorities were revealed, which included students, school safety, and classroom instruction. While mutual priorities were disclosed, different methods of communicating these priorities were identified. Lastly, the building principals noted

involvement throughout the school in a variety of ways, most notable through visibility around the school, participation in initiatives, and shared leadership.

Findings – Teacher Focus Groups

In addition to the three building principals, three separate focus groups were interviewed from the schools identified as having a positive school climate. Analysis of the scripts from the focus group interviews suggested that the teachers could identify and discuss common leadership practices related to their principals' feedback, professional priorities, communication of priorities, and the involvement of the school leaders within the school.

   Feedback.

Each teacher focus group described multiple forms of feedback provided by their building principal. Teachers from both Schools 2 and 11 explained how Pivot was utilized as a method of formal feedback. During the focus group interview from School 11, teacher 2 expounded on the Pivot system, "That new evaluation system, you know, that is a big part. I know for me […] that's been a positive thing through the feedback." Teacher 2 from School 2 shared a similar view. "We do these Pivot evaluations. […] They do give feedback on […] when he comes in and does a quick review of my things." Aside from Pivot, all teachers communicated other forms of feedback given by their school principal.

The other forms of feedback were informal in nature. Teacher 4 from School 11 stated, "She will stop in your room and […] make a positive comment in front of the whole class." While Teacher 2 from School 11 noted, "She'll send you something on the

computer or something via technology." Conversations with the principal were indicated as one way informal feedback was given. Teacher 2 from School 2 commented, "I talk to him like every day. There's always feedback. […] There's communication every day for me." Feedback through email was reported from the focus group from School 6. Teacher 3 remarked, "I generally email him on […] questions I have. […] He does email me right back." Teacher 2 agreed, "You do get that."

Along with the similarities in types of feedback provided, some common themes emerged about teachers' feelings related to the feedback provided. Both focus groups from Schools 2 and 6 held similar beliefs about the reasons behind the frequency of the principals' given feedback. Teacher 1 from School 6 quantified the principal's feedback as "minimal," however, teachers from the same school qualified that statement. Teacher 3 reported, "He trusts what we are doing." Similarly, Teacher 4 suggested, "He views us as professionals. […] We get the, 'We trust you, think you're one of the best.'" The focus group from School 2 had parallel thoughts. Teacher 4 from School 2 said of feedback, "I don't feel like we get as much. […] He trusts all of the staff and he makes that known all the time […] and treats everyone like a professional." Another comparable idea came from Teacher 3 of School 2, "He definitely does not try to micromanage us at all."

While teachers from Schools 2 and 11 referred to the provided feedback as "helpful," teachers from School 6 expressed a desire for more feedback. Teacher 1 commented, "I've asked him, 'What do you think I need to work on?' and then he'll come up with it." This teacher felt the feedback had to be sought out by the teacher. Teacher 4 had a similar opinion. "He'll give me feedback in terms of what the student is thinking […], but in terms of […] teacher practice, for the most part, no."

Teachers from the three focus groups indicated that feedback in various forms was provided, both formally and informally. Two focus groups noted that the quantity of feedback given may be related to levels of trust between the school leader and the teachers. Many of the teachers found their principal's feedback helpful, while others desired more feedback related to their teaching practices.

Priorities.

The focus group interviews revealed similar priorities between the different school leaders. Students were noted as a priority for each principal. Teacher 4 from School 11 claimed, "I think her priorities are the students, first of all." Teacher 2 from School 2 observed, "He wants the kids to excel." Teacher 3 from the same school echoed that sentiment. "He absolutely cares if the kids do well." Teacher 3 from School 6 responded, "Kids feel like they can go in and talk with him if they have issues." Along with students as a priority, the focus groups shared another of their school leader's priorities: maintaining an orderly and respectful environment. Teacher 4 from School 6 explained, "He likes everything to be ordered and structured." Further support for that concept came from Teacher 3 of the same school. "He's created a very respectful environment here." Teacher 3 from School 2 noted, "He wants the building to run smoothly." Additionally, Teacher 3 from School 11 declared, of the principal's priorities, "Student behavior has been huge."

Aside from the shared priorities of students and an orderly and respectful school environment, two focus groups identified a priority not shared between the school leaders. Teachers from School 2 noted curriculum and instruction as a priority of their

building principal. "You can tell what his priorities are […] especially with curriculum. He gets […] almost obsessed with it," shared Teacher 4. Teacher 2 explained, "He uses data to support his idea." While curriculum was an additional priority for the principal of School 2, teachers from School 6 acknowledged another of their principal's priorities. Teacher 2 remarked, "I think another priority for her has been meeting all of her teachers' needs."

Both students and orderly and respectful school environments were common priorities of the school leaders, as described by the teacher focus groups. In addition to these shared beliefs, curriculum and meeting teachers' needs were also noted as priorities for building leaders.

Communication of priorities.

Just as school leaders had some commonalities in their priorities, so too were similarities in how these priorities were communicated to the teachers within these schools. Teachers from Schools 2 and 11 described direct means of communication related to the principals' priorities. "Staff meetings," "sharing whole group," "clear," and "it's not like you have to guess" were ways in which teachers from Schools 2 and 11 explained their principals' approaches to communicating their priorities.

Teachers from School 6, however, indicted a different style of communication of their principal's priorities. Of the manner in which the principal communicates priorities, Teacher 3 said, "It's just a feeling. You just know it." This indirect form of communication was also explained by Teacher 1, "Just by example. By watching him."

Whether the principal employed a direct or indirect form of communication, teachers within each focus group could clearly define what their principal's priorities were within their schools.

School Involvement.

The focus group interviews revealed that principals within these schools were highly visible and involved in multiple facets throughout their schools. Teachers from School 2 listed the principal's involvement as: "he's everywhere, all the time," "he's rarely at his desk," "he does all the lunches," "breakfast, lunch, he's around and about the hallways," "he's always talking to kids," and "the kids all know who the principal is." About the principal of School 6, teachers noted frequently seeing the principal in the hallways, cafeteria, and "he goes to a lot of events." The principal of School 11 was similarly occupied throughout the day. The teachers explained: "she's in the cafeteria," "greets the kids in the morning," "comes into our classrooms," "committees," "groups," "outside for recess duty" and "really hands on with everything." Teachers from each focus group noted their principal's visibility and school-wide involvement during their interviews.

Teacher focus group interviews were conducted, scripted, and then coded. Common themes related to principal professional practices emerged. First, teachers were provided multiple forms of feedback, both formally and informally. Some teachers noted that "trust" was a factor in the quantity of feedback given, while other teachers hoped for more specific feedback about their teaching practices. The focus groups also delineated two common priorities of their school leaders: students and orderly and respectful school

environments. Other priorities were noted for some of the principals, including

curriculum and meeting teachers' needs. These priorities could be communicated either

directly or indirectly, depending on the principal. Lastly, teachers shared multitudinous

ways in which their principals were involved throughout the school. In particular,

principals were highly visible and participated in and/or attended a variety of initiatives

and events.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Using AdvancED survey data, three schools within an ISD were identified as having positive school climate. The building principal and a focus group of four teachers were interviewed from each of these three schools. Interviews were scripted and then coded for themes related to principal professional practices and characteristics. Common themes emerged in the areas of feedback, priorities within the school, communication of those priorities, and ways in which the principal is involved throughout the school. Each area can be connected to recent literature related to school leadership.

Feedback.

Principals and teachers alike reported that feedback was provided both formally and informally, utilizing a variety of methods. Feedback is strongly connected to recent literature about school leadership, especially as feedback relates to teacher evaluation. Tuytens and Devos (2013) noted, "Strong school leaders focus more on the developmental discussion of teacher evaluation and integrate formal feedback during evaluation conferences with informal feedback during their daily practice" (p. 15). Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) also indicated the principal's responsibility in these important feedback conversations. "Principals were the critical link in stimulating the conversations that led to the classroom practices that are associated with improved student learning" (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011, p. 54). Differences in the levels of feedback were provided during one of the focus groups. This differentiated level of feedback matches Blasé and Kirby's suggestion to "tailor feedback to the individual teacher" (p. 36). More recently, Kraft and Gilmour (2016) described the role of feedback in the new evaluation cycle

when they claimed, "These cycles of observation, reflection, dialogue and feedback, and goal setting can provide teachers with new ideas as well as frequent and relevant feedback to support their professional growth" (p. 5). Both the teachers and principals who participated in this research project valued the use of feedback and described ways in which feedback was utilized in their schools.

Trust.

Along with the use of feedback as part of the evaluation process, two of the focus groups referenced trust as an important element in their relationships with the principal. Tschannen-Moran (2013) referenced trust and its relationship to the supervision and evaluation of teachers. "If supervision is practiced in such a way that the greater attention is perceived as an increased care with a focus on problem solving and coaching, principals will have an opportunity to demonstrate their competence and expertise "(p. 46). Further support for trust-based teacher and principal relationships comes from Kouzes and Posner (2013), who explained responsibility and accountability increase when one "consciously create[s] a climate of trust and give[s] independence" (p. 80) to a team. Trust from the principal was mentioned by two of the teacher focus groups and was considered an essential component of their relationships with the principal.

Priorities.

Two common themes surfaced when both principals and teacher focus groups were asked about the school leaders' priorities: students and safe, orderly environments. Southworth (2011) explored the concept of learning-centered leadership and acknowledged, "Modelling strong concern about students' progress, classroom and

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pedagogic processes conveys to everyone that the core business of the school is uppermost in the minds of the leaders" (p. 100). Principals involved in this research were not solely concerned with students as learners, but also students as people. Blasé and Kirby (2009) purported, "Respect for students is a prominent theme evident in the language and behavior of effective principals" (p. 25). Along with having students as a top priority, principals included in this study prioritized safe, orderly schools, as well. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) identified a safe and orderly environment as one of the 11 factors for the "what works in school" model. According to Marzano et al. (2005), "Safety and order […] has been recognized by many as a necessary condition for effective schooling" (p. 88). Döş and Savaş (2015) also suggested "an orderly, safe climate that is conducive to teaching and learning" (p. 3) is a characteristic of an effective school. Such priorities were clearly identified by both teachers and principals in this research and also closely connected with recent literature about school leadership.

Communication of priorities.

While the top two priorities of the principals were explicitly defined, how these priorities were communicated with teachers was more ambiguous. Two of the principals, according to the focus groups, clearly communicated the priorities and expectations, while another principal relied more on modeling his priorities. Blasé and Kirby (2009) concluded, "Effective principals use every available means – verbal and nonverbal – to communicate what is expected" (p. 35). Reeves (2009) further supported this idea explaining, "Sustained and consistent communication can make a remarkable impact" (p. 52). Although teachers were able to explain what their principals' priorities were, no

specific communication practice was noted as consistent between the three school leaders from this research.

Visibility.

One of the principal practices which was common to all school leaders in this research was being visible throughout the building. Teachers and principals noted the importance of the principal being in various locations around the school. The concept of principal visibility is also described in recent school leadership literature. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) indicated, "Visibility requires the principal to have frequent contact with teachers and students. The principal's strong presence communicates that administration and staff are a team working together in all aspects of the school" (pp. 102-103). Further support for principal visibility is found in Blasé and Kirby (2009). "Visibility in the hallways is deemed to be an effective manner of communicating support to both teachers and students" (p. 113). The practice of principal visibility was clearly identified and described by principals and teachers in this research project and is closely tied to school leadership literature.

In addition to visibility, the principals in this research project were also identified as being actively involved throughout various facets of their schools. Sergiovanni (2013) described this style of leadership as, "People and institutions entrust a leader with certain obligations and duties to fulfill and perform on their behalf. Stewardship involves placing oneself in service to ideas and ideals and to others who are committed to their fulfillment" (p. 388). Principal involvement is further explained by Green (2010). "There is the realization that all individuals have […] skills and attributes [that] can be critical to

school goal attainment" (Green, 2010, p. 103). Principals in this study were noted to attend school events or serve as members of different school committees or groups. Such involvement is connected to both principal practices and recent leadership literature.

Many of the key principal practices identified during these interviews have clear connections to recent leadership literature. Both principals and teacher focus group participants identified these common practices: provide teacher feedback, develop trust relationships, identify and communicate priorities, be visible within the school, and engage in a variety of activities throughout the school. While this is not an exhaustive list of all principal practices and characteristics, these concepts emerged as common habits of principals in schools with a positive school climate.

Recommendations for future research

This research project could be expanded to include additional schools, such as schools outside of the selected ISD and/or all schools within the selected ISD, including those that may not have a positive school climate. Increasing the number of schools included would allow additional data to be gathered to determine if the same leadership characteristics and practices emerge. Future research could also encompass longitudinal data for the three schools currently included in this project. Building upon the current research, the researcher could visit the three schools to determine initial impressions or "feelings" and utilize the responses from the open-ended AdvancED survey questions to probe further into teachers' and principals' perceptions of their school. There are a number of possibilities when considering future research connected to this project.

Conclusion

Leadership practices and characteristics of effective school leaders are defined in state and national standards, as well as described in literature about school administration. This research project attempted to answer two questions related to the leadership practices and characteristics of principals in schools identified as having a positive school climate in the age of teacher evaluation. Interviews with principals and teacher focus groups were conducted, scripted, coded, and analyzed for themes. These themes were then connected to current leadership literature.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval

Northern Michigan University

Memorandum

Office of Graduate Education and Research
1401 Presque Isle Avenue
Marquette, MI 49855-5301
906-227-2300
FAX: 906-227-2315
Web site: www.nmu.edu

TO: Kristina Hansen
School of Education, Leadership, and Public Service

CC: Bethany Bergh
School of Education, Leadership, and Public Service

DATE: June 10, 2015

FROM: Brian Cherry, Ph.D.
Assistant Provost/IRB Administrator

SUBJECT: **IRB Proposal** HS 15-672
IRB Approval Dates: 6/9/2015-6/9/2016**
Proposed Project Dates: 8/1/2015-5/1/2016
"Effective School Leadership Practices in Schools with Positive Climates"

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your proposal and has given it final approval. To maintain permission from the Federal government to use human subjects in research, certain reporting processes are required.

A. You must include the statement "Approved by IRB: Project# HS 15-672" on all research materials you distribute, as well as on any correspondence concerning this project.

B. If a subject suffers an injury during research, or if there is an incident of non-compliance with IRB policies and procedures, you must take immediate action to assist the subject and notify the IRB chair (dereande@nmu.edu) and NMU's IRB administrator (bcherry@nmu.edu) within 48 hours. Additionally, you must complete an Unanticipated Problem or Adverse Event Form for Research Involving Human Subjects

C. Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant.

D. If you find that modifications of methods or procedures are necessary, you must submit a Project Modification Form for Research Involving Human Subjects before collecting data.

E. **If you complete your project within 12 months from the date of your approval notification, you must submit a Project Completion Form for Research Involving Human Subjects. If you do not complete your project within 12 months from the date of your approval notification, you must submit a Project Renewal Form for Research Involving Human Subjects. You may apply for a one-year project renewal up to four times.

NOTE: Failure to submit a Project Completion Form or Project Renewal Form within 12 months from the date of your approval notification will result in a suspension of Human Subjects Research privileges for all investigators listed on the application until the form is submitted and approved.

All forms can be found at the NMU Grants and Research website: http://www. nmu.edu/grantsandresearch/node/ 1 02

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APPENDIX B

Focus Group Questions

1. What words or phrases best describe your principal?
2. Describe the principal's relationships with teachers/students/parents.
3. **Does your principal provide feedback? If yes, in what ways does he/she provide feedback? If no, how do you feel about the absence/lack of feedback?**
4. What are some things your principal does well?
5. What are some areas in which your principal could improve?
6. **How do you know what your principal's priorities are within the school? What are his/her priorities?**
7. **In what ways is the principal involved throughout the school**?
8. Describe any changes your principal has made to the school. Why do you think he/she made those changes?
9. What else would you like me to know about your principal?

APPENDIX C

Individual Principal Interview Questions

1. What words or phrases best describe you as a principal?
2. Describe your relationships with teachers/students/parents.
3. **Do you provide feedback to your staff? If yes, how do you provide feedback? If no, why do you choose not to give feedback?**
4. What do you think your strengths are as a principal?
5. What are areas in which you think you could improve?
6. **What are your priorities within the school? How do you communicate these priorities to others within the school?**
7. **In what ways are you involved throughout the school?**
8. Describe any changes you have made within your school during your time as principal. Why did you make these changes? How did you communicate the changes to people affected?
9. What else would you like me to know about you as a principal?

Approved by IRB: Project #HS15-672

Informed Consent: Principals

[Date]

Dear [principal name]:

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to gather information about current school leadership practices and how these practices may positively impact school climate.

I am inviting you to be in this study because you are the principal in a school with a positive school climate, as indicated on the School Improvement AdvancED school survey.

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed about your leadership practices. Some of the questions I may ask are: "Could you describe your vision for your school?" "How do you share that vision with others?" and/or "How do you build trust with teachers?" The interview will last between one and two hours.

I will keep the information you provide confidential; however, federal regulatory agencies and the Northern Michigan University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. Although an audio recording of the interview will be made, once the transcription of the interview occurs, the recording will be destroyed. If a report is written about this study I will do so in such a way that you and your school cannot be identified.

There are no known risks from being in this study, and you will not benefit personally. However I hope that others may benefit in the future from what I learn as a result of this study.

You will not have any costs for being in this research study

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to be in this study, or if you stop participating at any time, you won't be penalized or lose any benefits for which you otherwise qualify.

If you have any further questions regarding your rights as a participant in a research project you may contact Dr. Brian Cherry of the Human Subjects Research Review Committee of Northern Michigan University (906-227-2300) bcherry@nmu.edu or Dr. Derek Anderson, IRB Chair, at dereande@nmu.edu. Any questions you have regarding the nature of this research project will be answered by the principal researcher who can be contacted as follows: Mrs. Kristina M. Hansen (906-280-2461) krhansen@nmu.edu.

I have read the above "Informed Consent Statement." The nature, risks, demands, and benefits of the project have been explained to me. I understand that I may ask questions and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without incurring ill will or negative consequences. I also understand that this informed consent document will be kept separate from the data collected in this project to maintain confidentiality. Access to this document is restricted to the principle investigator.

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Subject's Signature   Date

School Name

Thank you very much for your consideration. Please return the signed consent form to me via email (krhansen@nmu.edu). I will contact you to schedule an interview.

Sincerely,

Kristina M. Hansen
Education Specialist Candidate, NMU

Approved by IRB: Project #HS15-672

APPENDIX E

Informed Consent: Teacher Focus Group Participants

[Date]

Dear Teacher:

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to gather information about current school leadership practices and how these practices may positively impact school climate.

I am inviting you to be in this study because you are a teacher in a school with a positive school climate, as indicated on the School Improvement AdvancED school survey. Three additional teachers will take part in this study at your school.

If you agree to participate, you will be a part of a focus group with other teachers from your school. The group will meet with me to answer questions about your principal's leadership practices, such as: "Could you describe your principal's vision for your school?" "How does he/she share that vision with others?" and/or "How does your principal build trust with teachers?" The focus group will meet at least one time for one to two hours.

I will keep the information you provide confidential; however, federal regulatory agencies and the Northern Michigan University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. Although an audio recording of the focus group will be made, once the transcription of the interview occurs, the recording will be destroyed. If a report is written about this study I will do so in such a way that you cannot be identified.

There are no known risks from being in this study, and you will not benefit personally. However I hope that others may benefit in the future from what I learn as a result of this study.

You will not have any costs for being in this research study

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to be in this study, or if you stop participating at any time, you won't be penalized or lose any benefits for which you otherwise qualify.

If you have any further questions regarding your rights as a participant in a research project you may contact Dr. Brian Cherry of the Human Subjects Research Review Committee of Northern Michigan University (906-227-2300) bcherry@nmu.edu. Any questions you have regarding the nature of this research project will be answered by the principal researcher who can be contacted as follows: Mrs. Kristina M. Hansen (906-280-2461) krhansen@nmu.edu.

I have read the above "Informed Consent Statement." The nature, risks, demands, and benefits of the project have been explained to me. I understand that I may ask questions and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without incurring ill will or negative consequences. I also understand that this informed consent document will be kept separate from the data collected in this project to maintain confidentiality. Access to this document is restricted to the principle investigator.

---   ---------------------------

                Subject's Signature   Date

Thank you very much for your consideration. I will contact you to notify you of the meeting date and time of the focus group.

Sincerely,

Kristina M. Hansen
Education Specialist Candidate, NMU

Approved by IRB: Project #HS15-672
APPENDIX F

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[Principal's name]

After analyzing survey data, [school name] was identified as having a positive school climate . Please review the attached letter and let me know if you would like to participate in my research project.

Could you also forward me a list of email addresses for your teaching staff? They will also be asked to participate in a focus group interview.

Thank you!

Kristina M. Hansen

APPENDIX G

Dear [School name] teacher,

I am currently working on finishing up a research project. Part of this research includes interviewing four teachers in a focus group.

After analyzing survey data, your school, [school name], was identified as having a positive school climate. Please review the attached letter and let me know if you would like to participate in my research project. This information will be kept confidential, as described in the attached letter.

Thank you!
Kristina M. Hansen